

Practicing The Way

DEVELOPING A PERSONAL RULE OF LIFE



What is a rule of life?

A rule of life is a schedule and set of practices and relational rhythms that help us create space in our busy world for us to be with Jesus, become like Jesus, and do what Jesus did—to live “to the full” (John 10v10) in his kingdom, and in alignment with our deepest passions and priorities.

While the word “rule” may strike you as a strict or binding constraint, the Latin word we translate “rule” was originally the word for a trellis in a vineyard. In the same way a vine needs a trellis to lift it off the ground so it can bear the maximum amount of fruit, and keep free of predators and diseases, we need a rule as a kind of support structure to organize our life around “abiding in the vine,” (John 15v1–8) as Jesus imagined.

It’s been said that we achieve inner peace when our schedule is aligned with our values. A rule of life is simply a tool to that end. Rather than a rigid, legalistic to-do list, it’s a life-giving structure for freedom, growth, and joy.

The majority of this book was developed by John Mark Comer

How to use this workbook

Go to greatneighbors.net/ROL for video tutorial.

This workbook was designed as a simple guide for you to develop a personal rule of life, not a one-size fits all list of “rules” to follow. Please adapt, change, and improvise as seems best to you and your community. Here are five easy steps.

Step 1: Look over the Rule of Life Chart and spend a little time contemplating it, considering how it relates to different areas of your life.

Step 2: On the following pages, prayerfully work through each life category one at a time, giving yourself a little time to list out your current practices, and to imagine what a more intentional rule of life could look like for you in this season.

Step 3: Draft your rule of life. Come back to the chart and fill in each category as you see fit.

Step 4: Try it out. Spend a few weeks living into your rule, and see how it feels. If it feels burdensome or boring, pay attention to that without judgment, and consider what you need to change. What’s working and what’s not working? What’s bringing you life? What’s draining you? Talk about it with a partner, close friend, or community member.

Step 5: Revise and commit. Based on step 4, adjust your rule to what seems best, and commit to it for an extended season of time (we recommend a minimum of three months, and maximum of a year). Over that time period, create space for reflection via journaling, talking to a friend, or just taking a walk and thinking about it, to see what effect a life organized around “abiding” is doing for your transformation into a person of love, joy, and peace in the kingdom of God.

Life Categories

Contrary to popular usage, in biblical theology, your “soul” (hebrew: *nephesh*) isn’t the invisible part of you that flies off to heaven when you die. Rather, “soul” is your whole person: the integrating center of your humanity, material and immaterial. Your will, mind, emotions, body, and relationships. The following categories are an attempt to apply a rule of life to your whole person, so that all of us can experience all of God.

1. Abiding
2. Mind
3. Body
4. Relationships
5. Rest
6. Work & Money
7. Gospel & Hospitality

The Seven Core Practices of the Way

Every church tradition and generation emphasizes its own rule of life, even if they don't use that language. There are seven spiritual disciplines we think are essential to following Jesus in our place and time. As core Practices to following Jesus, these seven Practices are likely to appear several times in your rule of life (for example, Silence & Solitude may be essential to both abiding and mind). Include these Practices wherever they make the most sense in your personal rule of life. Here are some questions to consider: which of these Practices are currently part of your life? What are 1–2 Practices you want to work into your daily or weekly routine? Visit practicingtheway.org for teachings and exercises.

1

Silence & Solitude

A moment of intentional time in the quiet to be alone with God.

2

Scripture

Continually committing to studying the word of God.

3

Prayer

Central to life with God, woven into the fabric of our routines.

4

Fasting

A willing abstinence from food for a period of time.

5

Simplicity

Structuring your life in such a way that it becomes more freeing.

6

Living in Community

Partners for the journey, to share life and the Lord's supper.

7

Sabbath

A day set aside for rest and worship, including church on Sundays.

Rule of Life Chart

Goals	Be with Jesus		Become like Jesus			Do what Jesus Did	
Practices	Abiding	Mind	Body	Relationships	Rest	Work & Money	Gospel & Hospitality
Daily							
Weekly							
Monthly							
Quarterly							
Annually							

ABIDING

Through Practices (also known as spiritual disciplines or sacred rhythms) from the life and teachings of Jesus, we create space in our life for the Spirit and truth of God to transform us into people of love, not by “trying really hard, but by training really hard.” What Practices do you utilize to “abide in the vine”? To turn your attention to God all through your day, and index your heart’s affection toward receiving and giving his love?

Examples: morning prayer, Scripture reading, worship music, the daily office, the examen, sabbath, fasting, silence and solitude, retreat, etc.

Recommended baseline practice: commit to daily quiet time away from your phone (ideally upon waking), a weekly sabbath, and church on Sunday.

If you’re new to this practice, we recommend you start with ten minutes a day, ideally upon waking, to read a Psalm and notice God’s witness, and gather with your church on Sunday.

Questions: What practices make up your current rule of life (official or unofficial)? What practices would you like to add in, cut out, or change?

MIND

What we give our attention to is the person we become. Through what scientists call neuroplasticity and Paul calls “the renewal of the mind” (Romans 12v2), we have a say in the kind of thought life we wire into our brain, and as a result, the kind of people we are being formed into — whether it’s formation through the truth of God, or deformation through social media, news feeds, and entertainment queues. How are you curating your thought life to take on “the mind of Christ” (Philippians 2v5-8)? And how are you carefully guarding your mind’s time on and input from digital devices to keep it healthy, free of temptation and distraction, and set on God’s loving, joyful companionship through your days and weeks?

Examples: Reading Scripture in the morning, regular podcasts or book reading, church on Sunday, gratitude, a digital rule of life, “parenting your phone,” digital sabbath, a daily limit on device use, etc.

Recommended baseline practice: commit to disengage from screens on a daily, weekly, and annual basis, set a time limit on your use of entertainment, and an established expectation of moral quality in what you take in. Commit also to the regular intake of truth and teaching through your medium of choice — reading, podcasting, Bible study, etc. and the daily habit of gratitude and hope.

If you’re new to this practice, we recommend you begin your day by reading the New Testament, before turning on your phone, even if only for a few minutes a day.

Questions: What practices make up your current rule of life (official or unofficial)? What practices would you like to add in, cut out, or change?

B O D Y

We are whole people. Mind and body. Immaterial and material. A holistic, embodied spirituality is key to the way of Jesus. Yet in a day and age of body-image obsession and sexual idolatry, many of us react into the opposite extreme: a kind of neo-gnostic spirituality that sees the body as no more than a container to carry “us” around until we die. In this view, sexuality becomes just an animal release impulse for pleasure, not the fusion of two souls in the self-giving love of a covenant relationship. But Paul calls followers of Jesus to “offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.” What habits of body do you utilize to keep your whole person healthy and “holy” (whole) before God?

Examples: sleep, regular exercise, a healthy diet, water, limiting alcohol intake, walking, rising at a certain time daily, activity in sports, annual doctor’s visit, vitamins, and honoring God with your sexuality by living by Jesus’ teachings.

Recommended baseline practice: commit to sleep a minimum of eight hours a night, get some form of exercise on a regular basis (as you are able), and eat well.

If you’re new to this practice, we recommend you start with going to bed earlier than you usually do, and taking a short walk each day.

Questions: What practices make up your current rule of life (official or unofficial)? What practices would you like to add in, cut out, or change?

RELATIONSHIPS

We are relational beings, created by a relational God for relationship. What relationships form our community before God? Who do we walk the way of Jesus alongside? And what are we doing to create, nurture, and deepen relationships of vulnerability and accountability? You may find it helpful to think through the categories of friendship, church, marriage, and family.

Examples for friendship: weekly phone call or coffee with best friend, regular times to connect over a meal, etc. In this season of more digital connection be intentional about hopping on prayer calls, doing a you version bible study with a small group of people, join a life group etc. Remember there is no replacement for gathering with other people so have it in your mind to move to that in wisdom.

Examples for church: weekly meal with community, church on Sunday, regular parties, serving together, pursuing relationships across lines of class and ethnicity, etc.

Examples for marriage: a fifteen-minute touchpoint per day, weekly date night, cultivating healthy sexual connection, regular getaways, etc.

Examples for family: sitting down to dinner three nights a week, sabbath, a weekly daddy-daughter date, annual vacation, family movie night or Saturday soccer match, etc.

Recommended baseline practice: commit to a weekly meal with your community and some daily and weekly touchpoints with your spouse and children or other family members, and/or closest friends.

If you're new to this practice, we recommend you start with a weekly get together with a close friend to connect at a soul level.

Questions: What practices make up your current rule of life (official or unofficial)? What practices would you like to add in, cut out, or change?

WORK & MONEY

When God created humans, he set them in a Garden to “work it and take care of it” (Genesis 2). Built into our humanity is the call of God to make our world more like Eden. What we do with our resources—time, money, gifting and capacity—matters to God (and to others). At its best, work is an expression of love and justice. At its worst, of ambition and greed. Our work often generates money; how we steward those resources is key to our apprenticeship to Jesus. A life of simplicity and generosity is a core tenant in Jesus’ vision of life in the kingdom. What habits have you built into your work life and financial life to make stewarding your work and money part of your life before God?

Examples: times of “deep work” each week, a fixed hour schedule, dedicated time to an entrepreneurial project, tithing, a blessing fund, sponsoring a child, etc.

Recommended baseline practice: commit to spend several hours each day devoted to your most important work, and to give away a minimum of ten percent of your gross income (tithing), with special attention to the church and the poor.

If you need help in the area of money reach out to michael@crossculturedenver.org, pick the ABCS of financial freedom by Barry Cameron or join a local FPU class.

Questions: What practices make up your current rule of life (official or unofficial)? What practices would you like to add in, cut out, or change?

G O S P E L & H O S P I T A L I T Y

Jesus left us with a mandate to “go into all the world and preach the gospel.” A gospel that he himself brought in both word and deed. While he was among us, he regularly welcomed people from all walks of life to the table for a meal. There’s a long-standing tradition from the way of Jesus that sees hospitality not only as an expression of love, but as the best way to invite people to both hear and experience the gospel of God’s love in action. What rhythms of hospitality and gospel have you worked into your life?

Examples: inviting a friend to church/life group, a regular night to host neighbors for dinner, spending time listening to co-workers, serving the poor through volunteering, etc.

Recommended baseline practice: commit to invite a friend who doesn’t follow Jesus over for dinner once a month, and to life group or church 1–2 times a year.

If you’re new to this practice, we recommend you start with one meal with a friend or neighbor who isn’t yet a follower of Jesus.

Questions: What practices make up your current rule of life (official or unofficial)? What practices would you like to add in, cut out, or change?
