Crafting a "Rule of Life" (Rhythms and practices for Spiritual life)

St. Benedict's "Rule of Life" is the kind of work all us can do in order to live intentionally around what is most important to us.

It is a process of aligning our rhythms, our schedule and our efforts with our values and desire to connect with Jesus.

Essentially crafting a "Rule of Life" is about making a "working document" subject to regular review and revision that is a guiding structure toward being with Jesus.

"Rule" in latin is "Regula" which is the same word for a "Trellis" or a "guiding structure." It exists to support and structure our lives around abiding in the vine.

These practices and rhythms simply help us create space to be with Jesus, to learn from him and hear from him, and be transformed by him.

Rom 12:1,2 MSG
"… 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."

"Your personal rule of life is the 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 A. Macchia (Crafting a Rule of Life)

Parsing this Quote:
- Holistic description: It is to be lived out in REAL life incorporating all of our realities, circumstances, roles, etc.

- Spirit Empowered: I.e guidance and empowerment, wisdom and revelation

- It includes both rhythms and relationships of life: Our rhythms intersect with our relationship with others on the journey. And so we influence (in many ways) others and they influence us.

- It changes us and brings the LIFE we were made for. (Get ready for the counterintuitive effect of a sweet release into life and joy and peace we've always wanted. "If you try and save your life you will lose it, but if you lose it for my sake you will find it.")

- It is humbly fulfilled for Christ's glory: (It's not about us. It is a life surrendered for him and his purposes - and not our own happiness or success etc. Not self centered or self-improvement.)

Here are four areas that can form a basis of crafting our own Rule of Life:

1. Abiding (or connecting to the vine.)

This may include the following types of rhythms and practices:

- Prayer and the Word
- Prayer experiences and experiments
- Silence and solitude
- Experiences that allow scripture to shape our lives (meditation, personal and group study, memorization, reading, sermons.)

2. Rest

This may include the following types of rhythms and practices: • Practicing the Sabbath

- Eliminate hurry
- Practicing self care (for example sleep, etc.)
- Fasting (to break strongholds.)

3. Relationships

This may include the following types of rhythms and practices: • Point others to Jesus (by practicing hospitality, doing the work of evangelism, and discipling others to teach them the way.)

- Pursue emotional health (to be able to love others well.)
- Pursue healthy singleness or marriage.

4. Work (and Calling)

This may include the following types of rhythms and practices: • Bring the Kingdom (Restoration) in everything we do. (Including empowering the poor and marginalized. Including engaging with corrupt systems for justice. Including care for the earth - for the sake of people)

- Strengthen the church
- Share our gifts generously (time and “talents” and treasure)
- Embrace all work as full-time ministry.

Some things to consider as you craft your rule of life

1. Start **Small**

2. Be **specific**: Practical and concrete, not vague or ideological. (Not “rest more”, but “Go to bed no later than 10PM”)

3. Consider your **personality** I.e. Are you a reader? An introvert? Kinesthetic learner? Etc.

4. Consider your **season of life** and stage of discipleship.
Don’t copy others and don’t adopt rules that are unreasonable for you. Just take the next step in YOUR journey.

5. Keep **a healthy balance of upstream and downstream practices**.
Upstream are those things that are hard for you and require some work, but really move your soul toward growth - fasting, Sabbath, etc. Downstream practices are those you find fun and easy and joyful. As a general rule only have a few upstream practices in your rule at any given time and LOTS of downstream.

6. Keep **a healthy balance of structure and spontaneity.**
Never let it override the Spirit’s frequently unscheduled calls on us and interruptions. And it shouldn’t feel legalistic or a dull obligation for any extended time. A good rule should feel like freedom and have satisfying feedback loops.

7. Remember that a good rule is a working document. (Like us it is dynamic, not static. Life is a bit of a moving target, and our needs change. If your rule is not bringing you life and fruit with God and others it is not a trellis but a bad rule!)

Let's try creating a personal Rule of Life:

Step 1

Spend time with the Lord and reflect and journal on each of the categories above. Use the following questions as a guide:
- What are practices and rhythms that you engage with currently in this area? - How do you feel about them? Do they give you life? Why or why not? - What are other ways that might help support and guide your connecting with Jesus and his ways in this area?
- Are there any practices or rhythms you'd like to try? Any you would love to jettison? Any that might need to be adjusted?
- Are there any other desires you feel rising up from the Holy Spirit within you as you reflect on this area?

Step 2
Take each of the areas and try and settle on one or two practices you feel the Lord is asking you to live by. Begin writing these down as the first draft of your rule of life. Brainstorm how this might look in your daily, weekly, and seasonal life and begin to employ those practices this week.

Then try and create a first draft completed with your rhythms and practices written down in all four areas.

Step 3

Now begin to consciously live by your rule.
Have your journal close by to record thoughts including how you might need to revise your original ideas based on what is working, not working and why.

Be sure to start small or you might get discouraged by too many "new" things happening at once, before you have the benefit of momentum and habits taking hold.

Remember that a Rule of Life is a working document, so keep tweaking it as the Lord leads.

Have Fun, Be Free, Enjoy the Lord, and may the Spirit of wisdom and revelation be with you.