

Way of Discipleship Small Groups

Having a healthy rule of life



Touching base (5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.



Introduction: This session will take a little longer than normal so that we have the opportunity to think through the things we do regularly to walk with God in our daily lives.

Opening question(s) (5 minutes)

What are your most regular habits? How do these change you?



Understanding the information (1 hour)

Share these thoughts in your own words or read them together:

God has given us many ways to be disciples who are being with God, placing Him at the forefront of our attention - worship, prayer, studying Scripture, meditation on Scripture, Sabbath, solitude and silence. It is through these practices that we can give God space in our lives to change us through His Spirit. Our role is about making the choices in how each day which will grow these practices as life-giving habits, in the same way that we clean our teeth, or eat regular meals. They are the exercises we do directly, in order to grow indirectly.



It is impossible to exercise, or start new exercises, without effort and change. But the way to genuine peace is found in using the time that God has given us in the best way possible to enable the things we really want to happen in our lives. In Luke's gospel Martha complains that, rather than helping her in the kitchen, her sister Mary is sitting at Jesus' feet, listening to Him. But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." Mary had chosen the one thing necessary.

Practices move from being good ideas to reality when we make choices about how to do them in our daily lives. This session you are invited to think about how you experience these practices, and what the next steps might be that God is calling you to do in living them out. The handout “Rule of Life” leads you in doing this. It’s an ancient idea adopted by many Christian communities down the centuries as a way of creating space for discipleship in our lives in a way which echoes our deepest longings and choices. While the word “rule” may seem strict, the word comes from a Latin term meaning “supporting scaffold”, like a trellis which lifts a vine off the ground, enabling the fruit to grow. The rule is not an end in itself, it is the means by which we can experience life in all its fullness.

Group activity: As a group, in pairs, or on your own, you are going to look at the rule of life handout.

Start by looking at each practice on the grid and discussing how each one is currently part of your relationship with God, or how you would like it to be. We can think about each practice through a daily or weekly or monthly/quarterly or yearly lens.

Some things might be good to do every day. For example, “Praying for my family before I go to sleep.” Some things might be good on a weekly basis, for example, “Worshipping God with others.” And some things might be something to do every so often, for example “Read a book or watch a programme or sermon that teaches me about being with God.”

On the chart fill in each section, praying about each one. You will not fill in every square. Be as realistic and specific as you can, while knowing that any change will always involve some effort.

Once you have done that, choose which practices you will make your focus over the next season (a few months or a year). You can put them on the page. After a few weeks see how it is going. What is growing fruit? What is not working? Remember this is not a test, an exam or a punishment!

It’s more like an exercise programme to get you fit and healthy. But with all programmes sometimes we can be over-ambitious, or not ambitious enough, and need to think again. The aim is that these practices will become easier as they become habits which reshape the way you live, and help you grow in paying attention to God.

Optional further material and questions

Share these thoughts or read them together:

The final two pages on the handout offer some thoughts about how a rule can be healthy, and not turn into a burden or duty.

Responding to God's leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, "What might God be showing me and how might I respond?" They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, "Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?"



Group prayer (5 minutes)

One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to gaze on the beauty of the Lord
and to seek him in his temple.
For in the day of trouble
he will keep me safe in his dwelling;
he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent
and set me high upon a rock.
Then my head will be exalted
above the enemies who surround me;
at his sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make music to the Lord.
Hear my voice when I call, Lord;
be merciful to me and answer me.
My heart says of you, "Seek his face!"
Your face, Lord, I will seek.
I remain confident of this:
I will see the goodness of the Lord
in the land of the living.
Wait for the Lord;
be strong and take heart
and wait for the Lord.



From Psalm 27

DEVELOPING MY RULE OF LIFE FOR BEING WITH GOD

START BY LOOKING AT EACH PRACTICE

and thinking about how each one is currently part of your relationship with God, or how you would like it to be.

We can think about each practice through a daily or weekly or monthly/quarterly or yearly lens.

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It's more like an exercise programme to get you fit and healthy. But with all programmes sometimes we can be over-ambitious, or not ambitious enough, and need to think again. See the "How can I avoid this being a burden?" section at the end.

The aim is that these practices will become easier as they become habits which reshape the way you live, and help you grow in paying attention to God.



BEING WITH GOD

DEVELOPING A RULE OF LIFE GRID.

You will not fill in each box, but wherever you sense you would like to grow in a practice write a realistic and specific possibility. Once you have filled it in choose up to three (one from each section) to make your primary focus.

Practice	Daily	Weekly	Monthly/Quarterly	Annually
Worship				
Prayer				
Study				
Meditation on Scripture				
Sabbath				
Solitude and Silence				

MY RULE OF LIFE

From the grid above, over the next _____ months/year I will commit to:

What I will do: _____
 (For how long?) _____ (How often?) _____

What I will do: _____
 (For how long?) _____ (How often?) _____

What I will do: _____
 (For how long?) _____ (How often?) _____

HOW CAN I AVOID THIS BEING A BURDEN?

A major source of conflict between Christ and the religious leaders of His time was how commandments, such as the Sabbath, which were meant to bring life to God's people had become soul-destroying and lifeless.

Rather than leading them into being with God and His grace, religious leaders were applying them as burdens – rules which became burdens which created fear of failure more than joyful obedience. In contrast Jesus reminded them that God's commandments are always given for people's benefit, not restriction: "The Sabbath was made for human beings, not human beings for the Sabbath." (Mark 2:27)

We all have routines and things we do most days which nurture us (or harm us!) The question is whether to have routines in our lives, but which ones are important? In order to grow in living by any rule in the right way, these final thoughts may help.

ANY "RULE" IS ALWAYS BEST MOTIVATED BY LOVE.

In the same way that I don't adopt the annual practice of remembering to buy my spouse a present for our anniversary, or get a gift of my nephew's birthday only because I have to as a duty, but because I want to out of love, so any practices of "being with God" will only flourish if they are a response to God's love. "We love, because He first loved us."

A GOOD RULE IS REALISTIC AND SPECIFIC.

If I was going to train to do a marathon, and had never done any running before, I wouldn't attempt

to run ten miles on my first day. Instead I would use "Couch to 5k", or at least ensure my first steps were a mixture of walking and running for a distance I could manage. Unrealistic aims can easily disillusion us. If you have never spent time in silence, and want to start building that into your day, better to start with five minutes and work from there, than aim for thirty minutes and be almost certain to fail.

Again, setting vague aspirations such as "pray more" will not be as helpful as very practical rhythms such as "Read a psalm in the morning."



MANY PRACTICES CAN BE DONE WITH OTHERS.

God always calls people *together*. The early Christians did much of their worship, prayer, study and listening in community. Rather than thinking of your rule only in individual terms, many things can be done with others.

Not only does this provide support and accountability, but you can learn from, and teach others in the process.

THINK ABOUT YOUR PERSONALITY AND LIFESTAGE.

If you are someone who likes people, silence and solitude will be hard for you. Doing the practices with others will be a better place to start. On the other hand, if you are an introverted person you will find being on your own more life-giving.

Similarly, if you have toddlers at home your rule will look very different from a retired or single person. Start with the practices you find come most easily to you, perhaps seeking to grow in just one which you find more difficult. Try and find a balance in your practices which works for you.

DON'T BE AFRAID OF BEING FLEXIBLE.

While practices require some effort, if you consistently are not experiencing fruit in your discipleship, or finding them too hard, don't be afraid to change.

Normally rules are things which don't alter, but it is more helpful to think of the practices we commit to in a Rule as being for a season. The way we grow as disciples does not happen in a "straight line" all through our lives. Life circumstances change. God may want to work on some things in us at one point and not others.

The writer Margaret Guenther puts it well when she says,

"A good rule can set us free to be our true and best selves. It is a working document, a kind of spiritual budget, not carved in stone but subject to regular review and revision. It should support us, but never constrict us."

