

Emotionally Healthy Spirituality**

Week 8—Go the Next Step to Develop a “Rule of Life”

Key Principle: We can structure our lives in such a way as to intentionally help us grow. Taking the time to plan and implement such a structure is important.

What is a “Rule/Rhythm of Life”? It is a **plan** that structures our **time** in such a way as to *create space* to participate in the **activities/practices** that help shape us into the image of Christ. (emphasis added).

Every one of us has 24 hours in a day, 168 hours in a week. Every one of us uses that time somehow. The questions we want to ask ourselves is: *What is my ultimate goal(s)? Am I using the time that I have in such a way as to reach my goal(s)? What can (or needs to) change in order for me reach my goal(s)?*

A good place to start is by simply documenting/tracking where our time goes. Below (last page) is a “weekly time log” that may be helpful. Another very important piece is actually articulating our goal(s). It is very easy to function with only a loose awareness of our goals, only a vague general direction of what we’re aiming at. Clear, obtainable, measurable objectives can be empowering. It’s valuable to have a target in mind, and a map on how to reach that target.

By ordering our lives to contemplate the love of Christ and to receive the love of Christ, we will be able to give the love of Christ away to others. In this way, he transforms our lives into a gift to our families, friends, coworkers, and communities.

The problem, however, is our busyness and lack of intentionality. Often, we find ourselves unfocused, distracted, and spiritually adrift. Few of us have a conscious plan for intentionally developing our spiritual lives.

Nurturing a growing spirituality in our present-day culture calls for a thoughtful, conscious, purposeful plan. To do this well requires us to uncover another ancient buried treasure—a “Rule of Life.”

Please don’t be intimidated by the word *rule*. The word comes from the Greek for “trellis.” A trellis is a tool that enables a grapevine to get off the ground and grow upward, becoming more fruitful and productive. In the same way, a Rule of Life is a trellis that helps us abide in Christ and become more fruitful spiritually. A Rule of Life, very simply, is an intentional, conscious plan to keep God at the center of everything we do. It provides guidelines to help us continually remember God as the Source of our lives. It includes our unique combination of spiritual practices that provide structure and direction for us to intentionally pay attention and remember God in everything we do. The starting point and foundation of any Rule is a desire to be with God and to love him.

God has made each of us unique and different. Our goal is the same: union with God in Christ, transformation into his image, and the freeing of our hearts from anything that stands in the way of Christ living in and through us. How we get there will vary, depending on our personality, gift mix, temperament, geographic location, and particular calling from God. In addition, God will have different practices and emphases at different seasons and phases of our lives.

As we begin to develop a Rule/Rhythm of Life there are 4 key areas we will want to explore and give attention to:

-Prayer (We're using "prayer" in the most general sense: awareness of God's presence, connecting with Him, enjoying Him.) This would include both personal/individual time and practices (such as Scripture reading and meditation, various forms of prayer, silence, solitude, fasting, and the whole host of "spiritual disciplines") as well as communal time and practices (like attending worship, Home Group, etc.) Are we experiencing growth, maturing, development, depth in this area? What will it take for that to happen? (Remember, one size DOES NOT fit all.)

-Rest (Beyond sleep—which is important—this includes "down time", times and activities that bring us life.) Here we might want to consider Sabbath, simplicity, and play/recreation. An important key here is removing distractions, reducing hurriedness/busyness, and freeing ourselves from unhealthy attachments.

-Work/Activity (We might consider this our "productive time", when we get things done.) Areas to consider would be our jobs, and service or volunteer activities, and care for our physical health. (Please avoid legalism or technicalities..."exercise" can be placed under "work" or "rest"...whatever floats your boat...this is not an exact science.:)

-Relationships (How we go about interacting with and loving the various strata of people in our lives.) Think family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, church, as well as the emotional health of those relationships, and your personal emotional health.

Part of the challenge we face is the tendency to think in terms of sacred vs. secular, or spiritual vs. physical. These really are a false dichotomy. Trying to categorize various elements, components, or dimensions of life into these categories isn't helpful. We are BEINGS with both a physical and spiritual nature that cannot be separated...one affects the other. So as we explore and examine the various practices and activities that we participate in, we must realize that how they affect us. For example, caring for our physical bodies is just as "spiritual" as prayer.

- Q. Describe something you plan for. (ex. budget, vacation, career, education, family, etc.) Why do you plan? How do you plan?**

- Q. Describe a time when planning for something produced better results than not planning for something. (Or, describe a negative experience that was the result of poor planning, and a positive experience that was the result of good planning.)**

- Q. We are making an assumption here—that our goal is actually union with God and growth in Christlikeness. In all honesty, is that your goal? (Honesty is more important than the “right” answer.) What is your goal? (Whatever it is, it’s important that you know it...even if at this point it is simply “survival”, that’s important to acknowledge.)
- Q. In what ways are you tempted to think in terms of sacred/secular, spiritual/physical? How does your current way of life reflect that thinking? How might you change that?
- Q. What practices/activities have helped you grow, mature, develop into who you are today? What practices/activities might you be interested in exploring or experimenting with?
- Q. Of the 4 key areas mentioned above, which would you consider underdeveloped or needing attention? Is any of the areas going well for you? Explain.

Exercise: In the space provided, jot down various practices/activities that you do in the 4 key areas. Highlight or asterisk one practice/activity in each that you find nurturing. Place a question mark next to one practice/activity that may not be working for you. If you’re comfortable, share this with your group.

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| Prayer/Connecting with God | Rest |
| Work/Activity | Relationships |

Exercise: Using the provided time log (see below), take a week and chart your time. Share what you discovered about your use of time. How might you be able to take more control of your time to reach your goals?

Weekly Time Log

| Time | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday | Sunday |
|----------|--------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|----------|--------|
| 5:00 am | | | | | | | |
| 6:00 am | | | | | | | |
| 7:00 am | | | | | | | |
| 8:00 am | | | | | | | |
| 9:00 am | | | | | | | |
| 10:00 am | | | | | | | |
| 11:00 am | | | | | | | |
| 12:00 pm | | | | | | | |
| 1:00 pm | | | | | | | |
| 2:00 pm | | | | | | | |
| 3:00 pm | | | | | | | |
| 4:00 pm | | | | | | | |
| 5:00 pm | | | | | | | |
| 6:00 pm | | | | | | | |
| 7:00 pm | | | | | | | |
| 8:00 pm | | | | | | | |
| 9:00 pm | | | | | | | |
| 10:00 pm | | | | | | | |
| 11:00 pm | | | | | | | |

* The majority of this document is excerpts from the book "Emotionally Healthy Spirituality" by Peter Scazzero (ISBN 978-0-310-34857-0), and the "Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Workbook" by Peter & Geri Scazzero (ISBN 978-0-310-08519-5)