

Distribution Agreement

In presenting this final project as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my final project in whole or in part in all forms of media, now and hereafter known, including display on the world wide web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this final project. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the final project. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this final project.

Signature:

Timothy M. May

April 23, 2021

**The Title Christian Was Given, Not Earned:
Churches that Lack Intentional Spiritual Formation Processes
Cheapen Grace**

By

Timothy M. May
Doctor of Ministry

Candler School of Theology

Rev. Dr. Thomas Elliott, Jr.
Project Consultant

Rev. Dr. Jennifer R. Ayres, Ph.D.
Director of Doctor of Ministry Program

Abstract

The Title Christian Was Given, Not Earned: Churches that Lack Intentional Spiritual Formation Processes Cheapen Grace

By Timothy M. May

If local churches are not producing mature disciples, what are they producing? If a church does not have a process for developing spiritually mature disciples, how will it fulfill the mandate to go and make disciples? Local churches that lose their sense of identity and purpose are examples of churches that do not have an intentional process for developing mature disciples. This project offers the "Rule of Life" as the intentional process for developing mature disciples. The creation of a "Rule of Life," will serve as the gateway to an ongoing spiritual formation pathway that will benefit both the individual and the congregation.

**The Title Christian Was Given, Not Earned: Churches that Lack
Intentional Spiritual Formation Processes Cheapen Grace**

By

Timothy M. May

**Florida Southern College, B.A., 1991
Candler School of Theology, M.Div., 1995**

Project Consultant: Rev. Dr. Thomas Elliott, Jr.,

**A Final Project submitted to the Faculty of the Candler School of Theology in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Ministry
2021**

Contents

SECTION 1 – THE CRUCIBLE

SECTION 2 – THE NEED FOR A TRAINING PLAN

SECTION 3 – THE PROPOSED SPIRITUAL TRAINING PLAN

SECTION 4 – SPIRITUAL MATURITY, AND THE “RULE OF LIFE”

SECTION 5 – *INTIMATE WALK WITH JESUS* SPIRITUAL FORMATION RETREAT

SECTION 6 – SELF REFLECTION AND CONCLUSION

APPENDIX

BIBLIOGRAPY

THE CRUCIBLE

It was January 2003, and I was standing in the USS Bataan hangar bay, LHD 5. Our ship had embarked Regiment Combat Team 2, a squadron of Harrier jets, and all the elements needed to support these Marines. Five Marines approached me, the Chaplain while we were heading to Iraq. They wanted to know if they would manage to perform their duties under pressure. As we discussed this anxiety, I invited them to share their experience of an event called "The Crucible."¹

Having these Marines recall this event was my way of leading them back to their "Rule of Life." Their training was their "military rule of life." This "rule of life" established the rhythms and routines needed to maintain good order and discipline in challenging, ambiguous, and volatile environments. While we could not know with absolute certainty how we would perform, we could trust that our "military rule of life" was designed to produce Marines and Sailors who would respond in predictable ways for the sake of others.

Just like these Marines wondered whether they could execute their duties so too the leaders of my new congregation were wondering whether, during a global pandemic, racial tensions, political unrest, witnessing 162 people leave the church in four years, facing denominational uncertainty if they could be the church they needed to be in this environment. The answer to their question would be dependent upon their process for developing mature

¹ <http://recruitparents.com/bootcamp/crucible.asp> The "Crucible" is a final test that every Marine recruit must pass before being rewarded the title "Marine" and earning the coveted Eagle, Globe, and Anchor (EGA). The test is a fifty-four-hour emotional, physical, and moral test. Through the test, the recruit will experience sleep and food deprivation. They will hike over forty-five miles of rugged terrain, perform various physical and mental team-building tasks, and display the necessary combat fighting skills. The "Crucible" is a rite of passage and a defining moment for every Marine.

disciples. Dr. James Fowler, a leading researcher on faith and moral development, offers that the health and transformation of a community, not just the local congregation, is at stake if a local church does not have an intentional process for developing mature disciples. He states, “Pastoral care consists of all the ways a community of faith, under pastoral leadership, intentionally sponsors the awakening, shaping, rectifying, healing, and ongoing growth in the vocation of Christian persons and community, under the pressure and power of the in-breaking kingdom of God.”²

When a church lacks an intentional spiritual formation process, it will not fulfill the mandate to go and make disciples.³ Franciscan priest and founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation, Richard Rohr, suggests that churches that lack a process for developing mature disciples will produce disciples that lack “natural compassion, natural mercy, or a natural flow of forgiveness. The church will not produce Christians who have integrated their true selves and soul healthily.”⁴ Therefore, without an intentional process of spiritual formation, the world will not come to know Christ because people will not see Christ living in their midst.⁵

However, when a church has an intentional spiritual formation process, it will produce mature disciples who can respond to all situations with faith and love because they have a process that empowers them to live a healthy, loving relationship with God and others. Writer

² James W. Fowler, *Faith Development, and Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987), 21.

³ The United Methodist Church states, “The mission of The United Methodist Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”

⁴ https://cac.instructure.com/courses/200/pages/exclusive-richard-rohr-interview?module_item_id=12932

⁵ “The world will not believe in Christ because of our sound theology, our correct creed, our well-defined dogma, or our rigorous religiosity. The world will believe when it sees Christlikeness manifested in our life. The world will know that God has sent Christ not simply because we pronounce it to be so but when they see Christlikeness lived out in their midst in our lives in the world. Robert J. Mulholland, *The Deeper Journey: The Spirituality of Discovering your True Self* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), Logos Research Systems.

and professor of Spiritual Formation and Wesley Studies, Steve Harper, writes, “We love God, rejoice in God, give thanks to God, and pray to God as a means of forming a personal communion with God that grows into the commission to live for God.”⁶ In other words, a mature disciple develops a healthy, loving relationship based upon faith in God, which becomes expressed as love of one’s neighbor regardless of who that neighbor might be.

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF THE PALM BEACH’S (UMCPB) NEED FOR A TRAINING PLAN

UMCPB was founded in 1892. In December 1990, two churches merged and First UMC was renamed UMCPB and relocated to the current location. For the next sixteen years, the congregation would experience growth. Anecdotally, life-long members refer to those times as the "Golden Years.” The surrounding community is thirty-eight percent African-American and thirty-six percent Caucasian. The congregation is still primarily a Caucasian congregation, but there are sufficient African-American, Hispanic, and Caribbean persons to make it attractive to people from all cultures.⁷

Before my arrival, the church's key leaders had informed me that the church was in a vulnerable place. Initially, these leaders identified the previous pastoral leadership as the primary reason for the church's issues. My research included a staff onboarding listening process facilitated by a consultant, weekly two-hour listening and learning sessions with the church strategic leadership group from July until November 2020 and eight Zoom listening sessions

⁶ Steve Harper, *Five Marks of a Methodist: The Fruit of a Living Faith* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2015), 51.

⁷ 2020 Year End Statistical Report, 394 Professing Members, 15 Asian, 95 African American, 30 Caribbean, 25 Hispanic

with various members. I also attempted to gather qualitative and quantitative interpretations through a churchwide survey offered by Healthy Church Networks.

By reading the Conference Journals from 2007 to 2019, I discovered that the church decline began in 2008. In 2007, the average worship attendance was 617. By July 1, 2020, the average worship attendance had dropped to 291. The departure of a loved and respected pastor in 2007 and a controversial multi-million dollar building campaign prompted that decline. The building campaign was controversial because only sixty percent of the congregation voted in support of the building. When I asked about the discernment process of going forward with such a slim majority, I learned that various contractors and builders had advised the leadership that it was a perfect time economically to begin building.

In 2008, the country experienced a significant economic crisis. The crisis caused many in the church to lose their jobs and homes.⁸ That harsh reality and the loss of 163 members through the pastoral change and unhappiness of decision to go forward with the building program, stalled the building campaign. Also, according to some of the people I met, the optics of building during a recession seemed out of alignment with reality.

In 2010, the Conference assigned a new pastor to UMCPB. The loss of members and income seemed to stabilize, but all efforts at completing the building of the new seven hundred seat sanctuary were halted. The new sanctuary remains uncompleted. When I asked what the process was for discerning whether to abandon the project or continue, the response I received

⁸ <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/2010/04/28/the-impact-of-the-september-2008-economic-collapse#:~:text=KEY%20FINDINGS,through%20the%20end%20of%202009>. The average household lost nearly \$5,800 in income, home values and stocks on average declined \$100,000, and the cost to the US economy was close to \$648 billion.

was that people were praying but that there was nothing intentional happening. One member shared, “We might go into the building, pray, write something on a brick or a card for a time capsule, but nothing substantial. We kind of wish it would just disappear.”

In 2017 the hopes of a return to the glory days of 2000 were renewed. The newly appointed pastor had been a pivotal staff member in the early 2000s. This prior staff member was now returning as an ordained Elder. However, over the next three years, the church would watch its congregation go through a rapid decline, losing approximately 162 worshippers. The primary reason for this mass exodus was significant differences of opinions about offering a person who had committed a crime in the past a key staff position. Initially, the person was added to the staff. A culture of suspicion and survival was created over time because of the lack of professional boundaries and no real accountability between the pastor, the staff, and the church leadership. Members openly wondered if God had left the church and if God was punishing the church because of the congregation's poor performance for the last two decades.

Based on the observations I have shared, I concluded that this church declined because it had a discipleship and disciple-making issue. The congregation as a body had stopped growing in its ability to trust God, the members were not trained to seek God in their ordinary lives, and they had lost connection to a ministry of compassion and service for its neighbors.⁹ For example, for a couple of years, the church has leveraged its large parking lot to support an

⁹ For example, hundreds of families are served through a non-profit organization called “Feed the Hungry” from the church parking lot, but only five people from the church serve as volunteers.

outreach called "Feed the Hungry." Hundreds of families are served through this non-profit organization. Five people from a church that averages 291 at worship serve as volunteers.

A SPIRITUAL TRAINING PLAN FOR UMCPB

This project asserts that the development of a "Rule of Life" would serve as the beginning point for UMCPB to become a spiritually healthy and mature congregation. While there is a wide range of possibilities for starting a spiritual formation process, this project starts with the guiding people in the process of developing a "Rule of Life." The advantage of the "Rule of Life" process is that the curriculum is the person's life. Unlike other spiritual formation curriculum's such as *"A Disciple's Path: Deepening Your Relationship with Christ and the Church," "Disciple,"* both resources I have used in other churches, the "Rule of Life" is designed to help people reflect on how they are living their lives as disciples. Typically, people who have engaged in curriculum based spiritual formation have demonstrated knowledge of the Bible, but not increased application of the Bible to their lives.¹⁰ Just as there are a wide range of beginning points, there are also numerous ways to measure if a church is developing mature disciples like, Fruit of the Spirit, for example. Two outcomes will be used in this project to determine if the "Rule of Life" is producing mature disciples: 1) The participants will be asked to consider if they are developing a healthy and loving relationship with God and 2) if that relationship is leading them to love their neighbor regardless of who that neighbor might be. If

¹⁰ Disciple Bible Study was a program developed in the hopes that United Methodists might become more biblically literate. The program can be defined with this description and reaction by Bishop Wilke, "After two or three years with phenomenal participation across the US, graduates of DISCIPLE started asking, "What's Next?" So we had another consultation. What's next? Goodness, we had studied the whole Bible!" Perhaps that was the issue, we United Methodists had studied the Bible, but we had not learned how to live the Bible.

the participants respond positively then the “Rule of Life” will be seen as effective. The participants in the project were the Christian leaders of UMCPB.

Laying a Foundation for the Innovation

Guiding UMCPB to develop a spiritual formation plan began before my arrival in July 2020. Upon learning that I would be appointed to UMCPB, I began my discernment process, asking God, "How will you use me? What in my life needs to be addressed so that I can be the pastor UMCPB needs me to be?" I also began to contemplate my opening sermon series. Based upon my conversations with the interim pastor and the leadership group, I decided a series on discipleship and prayer would be an appropriate start. The first series outlined actions a Christian might consider if he or she were going to be on a pathway to becoming a mature disciple. The following series, the spiritual discipline of prayer, was offered as a means for increasing the disciple’s willingness to love the community the way Jesus loves the community.¹¹ The desired outcome for both series was to begin casting a vision for the kind of culture I hoped we would create together.

During these sermon series, I met with the church leadership group every Tuesday evening. In our meetings, I shared what I was hearing from them, the loss of trust in God, a limited engagement with the community, and uncertainty about the church's future after the pandemic. I then offered this sobering diagnosis, churches that are not producing mature disciples will eventually die. The path I laid out for them was a process for developing mature disciples.

¹¹ Appendices, “Sermon Series”

Learning to Communicate Together

The strength of the "Rule of Life" comes when a person believes they are in a group where it is safe to share what is happening in their journey to becoming a mature disciple. For this to occur, I guided the leaders in a group formation process called "*5 Voices*."¹² This step was necessary because this group was struggling to hear each other creating a culture of suspicion. The workshop would provide the leaders a way to identify their primary way of engaging others. Having this information would provide these leaders with a process to offer support, encouragement, and accountability to each other.

"Rule of Life" Development Retreat

A retreat for developing a "Rule of Life" was held in December. New COVID protocols required that this retreat be conducted via a Zoom Meeting. The retreat was titled "*An Invitation for an Intimate Walk with Jesus*." The retreat was conducted on a Friday evening and Saturday morning for a total of five hours. The immediate result of the retreat was the creation of a Rule of Life rough draft.

SPIRITUAL MATURITY, AND THE "RULE OF LIFE"

Local churches are responsible for making mature disciples who engage the world as Jesus engaged the world. Creating a description of this disciple is a challenge amongst a myriad of challenges. However, some characteristics should be prominent no matter the description. For example, this project asserts that a mature disciple is continually developing a healthy and loving relationship with God. Likewise, a mature disciple will love their neighbor, regardless of

¹² 5Voices.com This workshop was developed by Jeremie Kubicek and Steve Cochran. I am a certified 5 Voice facilitator.

who that neighbor might be or act. In this section, two critical questions will be considered: 1.

What is spiritual maturity? 2. How does a “Rule of Life” encourage spiritual maturity?

What is Spiritual Maturity?

The process towards spiritual maturity is exactly that, a process. Spiritual maturity is growing into the likeness of Christ in all ways. It is not instantaneous, nor can it be assumed that a life-long church attendee is a spiritually mature disciple. The Apostle Paul describes this process as a “growing-up in every way” until we “become mature, attaining the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”¹³ This process of growing into the likeness of Christ requires a Christian to “put off the old nature...and to put on a new nature.”¹⁴ An example of putting on a new nature is offered by Jesus when He says, "You have heard it said, 'an eye for an eye, but I tell you..."¹⁵ Mature disciples serve and love that neighbor no matter what.

Jesus established love as a pathway to spiritual maturity when He responded to the lawyer’s question about the greatest commandment, “Love God and love your neighbor.”¹⁶ After Jesus tells His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer, He is rebuked by Peter. For Jesus, a disciple embraces a life of self-sacrifice for the sake of others.¹⁷ This action of self-sacrifice must be rooted in a spirit of unconditional love. Paul tells the Christians in Corinth that if they "speak like angels, but do not have love, they are nothing but a noisy gong.”¹⁸ The

¹³ NRSV, Ephesians 4:13,15

¹⁴ NRSV, Ephesians 4:22-24

¹⁵ NRSV, Matthew 5:38-42

¹⁶ NRSV, Matthew 22:34-40

¹⁷ NRSV, Matthew 16:21-28

¹⁸ NRSV, 1 Corinthians 13:1

Church of Ephesus was criticized because they were adhering to great works, but “had forsaken their first love.”¹⁹

In Romans 12, Paul challenges disciples that were facing persecution while living in a divisive culture to offer their bodies as a living sacrifice, as a means for conforming to God’s will. Paul was telling these Christians to intentionally remove anything that might hinder their ability and willingness to be entirely dependent upon God and be used by God. Paul argues that Christian communities ought to produce mature disciples, bearing fruit of their maturity through God’s ability to bring forth love, mercy, forgiveness, and kindness through them, despite the pessimistic, hedonistic, and violent culture of Rome. For Jesus and Paul, mature disciples know how to love, especially those challenging to love. Paul mirrors Jesus’ teaching when he says, “Bless those who persecute you... Do not repay anyone evil for evil... Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.”²⁰ These descriptions of a mature disciple make it nearly impossible for a person to say, "I am already a mature disciple," for a disciple is always in progress until they are fully united with God for all eternity. Therefore, a measurement for growth as a disciple ought to be one’s capacity to love unconditionally, especially those who have proven to be challenging.

Paul expands upon being a living sacrifice to the Christians of Colossae. For Paul, a mature disciple would “put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”²¹ This “putting on the new self” involves being clothed in fruits such as

¹⁹ NRSV, Revelation 2:1-4

²⁰ NRSV, Romans 12:14-21

²¹ NRSV, Colossians 3:10.

“compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.”²² The disciple would grow by eliminating practices such as “discrimination, anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language.”²³ This putting on a new self, no longer conforming to the patterns of this world is the result of Jesus’ action upon the cross.²⁴ Former New Testament scholar and prolific writer on spiritual formation, Robert Mulholland Jr, offers this point about putting on the new self:

In Christ, God has already put the false self to death (2 Cor 5:14). Our role is to acknowledge this reality. I do not mean, however, simply an intellectual assent to a theological fact, a cognitive affirmation of dogma. I mean a proactive acknowledgment of losing our self for Christ’s sake, of denying our self, of taking up our cross, of being crucified with Christ: a radical abandonment of our entire self-referenced structure of being.²⁵

Spiritual maturity means continually developing a healthy and loving relationship with God and loving your neighbor, regardless of who that neighbor might be.

A healthy and loving relationship with God is developed by understanding that relationship with God must be evolving. A disciple may first understand God in a child-like way, but eventually, that disciple must learn how to relate to God as an adult. If an adult person still relates to God in the same way as they did as a child, that person has not grown up. This is what Paul is describing to the disciples in Corinth.²⁶ When Jesus says to His disciples, “I do not call you servants any longer... I have called you friends because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father,”²⁷ Jesus is describing the relationship evolution.

²² NRSV, Colossians 3:12

²³ NRSV, Colossians 3:8-9

²⁴ NRSV, Colossians 1:21-22

²⁵ M. Robert Mulholland Jr., *The Deeper Journey: The Spirituality of Discovering Your True Self* (Westmont, IL: IVP Books, 2016). Logos Bible Software.

²⁶ NRSV, 1 Corinthians 13:11.

²⁷ NRSV, John 15:14–15.

Jesuit Priest and frequent media commentator on American spirituality James Martin

summarizes the point:

Your childhood image of God may need to grow. When you're a child, you may see God as I did: the Great Problem Solver. Later on, you might relate to God as a parent. As you mature, you might relate to God in still different ways: Creator, Spirit, Love. Christians might find themselves looking at Jesus differently, too: not only as Savior and Messiah but perhaps as brother and friend. The way you relate to God often mirrors relationships in other parts of your life, particularly with parents or authority figures.²⁸

Just as growing into being a mature disciple is a process, the evolution of growing in one's understanding of God is also a process.

The process for developing a healthy and loving relationship with God is described when Paul shares his expectation that the disciples of Corinth should be learning how to think deeply.²⁹ For Paul, this concept of deep thinking was crucial to the Christian experience. A mature disciple would think in a way that allowed him or her to distinguish between patterns of culture and patterns of the Kingdom of God.³⁰ Being able to make these kinds of distinctions was critical for disciples who wanted to live according to the patterns of the Kingdom of God.³¹ While Paul speaks of being a child and now an adult³² maturity as a disciple was not a stage of life but is revealed by the stage of a person's thinking and doing. A child who demonstrated trust in God and profound love for a neighbor would have been deemed a spiritually mature disciple.³³

²⁸ James Martin, SJ., *The Jesuit Guide to Almost Everything: A Spirituality of Real Life*. (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2012), 137.

²⁹ 1 Corinthians 14:20.

³⁰ 1 Corinthians 2:6.

³¹ Romans 12:1–2.

³² 1 Corinthians 13:11

³³ NRSV, Matthew 21:16 and Psalm 8:2

Those disciples who thought from a worldly perspective, from the flesh perspective, are referred to as “babes” in Christ. Those disciples had the basic knowledge of Jesus as the Christ. They also believed in the teachings of Jesus. These factors allowed them to take up membership in Corinth's Christian church because they had the most basic understanding required. However, they show no evidence that they are growing in their capacity to think and act beyond that basic understanding. Their inability to continue growing a healthy and loving relationship with God has stalled their ability to love one another. The fruits of this stalled love of neighbor are divisiveness and squabbling over nonsensical issues.³⁴ Paul, therefore, considers them immature disciples. In effect, Paul was saying to these Christians you are called Christians, this title is given to you by others because you claim to follow Jesus. Because you have failed to grow, to mature, you have not earned the right to be called disciples and you cheapen the grace given to you by your inability to love one another.

It is through various trials and tribulations where submission to God's will can be accelerated or become stuck. A mature disciple in the face of trials, tribulations, and persecutions is provided the opportunity to display their understanding of Jesus' place in the Kingdom of heaven while demonstrating his or her dependence and trust upon God. A mature trusts God's promise to "never leave or forsake us" and to be "our helper"³⁵ in those turbulent times. Therefore, a disciple in the face of complex or mundane experiences will seek ways to prioritize all the areas of one's life so that the disciple reflects the heart and mind of Christ.³⁶

³⁴ NRSV, 1 Corinthians 3

³⁵ NRSV, Hebrews 13:5-6

³⁶ NRSV, Colossians 3:17.

This process begins with the disciple refusing to overcome these challenges through his or her might or power, but instead by becoming more dependent upon God's Spirit.³⁷ When Paul writes, "But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil³⁸" he is rebuking these disciples because the trials and difficulties they were experiencing were not revealing their strength and confidence in God, but rather the immaturity and shallowness of their faith.

Discerning between right and wrong actions is also evidence of maturity as a disciple.³⁹ Paul defines this process as discerning or being reflective about one's course of action. For a mature disciple knowing how to make good decisions, or in biblical terms, "distinguishing good from evil.⁴⁰ requires practice. Paul uses the imagery of an athlete in training to describe this discipline and practice. Evidence that the mature disciple was engaged and winning the battle was that "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control,⁴¹" would be present in the life of the disciple even when surrounded by the exact opposite.

Once an outspoken member of the Christian Moral Majority movement, Ben Howe offers a negative example of what happens when local churches produce disciples that do not take the responsibility of reflecting on one's course of action seriously:

Christian conservatives were done playing nice with their enemies. They were past the point of carrying about anyone's sob stories. They were intent on excusing any lack of empathy as allegiance to cold hard facts, and they were quite ready to Make America Great Again, through any means necessary. Christians are sick and tired of being politically correct. They are tired of losing, and therefore, they concluded, "God needs us

³⁷ NRSV, Zechariah 4:6

³⁸ NRSV, Hebrews 5:14.

³⁹ NRSV, Romans 7:7-24

⁴⁰ NRSV, Hebrews 5:14

⁴¹ NRSV, Galatians 5:22-23.

so badly to achieve His ends that we must be willing to sacrifice anything, even His very commands, in order to accomplish His will.”⁴²

Jesus taught His disciples, “No good tree bears bad fruit...for each tree is known by its fruit...”⁴³

He also said, “There are some who will not enter the kingdom of heaven, even though they prophesied, drove out demons, and performed miracles in my name.”⁴⁴ When disciples are not reflective on their actions and they lack an intentional spiritual formation pathway then they will eventually produce fruit that displays their immaturity. Ultimately, they will become the disciples described by Ben Howe and Father Richard Rohr. However, when churches are intentional in guiding disciples to develop a healthy relationship with God and love their neighbor that church will be well on their way to accomplishing the transformation of the congregation and community described by Dr. Fowler.⁴⁵

How does a “Rule of Life” encourage spiritual maturity?

The "Rule of Life" is a holistic process that frees a person to develop Spirit-empowered patterns of living. These patterns will encourage the Christian to go grow more loving and trusting, "growing up in every way into Him who is the head into Christ."⁴⁶ The “Rule” is meant to guide the members of UMCPB to grow in their relationship with God. It is also designed to increase their capacity to love unconditionally, themselves and their neighbors. The Sharing Groups, modeled after Wesley's "Class Meeting," will be adopted as the pathway for ensuring

⁴² Ben Howe, *The Immoral Majority: Why Evangelicals Chose Political Power over Christian Values* (New York: NY, Harper Collins, 2019), 147.

⁴³ NRSV, Luke 6:43–45.

⁴⁴ NRSV, Matthew 7:21–23.

⁴⁵ James W. Fowler, *Faith Development, and Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987), 21.

⁴⁶ NRSV, Ephesians 4:15.

support, encouragement, and accountability. The desired outcome of these sharing groups is for "a company of believers having the form and seeking the power of godliness...to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation,"⁴⁷ thus creating a culture of love, compassion, and accountability, outcomes needed to transform a church and a community.

The "Rule of Life" will be the resource that guides disciples to answer a question that is similar to the question of the Marines, "Will we act as mature disciples under pressure?" The "Rule of Life" will also help the disciple remained focused on that continual development of a healthy and loving relationship with God as he or she becomes more aware of God's presence in his or her everyday activities.

"Rule of Life" in the New Testament

The actual beginning of a "Rule of Life" concept grew out of the early monastic movements. Christianity had become the legal religion of the Roman Empire. Christian men and women were disturbed by the influence the Roman culture was having on these Christians who no longer had to fear persecution, death, and discrimination. These disciples withdrew into the desert, attempting to find God. As these disciples gathered in the desert as individuals, they eventually formed communities that led to the development of living rules together.⁴⁸ When considering if Jesus taught His disciples a "Rule of Life," it is helpful to remember that the word "rule" is not meant to be understood as a strict, dogmatic means for existence, as it sometimes

⁴⁷ Albert C. Outler, *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford Press, 1980), 178.

⁴⁸ Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: It's Impossible to Be Spiritually Mature While Remaining Emotionally Immature* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Press, 2014)

can be understood. Instead, it is most helpful to think of "rule" as habits that a disciple designs to grow in their relationship with God for the sake of loving and serving their neighbors. Therefore, when considering Jesus' "teaching" a "Rule of Life," it would help start with Jesus' words regarding the vine and the branches.⁴⁹ This is a helpful beginning place because the emphasis is upon the relationship between God and the disciple. Everything rises and falls on that relationship. In addition, a disciple might consider Jesus' teaching of the Beatitudes as the next step in "Rule of Life" development. Here Jesus would be outlining the processes for loving self and neighbor.

Following Jesus' ascension, the early Christians developed a basic concept of a "Rule of Life." This was described in Acts 2 and 4 as disciples gathering to pray, receive teaching, fellowship, and selling their possessions. The habit of "selling their possessions" as part of the "Rule of Life" is being highlighted because it emphasizes the importance of having a healthy growing relationship with God for the sake of others.

The community had declared, "no one would claim private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common."⁵⁰ The issue was not necessarily about living a life of simplicity. This habit was designed to increase one's trust in God by making sacrifices for the sake of one's neighbor. In Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira, who know their community's "Rule of Life," hold back some of the proceeds. This deliberate act demonstrated a place where these disciples had grown stuck in their relationship with God, which hindered their willingness to make sacrifices for the sake of others. Unfortunately, the consequence for such a decision was

⁴⁹ NRSV, John 15:1-2

⁵⁰ NRSV, Acts 4:32.

quite severe, as they both died. This consequence is not highlighted to suggest this is what happens when someone stops moving in the direction of spiritual maturity. Instead, this consequence was highlighted to demonstrate that spiritual maturity expects the disciple to continually grow in their capacity to trust God which leads to the taking right actions more consistently. Perhaps even more important, this example demonstrates that a disciple must have a willing heart to embrace the change of behavior required to grow in one's relationship with God so that the right action can be taken for the sake of others.

“Rules of Life” Beyond the New Testament

Pastor and writer, Peter Scazzero writes, “A rule of life is an intentional, conscious plan to keep God at the center of everything you do...The starting point and foundation of any rule of life is a desire to be with God and to love Him.”⁵¹ When considering a "Rule of Life," Saint Benedict is often the starting place. Like the early monastics before him, Saint Benedict found it difficult to discern God's will amid the pressure to conform to society's patterns in his time. His answer to this challenge was to develop a “Rule of Life” titled "Little Rule for Beginners." This "Little Rule" is an extensive set of ways for disciples to live together as a monastic community while also serving the secular community and is why Saint Benedict is widely known as the Father of Western monasticism.

Saint Benedict's "Rule of Life" was designed to lead a community to hear from God. Hearing from God meant adhering to a discipline of listening for God through a strict practice of humility. Saint Benedict's "Rule of Life," required the disciple to commit to a "disciplined

⁵¹ Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Press, 2017), 196.

journey." The "disciplined journey" meant a strict observance to specific times of prayer, contemplation and a certain order of worship. All of this structure was designed to put the disciple in a posture of humility intentionally silencing all the worldly distractions. While Saint Benedict knew this pathway was rigid and required great discipline, he believed "the disciple will progress in this life and faith, and the heart of the disciple will expand with the inexpressible joy of love as the disciple runs the way of God's commandments."⁵²

Saint Ignatius also wanted to guide disciples to have a pathway for living in a healthy and loving relationship with God amongst the distractions of a secular world. The primary emphasis of Saint Ignatius' "Rule of Life" was learning how to discover God in all areas of life. Saint Ignatius' contribution to the "Rule of Life" was through a process called "Spiritual Exercises." The "Spiritual Exercises" is not a "Rule of Life" but rather a designed four-week meditation on the life of Jesus. These exercises were meant to lead a disciple through an experiential contemplation process. This process would lead the disciple to experience 1) The unconditional, creative, and inviting love of God; 2) The boundless mercy of God; 3) Being on mission with Jesus; 4) A life of grace and compassion as seen through the suffering of Jesus, and 5) The joy of the risen Lord.⁵³

James Martin, a Jesuit priest, describes this experiential contemplation as "a contemplative in action."⁵⁴ The Ignatian "contemplative in action" is important because it invites

⁵² Stephen A. Macchia, *Crafting a Rule of Life: An Invitation to a Well-Ordered Way* (Downers Grove, IVP, 2012), 15.

⁵³ Kevin O'Brien, SJ, *The Ignatian Adventure* (Chicago, IL, Loyola Press, 2011), 23.

⁵⁴ James Martin, S.J., *The Jesuit Guide to Almost Everything: A Spirituality for Real Life* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2010), 7.

a busy disciple who wants to design a “Rule of Life” to learn how to listen and see God in the everyday demands of life. This “contemplative in action” liturgy was different from Saint Benedict's "Rule of Life" liturgy. Where Saint Benedict’s “Rule of Life” had prescribed times of prayer and contemplation to help the disciple hear from God, the Ignatian “Rule of Life” liturgy was the disciple's actual life. While there were structure and a careful plan to experiencing the "Spiritual Exercises," what was more critical to Ignatius was that "the individual find a pathway that suited them best.”⁵⁵

The rigid component of the Ignatian "Rule of Life" would be found in what Saint Ignatius called "The Examen." Martin writes, "Ignatius used to say that the examen was so crucial that even if Jesuits neglected all other forms of prayer in their day, they should never neglect this one.”⁵⁶ The examen was a time when the disciple would intentionally engage in having God search the disciple's conscience by reviewing the events of the day similar to what is described in Psalm 139. The “examen” is the self-reflection tool that is often times missing in the spiritual formation process.

A Methodist “Rule of Life”

Centuries later, John Wesley would shape a “Rule of Life” for Methodists. When considering John Wesley’s “Rule of Life” for Methodists, one turns to the “rules’ created for the United Societies. The “rules” were quite simple, "Do no harm, do good, and attend to the ordinances of God." John and Charles Wesley created these “rules” because they were

⁵⁵ Martin, *The Jesuit Guide to Almost Everything: A Spirituality for Real Life*, 20.

⁵⁶ Martin, *The Jesuit Guide to Almost Everything: A Spirituality for Real Life*, 87

increasingly concerned that Christians were not demonstrating discipline in their discipleship.⁵⁷

This concern reached a climax in 1743 when sixty-four people were expelled from the Society in Newcastle for failing to walk in the Gospel's ways. These “rules” became a requirement for joining the Society and expelling people from the Society. While laying out the "rules," John provided specific examples from the list of reasons people had been expelled from the Society in the first place to clarify what he meant by these three “Rules of Life.”

While the “rules” of 1743 are “The Rules of Life” in the strictest sense for Methodists, I would offer that Wesley had begun describing the “rules” for a Methodist in 1742 when he wrote his essay, *“The Character of a Methodist.”* The essay was a response to criticisms about the Methodists and it was an opportunity for Wesley to emphasize specific "distinguishing marks,"⁵⁸ of mature disciples who were becoming and living as Methodists. He did not believe these “distinguishing marks” made a Methodist a more mature disciple than other disciple. Rather, these “marks” were to be understood in the context of as means to growing in the relationship with God and love of neighbor as Methodists.

INTIMATE WALK WITH JESUS SPIRITUAL FORMATION RETREAT⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 138.

⁵⁸ Steve Harper, *Five Marks of a Methodist: The Fruit of a Living Faith. The Distinguishing marks offered by Steve Harper: A Methodist loves God; A Methodist rejoices in God, A Methodist gives thanks, A Methodist prays continuously, and A Methodist loves others.*

⁵⁹ The Spiritual Formation Retreat, titled "*An Invitation for an Intimate Walk with Jesus*," was a five-hour experience over two days. The retreat was virtual because of pandemic restrictions. Nineteen people attended it. The people attending the retreat were members of the church leadership team. The average age of the participants was about sixty-three years of age. Every participant had been a Christian for at least twenty years. Eighty-four percent of the participants had been members and leaders in the church for at least ten years.

The innovation included an introductory workshop called 5 Voices,⁶⁰ a spiritual life survey,⁶¹ and a spiritual formation retreat with instruction on developing a “Rule of Life,”⁶² and sharing groups. The heart of the project was a Spiritual Formation Retreat entitled “An Invitation for an Intimate Walk with Jesus” and was a five-hour experience over two days. Sixteen people attended it. Of the sixteen there were twelve females and four males. Five of the sixteen represented other groups besides Caucasian. The people attending the retreat were members of the church leadership team. The average age of the participants was about sixty-three years of age. Every participant had been a Christian for at least twenty years. Eighty-four percent of the participants had been members and leaders in the church for at least ten years.

5 Voices Adapted Workshop

Before the Spiritual Formation Retreat, the participants engaged in a workshop called 5 *Voices*.⁶³ This was a part of the retreat because participants needed a concrete process to reflect on who they were and who they wanted to be with other people by looking at their masks and triggers. Also, the resource provided a process for sharing and challenging others without becoming defensive or passive-aggressive. The intention of the 5 *Voices Workshop* “Is it gives each person a way to understand how he or she sounds to others and how he or she will interact with the world.”⁶⁴ This resource is a secular business resource. It is not intended to be used in

⁶⁰ 5 Voices Workshop Classes located in Appendix B

⁶¹ Spiritual Life Survey Sample located in Appendix C

⁶² Rule of Life Sample and Retreat Format located in Appendix D and E

⁶³ I became a trained facilitator with this program because I view it as a valuable team-building resource. Before introducing the spiritual formation retreat, I decided to hold this workshop because the staff and church leadership needed to have a common language for sharing ideas and challenges healthily and productively. Foundational to 5 *Voices* is the understanding that the better a person knows themselves, the more capable they will be at leading others.

⁶⁴ Jeremie Kubicek and Steve Cockram, *5 Voices: How to Communicate Effectively with Everyone You Lead*

the way that I used it, however, the exercises provided a great entry point to developing a “Rule of Life,” because it aligned with Saint Augustine’s point, “How can you draw close to God when you are far from your own self?”⁶⁵ As one participant noted, “I had an ‘Aha’ when you invited us to consider that one of our triggers may actually be one of our masks that we wear that may keep us from experiencing God more fully.”

Spiritual Life Survey

The current leadership was invited to complete a Spiritual Life Survey prior to the retreat. Sixteen leaders participated in the survey. The survey consisted of checkboxes, fill in the blanks, and scale ranking. All measurements were calculated by the participant as the survey is a self-observation tool. The survey results acted as a baseline and a guide for creating a "Rule of Life" rough draft. This survey will be revisited quarterly so the participant will have a tool of personal measurement. Verbally, participants have highlighted that the tool is effective and should be made available to all members. The leadership have not returned survey at the time of this writing.

DAY 1

Session#1 Purpose of a “Rule of Life”

The retreat began with a reflection on Psalm 8 in preparation for a discussion about developing a “Rule of Life.” The first session introduced the purpose of such a Rule through a group discussion of Romans 12:1–2. The participants were invited to reflect that the power of the "Rule of Life" is found when the disciple begins to seek God's presence in everyday

(Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Press, 2016), 13.

⁶⁵ <https://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/twayne/aug5.html>

occurrences. By looking for God in the disciple's daily life, there would not be a dependency upon a specific leader, pastor, or curriculum. The purpose of the "Rule of Life" was to help disciples develop a pattern for continually growing in their relationship with God and seeking ways to love their neighbor regardless of who that neighbor might be.

Session #2 – “Rule of Life” With Sharing Groups

The group also needed to see how a "Rule of Life" can help develop healthy groups. This idea was introduced through a provocative question from Robert Mulholland, “Suppose you offer to God consistently, a spiritual discipline, day by day, and keep offering it, and God chooses not to use it, how might that impact your daily walk with God?”⁶⁶ The purpose of the question was to help participants see that the power of a "Rule of Life" is not in treating it as a to-do list but in sharing it with a group of people who will provide support, encouragement, and accountability. The power lies in the self-reflection or “examen” process.

The conversation revealed a deep thread of individual spirituality and the need for safe accountability groups. Some examples: one participant responded that the question was “jarring, disturbing,” because it was “difficult to imagine that God would not choose to use what was being offered.” Still, another suggested, “if I offered something and it was not being used, it would cause me to stop offering.” And yet another said, “Then I would just take my ball and leave.” No one suggested that they might reflect on this with a sharing group or even a pastor. Their comments and reactions were more along the lines of: “Maybe I am not listening hard enough? How does one ever know if they are hearing from God?”

⁶⁶ Robert, Mullholland, Jr., *Shaped by the Word* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2000), 116.

Next, the group was introduced to how their "Rule of Life" would be used in a sharing group. The work of becoming a spiritually healthy and mature Christian is intended to be done in community with others on a similar path. These sharing groups are designed to help a disciple examine if the way they are thinking, feeling, and acting in the ordinariness of life is being transformed⁶⁷ by God's will. The group would also help the disciple see if they were continually growing in their relationship with God. The group would also help the disciple determine growth in the area of loving his or her neighbor. Therefore, the sharing group is tasked with providing support, encouragement, and accountability to each other. The groups would consist of three to five persons. For the time being, the groups are either male or female groups. This division was purely for ease of separation as some of the members were married to each other.

A healthy group will invite the participant to deal honestly with their current patterns of living so that they become more dependent upon God. Therefore, when a disciple is struggling to live out his or her "Rule of Life," the disciple is invited by the group to consider the cause of the struggle. Lewis Chafer, 20th Century theologian and founder of Dallas Theological Seminary, offers this thought as to why there may be a struggle, "There is a vast difference between "fighting" to do what God alone can do and "fighting to maintain an attitude of dependence on Him to do what He alone can do."⁶⁸ More dependency upon God reveals greater trust in God. However, these insights will not be received if the group is not experienced as healthy and safe.

⁶⁷ NRSV, Romans 12:1–2.

⁶⁸ Lewis Chafer, *He That is Spiritual: A Classic Study of the Biblical Doctrine of Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI., Zondervan Press. 1967), 97.

Session #3 – Am I Growing? Mature Disciple Discussion

The session focused on one specific question, “How does one know they are a mature disciple or that one is on a pathway to spiritual maturity?” Getting to the answer involved a discussion of the following biblical passages, 1 Corinthians 14:20; 1 Corinthians 2:6, 1 Corinthians 3:6, Hebrews 5:14, and Galatians 5:22–23. The primary focus was to understand that spiritual maturity was an intentional, life-long process. Galatians 5:22–23 would provide an easy starting point for deeper reflection into the self-scoring section of the spiritual assessment. In the discussion, the participants were challenged to go beyond, “How do I increase my score?” They were challenged to consider, “What practices need to remain in place to sustain the score? How would you guide someone to increase their score in this area?” The reason for this challenge was to reinforce the point that the “Rule” is a tool meant to guide the participant in continually growing in their relationship with God and in loving their neighbor.

Another focal point for this session was the introduction of the term “indifference.” Ruth Haley Barton, author, Founder of the Transforming Center, and Spiritual Director, shares that “In the context of spiritual discernment, indifference is a positive term signifying that, ‘I am indifferent to anything but God’s will,’ there is a capacity to relinquish whatever might keep us from choosing God and love.”⁶⁹ By introducing Barton’s insight about indifference, I wanted retreatants to see how an attitude of indifference could influence the way they developed a

⁶⁹ Ruth Haley Barton, *Pursuing God’s Will Together* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 175.

Rule” by considering John Wesley’s Covenant Prayer as a possible model.⁷⁰ The spiritual practice of indifference was another way to evaluate growth in one's relationship with God.

The session ended with an experiential practice of silence and solitude. We again looked to Ruth Haley Barton for guidance as she reminded us why silence and solitude are essential disciplines for the disciple on a pathway to maturity, "To enter into solitude and silence is to take the spiritual life seriously. It is to take seriously our need to quiet the noise of our lives, cease the constant striving of human effort, pull away from our absorption in human relationships for a time to give God our undivided attention."⁷¹ The participants began the process using this sentence as a guide: “God, help me to learn more about myself so that I can learn more about you.” After centering themselves, they remained silent until they felt ready to move into a deeper space of reflection. The reflection exercise was a structured exercise from John 4, “Jesus and the Woman of Samaria.” The story invited the participants to consider: 1) What mask(s) might Jesus be inviting me to remove? 2) What blocks me from experiencing God fully? 3) What do I need to do if I want to be more still before God? After the time apart, we reconvened, and the participants shared what that experience was like for them and what insights they had discovered. Many shared that once they got still, it was challenging for them to listen to the Bible rather than analyze the story's words. There was much agreement about the need to practice being still and inviting the story to come alive.

⁷⁰ “Let me be your servant, under your command. I will no longer be my own. I will give up myself to your will in all things. Lord, make me what you will. I put myself fully into your hands; put me to doing, put me to suffering, let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you, let me be full, let me be empty, let me have all things, let me have nothing. I freely and with a willing heart give it all to your pleasure and disposal.”

⁷¹ Ruth Haley Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2010), 35.

Day 2

Session #4 – “Why, Be, Do” Identifying Guiding Principles for a “Rule of Life”

Day two began with a reflection on Psalm 63. This day's desired outcome was for the participants to leave with a rough draft of their "Rule" in place. The process for helping participants discover the guiding principles for a person's "Rule of Life" was adapted from Lance Secretan, leadership and inspiration coach and writer. Lance offers this insight as to why it is essential to have guiding principles when developing a "Rule of Life," "When you stand in the presence of someone who has a deep, inner knowing of who they are, someone who is clear about WHY they are here on earth, how they will BE while they are here, and what they have been called to DO, you are standing in the presence of an inspiring person."⁷² The primary focus throughout the day was the question, "How will my 'Rule of Life' lead me to have a growing and healthy relationship with God and lead me to love my neighbor even more than I currently do, so that I can be an inspiring person to others?"

Guiding Principle: WHY?

The participants were invited to reflect on Jesus' determination to "set His face towards Jerusalem" as a way to appreciate the power that guiding principles offered. The participants began this process with another silence and solitude exercise that lasted for twenty-five minutes.

⁷² Lance Secretan, *The Spark, the Flame, the Torch: Inspire Self. Inspire Others. Inspire the World* (Ontario: The Secretan Center, 2010), 15.

Luke 9:51–62 was the scripture selected to guide the exercise. Three questions guided the reflection: 1) What can I learn from this reading that will help me discover and live according to my guiding principles? 2) What are two things that I believe are causing incredible damage to the world? 3) What are a couple of ways that I would want to ‘set my face towards these issues and resolve them? The purpose of these questions was to guide the participant to connect with a pain, a disturbance, discontentment with the world that would inspire them to want to devote their lives to trying to resolve if they had enough time and resources. These questions were designed to lead the participant back to the primary question of the day.

Guiding Principle: BE?

To help participants discover their "being" statement, they were invited to reflect on the adverse outcomes described in Matthew 23. Matthew 23 was selected to illustrate negatively what occurs when a disciple's "being" and "doing" are not congruent with each other. Many leaders, Christian and non-Christian, see a problem, set their faces towards resolving the problem but fail to take the time to develop the character needed to resolve the problem. The primary question to be answered during this time was "How do I want to 'Be' in the world?" The participant would be considering the Fruit of the Spirit as character qualities to be developed in his or her life. For example, the participant may be reluctant with his or her love towards certain people but wants to become more like Jesus in demonstrating love toward their neighbor. These aspirational values were meant to be guiding principles of his or her "Rule of Life." To help the participant discover these aspirational values, they were invited to focus on the question, "In order to set my face towards 'My Jerusalem,' what am I doing in the dark that needs your light shined upon it so that I can become what you want me to become?"

Guiding Principle: DO?

The final guiding principle exercise was centered on answering the “Do” question. The participants considered how Paul had concluded that his doing was to serve as a missionary to the Gentiles. The biblical reflection for this portion of the exercise was Acts 8:1–11. In this portion of the guiding principle development, the participant was answering the question, “What will I do in order to continually develop my relationship with God and increase my capacity to love my neighbor?” The prompt to help them answer that question was “Holy Spirit, with my gifts, talents, skills, dreams, and passions, how should I serve others for your sake?” One participant shared her doing statement, “Stop avoiding God and weekly reflect on how God strangely warmed my heart.” This was a tremendous insight as she shared that it had been far too easy to “hide” and remain detached from the process throughout the retreat.

Session #5 - “Rule of Life” Life Categories

The retreat went much quicker at this point because this would be similar to many goal-setting processes that the participants had experienced. As one participant mentioned, “This is like meeting with a life coach.” Here the Rule development would address five categories of everyday life, by referring back to Eugene Peterson’s translation of Romans 12:1-3.⁷³ The desired outcome was for the participants to have a way to see the integration of spiritual formation with everyday life. The five categories were: Spiritual, Physical, Financial, Relational,

⁷³ 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.

and Intellectual. The participants were given a basic description of each category. For each category, the participants were to begin capturing actions that would be a part of their daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, and annual routines.

Retreat Conclusion

The conclusion of the retreat was designed to invite the participants to appreciate that the way we train (as Christians) determines how we live out our “Rule of Life” and this will influence the impact we desire to have in the church and our community. I solidified this point by speaking about the engagement I had with the Marines on deployment. We then viewed a video segment titled, “Touch the White Fence,”⁷⁴ and had a brief discussion after reading Hebrews 5:11 through 6:2.

After Retreat Actions

The leadership group has begun meeting in sharing groups to facilitate mutual support, encouragement, and accountability. After Easter, the participants will take the spiritual self-assessment, which will provide me with an opportunity to see whether the “Rule of Life” is an effective tool for spiritual growth. This assessment will consist of the leaders completing the Spiritual Life Survey again and answering two specific questions: 1. Has your "Rule of Life" helped you continually grow in your relationship with God? 2. Has your "Rule of Life" increased your willingness to love your neighbor regardless of the neighbor?

SELF-REFLECTION AND CONCLUSION

⁷⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wgYxqAPagL8>

The inspiration for this project began years ago while I was serving on active duty. This question has always enamored me, "How does a pastor develop disciples?" It was pretty easy to see the "discipleship pipeline" in the military. Our "Rule of Life" evolved around three core components, Honor, Courage, and Commitment. Whether enlisted or officer, every service member is introduced to the naval "Rule of Life" from day one. The "Rule of Life" teaches us that the community's strength depends on each servicemember's living according to the core components. If a service member does not take the military's version of the "Rule" seriously, they can compromise the entire unit's integrity. If the unit's integrity is compromised, then the mission is compromised, ultimately losing lives.

When I introduced the concept of a Christian "Rule of Life," I believed the mission of developing disciples at UMCPB was compromised. The process of guiding people to develop a "Rule of Life" is meant to be generative. Leaders will eventually guide other Christians through the same process they experienced during the spiritual formation retreat. The long-term desired outcome is that transformative changes will occur in the church and the community because the "Rule of Life" will become the primary resource that prepares a disciple to determine if they have grown in the areas of trusting God and loving their neighbor.

There are some preliminary indicators that using a "Rule of Life" is leading UMCPB to recover that mission. For example, when the church hosted a drive-thru event for special needs people in our community,⁷⁵ almost seventy volunteers showed up to wave and celebrate these

⁷⁵ This was the lead-up event to the Tim Tebow Night to Shine Event. Because the event was going to be virtual, we did a Shine-Thru. The participants would drive thru the parking lot and pick up their gifts and swag for the event. As they drove thru, members of the congregation would line the parking lot waving banners and balloons.

special people in the pouring rain for several hours. At our most recent "Feed the Hungry" event, over twenty-five volunteers from the church were on hand. These folks distributed over nine hundred treats made by the church members to approximately seven hundred people receiving food.

However, a vulnerability threatens the sustainability of this project. If we do not understand that following our "Rule of Life" is for the sake of others, we will not grow in our relationship with God, nor will we love our neighbor. This means we will eventually cheapen the grace given to us by becoming Christians who lack compassion, mercy, and forgiveness. The sharing groups are what keeps that from occurring. These groups must continually seek an answer to these two questions, "Is your 'Rule of Life' growing your relationship with God? Is your 'Rule of Life' leading you to love your neighbor more?" This "Rule of Life" depends on people engaging in a perpetual reflective lifestyle, of always being on the lookout for God in their everyday activities.

Appendix A

10 Week Sermon Series – “A Christian Maturity Pathway”

My Desired Outcome: This will be my first sermon series with UMCPB. My desire would be to lay a foundation for what I hope to do as their pastor—to develop mature Christians who finish well. Therefore, these will be the ten primary traits on which I will be focusing as their pastor.

The pathway to developing a mature Christian who finishes well requires us to learn how to abide in God’s empowering presence; worship in spirit and truth; engage in intentional spiritual practices that bring life, joy, and satisfaction; operate as a community; build and sustain healthy relationships; serve others like Christ: share the love of Christ, embrace diversity, and function as good stewards of God’s resources.

July 5, 2020

Scripture: [John 15:1-11](#)

Desired Outcome: Through this sermon I want to equip my new congregation to long to live in the empowering presence of God by **abiding** in *their* calling.

July 12, 2020

Scripture: [John 4:16-24](#)

Desired Outcome: Through this sermon, I want to remind my congregation how to **worship** in spirit and truth.

July 19, 2020

Scripture: [Psalm 16:8-11](#)

Desired Outcome: Through this sermon I want my congregation to discover sustainable life, joy, and satisfaction with God through daily **spiritual practices**.

July 26, 2020

Scripture: [Acts 4:32-35](#)

Desired Outcome: Through this sermon, I want to remind my congregation how to be an engaged **community**: one team, one fight.

August 2, 2020

Scripture: [1 Corinthians 13](#)

Desired Outcome: Through this sermon, I want to remind my congregation that we will be known in the community by how we **relate** to one another.

August 9, 2020

Scripture: [John 13:1-20](#)

Desired Outcome: Through this sermon, I want my congregation to commit to becoming **servants** like Christ.

August 16, 2020

Scripture: [Acts 8:26-40](#)

Desired Outcome: Through this sermon, I want my congregation to long for opportunities to **share** the love of Christ with as many people as possible.

August 23, 2020

Scripture: [Colossians 3:23-24](#)

Desired Outcome: Through this sermon, I want to remind my congregation how to manage their lives in a God-honoring way.

August 30, 2020

Scripture: [John 17:13-26](#)

Desired Outcome: Through this sermon, I want to lead my congregation to discover how to **network** with other congregations, denominations, and faith experiences.

September 6, 2020

Scripture: [John 12:24](#)

Desired Outcome: In this sermon, I want to invite my congregation to discover the secret to biblical **stewardship**.

5 Week Sermon Series – “Changing Our City Through Prayer”

The desired outcome for this sermon series is that at least 20 people will commit to participating in the Sweet Hour of Prayer and at least 12 will begin to serve as Prayer Partners with me. Ultimately what I am hoping to happen is we will have laid out a framework to have a very robust prayer ministry at our church.

September 20, 2020

Scripture: Matthew 21:21

Desired Outcome: To lay the biblical foundation for why we should be a praying church.

Desired Action: Make an appointment on your calendar each day this week to spend 10 minutes in prayer and 5 minutes in silence.

September 27, 2020

Scripture: Luke 11:1-4

Desired Outcome: For listeners to know how to prepare themselves to pray, have some practical tips for praying spiritually and principles to align their prayers with God.

Desired Action: For each person to collect 5 business cards and then to pray for those businesses each day this week.

October 4, 2020

Scripture: Matthew 21:13

Desired Outcome: That each person would know how to turn their home into a home of prayer.

Desired Action: At least 35% of people would create a prayer room, take a picture and post it to our webpage.

October 11, 2020

Scripture: Exodus 17:8-13

Desired Outcome: Each person would know how to pray a hedge of protection around our ministry leaders.

Desired Action: At least 20% of people would connect with Nimmy to help develop a team that prays during our worship services.

October 18, 2020

Scripture: Joshua 1:1-5

Desired Outcome: Each person would know how to pray without ceasing while living life.

Desired Action: 35% of people would draw a .25mile radius around their home and begin to pray God's blessing upon that area.

Appendix B

Session #1 – Discover Your Leadership Voice

Session #2 – Appreciate the Power of Your Voice

Session #3 – The Art of Collaboration

Session #4 – Optimizing Team Performance

Session #5 – Team Kryptonite

Appendix C

Basic Spiritual Formation Demographic Question

1. How often do you pray? Daily, Weekly, As Needed, Other
2. When you pray, for what do you typically pray?
3. How often do you read the Bible? Daily, Weekly, As Needed, Other
4. When you read the Bible, how do you read it? (Academically, Devotionally, Chronologically, New Testament only, Other
5. How often do you attend worship services? Weekly, 2-3 times a month, Whenever, Other
6. Are you a member of a small (church) group?
7. Do you believe you give 10 percent of your monthly income to the ministry of the church?
8. When were you baptized as a Christian?
9. How long have you been a United Methodist?
10. How long have you been a member of UMCPB?
11. How would you finish this statement? A mature Christian is....
12. Based on your answer to the previous question about a mature Christian, how would you rate your maturity as a Christian? Immature, Growing, Mature, Wise Influencer

The two disciples who were traveling to Emmaus after Jesus' death encountered Jesus. Later, after breaking bread with Jesus, they said, "Were not our hearts burning within us..." (Luke 24:32). When was the last time you had a "heart burning within" experience?

What does "testing the spirits to see whether they are from God" (1 Corinthians 12:10; 1 John 4:1) mean to you?

What evidence would you offer as proof that you love your neighbor/ yourself/ God more this year than last year?

What evidence would you offer as proof that you have the capacity to love your enemies?

Where do you sense that God is leading you to serve?

Jesus said, "Remain in me and I will remain in you" (John 15:4). What do you believe Jesus meant when He said this? How do you practice remaining in Jesus?

On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being nowhere near the expectation, 5 being I more than meet the expectation), how would you rate yourself in displaying these fruit of the Spirit:
 Almost Never Usually Never Usually Usually Always Almost Always

Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, Self-Control

Appendix D

- **What are two things that you believe are wrong in the world, that if these two things were left unchecked, they might cause humanity to cease to exist?**

My face is set towards the problem of inauthentic spirituality and individualism.

- **Describe a couple of ways that you would “set your face towards these issues” and resolve them.**

My direction for resolving these problems is to create spiritually authentic communities that inspire people to discover and express their unique spirituality, unconditional love, powerful forgiveness, authentic hope, courageous compassion, and radical generosity.

- **How do you want to be in the world?**

- *I want to be engaging, friendly, playful, likable, dependable. I want to show up as someone who is trustworthy and values the team.*
- *I want to be a person who treats everyone as an equals*
- *I want to be a person who fosters stability and security in my home, church, and community.*
- *I want to be a person who invites others to pursue their goals and organizes people to use their gifts and passions to make the world a better place.*
- *I want to be a person who has tremendous faith in God and uses that faith to tackle the difficult problems our world faces.*
- *I want to be self-confident and self-affirming without being arrogant and judgmental.*
- *I want to be a person who values both independence and inter-dependence.*

- *I want to be a person who demonstrates courageous leadership.*
- *I want to be a person of faith that others would want to imitate.*

➤ **What is the Holy Spirit's answer to your question, "With my gifts, talents, skills, dreams, and passions, how should I serve others for your sake?"**

With your gifts, talents, skills, dreams, and passions, you should inspire Christians to become disciples that others would want to imitate, and you should do so through teaching, leading, coaching, and preaching.

My Spiritual Priorities

- *Daily – Read Scripture and Journal; Complete 3 Prayer Offices*
- *Weekly – Celebrate the Sabbath*
- *Monthly – Experience a Sabbath from electronics.*
- *Quarterly – Take a silence and solitude retreat.*
- *Annually – Review my spiritual journal entries and complete one spiritual formation activity.*

My Physical Priorities

- *Daily – 7 Hours of Sleep, 10,000 Steps, eight glasses of water*
- *Weekly – Complete 1 Daily Fast (Dinner to next day lunch)*
- *Monthly – Play at least 1 round of golf*
- *Quarterly – Run at least a 10K*
- *Annually – Have a medical exam.*

My Financial Priorities

- *Live out the 10-10-80 Principle*
 - *10% to God*
 - *10% to Savings*
 - *Live within my 80%*

My Relational Priorities

- *Daily – Pray for each member of my family by name. Check-in with each person and listen to their description of the day they had.*
- *Weekly – Be intentional about connecting with Jackie (my wife). Do something as a family.*

- *Monthly – Have a date with each kiddo.*
- *Quarterly –*
- *Annually – Enjoy a family vacation.*

My Intellectual Priorities

- *Daily – Plan my next day, complete a daily examen, read for at least 20 minutes.*
- *Weekly – Review my week, inbox Zero*
- *Monthly – Complete a monthly review, finish reading at least 2 Books*
- *Quarterly – Complete at least one personal growth course. Complete a quarterly review.*
- *Annually – Review the year, establish goals for the coming year.*

Spiritual Formation Retreat

AN INVITATION FOR AN INTIMATE WALK WITH JESUS



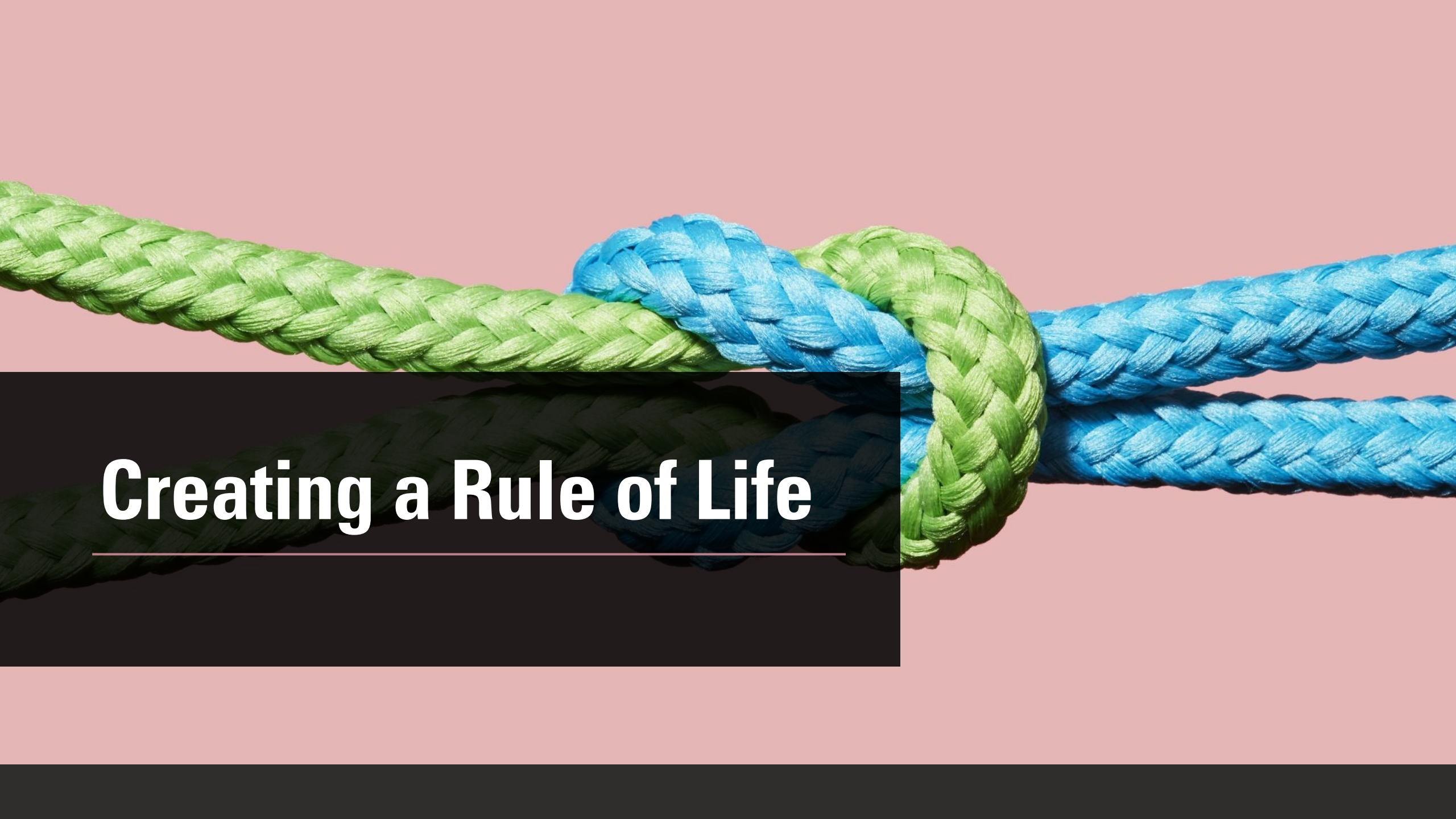
Time to Reflect

*"How can you draw
close to God when
you are far from your
own self?"*

- Saint Augustine

Psalm 8

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name
in all the earth! You have set your glory
above the heavens...When I consider your
heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon
and the stars, which you have set in place,
what is humanity that you are mindful of us?



Creating a Rule of Life

Romans 12:1-2

The Message

Take your everyday, ordinary life – your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking around life and place it before God as an offering. Embracing whatever 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 maturity. God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

The Desired Goal of a Rule of Life is

Sustainable Christian Maturity

Time to Reflect

Suppose you offer to God consistently, day by day, and keep offering it, and God chooses not to use it, how might that impact your daily walk with God?

Robert Mulholland Jr – Shaped by the Word

John Wesley's Prayer

Let me be your servant, under your command. I will no longer be my own. I will give up myself to your will in all things.

Lord, make me what you will. I put myself fully into your hands: put me to doing, put me to suffering, let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you, let me be full, let me be empty, let me have all things, let me have nothing.

I freely and with a willing heart give it all to your pleasure and disposal.

A Mature Christian

- A mature Christian is one who has learned how to think deeply. **1 Corinthians 14:20**
- A mature Christian would be able to think in a way that allows him or her to distinguish between patterns of culture and patterns of the kingdom of God. **1 Corinthians 2:6**
- A mature Christian is one who understands that growth, maturity, is not the result of the efforts of human beings. Growth is caused by God through human effort. **1 Corinthians 3:6**
- A mature Christian can distinguish good from evil. **Hebrews 5:14**
- A mature Christian is submitting to strenuous training, feasting on solid food manifested as, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self-control. **Galatians 5:22-23**

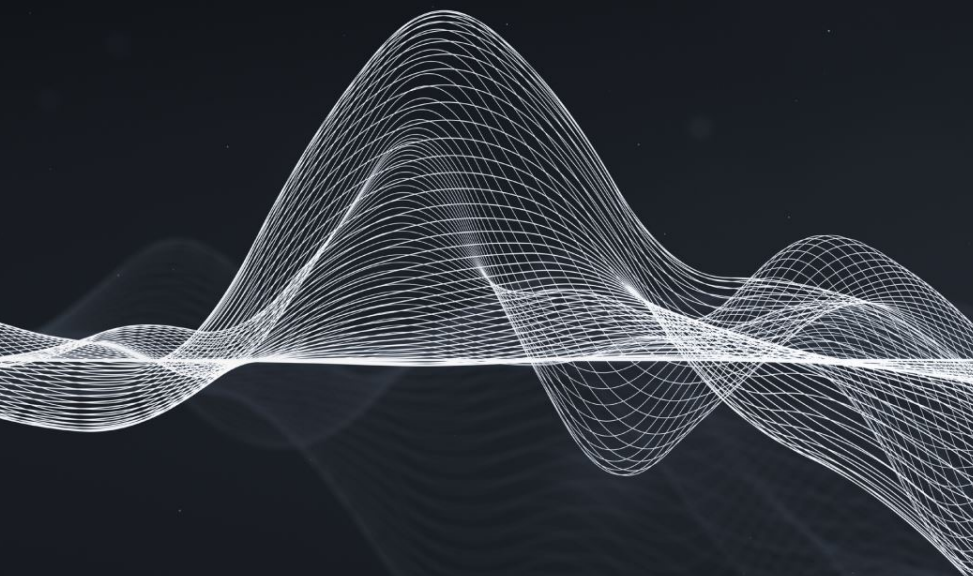
What is A Rule of Life?

“Your personal Rule of Life is a holistic description of the Spirit-empowered rhythms and relationships that create, redeem, sustain and transform the life God invites you to humbly fulfill for Christ’s glory.” – Stephen Macchia, [Crafting a Rule of Life](#).

The beginning place for crafting a Rule of Life involves embarking on a journey of self-discovery. The more we learn about us, the creation, the more we learn about the Creator.

Learning Journey Assignment

- Begin with a silent prayer – Help me to learn more about myself so that I can learn more about you.
- Read John 4
- Consider the following questions and write down what the Holy Spirit reveals to you.
 - What mask(s) might Jesus be inviting me to remove?
 - What blocks me from experiencing God fully?
 - What would I need to do if I want to be more still before God?



Growth Through Sharing



**Spiritual
Formation Retreat**

The Continued
Journey



Something to Ponder

“True love is not a hide and seek game: in true love, both lovers seek each other.”

Michael Basseyy Johnson



Knowing God

What matters supremely, therefore, is not, in the last analysis, the fact that I know God, but the larger fact which underlies it – the fact that He knows me. I am graven on the palms of His hands. I am never out of His mind. All my knowledge of Him depends on His sustained initiative in knowing me. I know Him, because He first knew me, and continues to know me. He knows me as a friend, one who loves me; and there is no moment when His eye is off me, or His attention distracted from me, and no moment, therefore, when His care falters. This is momentous knowledge. There is unspeakable comfort, the sort of comfort that energizes, be it said, not enervates, in that knowing that God is constantly taking care of me in love, and watching over me for my good. There is tremendous relief in knowing that His love for me is utterly realistic, based at every point on prior knowledge of the worst about me, so that no discovery now can disillusion Him about me.

J. I. Packer, Knowing God

Psalm 63

I Seek You





A Friend of God





Discussion Question

As we begin this day what is already stirring in your hearts and minds?

How are you experiencing God's presence?

What might be distracting you from earnestly seeking God?



Discovering Your Guiding Principles

When you are inspired by some great purpose, some extraordinary project, all your thoughts break their bonds; your mind transcends limitations, your consciousness expands in every direction, and you find yourself in a new, great and wonderful world. Dormant forces, faculties and talents become alive, and you discover yourself to be a greater person by far than you ever dreamed yourself to be.

Patanjali

...He set His face towards Jerusalem

- Start in silence, then pray, “Father as I begin these exercises today help me to grow more intimate with you.
 - Read Luke 9:51-62 – You are reading with the perspective of answering the question what can I learn from this reading that will help me discover and live according to my guiding principles.
 - To help discover those principles consider the following questions:
 - What are two things that you believe are wrong in the world, that if these two things were left unchecked they may actually cause humanity to cease to exist?
 - Describe a couple of ways that you would “set your face towards these issues” and resolve them.
-



My Guiding Principle

My face is set towards the problem of inauthentic spirituality and individualism.

My direction for resolving these problems is to create spiritually authentic communities that inspires people to discover and express their unique spirituality, unconditional love, powerful forgiveness, authentic hope, courageous compassion, and radical generosity.

...they do not do what they preach

- Start this exercise in silence, then pray, “Help me be true to you.”
- Read Matthew 23 – You are reading this passage to see an example of what happens when are doing does not match our being. “Father in order to set my face towards “My Jerusalem” what am I doing in the dark, that needs to have your light shine upon it so that I can become what you want me to become?”
- Now take some time and write down how you want to be in the world.



My Guiding Principle

- I want to be engaging, friendly, playful, likeable, dependable. I want to show up as someone who is trustworthy and values the team.
- I want to be a person who is committed to everyone being treated as equals.
- I want to be a person who fosters stability and security in my home, church, and community.
- I want to be a person who invites others to pursue their goals and organizes people to use their gifts and passions to make the world a better place.
- I want to be a person who has tremendous faith in God and uses that faith to tackle the difficult problems our world faces.
- I want to be self-confident and self-affirming without being arrogant and judgmental.
- I want to be a person who values both independence and inter-dependence.
- I want to be a person who demonstrates courageous leadership.
- I want to be a person of faith that others would want to imitate.

...from now on I will go

- Start this exercise in silence, then pray, “Help me to do what you would have me do.”
- Read Acts 18:1-11 You are reading this passage to see how Paul discovered what he was to do, how he discovered it, and what happened when he did it.
- Paul declared, “From now on I will go to the Gentiles” journal the Holy Spirit’s answer to your question, “With my gifts, talents, skills, dreams, and passions how should I serve others for your sake?”



My Guiding Principle

With your gifts, talents, skills, dreams, and passions you should inspire Christians to become disciples that others would want to imitate through teaching, leading, coaching, and preaching.



Break Time



Debriefing the Assessment

- How would you finish the statement - A Mature Christian...
- Testing the Spirit means
- Remaining in me
- Measurement goal of the Fruit of the Spirit



Rule of Life Categories

Spiritual

Physical

Financial

Relational

Intellectual



Spiritual Priorities

- The Christian Year is built around a calendar of events – Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, Ordinary Time and All Saint’s Day.
- The Christian Week focuses on the blessings and joys of creation, with Sabbath marking the end of a week.
- The Christian Day focuses on the opportunity to live as a living sacrifice.
- **Write out what your Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Quarterly and Annually Spiritual Priorities might be.**



My Spiritual Priorities

- Daily – Read Scripture and Journal; Complete 3 Prayer Offices
- Weekly – Celebrate the Sabbath
- Monthly – Experience a Sabbath from electronics.
- Quarterly – Take a silence and solitude retreat.
- Annually – Review my spiritual journal entries and complete one spiritual formation activity



Physical Priorities

- It is important for us to remember that our physical bodies are also the temple for the Holy Spirit. We cannot love God and serve others if we are sick.
- **Write out what your Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Quarterly and Annually Physical Priorities might be.**



My Physical Priorities

Daily – 7 Hours of Sleep, 10,000 Steps, 8 glasses of water
Weekly – Complete 1 Daily Fast (Dinner to next day lunch)
Monthly – Play at least 1 round of golf
Quarterly – Run at least a 10K
Annually – Have a medical exam.

Financial Priorities

“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life...But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

Matthew 6:24-25, 33

- **Write out what your Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Quarterly and Annually Financial Priorities might be.**



My Financial Priorities

- Live out the 10-10-80 Principle
 - 10% to God
 - 10% to Savings
 - Live within my 80%



Relational Priorities

5 Keys to a Healthy Relationship

- ✓ Love
- ✓ Honesty
- ✓ Intimacy
- ✓ Receiving and Giving Care
- ✓ Sharing Interests

Make a list of your key relationships.

Place a score next to each of these categories (1 to 5).

Write out 1 Action you will take to either raise the score and sustain the score.

Define the action in a category of Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Quarterly, and Annually.





My Relational Priorities

- Daily – Pray for each member of my family by name. Check in with each person and listen to their description of the day they had.
- Weekly – Be intentional about connecting with Jackie. Do something as a family.
- Monthly – Have a date with each kiddo.
- Quarterly –
- Annually – Enjoy a family vacation.

Intellectual Priorities

The background of the slide is a dark blue, almost black, surface covered with numerous light bulbs. Most of the bulbs are unlit and appear as dark, rounded shapes. In the center-right area, one light bulb is illuminated, glowing with a bright yellow light. The lighting creates soft shadows and highlights on the bulbs, giving them a three-dimensional appearance. The overall mood is one of intellectual focus and enlightenment.

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Ephesian 5:15-17

This priority captures areas that are meant to stimulate our thinking, planning, and organizing.

Write out what your Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Quarterly and Annually Intellectual Priorities might be.

My Intellectual Priorities

Daily – Plan my next day, complete a daily examen, read for at least 20 minutes.

Weekly – Review my week, inbox Zero

Monthly – Complete a monthly review, finish reading at least 2 Books

Quarterly – Completed at least one personal growth course. Complete a quarterly review.

Annually – Review the year, layout goals for coming year



Touch the White Fence



BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barton, Ruth Haley. *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2010.
- _____. *Pursuing God's Will Together*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2012.
- Chafer, Lewis. *He That is Spiritual: A Classic Study of the Biblical Doctrine of Spirituality*. Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan Press, 1967.
- Fowler, James W., *Faith Development, and Pastoral Care*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987.
- Hamilton, Adam, *Revival: Faith as Wesley Lived It*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2014.
- Harper, Steve, *Five Marks of a Methodist*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2015.
- Heitzenrather, Richard, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995.
- Howe, Ben, *The Immoral Majority: Why Evangelicals Chose Political Power over Christian Values*. (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2019).
- Kubicek, Jeremie, and Steve Cockram, *5 Voices: How to Communicate Effectively with Everyone You Lead*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Press, 2016.
- Martin, James, SJ, *The Jesuit Guide to Almost Everything: A Spirituality for Real Life*. New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2010.
- Mullholland, Robert, Jr., *Shaped by the Word*. Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2000.
- _____. [*The Deeper Journey: The Spirituality of Discovering Your True Self*](#) Westmont, IL: IVP Books, 2016, Logos Bible Software.
- O'Brien, Kevin SJ, *The Ignatian Adventure*. Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2011.
- Outler, Albert C., *John Wesley*. New York, NY: Oxford Press, 1980.
- R. J. Wyatt, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979–1988.
- Scazzero, Peter, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Press, 2017.
- Secretan, Lance, *The Spark, the Flame, the Torch: Inspire Self. Inspire Others. Inspire the World*. Ontario, CN: The Secretan Center, 2010.

Watson, Kevin, "The Heart of a Methodist Revival" <https://goodnewsmag.org/2014/11/the-heart-of-the-methodist-revival/>