

**Beyond A New Year Resolution:
Writing a Rule of Life**



**MY RULE
OF LIFE**

Guided reflections and suggested practices for creating your own

RULE OF LIFE

Rule of Life: crafted rhythms that provide a framework for freedom and a pathway to flourishing.

Everyone already has a specific pattern by which they live; the question is whether or not it's intentional.

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PROLOGUE

In John 10:10, Jesus declares his purpose for coming to earth. "I have come that they" (he is talking about you) "may have life, and have it to the full." Other translations use the word, "abundantly." What does it mean to have life to all its fullness? In our world full of shiny entertainments and relentless distractions how can we pause long enough to even answer such a question? Over the centuries, Christians have answered these questions with a practice. A life craft. They have written for themselves a Rule of Life.

Here is my invitation:

Would you join this journey?

Would you craft a Rule of Life?

If you will, the following pages are your guide. This booklet is part journal and part instruction manual. More than anything, it is an offering of hope - hope that your life might be joyfully conformed in every area to God's kingdom and desires. It might be full.

Grace and Peace,

Karl Helvig, Centennial Covenant Church

PROLOGUE: WHAT IS A RULE OF LIFE?

St. Benedict crafted what is now one of the most famous Rules of Life. His Rule, dating from the 6th century, served as a road map for the daily rhythms of those in his monastic community. A Rule is comprised of intentional practices which create a framework for freedom. It is not a list of rules that restrict or deny; rather it is a framework - some call it a trellis - within which abundant life flourishes. Just as garden plants need a trellis to grow, a Rule provides structure for health. In the words of St. Benedict himself, "It is simply a handbook to make the very radical demands of the gospel a practical reality in daily life." It is a guide to pursuing the life Jesus offers.

As you consider whether to craft a Rule for your own life, ponder this: **do you desire greater flourishing in any area of your life?** If so, then a Rule may be exactly the trellis on which your life in Christ might grow.

This guide to crafting a Rule is structured around the four Priority Callings of one church in Littleton, CO. Whether or not you are part of CCC, our four priority callings outline the essential components of any life well lived. They are the four essential realms of abundant living.

Under the heading of each calling there will be questions to guide prayerful reflection. **Don't rush your way through.**

Rather, take time with the questions. After these guided reflections, there will be an invitation to consider specific practices for your Rule. These practices might include things like prayer and fasting as well as exercise and leisure reading. Practices can be daily or weekly, monthly or quarterly, or yearly. While there is no need for rigidity, it is wise to think holistically so that the life-giving structure of your Rule is a helpful plan throughout the year.

Finally, at the end is a template for writing your Rule. This template will have space to put a daily, seasonal, and annual practice under the heading of each Priority Calling. There will also be space to consider the realms of your own life - physical, emotional, intellectual, relational - in which this Rule is most needed. We intentionally include all areas of life because we believe every area of life is a part of your spiritual life. Prayer and singing, diet and exercise, vulnerability and setting boundaries are all ingredients of our one, integrated life with God.

Again, this journal is a guide for a journey, not a rigid requirement. More than anything, we hope it is a prompt for you to begin today intentionally structuring for yourself a life of abundance in Christ.

Let this be a chance to move beyond a mere New Year's resolution and instead begin considering the healthy habits and structures, rhythms and practices that will provide a strong center from which you live all your days.

SECTION 1: UP

VULNERABLE WORSHIP

Priority Calling: to experience God's loving presence

Worship is a big, hearty word that wraps its giant arms around a vast diversity of practices, experiences, and facets of life. Find or create a space where you can reflect on this question: how and where have you most meaningfully experienced worship in your life? This may have been in a church with others or on a mountain top all alone. Write down some observations, stories, or experiences of worship that have been part of your life.

In our Priority Calling, we acknowledge that worship is meant to be a practice in which we experience God's loving presence. Take a moment and recall some times when you have most clearly experienced God's loving presence. Where were you? What were you doing? Why do you think that particular moment was such an experience of God? Again, try not to draw boundaries around the spaces you can encounter God's love.

The practice we have connected with our first Priority Calling is *Vulnerable Worship*. Worship is something we engage holistically and with the deepest part of our lives. Worship cannot be faked. We cannot pretend our way into God's loving presence; we must be honest. All the good and all the messy. The fullness of joy and the most painful sorrow. Vulnerability is an essential component of true worship. Are you able to be vulnerable in worship? Where have you most experienced true vulnerability? Is this concept new or familiar to you?

Practices to consider: Having reflected on your own experiences of vulnerable worship, consider what worship practices might be most important for you to include in your own Rule of Life. Again, worship is a big, bold word that includes many practices. Some to consider include:

- Corporate worship on Sunday mornings
- Prayer practices like the prayer of Examen, *Lectio Divina*, or the Immanuel Prayer. (Examples of these can be easily found online)
- Intentional time in creation to connect with the creator
- Regular prayer for friends, family, and colleagues
- Praying Scripture
- Silence or solitude
- Journaling
- Expressions of gratitude

Which of these practices stand out to you? What other practices might you write for yourself? What practices best create the habit of vulnerable worship in your life?



SECTION TWO: WITH

AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Priority Calling: to cultivate companions for our shared journey of faith.

Relationships are part of every facet of life. At home, work, church and in our leisure; relationships are central to who we are and how we live. Too often, sadly, relationships become shallow, draining, and inauthentic. That is not God's design. Rather, we are designed for authenticity in our connection with others. Where have you experienced authentic relationship? Where have you felt completely free to be exactly who you are - both the good and the bad - with others? Write down some of those experiences and people.

In our Priority Calling, we acknowledge that authentic relationships are designed to be a context where faith can flourish. What relationships in your life have helped curate a flourishing faith? What about those relationships was so life giving?

What are the characteristics of authenticity that are most important and meaningful to you? How fully are you able to express those to others and receive those from others?

Practices to consider: Having reflected on your own experiences of authentic relationships, consider what relational practices might be most important for you to include in your Rule of Life. Some practices to consider might include:

- Participation in a Life Group, where people gather to intentionally share life with one another, pray for one another, and study scripture together. Most local churches offer these.
- Seeking a mentor to help guide or encourage you in life, faith, vocation, and family. Or, seeking to be a mentor to someone.
- Regular meals with your family
- Sharing meals with close friends or other families
- Intentional hospitality
- Focused time with your children or dates with your spouse/significant other
- Activities and conversations with close friends
- Phone calls with family/friends who don't live nearby

Which of these practices stand out to you? What other practices might you write for yourself?



SECTION THREE: IN

LIFE TRANSFORMATION

Priority Calling: to know and grow into our true identity, found in Christ.

Depending on your background, “transformation” may be a buzzword you have heard too many times or it may be a concept entirely new and unfamiliar. Regardless, every person needs to experience transformation. Most people know this intuitively: our world is broken. That’s not to say everything is as bad as it could possibly be, but rather that the problems of pain and evil and suffering - what the Bible calls sin - touch every part of creation. Because of this brokenness, we need transformation. We need to be changed from brokenness to wholeness, from weakness to strength, from sin to salvation. This transformation is a need in every realm of life: physical, relational, emotional, and intellectual. When have you experienced the greatest positive transformation in your life? Write some memories below.

In our Priority Calling, we acknowledge that this transformation is for all life, that is the whole of life. In what area of your life do you most need transformation? *Please don't rush through this question! Dig deep into the specifics of your life as you process.*

Considering the greatest seasons of transformation you have experienced, what are some of the practices or circumstances that helped lead to that transformation? What was happening around you? Who were you with? What was your state of mind? What stands out to you about these observations?

Practices to consider: Having reflected on your own experiences of life transformation, consider what practices might be most important for you to include in your Rule of Life. All true and lasting transformation is rooted in Christ. We are transformed into the person who God, through Christ, created us to be. Therefore, scripture is central in these practices. Some practices to consider might include:

- Intentional engagement with preaching during Sunday worship. Intentionally processing sermons through journaling or discussion with others.
- Personal study, memorization, or praying of scripture.
- Intentional fasting from food, certain activities, or media.
- Daily, seasonal, or annual times of silence and solitude.

Again, we recognize that transformation, while centered on God and his word, is needed in every area of life. Therefore, other practices to consider might include:

- Healthy eating.
- Life-giving exercise.
- Accountability for increased health and growth physically, emotionally, or relationally.
- Spiritual direction or professional counseling.
- Learning by reading or other study.

Which of these practices stand out to you? What other practices might you write for yourself?



SECTION FOUR: OUT

ACTIVE LOVE

Priority Calling: to activate love everyday, everywhere.

As we create practical rhythms of vulnerable worship, authentic relationships, and life transformation, this all leads us somewhere. While the details of this leading are different for each of us, the direction is always the same. Transformation leads us into outward-focused living. God is love; when we are changed by him, we are changed into more loving people. That love is designed to be expressed for the good of others. When have you seen or experienced the power of active love?

Our Priority Calling indicates that this love is not secluded in one small area of life, nor is it intended for only some people. Rather, the opportunity to activate love is found in every moment of every day and every circumstance. What are the realms of your life - home, school, career, friendships, family - where you believe God is calling you to activate love? How have you already done that and how might you most readily stretch yourself to love more?

This love is meant to be a natural expression of who you are. God made you with specific gifts designed to express love to others. What are the gifts you have - knowledge, personality, skills, resources - with which you are best able to activate God's love for the good of others?

Practices to consider: Having reflected on your own experiences of active love, consider what outward facing practices might be most important for you to include in your Rule of Life. Some practices to consider might include:

- Discovering how to use your professional skills for loving purposes
- Mentoring someone in your workplace as an expression of God's love
- Volunteering at a local church
- Volunteering with a church ministry partner (i.e. Love INC, North Littleton Promise, The Master's Apprentice, Mile High Ministries, etc...)
- Intentionally getting to know someone in your neighborhood.
- Inviting a friend or colleague to read the Bible with you
- Regular, proportional financial giving to the church or other non-profit organizations

Which of these practices stand out to you? Or, what other practices might you write for yourself?



YOUR RULE

On the following pages you will find a template for creating your own Rule of Life. Remember, this is meant to be a helpful tool, so feel free to adapt it to your needs. The most important thing is that you are learning how to create habits that lead to genuine flourishing. *Abundant Life* is the goal - not filling in the blanks or getting the right answer.

Throughout this journal, you have seen examples of practices. The practices you choose need to fit your life. You may need to identify locations for certain practices, such as at home, at the office, or at church. It is often helpful to identify frequencies you intend to practice - daily, on a particular days of the week, every month, every quarter, once a year. Try to be realistic. Don't create a Rule you will never follow.

There are many other resources available for helping you develop your own Rule of Life. Google away and you will find plenty. Three good options would be: *Celebration of Discipline*, by Richard Foster, *Crafting a Rule of Life*, by Stephen A. Macchia, and the *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun.

Last, remember to give yourself grace. If you try this and make positive changes along the way, great! Embrace the journey. Regardless, don't beat yourself up. Grace!

Let's get started by identifying some overall desires. Here are two simple exercises for beginning to craft your Rule. First, in each area below write one sentence capturing your desire for growth and abundant life.

UP: VULNERABLE WORSHIP

WITH: AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIPS

IN: LIFE TRANSFORMATION

OUT: ACTIVE LOVE

Now repeat the process, but with a different lens for processing. In each area below, write one sentence capturing your desire for growth and abundant life.

RELATIONAL HEALTH

PHYSICAL HEALTH

EMOTIONAL HEALTH

PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH

With the above answer in mind, begin filling out the practices for your Rule.

UP:

Craft a daily/weekly, seasonal (monthly or quarterly), and annual practice that will lead you into a life of holistic vulnerable worship.

DAILY/WEEKLY:

SEASONAL: (MONTHLY/QUARTERLY)

ANNUAL:

WITH:

Craft a daily/weekly, seasonal (monthly or quarterly), and annual practice that will lead you into a life of holistic authentic relationship.

DAILY/WEEKLY:

SEASONAL: (MONTHLY/QUARTERLY)

ANNUAL:

IN:

Craft a daily/weekly, seasonal (monthly or quarterly), and annual practice that will lead you into a life of holistic life transformation.

DAILY/WEEKLY:

SEASONAL: (MONTHLY/QUARTERLY)

ANNUAL:

OUT:

Craft a daily/weekly, seasonal (monthly or quarterly), and annual practice that will lead you into a life of holistically active love.

DAILY/WEEKLY:

SEASONAL: (MONTHLY/QUARTERLY)

ANNUAL:

EPILOGUE:

Integration - the essential ingredient in every Rule.

While writing this booklet, I experienced a constant struggle. I found myself saying, "Karl, you can't separate these things into neat categories. They're all connected with one another!" I wanted to write on every page, "Transformation is *connected to relationships*," and "Service is an *expression of worship*." Well, instead of adding another 10 pages of reminders about integration, I will instead offer this simple reminder:

None of these callings can exist on their own. Each dimension of life - up, with, in, and out - are essentially integrated with every other. Integration is the goal.

If you felt any similar tension while completing this guide, good. You have good instincts. The hope is that by giving focus to each of the areas on their own, we might eventually learn how they integrate in a unified life of discipleship. I pray that your work on this guide might result in a life that is more integrated and less divided, more focused and less fractures. Grace and peace to you on the journey.

Karl Helvig, Centennial Covenant Church

ABOUT CENTENNIAL COVENANT CHURCH



CENTENNIAL COVENANT CHURCH

Centennial Covenant is a growing, intentionally multi-generational, justice and mission focused congregation in the city of Littleton, CO. We believe that God is present and active in the life of every person, that the word of God is powerful and effective for shaping our lives to look more and more like Jesus, and that God's desire is for every person to use the gifts they have for the good of others. These beliefs are captured and expanded on in the Affirmations of our denomination, the Evangelical Covenant Church, and in our church's mission and priority callings.

Learn more at:

www.centcov.org

www.covchurch.org



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