

RULE OF LIFE

Contemplative, Holiness, Spirit-filled, Social Justice, Proclamation, Incarnational

On a piece of paper, write these six headings, leaving a bit of space between them. Under each heading write one or two simple, specific statements of intention, stating in concrete terms how your desire to follow Jesus can be expressed in your daily living. Don't describe your life as it is now, but don't stray too far from that either. Give yourself some room for growth. Practice moderation.

Contemplative

"How do I intend to seek to be open to, and immersed in, the presence of God? How will I pray and worship?"

Think in specific terms about what your prayer might look like rather than how much time you will spend praying.

Holiness

"How do I intend to cultivate habits of holy living?"

Think about how you can set aside your own desires to be in communion with God. This might mean a time of silence or solitude, focusing on the presence of God in that moment. It could also mean time for confession or reflection about our life and intentionality in asking God for forgiveness and guidance.

Spirit-filled

"How can I allow the Holy Spirit to minister through me?"

Think of the gifts and talents that you have and how you can use them to edify the community where God has placed you. Consider what part of your personality brings you joy and how you can use that to build up the community of believers.

If you are unsure about what your spiritual gifts are, you might consider writing under this heading, "Be attentive of how the Holy Spirit is using me in my faith community."

Social Justice

"How can I 'act justly and love mercy' as I 'walk humbly' with my God? (Micah 6:8) "How can my life contribute to the health of my community and world?"

There is a wide variety of ways of expressing God's compassion for this broken world. We are drafting a personal Rule of Life, but if we are to follow the ways of Jesus, that also means that we are called to serve others and take care of creation. Your items under this heading can be anything from volunteer work to making eco-friendly lifestyle choices.

Proclamation

"How am I allowing the voice of God to speak to me and through me?" "How am I engaging and expressing Scripture?"

Studying scripture and learning how to share the Good News of the Gospel are important for the health and growth of our own faith. Be realistic and specific. How much scripture can you realistically commit to reading? And how will you find opportunities to share your faith with others? How can you realistically and specifically challenge yourself in this area of your faith life?

Incarnational

"How can you know the extraordinary grace of God through your everyday living?" "How can your life become a sacramental experience?"

The classic definition of a sacrament is "an outward sign of an inward and invisible grace." Consider what you can do to make every day, mundane events in your life become a place where God is made visible. This may be the most challenging to accomplish.

In listing these six areas, you have created a Rule of Life. And under each heading there are two items. That is 12 things on your Rule of Life.

If following all 12 of these items feels like too much, just pick three or four to focus on.

LECTIO DIVINA

Preparation

Choose a short passage (6–8 verses)

Take a moment to prepare yourself for the reading

Become consciously aware of God's presence

Step One: READ (*Lectio*)

Read the text through slowly. Let the words resonate, sink in, and settle into your being. As you read, listen for a word or phrase that catches your attention. Allow for a moment of silence, pondering the word or phrase as a gift or message that God has given you. This is the word that is meant for you. Listen to what the Holy Spirit has to offer, without judging or analyzing what has come to you.

Step Two: REFLECT (*Meditatio*)

Read the passage again and listen for the way in which this passage connects with your life. Ask, "What is it in my life right now that needs to hear this word?" Allow several moments of silence following this reading and explore thoughts, perceptions, and sensory impressions.

Step Three: RESPOND (*Oratio*)

In the third reading listen for your own deepest and truest response to what God is telling you. In the moments of silence that follow, allow your prayer to flow spontaneously from your heart. You are entering into a personal dialog. Pay attention to any sense that God is inviting you to act or respond in some way to the word you have heard. You might find it helpful to write your prayers or to journal at this point.

Step Four: REST (*Contemplatio*)

In the final reading you are invited to release and return to a place of rest in God. You have given your response its full expression, so now you can move into a time of waiting and resting in God's presence. Know that you belong to God. You loved and beloved, just exactly as you are. In your journal or prayer, finish this step with thanksgiving. And then just sit and rest in the presence of God.

CENTERING PRAYER

Preparation

Set aside time. Set aside at least 20 minutes to practice centering prayer. It is helpful to set a timer so that you aren't distracted by watching the clock.

Choose a quiet space. Choose a peaceful, quiet space where you won't be distracted by other activities around you.

Expectations

Let go of objectives. You have nothing to do during centering prayer except to be present with God.

Allow thoughts to pass freely. As thoughts arise, acknowledge them and then in your mind gently push them away and return to your prayer.

Know that you might fall asleep. If you fall asleep while praying, just continue praying when you wake up. If you sleep for the whole session, count it as a gift from God.

Divine Therapy. Centering prayer is a safe place to let the tension in our bodies and the repressed thoughts in our minds escape. As the emotional baggage of a lifetime leaves us, the Holy Spirit rushes in to fill and occupy this new space.

The Four Guidelines to Centering Prayer

1. Choose a sacred word. The sacred word is not used as a mantra, it is used only when needed, as an anchor back to the present moment. The sacred word helps you to just be with God.

2. Sit comfortably and with eyes closed, settle in briefly and then silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.

3. When engaged with your thoughts acknowledge them and then, ever so gently return to the sacred word.

4. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes. Don't rush away from your time with God.

PRAYER OF EXAMEN

Preparation

Find a spot where you can reflect uninterrupted. Invite God into your prayer, asking for the grace to see yourself honestly as you review your day. At a meditative pace, review your day using the following five steps. You can prayerfully meditate on your responses or journal as you move through the reflections.

Five Steps to the Prayer of Examen

1. Become aware of God's presence. As you prepare to look back on your day, ask the Holy Spirit to shine the light that will clear your vision—so you might see what God wants you to see. Recall your day and name anything for which you are particularly grateful. Thank God for these gifts.

2. Review the day with gratitude. Review the events of your day and notice where you felt God's presence. Were there any invitations to grow? How did you respond? Practice giving thanks for all of your experiences, even if they were hard, as they were an opportunity to grow and to invite the Holy Spirit into all areas of our life.

3. Pay attention to your emotions. Recall specific moments and your feelings at that time. Name those things from the day for which you are both grateful and sorry. Include both actions and feelings, things you did or did not do. Recall the sights, sounds, smells, conversations, thoughts, and feelings you experienced. Give your attention to those moments and offer them to God

4. Pray about one moment of the day. Reflect honestly on the moments you felt out of tune with God—something you said, a missed opportunity, some way you wish you had acted differently. For what do you need forgiveness? Look at your shortcomings and allow God to heal them. Recall one specific moment in your day and pray about it.

5. Look toward tomorrow. As you end your day, look to tomorrow. Conclude by thanking God for the gift of your life and this day. Ask for God's help in the future: to open your eyes, your ears, and your heart to see where God is working. Conclude the Examen with the Lord's Prayer.