

The Trinity Mission

Creating a Rule of Life

For Yourself and Your Family

A Pamphlet
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What is a Rule of Life and Why Should I Have One?

A Rule of Life is simply a well thought out, general description of how you want to live your life to the glory of Jesus Christ. The reality of our lives is that we live our day-to-day intending to start this thing next week - do that thing when we get through this busy season - put our money there when we have a little more of a safety-net built up.

The point of a Rule of Life is to take some time to think through all these things *now*, to think through our own gifting and calling, and then to chart a course onward and upward into the knowledge and experience of God's grace, to describe what we want our life to look like and to describe it *realistically*.

Creating a Rule is not difficult but it does take some honesty and humility. A Rule of Life is not a calendar or an agenda. It is a standard (think: Ruler) that you can use to measure whether or not you are becoming the person you believe that Christ has made you to be.

Furthermore, it is not ironclad. In fact, I'd recommend that you reassess it at least yearly. As your life changes and as you mature in Christ, your path forward will likely change as well.

A Rule of Life For Your Family As Well

Some of you may wish to make a Rule of Life for your family. In fact, the idea of a Rule began as a way to establish a common way of living in a community. This is helpful even today. Perhaps you may make your Rule as two parts. Part One is what applies to everyone in the family. Part Two each person makes for themselves.

Suggestions for the Process of Making Your Rule

As I said above, a Rule of Life is to be a *well thought out* description of your life. For this reason, I'd suggest prayer and some sort of fasting to open yourself to the Holy Spirit's guidance before you begin developing your personal Rule. If you are able, you may even want to go off for a quiet personal retreat to kick-off the creation of your Rule.

After you have developed a draft, show it to people who know you well and are willing and able to shoot you straight. A Rule is to be reasonable but it is also a spiritual discipline. A Rule that subtly encourages greed or slothfulness (for example) may be reasonable but it's not really what we're trying to achieve.

After you have made it, print it out. You might even give it to a couple trusted friends and explain to them that this is the sort of person you want to be and ask if they would be willing to ask you about it every now and then.

As you can probably already imagine this is not an easy thing to do. It's a whole lot easier just to imagine yourself developing good habits and disciplines than it is to write out those habits and disciplines and show them to someone else as goals you wish to achieve.

As a last thought before we begin making a Rule of Life, it should be pointed out that everyone's structure will be different. Some people are "check-box" people and they want to have a list of things to check off. Perhaps things you do each day, other things you do each week, each month, etc. Their Rule will maybe look a little more like a list of things to be done at particular frequencies.

Other folks are "trajectory" types. They want to have a general mission and vision described but for them the check-boxes begins to feel legalistic and confining. Their Rule may be a more general description of who they believe they are in Christ and where they want to go with that.

The important things for either type and all types in between is that your Rule is Observable, Measurable, & Attainable.

Observable – others can see whether or not you are living up to your Rule.

Measurable – it can be determined whether or not you are actually living up to your Rule.

Attainable – your Rule is realistic for who you are and where you are in life.

What Sorts of Things Should I Have in My Rule

Now let's think through some of the things you should consider having in your Rule. Because we are uniquely called and gifted, everyone's Rule of Life will be different. But in case you are reading this without the advantage of assistance from a spiritual director, I want to talk through some of these things in a little more detail and offer what I believe are helpful standards to set for yourself.

Suggestions for Your Rule of Life

Eucharist Attendance

Gathering together as the Body of Christ, worshiping Him in a manner consistent with His people's worship throughout history, and receiving His Body and Blood so that He may dwell in us and us in Him as we go out into the world to be salt and light, to be Christ Himself among a crooked and depraved generation – this is the backbone of the Christian life. It should be the backbone of our Rule as well.

The early church believed this so strongly that there was a time that missing the Eucharistic worship 3 times in a row resulted in ex-communication. Certainly, our own ideal should be to participate in the Church's worship and communion on every Sunday. If this is not possible because of health or geography then you will have to adjust accordingly.

Prayer with Church

This is gathering together as the Body of Christ to immerse ourselves in the Scriptures and to pray as the Body for our leaders, for those in need, for the whole world, etc. In Anglican circles, we call it the Daily Office. This is different than personal prayer but rather it should be considered more along the lines of intercessory prayer performed as the whole Body of Christ.

There was a time when it was not unreasonable for the Church to gather together physically every day for the Daily Office. Perhaps (and sadly so) it may not be possible to do this in our modern lives. However, praying the Offices at home or joining in with our Audio Daily Office podcasts at thetrinitymission.org are good ways to continue this practice even in the modern era.

For those who have families, praying these services at home will probably have some cross-over with the next section – Family Prayer and Scripture Reading.

Family Prayer and Scripture Reading

Whether you are newly-weds, empty-nesters, a single parent, or a couple raising children together it is crucial to the formation of the family as a whole as well as the individual members of it that you pray together (for this purpose "prayer" includes listening to Scripture, praying pre-written liturgical prayers, and free-form prayers).

How often you pray together and at what time will be different for every family but there should be some sort of rhythm where your family knows it will gather for prayer.

For the parents who feel a little uncomfortable starting this sort of thing we have the book: Daily Office for Individuals and Families at thetrinitymission.org. We are working on other resources for you as well so keep checking in.

Personal Prayer & Scripture Reading

The book just mentioned is also helpful for this part of your daily life (and it should be daily). It should also include the things I mentioned above concerning prayer (i.e reading Scripture, praying pre-written liturgical prayers, and free-form prayers).

Personal Study

We are all called to be continually growing in grace but not everyone is called to greater academic attainment. You may want to have as a part of your Rule some expected frequency of reading Christian writers, listening to podcasts, etc. Some amount of this is usually good but it's not for everyone. I mention it here to stress the point that it is not the same as Personal Prayer & Scripture Reading.

Meals with Church

Where we have our meals, how we have our meals, and with whom we have our meals says a tremendous amount about our priorities and even our theology (didn't see that one coming did you?)

We'll suffice it to say that there should be some frequency to your sharing a meal with people from your church. This does not mean the whole congregation (though that should occur too) nor does it mean that it must be the same people every time, in fact, it probably shouldn't be.

Family Meals

By a family meal I mean any meal that occurs in your home (or a picnic or something) and includes all of your family (though others may be present as well). The family meal is perhaps one of the primary ways that a family establishes its identity (the relationship of this discussion to the Eucharist is not incidental).

In our modern lives a family meal can be excruciatingly difficult to schedule, but I'd challenge you to seek to make it the norm rather than the exception. That is to say that at least one meal is had together on at least 4 days of the week.

Fasting

So enough about all this eating, what about not eating?

Solitude / Reflection / Personal Retreat

This might be the one quality that all the saints of the Church's history have had in common.

Budget: Spending / Giving / Saving

When is enough enough? Many of us will continue to earn money until we pay the undertaker, and that's usually a good thing.

But there is probably a point in all of our lives where saving becomes idolatry and is motivated by greed or fear. Likewise, left unchecked our spending often becomes fueled by fear, envy, lust, or gluttony. Where is that point for you? You might give it a real number. Otherwise, that point will *always* be just a little bit more.

You can always change the number later on. But when you do, you'll be aware that you are making a change and therefore the change itself will be intentional rather than accidental.

Isaiah 58

Read it. Then read Isaiah 1, Isaiah 61, and Matthew 25. Then think about what your Rule should include along these lines.

Character Qualities

It might be helpful simply to list the character qualities that you want to be known for. In each of the first two example Rules, I give a list that has been drawn up over the years from my own life and from working with others. You may wish to add more to it. Feel free to steal it exactly.

Personal Mission Statement / Family Mission Statement

For some of you, this may be the primary element of your Rule. Just like for an organization, a personal mission statement is clear and generally describes the sorts of things you are about. Also, like in a corporation, a mission statement helps you to decide what things you will *not* be about. A mission statement can be a very handy companion to the budget section above.

Service in Community

This is different than the Isaiah 58 section above. This would include more general types of service (i.e. a youth group leader, a community gardener, a mentor, or some other sort of work that benefits your local community).

Marriage

Time away together and alone? Dates? Marriage enrichment workshops?

Health & Physical Fitness

Just a reminder, the Rule should describe who you are *generally* not detail out your week.

Consumption

We live in a world that tries to make us more and more consumers of products and less and less creators or producers. What would it look like in your life to limit consumption (spending, eating out, buying things you could easily make yourself).

An activity as simple as learning to make butter from milk or to make bread from scratch can begin to change our whole outlook on such things.

Media

Take a minute to add up the hours you spent on social media this week (and then double it to get the actual number you probably spent). Add to this the hours watching TV or movies or surfing the internet. These things perhaps are not intrinsically bad. But your Rule is a good way to intentionally determine just how much of your life they will take up.

By the way, did you know that the word “muse” has to do with being thoughtful or being creatively inspired. Thus the word “amuse” means “not-muse.” What are the differences between “a-musement” and “re-creation?” How can your Rule direct toward the one and away from the other?

Example Rules of Life

Below are some examples of a Rule of Life. Your Rule may look very different. Some Rules may be 10-15 pages long while others may be one long summary paragraph. The important thing is that it is observable, measurable, and attainable.

John Doe **Personal Rule of Life**

General Statement:

I am a child of God, a husband, a father, and a creative person desiring to use business as a form of mission in my community. In all aspects of the way that I love my wife, lead my family, serve my Church and community, and conduct my business(es) I will seek to bring glory to Jesus in my thinking, my speaking, and my actions. Furthermore, I recognize that my family, my church, as well as the families of my employees can be blessed or hurt depending on my obedience to this manner of life I am describing.

By the grace of God and the enabling of the Holy Spirit, this is what my life will look like:

Personal

- time in prayer and Scripture [*Ideal: daily – Acceptable: 5xweek*]
- extended quiet time (practicing solitude) [*Ideal: weekly – Acceptable: 2xmonth*]
- fasting [*Ideal: Wed & Fri until 3pm – Acceptable: weekly*]
- Matthew 25/ Isaiah 61 etc. activities [*Ideal: weekly – Acceptable: monthly*]
- quiet retreat [*Ideal: quarterly – Acceptable: yearly*]
- meet with a spiritual director [*Ideal: monthly – Acceptable: quarterly*]

Family

- family meals [*Ideal: daily – Acceptable: 4xweek*]
- family prayer [*Ideal: daily – Acceptable: 4xweek*]
- special activity with (wife) only [*Ideal: weekly – Acceptable: monthly*]
- special activity with (child) only [*Ideal: weekly – Acceptable: monthly*]
- play-time with (child) [*Ideal: few minutes daily – Acceptable: 4xweek*]
- special family events [*Ideal: weekly – Acceptable: 2xmonth*]

Church

- Eucharist/worship [*Ideal: weekly – Acceptable: 3xmonth*]
- Daily Office (at home, may include above prayer times) [*Ideal: 2xday – Acceptable: 5xweek*]
- Daily Office (gathered together) [*Ideal: weekly+ – Acceptable: 2xmonthly*]
- Service to my Church [*Ideal: 2xmonth – Acceptable: monthly*]
- Other forms of service in the local community (may include Matt. 25 above) [*Ideal: 2xmonth – Acceptable: monthly*]

Finances

- As a family to live on \$x or less annually (including all savings, vacation, etc.)
- To give 10% of annual amount (above) to Church

- To give/spend 50% of amount in excess of \$x each year to works for God's kingdom with emphasis on justice and mercy causes/ministries
- When total value of all savings/assets > \$xx, then we will give 75% of amount in excess of \$x/year to works of God's kingdom

Business

- To pay well above the average for employees who have demonstrated loyalty
- To have at least x employee(s) who may not have an opportunity to work elsewhere (prison record, foster kid, etc)
- To know the names of my employees spouses (and children??)
- To determine creative ways to have my employees celebrate the Holy Days that I celebrate (e.g. treats, bonuses, parties, etc)
- To be known by my employees as both hard-working and compassionate
- To be known by peers as fair and of the highest integrity

Other Qualities I Will Cultivate

To love the Lord God with all of my heart, mind, soul and strength

To love my neighbor as my self

Not to do to another that which I would not do to my self

To honor all people equally

To deny my self that I may live to follow Christ

To relieve the poor and oppressed

To visit the sick

To show compassion on those in prison

To offer help in time of need

To console the sorrowful

To be utterly aware of the needs of outsiders and to love them well and appropriately

To offer Godly hospitality

To prefer nothing to the love of Christ

Not to give way to anger

Not to foster a desire for revenge

Not to entertain deceit in the heart

To do no evil by action or inaction

To be a person of integrity

To do no injury and to bear patiently injury done to me

To love my enemies

To pray for my enemies

To actively pursue goodness and good works

Not to be proud but

To acknowledge the presence of my gifts and

To glorify God by recognizing them truly as gifts

Not to be given to drunkenness

Not to be lazy

Not to be a murmurer or gossip

- To always trust in God
- To exemplify freedom and abundant life in Christ
- To guard against wicked or malicious speaking
- To apply myself often to prayer
- To be exemplary in all relationships
- To work restoratively
- To be a cultivator
- To be a good steward using God's priorities
- To pursue excellence in all things
- To be sexually pure
- To honor the aged
- To love and respect the younger
- To seek peace
- To glorify God in thought, word and deed

Jane Doe **A Design For My Life**

I am a child of God, a wife, a mother, a daughter, and a teacher. I want to love my husband excellently and be an exceptional mom. I want to raise up my children as well as my students to be strong and independent men and women who know, love, and serve Jesus Christ as their King.

Prayer & Study

Monthly: Read a sermon or letter from the early Church
Weekly: pray with Women's group
Daily: Prayer & Scripture

Disciplines

Yearly: personal quiet retreat
Monthly: meet with spiritual director
Weekly: fast
Daily: 20 minutes listening prayer

Wife

Yearly: Marriage Retreat
Monthly: Date Night
Weekly: Buy or make something special just for John
Daily: pray for him

Weekly Eucharist/ Worship

Mom

Yearly: weekend trip with each kid alone
Monthly: special activity with each
Weekly: fun family activity
Daily: make healthy meals, tell them I love you at least 10x each, pray for them each

Other

Yearly: help run summer program for special needs kids
Monthly: have someone to dinner that we don't know too well
Weekly: serve at the shelter
Daily: help kids Skype with grandparents
Daily: speak kind words to a stranger

Other qualities I will cultivate in my own life and the life of my family

† To love the Lord God with all of my heart, mind, soul and strength † To love my neighbor as my self † Not to do to another that which I would not do to my self † To honor all people equally † To deny my self that I may live to follow Christ † To relieve the poor and oppressed † To visit the sick † To show compassion on those in prison † To offer help in time of need † To console the sorrowful † To be utterly aware of the needs of outsiders and to love them well and appropriately † To offer Godly hospitality † To prefer nothing to the love of Christ Not to give way to anger † Not to foster a desire for revenge † Not to entertain deceit in the heart † To do no evil by action or inaction † To be a person of integrity † To do no injury and to bear patiently injury done to me † To love my enemies † To pray for my enemies † To actively pursue goodness and good works † Not to be proud but † To acknowledge the presence of my gifts and † To glorify God by recognizing them truly as gifts † Not to be given to drunkenness † Not to be lazy † Not to be a murmurer or gossip † To always trust in God † To exemplify freedom and abundant life in Christ † To guard against wicked or malicious speaking † To apply myself often to prayer † To be exemplary in all relationships † To work restoratively † To be a cultivator † To be a good steward using God's priorities † To pursue excellence in all things † To be sexually pure † To honor the aged † To love and respect the younger † To seek peace † To glorify God in thought, word and deed

John Doe, Jr. Rule of Life

My General Rule

God has made me creative, caring, and steadfast. It is my desire to serve Him in my personal and professional life by cultivating the Kingdom of God in those around me; by caring well for everyone who He puts in my path; and for exemplifying steadfastness, integrity, and reliability at work, with my church, and among my friends and family.

Regular Practices to Help Me Achieve It

Daily:

- Daily Office at home
- 10+ minutes reflection on Scriptures
- Keep prayer journal
- Engage someone in meaningful conversation (that they are interested in)
- Intentionally speak kindly to 10 people

Weekly:

- Sunday Worship
- Serve Tue & Thurs at the foster home
- Wednesday Evening Prayer & dinner at the church
- Exercise 30minutes – twice
- Creative writing 1hr – twice

Monthly:

- Meet with spiritual director
- Have people over for dinner party
- Have a quiet retreat
- Develop main hobbies (birding, beer & wine making, bread-baking, gardening, cooking)
- Give 10% (on top of tithe to Church) to the foster home

Yearly:

- Extended quiet retreat at the monastery
- Learn 2 new hobbies (even if I do not develop them but just so that I can have more topics of connecting with others)