

EVERYONE HAS A RULE OF LIFE

Everyone has a Rule of Life, a set of principles on which they base their lives. It can be summed up as the "Rule of Loves." One's Rule of Life is usually not put into words, but we could put their Rule of Life into words if we could see:

- where they spend their time and money
- where they expend their energies
- what they treasure most and would protect like a lion
- what energizes and restores them
- what gives them satisfaction
- what gives them peace of mind and heart
- what enables them to grow
- what gives them a sense of relationship with something greater than themselves

If we were to look at our own lives in that light, we might be surprised at the Rule of Life we've been living our lives by.

Does everyone need a Rule of Life?

Yes, we do, and we each already have one, whether it is verbalized or not. Every living being has a set of principles by which life is lived. The principles may be reflexive/reactive, instinctive or intentional, but they're there, in some form or another. The advantage of spelling out one's Rule is that then it can be encouraging and challenging and intentional.

What is a Christian's Rule of Life?

We MUST move beyond random, haphazard approaches to the spiritual life. In Christian tradition, this structured arrangement of spiritual practices and approaches is referred to as "a rule of life." A rule of life is an intentional way of ordering our life around the values, practices and relationships that keep us open and available to God for the work of spiritual transformation that only God can bring about. Simply put, a rule of life provides structure and space for our growing.

"However, if we look closely at the way we live day to day, we may well notice that our approach to spiritual transformation is much more random and haphazard than our approach to finances, home improvements and weight loss! Many of us try to shove spiritual transformation into the nooks and crannies of a life that is already unmanageable, rather than being willing to arrange our life for what our heart most wants. We think that somehow we will fall into transformation by accident.

Jesus had something to say about this. He used parables to picture a person who has searched long and hard for something very valuable and very special. In one story the prized item is a piece of land; in another it is a valuable pearl. In both stories, the merchant has been looking for this prize all his life, and when he finds it, he doesn't hesitate. He sells everything he has so that he can buy what he has been searching for.

Both the field and the pearl are metaphors for the kingdom of God—that state of being in which God is reigning in our life and his presence is shaping our reality. The kingdom of God is here now, if we are willing to arrange our life to embrace it. Paul speaks in passionate terms of using every ounce of his energy and intentionality to present every person mature in Christ—beginning, presumably, with himself. The only question, it seems, is, How bad do you want it?"

¹ Content mainly from: "Discovering Your Rule of Life" by Michael Haywood & "Sacred Rhythms" by Ruth Barton

Just how imposing is a verbalized Rule of Life?

It's a rule, much like a ruler or yardstick, something that gives a guideline. It's not a Law. It doesn't imply "must," but rather gives someone something to aim for. It encourages one to reach beyond the ordinary grasp. Our Rule of Life describes our customary lifestyle, the things we do -- or want to do -- in our daily lives; it is a way to put ourselves in the position to receive from (and respond to) God, develop our strengths, and challenge our weaknesses.

If the traditional, ancient term "rule" concerns you because it sounds legalistic, think of "rule" as a "rhythm of life" or as a "Curriculum in Christlikeness" (Dallas Willard), or as a "Game Plan for Morphing" (John Ortberg).

3. OK, when (or if) I decide to make a Rule of Life for myself, where do I start?

A rule of life seeks to respond to two questions: "Who does God want me to be? How do I need to live so I can become who God wants me to be?" A rule of life seeks to address the interplay between these two questions.

After you pray a lot you then begin to answer the first question (and be specific based on growth areas, strength areas, and specific situations you find yourself in). Start by looking at your life with fresh eyes. Provide a clear self-assessment that briefly describes your current situation in life: family responsibilities, church, work schedule, and other life circumstances. Your self-assessment should also reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of your character. In general, talk over your self-assessment with someone who knows you well and ask for that person's candid feedback. Beginning your Rule with an honest self-assessment will push you to develop a rhythm of life which is unique to God's call on your life and your personality, circumstances, and needs. Based on these answers, you then start to answer the second question.

You don't try to fit the rule of life into your existing life, you begin to re-order everything in your life around a new rule of life. A Rule of Life is not a bunch of things you must add onto an already busy life! It might help to do a "start/stop" exercise at this point. Then you begin to develop a plan to set-up structure. Look over your Rule and see if there's anything missing. Check to see if your Rule feels oppressive or encouraging. Tweak the details. Live with and by your Rule for a month or so, and then look it over again, to see if it needs to be modified. Re-evaluate your Rule once every year and modify it or recommit to it.

Know that people do not just find a Rule and claim it. They work out their own Rule, bit by bit, for their own life and lifestyle. And a Rule of Life should not be so pie-in-the-sky that it's unattainable. In order to be life-giving, a Rule must be *realistic*! A Rule should describe possibility and challenge, but not perfection. It must be something that is possible.

Also, a Rule should not be so long, so comprehensive, and so detailed that it is oppressive. It's better to err on the side of brevity, as long as the Rule one writes for oneself is broad enough to encourage one along in a number of avenues of life. Be succinct and make your actual written Rule a 3/4 to 1 page document.

Last, one's Rule should be about specific things one will do. "To do better" is not enough. One should spell out the things one will do and how often one will do them. Review the Rule at least annually, modify if necessary, and recommit to it.

What can I expect my Rule to do for me?

The Rule is not meant to be an end unto itself; rather, it is -- or could be -- a means of strengthening our relationship with God.

Do I have to do this Rule of Life stuff all by myself?

No, it's helpful to have a mentor, friend, or a group of people you can come to for help, perspective, and accountability.