



Developing a Personal Rule of Life

A Resource of
First Presbyterian Church of Lakeland, Florida



**FIRST
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH**
LAKELAND, FLORIDA

“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.”

Luke 9:23

The life of following Jesus is a daily life. Discipleship is not sporadic or reactive; it is formed through ordered, repeated choices shaped by grace. We live as disciples of Jesus because God has first claimed us in Christ, and we respond by ordering our lives with intention.

This document is a toll to help you prayerfully discern how everyday life can be ordered around following Jesus. It invites you to name spiritual rhythms and practices that support faithfulness, joy, and growth in holiness within the life God has given you.

What is a Rule of Life?

A Rule of Life is a commitment to live with intention under the lordship of Christ. Historically, a “rule” referred to a guide or measure - much like a ruler - that helped Christian communities remain faithful in their shared life. Early Christians adopted structured patterns of prayer, worship, fasting, and rest to resist spiritual drift and remain attentive to God.

Over time, the idea of a Rule of Life has expanded beyond monastic communities to include personal discipleship. Today, a Rule of Life is a clear, realistic framework of spiritual practices that helps a Christian live faithfully in real circumstances - work, family, vocation, and community.

A Personal Rule of Life

Most of us do not belong to communities that assign a shared rule, yet all of us are shaped by habits, expectations, and values - whether intentional or not. A personal Rule of Life allows us to become attentive to the forces shaping us and to align our lives more fully with the purposes of God.

A personal Rule of Life is:

- **Personal** - shaped by your season of life, gifts, and limitations
- **Holistic** - addressing daily, weekly, monthly, and annual rhythms
- **Grace** - centered - grounded in God’s initiative and faithfulness

This is a living document. It can and should be revised as life circumstances change.

A Rule of Life in the Reformed Tradition

Developing a personal Rule of Life is not at odds with Presbyterian or Reformed theology. At its heart, it is an expression of biblical theology - how the gospel shapes daily life.

Reformed Christians affirm that we are justified by grace alone through faith alone. A Rule of Life does not earn God’s favor; it responds to it. Spiritual practices are not the basis of salvation, but ordinary means God uses to form us in sanctification.

Throughout Scripture, God's people are shaped by ordered rhythms of prayer, worship, rest, generosity, and obedience. From Israel's covenant life to the early church's devotion to shared practices (Acts 2:42), faith has always been lived through daily patterns.

Within the Reformed tradition, God works through ordinary means of grace - Word, Sacrament, prayer, and community. A personal Rule of Life simply names how one intends to live attentively within those means, trusting God to bring growth.

In this way, a Rule of Life reflects the Reformed conviction that sanctification is a lifelong, Spirit-led process, grounded in grace and lived faithfully in ordinary life.

What Goes into a Personal Rule of Life?

A Rule of Life is made up of spiritual practices - often called disciplines - that God uses as ordinary means of grace. These include essential spiritual practices such as prayer, Scripture reading, and worship, as well as faith-building practices such as fasting, generosity, service, silence, confession, and study.

Not every practice is for every person or every season. Discernment, self-awareness, and honesty are essential. The goal is not spiritual business, but growth in love for God and neighbor.

Start with a Self-Awareness

Before writing a Rule of Life, reflect prayerfully on your current season of life: responsibilities, limitations, relationships, and patterns. Consider areas of strength and areas where sin or imbalance is most evident.

One helpful framework comes from the historic list of the "seven deadly sins," understood as root patterns that distort love. Consider which tendencies most need God's transforming grace.

Sloth → Fruitfulness (not mere productivity)

Anger → Gentleness

Envy → Love

Lust → Chastity

Greed → Generosity

Gluttony → Self-denial, moderation

Pride → Humility

Where do you struggle most? Begin there. Allow areas of weakness to guide the practices you adopt. God often uses practices not to display our strength but to reshape our desires for his glory and our good.

Specific Spiritual Practices

A personal Rule of Life becomes sustainable when practices are ordered realistically across time. Rather than attempting to do everything every day, this framework invites you to discern what faithfulness looks like at different intervals of life. These rhythms are not about earning God's favor. They are ways we place ourselves where the Spirit ordinarily works, trusting God to bring growth.

The following is a list of possibilities. It is up to you to name the spiritual rhythms and practices needed for this season of your life.

Daily Practices

Fixed Time of Prayer

Setting aside a regular time for prayer establishes attentiveness to God at the beginning, middle, or end of the day. Prayer need not be long to be faithful. Consistency matters more than quantity. Fixed prayer times anchor the day in dependence on God and remind us that our lives are lived before him.

Helpful approaches may include written prayers, the Psalms, the Lord's Prayer, intercessory prayer, or silent prayer. Over time, fixed prayer trains the heart to turn toward God throughout the day.

Scripture Reading

Daily engagement with Scripture places us under the formative authority of God's Word. Scripture reading may follow a lectionary, a reading plan, or focused attention on a single book of the Bible. The goal is not speed or volume, but receptivity.

Reading Scripture daily reminds us that God speaks before we act and reveals his character, promises, and purposes over time.

Examen or Daily Reflection

A daily examen is a brief, prayerful review of the day. It invites attentiveness to God's presence, gratitude for gifts received, honest recognition of sin or missed opportunities, and trust in God's grace.

This practice cultivates self-awareness, humility, and gratitude while guarding against both spiritual complacency and harsh self-judgement.

Journaling

Journaling provides space to record prayers, Scripture insights, gratitude, questions, or recurring spiritual patterns. Writing helps clarify what we notice and remember what God is doing over time.

Journaling is especially helpful for discerning growth, naming struggles, and identifying seasons that may call for adjustment to one's Rule of Life.

Prayer Before Meals

Praying before meals is a simply practice of gratitude and dependence. It interrupts routine with remembrance that daily provision comes from God's hand.

This practice forms humility and gratitude, particularly when practiced consistently and without hurry.

Attentiveness to God's Presence in Daily Work

This practice involves consciously offering work - paid or unpaid - to God. It may include brief prayers before tasks, reminders of vocation, or intentional pauses.

Attentiveness resists the false division between sacred and secular, affirming that all of life is lived before God.

Weekly Practices

Corporate Worship

Weekly worship with the congregation is central to Christian discipleship. In worship, God gathers his people, speaks through Word and Sacrament, and forms us as the body of Christ.

Corporate worship reminds us that faith is not private and that we belong to one another in Christ.

Sabbath Rest

Sabbath is the intentional practice of ceasing from ordinary work and productivity. It is an act of trust that God sustains the world without our constant effort.

Sabbath may include worship, rest, delight, and unhurried time with others. It resists both burnout and self-sufficiency.

Small Group, Class, or Study

Regular participation in Christian learning and fellowship supports growth in understanding and faith. This may include Bible studies, classes, or covenant groups.

Learning in community allows Scripture and theology to shape us alongside others.

Service Within the Church

Serving within the church uses gifts for the building up of the body of Christ. Service reminds us that discipleship includes contribution, not consumption.

Faithful service need not be public or prominent to be meaningful.

Intentional Time with Christian Community or Family

Setting aside weekly time for relationships nurtures love, accountability, and encouragement. Faith is strengthened through shared meals, conversation, prayer, and presence.

Monthly Practice

Extended Prayer and Reflection

Monthly extended prayer provides space for deeper listening and reflection beyond daily routines. This time may include silence, Scripture meditation, or guided prayer.

Such pauses help prevent spiritual drift and cultivate attentiveness.

Review of Rule of Life

Regular review allows the Rule of Life to remain realistic and life-giving. This is a time to notice what is sustainable, what feels forced, and where God may be inviting change.

Spiritual Conversation

Intentional conversation with a trusted friend, mentor, or pastor provides encouragement, accountability, and perspective. Speaking faith aloud often brings clarity.

Review of Finances with Attention to Generosity

Monthly financial review invites stewardship and generosity. This practice aligns resources with values and resists unconscious consumption.

Engagement in Mercy or Justice-Focused Ministry

Regular engagement with needs beyond one's immediate circle reflects God's concern for the vulnerable and forms compassion and humility.

Seasonal or Annual Practices

Observance of the Church Calendar

Participating in seasons such as Advent, Lent, and Easter shapes life around the story of Christ rather than the rhythms of culture.

Personal Retreat

Retreats provide extended time for prayer, silence, and listening. They may be brief or extended and adapted to life circumstance.

Focused Season of Prayer or Fasting

Intentional seasons of fasting or focused prayer heighten dependence on God and clarify desire. These practices are best entered prayerfully and with discernment.

Annual Revision of Rule of Life

Annual review recognizes changing seasons of life and invites renewed intentionality.

Intentional Generosity Beyond Regular Giving

Special acts of generosity train freedom from attachment and cultivate joy in giving.

Lifetime Practices

Pilgrimage or Significant Spiritual Journey

Pilgrimage offers embodied reflection and prayer in a distance setting, often marking significant seasons of faith.

Long-Term Vocational Discernment

Discerning vocation is an ongoing practice of listening to God's call in work, service, and life direction.

Mentoring Relationships

Being mentored or mentoring others reflects the generational nature of faith formation.

Establishing a Legacy of Generosity and Service

Considering long-term impact encourages faithfulness beyond one's own lifetime.

Additional Helpful Practices to Consider

- ☐ Regular confession and assurance of forgiveness
- ☐ Spiritual reading beyond Scripture
- ☐ Fasting as a part of prayer, repentance, or preparing for a work of ministry
- ☐ Limiting digital consumption or practicing technology Sabbath
- ☐ Physical care through rest and movement
- ☐ Practices of gratitude and celebration

A Pastoral Word of Freedom

This Rule of Life is offered as a tool for discipleship, not as a measure of faithfulness or a basis for our standing before God. Our justification rests entirely in Jesus Christ and not in the consistency, sincerity, or success of our spiritual practices. These rhythms are meant to support attentiveness to God's grace through the ordinary means he provides, always under the authority of Scripture and within the shared life of the church. If at any point this Rule of Life burdens the conscience, encourages comparison, or obscures the gospel of grace, it should be revised - or set aside - in freedom and trust, confident that God's faithfulness does not depend on our performance.

Prayer

Faithful God, you are the author and finisher of faith.
By your Spirit, order my days, shape my desires,
and form me into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

Amen



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