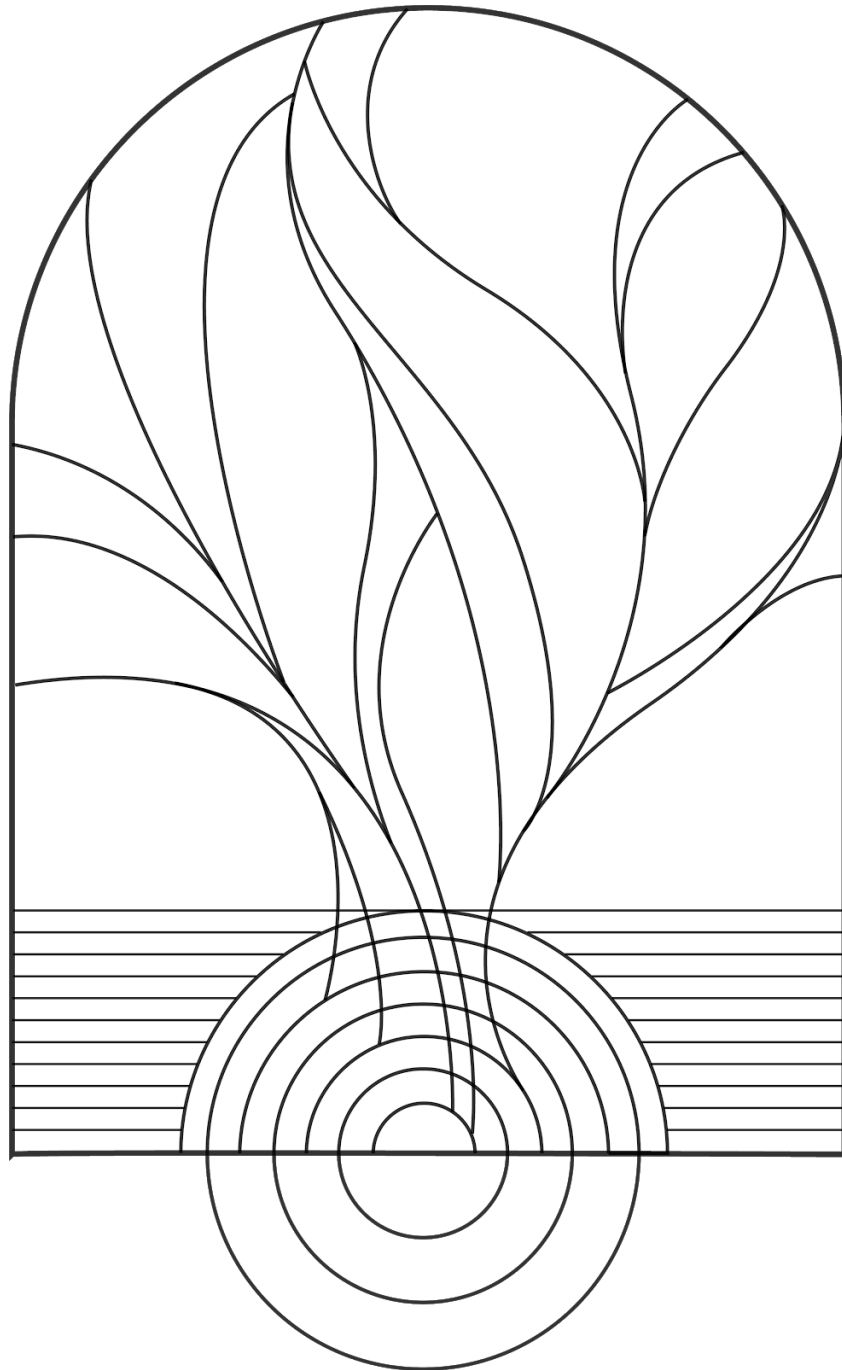


The Rule of Life

Guide to Practice 2021



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“So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.”

Romans 12:1-2 (MSG)



What is a Rule of Life?

Rule of Life is ancient language that describes an intentional plan to regulate, regularize, and reorganize our lives around the gospel. To use Biblical language, it's our plan to abide in Jesus (John 15), stand firm in the freedom that Christ has given us through His grace (Galatians 5), and help us to grow into trees planted by flowing streams, evergreen, and bearing fruit in season (Psalm 1).

In our church family, the Rule of Life is:

- *A commitment.* Many spiritual discipline experts say that it takes months if not years to learn to love and feel at home in the practices. We will work on seasonal commitments (three months to a year) to God and one another.
- *To a set of spiritual practices.* Habits that will help us to resist the slow slide of idol worship or functional atheism in our culture and embrace the love and life of our living God.
- *Made in community.* A rule of life is not primarily *mine*. Rather, it is a commitment I make with God and with others (our families, our partners, our friends, our church) to grow into life in the body and for our church family to become more and more a reflection of our triune God. We will need each other to keep us accountable, share burdens, and light the path for growth.
- *To participate in the divine life of God.* Our goal as followers of Jesus in community with one another is *not* to have a rule of life. Rather, our rule of life is a plan to live into the person and mission and kingdom that Jesus has gifted to us. Therefore, the goals are to grow in love for God, to become the person that God is calling us and gifted us to become, to emanate the glorious face of our God, and to be a community of people who love Jesus together.

In order to facilitate this goal, we have two Rules of Life in our church: a *Community Rule of Life* (p. 6) and a *Personal Rule of Life* (p. 8).



The first and most basic thing we can and must do is to keep God before our minds. David knew this secret and wrote, *“I have set the Lord continually before me; because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; my flesh also will dwell securely”* (Ps. 16:8-9, NASB).

This is the fundamental secret of caring for our souls. Our part in thus practicing the presence of God is to direct and redirect our minds constantly to Him. In the early time of our “practicing” we may well be challenged by our burdensome habits of dwelling on things less than God. But these are habits—not the law of gravity—and can be broken. A new, grace-filled habit will replace the former ones as we take intentional steps toward keeping God before us. Soon our minds will return to God as the needle of a compass constantly returns to the north. If God is the great longing of our souls, He will become the pole star of our inward beings.

Dallas Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*



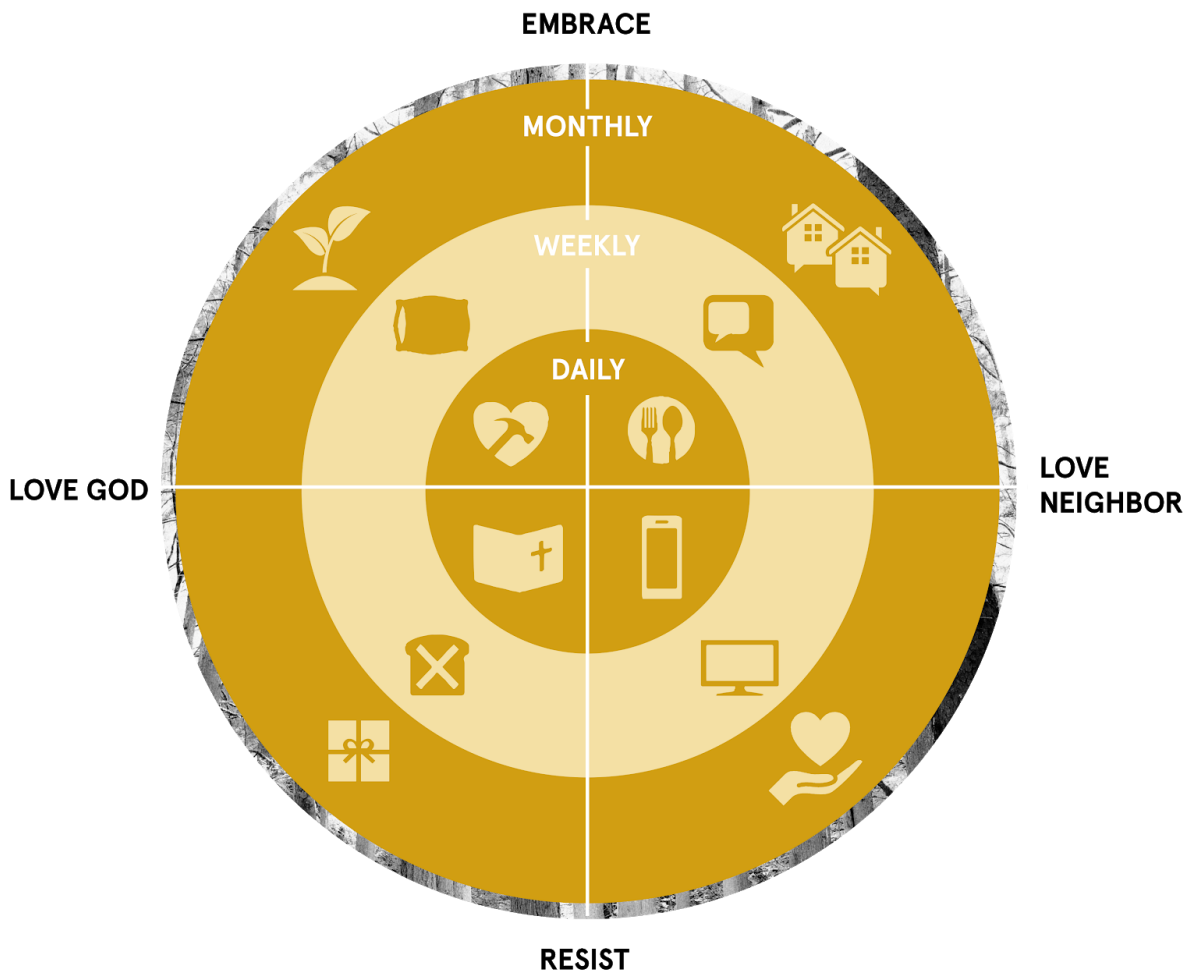
Community Rule of Life

The Community Rule of Life is a curated montage of 12 practices chosen by our leadership, which is:

- *Thorough.* It covers the majority of the Christian life.
- *Essential.* It covers many of the requisite and classic spiritual practices.
- *Aspirational.* We believe that if each of us oriented our lives around community rule of life, we would develop as followers of Jesus. While most of us *could* do all 12 practices and we would strongly suggest you move in that direction, we encourage each person to start where they are in their spiritual journey and use our Community Rule as a goal.
- *Specific.* Each discipline is designed to be clear and ready to practice.
- *A guide.* While it does not assess whether you're a "good Christian", it can function to guide our practices and serve as a *ruler* for our spiritual lives. Our Community Rule of Life will also be used to guide new believers and baptismal candidates as they seek to follow Jesus.
- *Set.* While we may make changes if needed, our Community Rule of Life will stay as-is for the foreseeable future.

Each practice was briefly introduced in our 2020/2021 series on the Rule of Life. All the information, resources, and teachings can be found at realityvancouver.church/ruleoflife

If you have never engaged in spiritual practice, are new to the faith, or just don't know where to begin, we suggest you start by either trying each practice one at a time for a set amount of time, OR choosing four practices - such as two embrace and two resist practices, or two "love God" and two "love neighbour" practices.



Community Rule of Life



“How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives. What we do with this hour, and that one, is what we are doing. A schedule defends from chaos and whim. It is a net for catching days. It is a scaffolding on which a worker can stand and labor with both hands at sections of time.”

Annie Dillard, *The Writing Life*



Personal Rule of Life

The Personal Rule of Life is a set of practices you will choose. It should be:

- *A Working Document.* It is a living and changing set of practices which can adapt to your season of life and discipleship to Jesus.
- *Timely.* While there are essential practices to every follower of Jesus (prayer, scripture, community, etc) which should be part of our rule of life in almost every season, our personal rule of life should also ask the question of what is most important to focus on in this season of my life.
- *Growing.* As mentioned above, practices which add to our schedules (ie - hospitality) need to be paired with practices that call us to abstain or withdraw (ie - curating screen time). As such, our personal rule of life should grow - not asking for more to do, but bringing more and more of our lives under the reign and rule of our King and the movement of the Holy Spirit.
- *Still a Rule of Life.* Although it's personal, it is still a commitment to a set of spiritual practices made in community to participate in the divine life of God.

There are better and worse, not right or wrong ways to create a Personal Rule of Life. Here are some questions to consider:

- *What are the practices that make up your current rule of life?* Whether you like it or not, each of us has practices that affect us spiritually. Make a list of the spiritual and other habits that make up your days, weeks, and months.

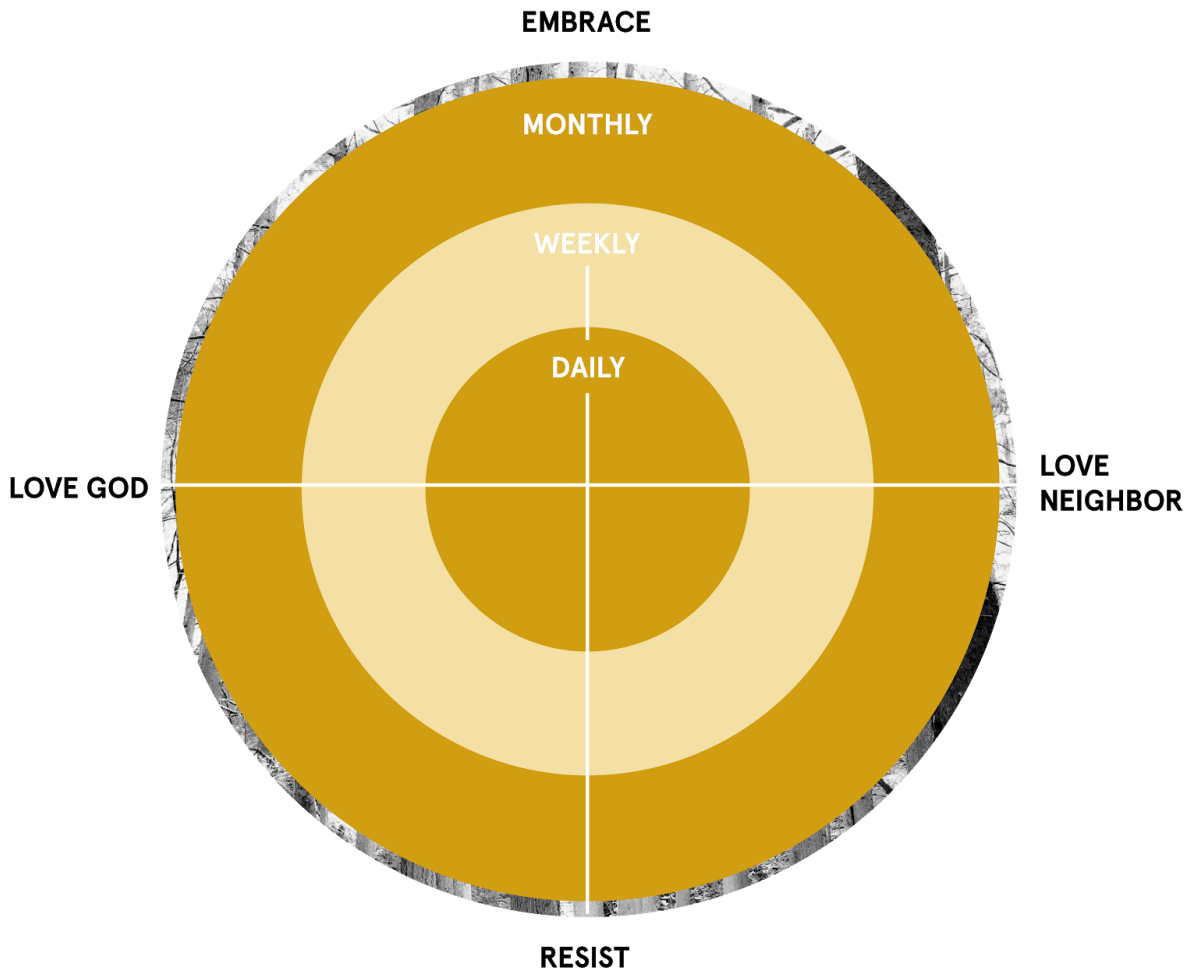
Note: If you have been a Christian for awhile, you may think you are currently engaging in a practice that was once a habit for you. For example, you may have had a season in which you prayed every morning, but if you look objectively at the past week, you may find prayer wasn't a part of any of your mornings. Carefully assess your *current* life for your *current* practices.



- *Which habits must you keep? Which you need to stop to create room for God and faith community?*
- *Of the remainder, which are facilitating growth into the person of Jesus? Which are not?*
- *Who do you want to be? Is there a character trait that you would like to grow in in this next season (humility, generosity, non-anxiousness)? What spiritual practice will create space for you to become this kind of person?*
- *Of all of the practices we've talked about is there one that the Holy Spirit is highlighting for you?*
- *Ask the following to someone you spiritually respect who knows you: "What is one practice I could add and one practice I could take out of my life for a season to help me partner with God in my life?"*

Encouragements as you create a Rule of Life:

- *Be specific.* Commit to practices that are practical, concrete, and embodied, not vague and ideological. For example: "weekly Sabbath on Sundays" is better than "rest."
- *Combine practices of abstinence with practices of engagement.* What will I stop in order to start this new spiritual habit?
- *Be realistic.* Our personalities may trend us towards over or under committing. Rather, try to be realistic, which in general means start small. It is much better to commit to one or two practices and grow into more as they become habits than to have a herculean Rule of Life that is unattainable. Remember, as Dallas Willard says, we are not earning, but joining our effort with God's.
- *Format it in a personally engaging way.* Write it down, draw it, [design a bookmark](#), use a spreadsheet, [create a family visual](#), or use our template below. (For more creative ideas visit ruleoflife.com)
- *Don't forget that even though it is a "personal" rule, it's not just yours.* A Rule of Life is "a commitment to a set of spiritual practices made in community to participate in the divine life of God". Be accountable, share your successes and failures, and use it to help others grow to become more like Jesus.





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