



COLLEGE
CHURCH

A ROADMAP FOR BECOMING MORE LIKE JESUS, ONE STEP AT A TIME

A Rule of Life Primer



How to Use this Devotional

This devotional can be experienced all at once, or spread out over multiple settings. You can use it by yourself, or with others (if the latter, each person should have their own copy). To get the best out of it, find a quiet place, free from distractions, and block out at least 60-90 minutes (a bit more if you decide to experience it with others)

Introduction

This devotional is designed to help you become more like Jesus, one step at a time.

It is not designed to help you develop a grand master plan for your spiritual life. If you're looking for a resource to help you think "big picture" about a Rule of Life, we highly recommend the Rule of Life Builder that is available for free at practicingtheway.org.

This devotional is designed to guide you through a process of discernment along two very specific questions:

1. In what way do I want to become more like Jesus in this season of my life?
2. And what practice or practices can help me to get there?

Blessings as you begin!

What is a Rule of Life?

A Rule of Life is a conscious, deliberate plan to build a life with Jesus at the center.

The word “Rule” can be misleading. A Rule of Life is not a list of rules. The word “Rule” in this context comes from the latin word for trellis—a structure that promotes growth.

If you plant grapes, pole beans, or a flowering vine in the ground without a trellis, it will ramble around and peter out. You won’t get many grapes or beans or flowers if you get any at all. But if you plant them next to a trellis, the trellis will help support and guide it so that it can grow up, towards the sun. Then it will “bear much fruit.”

A Rule of Life is a set of intentional practices that help a person or community grow towards Jesus. We’ll explore what those practices are in what follows.

Priming the Pump

Before we go any further, let’s stop and take stock of where you are right now.

Take 10-15 minutes to reflect on the following questions. Feel free to write your answers below, or in a journal. When you’re done, consider sharing them with a trusted friend.

1. What is the most pressing and absorbing challenge in your life right now?

2. What, if anything, is Jesus saying to you about this?
(Consider pausing for several minutes to ask Him!)

3. Is there something that you hope God does in you so that you can navigate this challenge in a more Christlike way?

Start with Jesus

What do you admire about Jesus?

Jesus is God in human flesh.

As such, He reveals not only God to us, but what it looks like to be fully alive and fully human!

What do you see when you look at Him? What do you notice about His character? His way of being? Write down at least a handful of characteristics that you admire about Him. Be specific!

If you're going through this with others, generate your list as a group!

Listening to God

Listening prayer is a vital practice for Christians.

When we carve out silence to listen to God, we surrender control and invite God to speak into our lives.

Spend about 10 minutes in silence with the two prompts printed below.

If you find that your mind is having trouble focusing, go back to your list of things you admire about Jesus.

If insights come to you slowly, that's OK! Even if they don't come at all...that's OK. You're still practicing being still and listening!

If insights come quickly, that's great! Keep listening! Ask God. "Is there more you want to say to me? Your servant is listening!"

Now find a comfortable place to sit. Slow down. Become aware of your breathing. Let your mind and body relax into God's goodness. You may choose to close your eyes, or open your hands, palms up, to put yourself in a position to receive.

Here are the prompts. Enjoy the Silence!

1. Ask Yourself: What's one thing that you admire about Jesus that you would like to be able to reflect more clearly and fully in your own life?
2. Ask God: in what way do you want me to grow in the coming months...so that I can become more like Jesus?

Stop and Share

If you're doing this with others, stop and share what you heard.

If you're doing this alone, consider sharing these things with a trusted friend soon!

What did you hear? What, if anything, did God bring to mind?

What's one way you'd like to become more like Jesus?

How do we change?

This is an important question!

We change, we're transformed, not by *trying*, but by *training*.

We change through *indirect effort*.

The classic example comes from the movie The Karate Kid, in which Daniel becomes an apprentice to Mr. Miyagi - a Karate Master and sensei.

Rather than teach Daniel how to fight, he puts him to work, painting a fence and waxing his car. Daniel is frustrated because he feels like he's wasting time NOT learning karate. Little does he know, he is actually building muscle memory that is laying the groundwork for karate skills. He is slowly being transformed through *training*!

You're already being transformed.

The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 12:2, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

We are already being formed by our culture!

We want to be formed by Jesus.

We can't transform ourselves.

But we can make space for the Holy Spirit to transform us! The Holy Spirit is eager to transform us so that we become more like Jesus!

So, how do we make space for the Holy Spirit to transform us? By engaging in Spiritual Practices!

When we:

Carve out solitude to be with God.

When we pray or engage with God through Scripture

When we commit to community and serve others...

...We are creating a space for the Holy Spirit to make us more like Jesus!

Our job is to create space by giving God our attention and practicing the way of Jesus!

The Holy Spirit's job is to transform us so that we become more and more like Jesus, over time.

On rare occasions we might experience breakthroughs: when we experience sudden and dramatic change all at once! Praise God when this happens!

Most of the time, however, we are transformed, slowly but surely, over time, as our thinking and habits change.

Speaking of habits...

Anti-Habits, Spiritual Habits and Creative Habits

One way to think about how we change is through:

- Anti-Habits
- Spiritual Habits
- And Creative Habits

An **Anti-Habit** is when we STOP doing the things that "conform to the pattern of this world" rather than Jesus.

A **Spiritual Habit** is a habit that mimics the way Jesus trained.

If you read the gospels, you find Jesus routinely practicing and evidencing the practices of *Solitude, Prayer, Reflection on Scripture, Sabbath, Fasting, Generosity, Community, Service, and Witness*.

(You can learn more about these practices at practicingtheway.org/resources)

A Creative Habit may be one you create yourself that helps you to practice the way of Jesus in your everyday life (some examples are provided below).

Perhaps a **Personal Example** would be helpful!

I (Pastor Bill) would like to be more patient and less hurried.

I am already being formed into an impatient and hurried person: by my own internal wiring, my family of origin and my culture.

When I look at Jesus, I see someone who is patient, unhurried and interruptible. Jesus seems to move through life at 3 miles per hour.

I would like to be more like Jesus! But how do I get there?

Anti-habits

First, I think about what engrained habits I need to break. So I ask myself:

When am I tempted to hurry? What do I need to stop doing?

1. I need to stop interrupting people and articulating what I think they're trying to say, for them. (*After all, Jesus loved to ask questions. He was curious. He let people speak for themselves. He wasn't in a rush to figure them out!*)
2. I need to stop stacking meetings! Cramming my day with more meetings and tasks that it can hold! I need to stop rushing from one thing to the next, and let my day breath! (*After all, Jesus was interruptible! He wasn't in a rush! He seemed to always have time for people, even in the middle of an urgent task!*)
3. I need to accept, rather than judge delays. I have a habit of judging things like traffic, long lines, and people who take forever to make a point as bad. (*Whereas Jesus didn't judge situations as bad; He wondered what God was doing and what He was called to do in every situation!*)

So I moved from a vision of Jesus (patient, unhurried), to identifying what habits I need to break.

Spiritual Habits

If my goal is to become more patient and less hurried, I need to practice waiting!
Not itchy, irritable waiting, but relaxed waiting.

Is there a spiritual practice that can help me to exercise my waiting muscles? YES!!

Listening Prayer!

Listening prayer, which you've already experienced once in this devotional, is a practice that involves giving up control, and waiting on God to speak.

It involves releasing your agenda and time table and surrendering your attention to God long enough to hear His voice.

I'll never become patient just by trying really hard to be patient.

But the Holy Spirit can help me become patient as I practice listening to God like Jesus did!

Creative Habits

What are some other ways that I can practice being patient and NOT being in a rush?

1. I can get into the first check out line, rather than seek out the shortest.
2. I can drive the speed limit.
3. When I experience a delay, I can turn judgment into wonder by asking God, "What do you want to accomplish in me through this delay?"
4. I can spend time reflecting on the lives and impact of patient people: people who have suffered long.

I hope this example of taking a characteristic of Jesus that I admire and aspire to live out in my own life (patience and being unhurried) and identifying anti-habits, spiritual habits and creative habits that the Holy Spirit can use to transform me has been helpful.

Now it's your turn!

Making a Plan

Take that one thing that you admire about Jesus that you would like to reflect in your own life, more and more.

Begin brainstorming your own anti-habits, spiritual habits and creative habits!

Below you will find questions to guide you, along with examples to stimulate your own thinking!

This is meant to be a solo activity, and an opportunity to be creative, and to listen to God.

Block out about 20 minutes to prayerfully identify at least one anti-habit, spiritual habit and creative habit.

Anti Habits:

What habits and patterns do I already have that I need to break in order to become more like Jesus in this way?

(for example: if you want to be more present, what distractions can you remove from your life?)

Spiritual Habits:

What practice could the Holy Spirit use to help you become more like Jesus in this way?

Examples:

Problem: Anxiety (I fear future loss)

Practice: Grounding (get out of your head and into your body) and Meditating on God's care for His creation (Matthew 6:25-34)

Problem: Lust (disordered desire)

Practice: Fasting and Prayer (I can put my desire for God ahead of my desire for food; I can put my core desires ahead of my lesser desires)

Problem: Pride (I think that I am better than others)

Practice: Service (I am a servant of others)

Creative Habits:

Can you think of other practices that might help you?

(Hint: these could be the flip side of your anti-habits!)

Examples:

Anti-Habit: I say yes to everything because I don't want to disappoint people.

Creative Habit: I practice saying, "Let me take some time to prayerfully consider this before giving you an answer."

Anti-Habit: I am easily angered when I'm around people who disagree with one of my fundamental convictions.

Creative Habit: When I discover such a disagreement, I lean in and ask, "How did you arrive at that conviction? What sorts of life experiences and relationships helped to shape that conviction in you?"

Stop and Share

If you're doing this with others, stop and share what habits and practices you identified.

If you're doing this alone, consider sharing these things with a trusted friend soon!

Two Encouragement

I hope you sensed God guiding you and speaking to you through this exercise!

This is what apprentices do! We consciously and deliberately set aside time to be with Jesus, so that we can become like Jesus and do as He does.

My first encouragement is for you to stick with this! It takes about 90 days to form a habit. To take something strange and different and have it become second nature to us! Rather than look for something new to move on to right away, consider making this ONE THING the thing that you focus on for the next 3 or 4, or even 6 months or more!

My second encouragement is to do this in community!

We can't sustain practicing the way of Jesus alone. We need a community in order to sustain our "long obedience in the same direction" as Eugene Peterson puts it!

We need to invite others into our journey, and give them permission to check-in, encourage, ask questions and pray (and hopefully, we're returning the favor!).

I encourage you to find someone that you will see on a regular basis, and tell them about what you began to realize through this devotional. And ask them to check in on you and pray for you as you seek to become more like Jesus in this way!

Post Script: Reflection and Next Steps (for 3-14 days after you complete the devotional)

21 Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, 22 throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. 23 Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. 24 Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.

Ephesians 4:21-24

In this Devotional, you took time to:

1. Reflect on Jesus' character – what is it that you admire about Him?
2. Listen to God and ask how He wants to make you more like Jesus
3. Develop a conscious and deliberate plan to make room for the Holy Spirit by identifying specific habits and practices that He can use to make you more like Jesus, over time.

Reflecting back on this experience, what did you hear most clearly from God?

Who have you told about what you heard? Who should you tell?

What obstacles might you face as you seek to break certain habits and begin new ones?

What will it take to overcome these obstacles? Who or what can help?

A Word about Small Groups

Small groups are ideal places to share with others about the ways in which you long to grow closer to, and become more like, Jesus.

If you're already in a small group, consider marking out a season, as a group, to take turns providing a 10 minute update on your "growing edge." What is God showing you? In what way are you growing toward Jesus? What habits and practices are helping you to grow? How can your community encourage, support and pray for you in this season of your apprenticeship to Jesus?

If you don't yet belong to a small group, visit thecollegechurch.org/small-groups to find out more!

Two Helpful Resources

Spiritual Health Reflection Tool:

www.practicingtheway.org/reflection

This is great for helping you identify areas in your life in which you need to grow.

Rule of Life Builder:

www.practicingtheway.org/ruleoflifebuilder

This is great for helping you to think big picture about your Rule of Life, and how to make a conscious, deliberate plan to practice the way of Jesus.