



RULE OF LIFE

→ by Clay Laughridge _____

WHAT IS A RULE OF LIFE? A rule of life is a schedule and set of practices that assists us in orienting our lives around Jesus. This was begun by some of the early church fathers, most notably Benedict in 527 A.D., who sought to distinguish themselves and their lifestyle from the world around them. Biblically, this can be seen in Daniel, who was transported to Babylon during captivity, yet ordered his life around devotion to God in such a way that he influenced the Babylonians rather than being influenced by them (Daniel 1:8; 6:10).

We all have a rule of life, which is simply the way we structure our days. It has been said that “Your system is perfectly designed to give you the results you are getting.” What results is our life system giving us? Joy and peace? Anxiety? How is our relationship with Jesus and others? What is the condition of our hearts? A rule of life should help us in our deficiencies and draw us closer to Jesus.

The following chart is meant to be a template, not to add more things to our already-busy lives, but to focus our lives by subtracting needless excess and adding areas of spiritual disciplines that we may currently lack in our daily lives.

As Margaret Guenther describes it, a rule of life is “a working document, a kind of spiritual budget, not carved in stone but subject to regular review and revision. It should support us, but never constrict us.”

HOW DO I DEVELOP A RULE OF LIFE? There is no “right” way to craft a rule of life; it is a means to an end to help us orient our lives around loving Jesus and becoming more like Him. A rule of life will vary from person to person based on our makeup, where we are in our walk with Jesus, and our current season of life. God has made each of us different, yet our goal is the same: to draw closer to Jesus and be transformed to become more like Him.

RECOMMENDATIONS

→ Start Small

Start with where you are, not where you wish to be. Start with a few of the suggested practices, then add more as they become habits. If you are not in the habit of praying daily, don’t begin with the goal of praying two hours a day. More than likely, that lofty goal will produce discouragement. Rather, begin with a goal of praying for 5 minutes a day. As you spend more time in prayer, you will find it easier to make time for longer times of prayer.

→ Embrace your Season of Life

A mother raising young children will probably not have the time or capacity for much silence and solitude, and she should not feel guilty about that. In that specific season of life, she is growing in love and patience as she gives priority to selflessly serving her family. All of us are in different seasons of life and different stages of our walk with God, and some of the spiritual disciplines will be dominant in different seasons. Understanding and embracing our season is paramount.

→ Balance Upstream & Downstream Practices “Downstream” practices are those disciplines that come easier to us, and “upstream” practices are those that require more effort. Perhaps sharing the Gospel comes easily to you, yet being in community makes you cringe. In that case, give a healthy priority to your downstream practice of evangelism, but be intentional about not neglecting your upstream practice of engaging in the community God has placed you in.

→ Balance Structure & Spontaneity

Remember, a rule of life is a flexible document meant to assist you in orienting your life around Jesus, not a set-in-stone law to restrict you. For example, if I have to sacrifice being with my children in a moment when they need me to get my daily Bible reading in, then my rule is no longer aiding me in becoming more like Jesus and becoming a person of love. ■

RULE OF LIFE | TEMPLATE

Jesus replied, “The most important commandment is this: ‘Listen, O Israel! The LORD our God is the one and only LORD. And you must **LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, ALL YOUR SOUL, ALL YOUR MIND, AND ALL YOUR STRENGTH.**’ The second is equally important: ‘**LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.**’ No other commandment is greater than these.” – Mark 12:29-31

Using the suggestions on the following pages, prayerfully consider ways you can grow in loving God, loving your neighbor, and loving yourself. Write them in the chart below to help structure your schedule, days, and year to reflect your values and priorities.

GOAL	LOVING GOD	LOVING OUR NEIGHBOR	LOVING OURSELVES
SUGGESTED PRACTICES	PRAYER FASTING SCRIPTURE WORSHIP SILENCE & SOLITUDE	COMMUNITY FAMILY GIVING & SERVICE SHARING THE GOSPEL	SABBATH CONFESSION LAMENT CELEBRATION BODY & MIND
Daily/ Regularly <i>Some practices should and will be more frequent than others</i>			
Weekly			
Monthly			
Quarterly/ Seasonally			
Annually			

**IF SOMEONE COULD ONLY SEE MY ACTIONS AND NOT HEAR MY WORDS,
WHAT WOULD THEY SAY ARE MY PRIORITIES?** – James Clear

RULE OF LIFE | SUGGESTED PRACTICES

LOVING GOD

→ **PRAYER** | Prayer is conscious, personal communication with God. I like to think of prayer as simply being with Jesus, hearing His voice, and expressing our heart to Him. Prayer changes things. After leaving his hurried life to enter a religious community, Thomas Merton described a few men devoted to prayer by writing that they “are doing for their land what no army, no congress, no president could ever do as such: they are winning for it the grace and protection and friendship of God.”

- **SCRIPTURE** | 2 Chronicles 7:14; Matthew 6:5-13; Revelation 5:8
- **RECOMMENDED BASELINE PRACTICES** | Commit to daily time in prayer and communion with Jesus away from all distractions (such as your phone and work responsibilities). If possible, try to make a habit to “meet with God before you meet with man,” even if all you have to give is 2 minutes.

→ **FASTING** | Fasting is intensified prayer, whereby we abstain from food for a period of time (be it one meal or several days). Jesus had a season of fasting before embarking on His earthly ministry and taught that those who follow Him will fast as well. In our age of excess and addiction, fasting is a means to deeply commune with God and demonstrate that our flesh is not master over us.

- **SCRIPTURE** | Isaiah 58:1-12; Matthew 6:16-18; Luke 4:1-2; Luke 5:33-35
- **RECOMMENDED BASELINE PRACTICES** | Commit to either a weekly or monthly day of fasting, whether for one meal or the entire day. Take the extra time fasting affords you to meet with Jesus through prayer, worship, Bible study, and serving others.

→ **SCRIPTURE** | God speaks to us through His Word as we read, meditate, and memorize Scripture. Jesus studied and knew the Old Testament scrolls (Luke 4), and the New Testament tells us that we are changed by the Word of God (Eph. 5:26-27) and that all Scripture is useful for doctrine, correction, and instruction (2 Tim. 3:16). The Word of God is also a tool that renews our mind according to the ways of Jesus rather than the ways of culture around us.

- **SCRIPTURE** | Luke 4:17; Acts 17:11; Ephesians 5:26-27; Romans 12:2; Ephesians 5:26-27
- **RECOMMENDED BASELINE PRACTICES** | Commit to daily or weekly reading the Scriptures. If you have never read the entire Bible, make it a goal to read through the Bible in a year, using a Bible reading guide at church or another plan. If you are new to Bible memorization, commit to memorizing one verse of Scripture per month.

→ **WORSHIP** | Secular author David Foster Wallace once stated, “Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship.” Worship is simply ascribing worth and value to someone else, and Scripture gives repeated commands and exhortations to praise and worship God. Praise is preoccupied with who God is and what He has done and lifts our focus off ourselves and our circumstances to the Almighty God. Worship is our response to the wonders and love of Jesus, our offering of love and devotion to Him.

- **SCRIPTURE** | Matthew 22:37-38; John 4:24; Romans 12:1; Psalm 47:1, 95:6, 149:3; Lamentations 2:19
- **RECOMMENDED BASELINE PRACTICES** | Commit to setting aside time weekly to worship God, both corporately with your local church community, and personally (using YouTube, an instrument if you play, or just your voice).

→ **SILENCE AND SOLITUDE** | The Gospels tell us that Jesus “often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed” as He, throughout His ministry, oscillated between being among His disciples and the people, and having times of silence where He could be with the Father. Silence and solitude is a way we, like Jesus, can be in God’s presence rather than allowing ourselves to be constantly bombarded with the world’s stimulation.

- **SCRIPTURE** | Luke 5:16; Colossians 3:2
- **RECOMMENDED BASELINE PRACTICES** | Commit to daily quiet time away from all external stimulation to be with Jesus (preferably upon waking). The time spent in silence and solitude will vary from person to person, but making this a daily habit is essential in our ability to hear and receive from Jesus in our busy world.

LOVING OUR NEIGHBOR

→ **COMMUNITY** | We are relational people created by a relational God for relationship. Jesus lived in community and spent plenty of time around others, along with His custom of attending synagogue. Community is a group of people with a common interest living in a specific area. There is much spiritual formation that occurs in the context of community as we open up and share life with others.

- **SCRIPTURE** | Matthew 11:19; Mark 3:14; Luke 4:16; John 2; John 12:1-2; Hebrews 10:25
- **RECOMMENDED BASELINE PRACTICES** | Commit to making a regular practice of gathering with other believers at church on Sunday morning, as well as throughout the week when possible, practicing hospitality in our homes, and pursuing relationships with other believers in our community outside of our lines of class, ethnicity, etc.

→ **FAMILY** | Jesus honored His earthly family, and much can be found in Scripture regarding healthy family relationships and their relationship to our spiritual life. Peter even writes that an unhealthy husband and wife relationship can hinder our prayers (1 Peter 3:7).

- **SCRIPTURE** | Luke 2:41-50; John 19:26-27; Eph. 5:25, 6:1-4; 1 Tim. 3:5; 5:8; 1 Peter 3:1-2,7
- **RECOMMENDED BASELINE PRACTICES** | Commit to family meals around the table three nights a week, as well as daily times alone to be with and communicate with your spouse.

→ **GIVING & SERVICE** | What we do with our time, money, and resources matters to God and others. We can either steward what we have been given to worship God and demonstrate love to others, or simply serve ourselves, which can be classified as greed or hoarding. It has been said that one in every four verses in the synoptic gospels deals with money. Just as “God so loved the world that He gave,” we can also demonstrate our love for others by being a cheerful giver of our time, talents, and treasure. Jesus was the consummate servant who told us that the greatest among us will be the servant of all.

- **SCRIPTURE** | Matthew 6:1-4; Mark 10:42-45; Luke 16:10-12, 22:27; John 3:16, 13:1-15; Acts 5:1-10; 2 Corinthians 8 and 9
- **RECOMMENDED BASELINE PRACTICES** | Commit to giving a regular tithe (10%) to your local church or to the poor and marginalized. If this is a struggle for you, begin to pray and ask God that He would begin to form you into a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:6-7). Also begin looking for ways to serve your friends and loved ones, such as washing dishes at home or reaching out to a friend who is going through a tough time.

→ **SHARING THE GOSPEL** | Jesus spent His earthly ministry preaching the gospel of the Kingdom, which included teaching others to repent, along with healing sickness and disease and restoring the broken. At His ascension, Jesus left the commission to go into all the world to preach and demonstrate this gospel of the Kingdom. As faithful men and women have relied on the Holy Spirit to accomplish this Great Commission for the past two thousand years, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ has continued to grow in influence and the message of the Kingdom has set millions free.

- **SCRIPTURE** | Matthew 4:17, 23-24; Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-20; Acts 1:8
- **RECOMMENDED BASELINE PRACTICES** | Intentionally form relationships with non-believers in your families, places of work, and communities. Make it a goal to meet at least one person a week in your daily interactions. As relationships develop, ask the Holy Spirit to empower and equip you to share the message of Jesus Christ with love, humility, and conviction.

LOVING OURSELVES

→ **SABBATH** | Jesus ushered in a new creation, saying, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). Just as God modeled rest in Genesis 2, practicing a weekly Sabbath day of rest can help us live from a place of rest in a restless and anxious world. Jesus affirmed and enjoyed the Sabbath and told us that it was made for man. In fact, Deuteronomy records that God’s command for the Sabbath was to demonstrate that His people are no longer slaves to the harsh Egyptian taskmasters. Having a weekly day of rest from our labors also reminds us that the fate of the world does not lie on our shoulders and teaches us to slow down and enjoy God and the wonderful gifts He has given to us.

- **SCRIPTURE** | Genesis 2:3; Deuteronomy 5:12-15; Matthew 11:28-29; Mark 2:23-28
- **RECOMMENDED BASELINE PRACTICES** | Commit to having a weekly Sabbath day to rest, worship God, and enjoy the blessings He has given you. If this is initially difficult for you, begin by taking a few hours off on your day off to intentionally rest, worship, and enjoy what God has given you.

→ **CONFESSION** | The book of James tells us to “Confess your trespasses to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed” (James 5:16). Confession involves being vulnerable and open with others about our struggles, weaknesses, and areas where we need to grow. This typically involves having one or two seasoned believers who are able to pray with us and gently correct us as we live as disciples of Jesus. Confession is also found in confessing our sins and weaknesses before Jesus, as He alone has the power to forgive and set us free from all sin and failure.

- **SCRIPTURE** | Matthew 9:6; Mark 1:5; Rom. 10:9-10; James 5:16; Galatians 6:1; 1 John 1:9

- **RECOMMENDED BASELINE PRACTICES** | Ask God to highlight a seasoned believer (or spouse) in your community or life that you can open up to with your struggles, challenges, and joys in your walk with Jesus. And most importantly, commit to regularly coming to and confessing your sins to Jesus, as He alone forgives.

→ **LAMENT** | Scripture records that we serve a God who has emotions. Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would be “a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3-4), and the shortest verse in the Bible reads, “Jesus wept” (John 11:35). It is important that we do not bury our emotions but process them with Jesus, and one of the ways we do this is through lament. A lament is a formal expression of sorrow that calls out to God for action. Over 2/3 of the psalms can be classified as laments, and Jeremiah penned an entire book of Lamentations. Lamenting before God means not ignoring difficult emotions or events in life but recognizing our deep dependency on God and purposefully allowing our griefs, pains, and losses to draw us closer to Him.

- **SCRIPTURE** | Matthew 27:46; 2 Samuel 1:17-18; Psalm 13; Psalm 42; 2 Cor. 1:3-7, 4:16-18
- **RECOMMENDED BASELINE PRACTICES** | Commit to not burying your feelings and emotions, but bringing them to God in prayer, song, or writings. Begin keeping a journal where you can be honest before God with your emotions and feelings.

→ **CELEBRATION** | Just as it is important to process our hurts and griefs before God through laments, it is also important to know how to celebrate and enjoy life. Throughout the Old Testament, Israel practiced the discipline of celebration through annual feasts such as the Feasts of Passover and Pentecost. Jesus’ first miracle was at a wedding, which in the Jewish culture of that time was the best party of all. If we are fun-deficient in our lives, it’s good to remember that Jesus was wanted at a wedding and didn’t spoil the fun when He arrived. Let us be a people who find time to celebrate and rejoice—individually and together—in the good gifts God gives us, big and small.

- **SCRIPTURE** | Deut. 14:26; 16:16; Psalm 45:7 Ecclesiastes 3:4; John 2:1-10; Romans 12:15
- **RECOMMENDED BASELINE PRACTICES** | Commit to intentionally thanking God for one good thing He has done that day. Enjoy God’s creation. Make time to annually celebrate birthdays, holidays, and achievements with your family, community, and friends.

→ **CARING FOR OUR BODY & MIND** | We are commanded in Scripture to love God with all of our heart, soul, and mind (Mark 12:29-31), and we are also told that our bodies are His temple (1 Cor. 6:19). Just as our flight attendants instruct us to put on our oxygen mask first before attempting to help others while on a plane, much in the same way, we are no good to others if we are physically and emotionally depleted and racked with anxious thoughts. Sometimes it is easy to overlook that importance of renewing our mind and taking care of our body, but this is essential if we are to be effective witnesses of Jesus on the earth.

- **SCRIPTURE** | Psalm 127:2; Mark 12:29-31; Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 6:19; Philippians 4:6-7
- **RECOMMENDED BASELINE PRACTICES** | Commit to getting enough sleep each night (if you are able in this season); make a habit of exercising and eating well; and limit and be selective in screen time, news, and social media consumption. ■