

RULE OF LIFE

Group Study Guide



Week One | Rule of Life

About this Study:

This curriculum is a two-week study on Rule of Life, an intentional plan for following Jesus. Week one reintroduces Northeast's corporate Rule of Life for all Stakeholders. Week two creates a framework for expanding and customizing Rule of Life for further growth.

What is a Rule of Life at Northeast:

A Rule of Life is a set of rhythms and restrictions that help you connect with God and resist popular culture.

At Northeast we want to challenge all our stakeholders to start their Rule of Life with a rhythm of daily prayerful engagement with scripture.

We also challenge everyone to choose a restriction intentionally limiting the quantity and quality of their screen intake.

We all have habits, schedules, priorities, and survival routines that form our current Rule of Life. W. Edwards Deming said, "Your system is designed perfectly to give you the results you are getting." So, are our habits working for us or against us? Are they leading us to become the people we want to be, are they forming us to become more like Jesus?

Why have a Rule of Life:

As Christians, we all desire to become more like Jesus. That is the summit of our lives. Most of us have appointments, schedules, demands, responsibilities, and other people depending on us and our time. If becoming like Jesus is the mountain in front of us and if we are ever going to reach the summit, it requires us to set aside time to climb the mountain intentionally spending time with Jesus so that we can allow his Holy Spirit to change us. Jesus's way of living models for us what it means to be fully human and have as He said, "life to the full". That means we are intentionally choosing to engage in

spiritual practices, relational rhythms, and worldly restrictions that help us to create space for us to be with Jesus, become like Jesus, and do what Jesus did.

Questions:

- What are any patterns or habits you can see from the life of Jesus?
- What are practices that you have seen Christians encourage to help build faith?
- What are areas you would like to improve in your spiritual life?

How Do We Grow:

The Latin word we have translated as “rule” came from the word for trellis. In a vineyard, a trellis is the structure or framework that helps hold the vine off the ground so it can grow and thrive, creating great fruit. There is an element of restriction to a trellis, but its main purpose is growth. The plant grows in and out of the trellis to reach heights it could never do on its own. We need that kind of structure to help support us as we grow to become more like Jesus.

“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.” - Margaret Guenther Wife, Mother, & Anglican Priest

How Does Our Heart Change:

Rule of Life and spiritual disciplines are tools: Well used and well-worn ways that have been helpful for many over the centuries as means to connect with and learn from God. There are two pitfalls to avoid when we step into spiritual disciplines or Rule of Life. One pitfall is to believe that it is all dependent on our efforts. We have all experienced a desire to fight against sin that looks like leaning into our own willpower and determination. That may succeed for a while but in the end it either leads to failure and frustration or pride in our own success that leads to external righteousness. At the same time, we need Jesus to be at the center of our transformation. Our inner righteousness is a gift from God that He eagerly wants to give us. It is not just for the select few but for all that call Jesus, King.

The other pitfall is to believe there is nothing we can do to change, or that we must simply wait on God to change us. The truth is that spiritual disciplines serve to help train us. “Spiritual transformation is not a matter of trying harder, but of training wisely.” - John Ortberg. Training is often associated with difficulty and can be intimidating. If we are going to intentionally engage our

faith, we must be just that, intentional. Dallas Willard says that “A discipline is any activity I can do by direct effort that will eventually enable me to do that which, currently, I cannot do by direct effort.” We all understand the physical example, if we start running today the goal is to be able to run further next month than we can run today.

Questions:

- Have you experienced the pitfalls described above?
- Discuss a time when you started a new habit into your routine.
- Was the new habit successful? Why or why not?

Stepping into a Rule of Life may still be intimidating. Starting the path of implementing intentional rhythms of life to grow spiritually can feel like a mountain that is too high to climb or a road that is too long to travel. But deciding not to start down that road is a choice as well, with an ultimate destination that causes us to miss out on what Jesus refers to as “life to the full.” Our hope is that you will start to process, with your community, the voice of the good shepherd that promises a better way. The voices you listen to are the voices that disciple you. Over time we become the sum of our choices or as Ralph Waldo Emerson put it, “Sow a thought and you reap an action; sow an act and you reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap a destiny.”

Read: John 15:1-8

“I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn’t produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.

“Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father.”

Questions:

- What stands out to you in this passage?
- Why do you think our producing fruit brings glory to God?
- How do we remain in Jesus?
- Give as many different general and specific examples of what fruit of the Christian life could look like.

Your Rule of Life:

At Northeast our corporate Rule of Life is to create a rhythm of daily engagement with scripture and to restrict the quantity and quality of screens and. Talk specifically about how you could seek to implement this in your life.

Week Two | Rule of Life

About this Study:

In week one we discussed Northeast's corporate Rule of Life to engage in healthy rhythms of Bible engagement and disengagement with screens. In week two we will discuss how to create a framework to expand Rule of Life to other areas that have classically been referred to as Spiritual Disciplines.

As you start out with customizing your Rule of Life, make sure to prayerfully engage and ask God to show you what He wants you to do. Your practice may look very different than someone else in your community. At the same time, engaging in the same practice together may provide insight. A mother of a two-year old's engaging with scripture may be listening on an app in a few quiet moments of the day, where someone in a different stage of life may find reading and learning for an hour the right rule for themselves. Wherever you find yourself, apply these guardrails that you will learn today in the how section and try to listen to what Jesus may have for you.

Opening Thoughts:

Richard Foster in his book *Celebration of Discipline* opens with this thought "Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people."
(Published in 1978)

Discussion:

- What do you think Foster means when he says instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem?
- Share a few routines (they do not have to be "spiritual") that you believe improve your life?

At the end of his life, Moses is giving his last words to the people and instructing them and encouraging them to keep pursuing the destiny God has laid out for them.

Read: Deuteronomy 30:15-20

“See, I have placed before you today life and happiness, and death and adversity, in that I am commanding you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, so that you may live and become numerous, and that the Lord your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to take possession of it. But if your heart turns away and you will not obey but allow yourself to be led astray and you worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you will certainly perish. You will not prolong your days in the land where you are crossing the Jordan to enter and take possession of it. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have placed before your life and death, the blessing, and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the Lord your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding close to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, so that you may live in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.”

Questions:

- What stands out to you from this passage?
- What are some practical ideas for us to obey this passage?
- Why is it sometimes difficult to be “all in”?

A Rule of Life is for every personality type and for people in every season of life. The key is to start. It is nothing more complicated than willing to take the first step from wherever you are to listen to the voice of Jesus. As you grow and seasons of life change, the rule will need to grow and change as well. A Rule of Life is a process of constant learning. You may grow in one practice for a season and then be led to tackle several different ones in the future, only to come back and grow stronger in an area you thought you already had high mastery with.

Read: Romans 12:2

“Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.”

Here you see the author Paul encouraging the church at Rome to engage in behavior that looks different than the world around them. Building a new rhythm can be challenging and we believe that doing this in a community environment is one of the strongest ways to create a lasting change. Some things you add to your Rule of Life may look like pulling back from good things, or things that just eat up our time. These would be good restrictions. Reengaging in a practice you have done before with a new perspective or renewed commitment can be a means of growth as well. The goal is to create the space to let God do the work in us.

How to Expand Your Rule of Life:

When starting to engage with a Rule of Life we believe it is important to use a few guard rails when implementing a new practice.

1. Start Small:

It is best to start with small habits and easily obtainable steps to your Rule of Life. If you want to add prayer time, it is better to start with five or ten minutes than an hour a day. It is easy to become discouraged if we overshoot our ability to grow. The priority is consistency over quantity. Remember this is a process, so start where you are, not where you would like to be.

2. Make Space:

Most of us are too busy to start adding more things to our already busy lives in order to enjoy God. That is why it is a good idea to think through what we will remove from our lives to make space for our new practices. People become easily burned out when the addition of more demands on their schedules becomes the straw that breaks the camel’s back. We are not calling you to do more but to do less.

3. You get out what you put in:

The more you lean into these practices, the more room you have for transformation. The more you just dabble with it, the less impact. It is important to know that not all progress is up and to the right. Learning any new skill can be difficult, and sometimes we must unlearn habits and routines to make that skill effective. Resist the urge to be self-critical and give the process time.

Remember we are doing something we can do now so that eventually we can do things we cannot currently do.

4. No formation without repetition:

The process of formation is not a four-week process. It can be slow, deep, and sometimes boring work to develop a Rule of Life. It can feel as if no progress is being made at all.

Repetition is important to lock in the habit. There will be ups and downs, so do not become discouraged. Continuing to repeat or even restart will be necessary.

Questions:

- Which of these guidelines will be helpful in the journey?
- Which do you feel will be most personally challenging when tackling a new Rule of Life?

Discussion:

Richard Foster in his classic book “Celebration of Discipline” lists the following disciplines in these categories. This list, while not exhaustive, is very helpful for expanding your personal Rule of Life. Inward disciplines impact our thought life and perspective on the world. We try to think God’s thoughts after him. Our outward disciplines help us live in a way that creates room for God and others in our lives. Our corporate disciplines are practiced in community with others who are followers of Jesus. Pick one or two to discuss with your group or perhaps one from each category. Brainstorm ideas for small steps you could take to implement them in your daily, weekly, and monthly rhythms.

Inward Disciplines	Outward Disciplines	Corporate Disciplines
Christian Meditation Prayer Fasting Study	Simplicity Solitude Submission Service	Confession Worship Guidance Celebration

Community is Key:

Community can be the key point in developing a new habit. As your Rule of Life changes and develops over the seasons, share your plan and your goals with your community. Ask for encouragement and open yourself to accountability to those in your community. Our journey of spiritual life and growth comes when we say “yes” to Jesus and move toward him together.

Practice:

As a way of practicing what you have learned, commit to a new Rule of Life that you want to grow in. Use the four guidelines to help shape what that practice will look like and let your group know what you have selected, your goal, and how you hope to implement this change.

Credits:

Practicingtheway.org – John Mark Comer

Celebration of Discipline – Richard Foster

The Life You've Always Wanted – John Ortberg

The Spirit of the Disciplines – Dallas Willard

Invitation to a Journey – Robert Mulholland Jr

Northeast Staff – Jonathan Thomas & Rich Cottrell