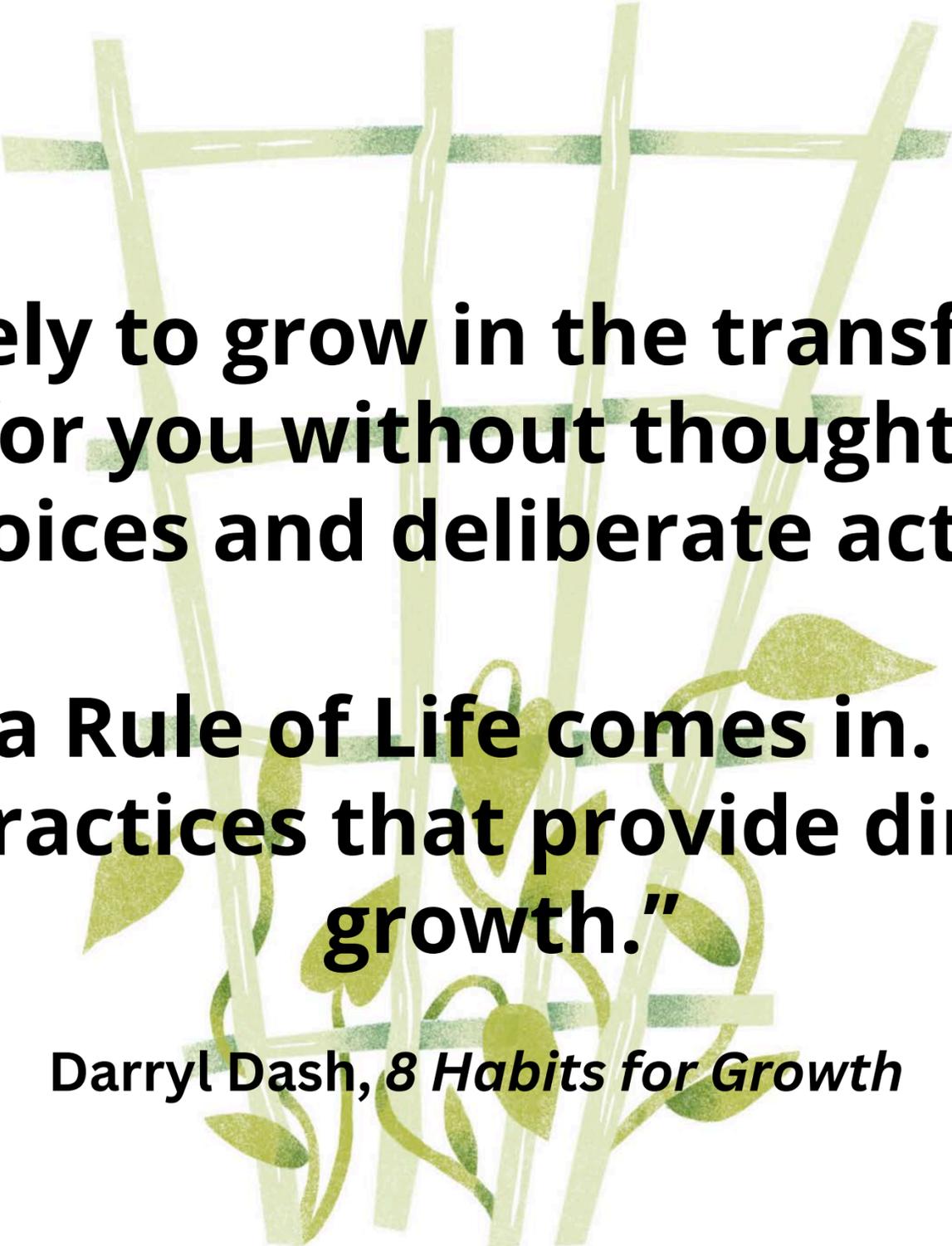


Faithful Leaders and Fruitful Ministry

Jen Pollock Michel

YLT Nashville, January 2026





You're unlikely to grow in the transformation that God intends for you without thoughtful, intentional choices and deliberate action.

That's where a Rule of Life comes in. A Rule of Life is a set of practices that provide direction and growth."

Darryl Dash, *8 Habits for Growth*

“

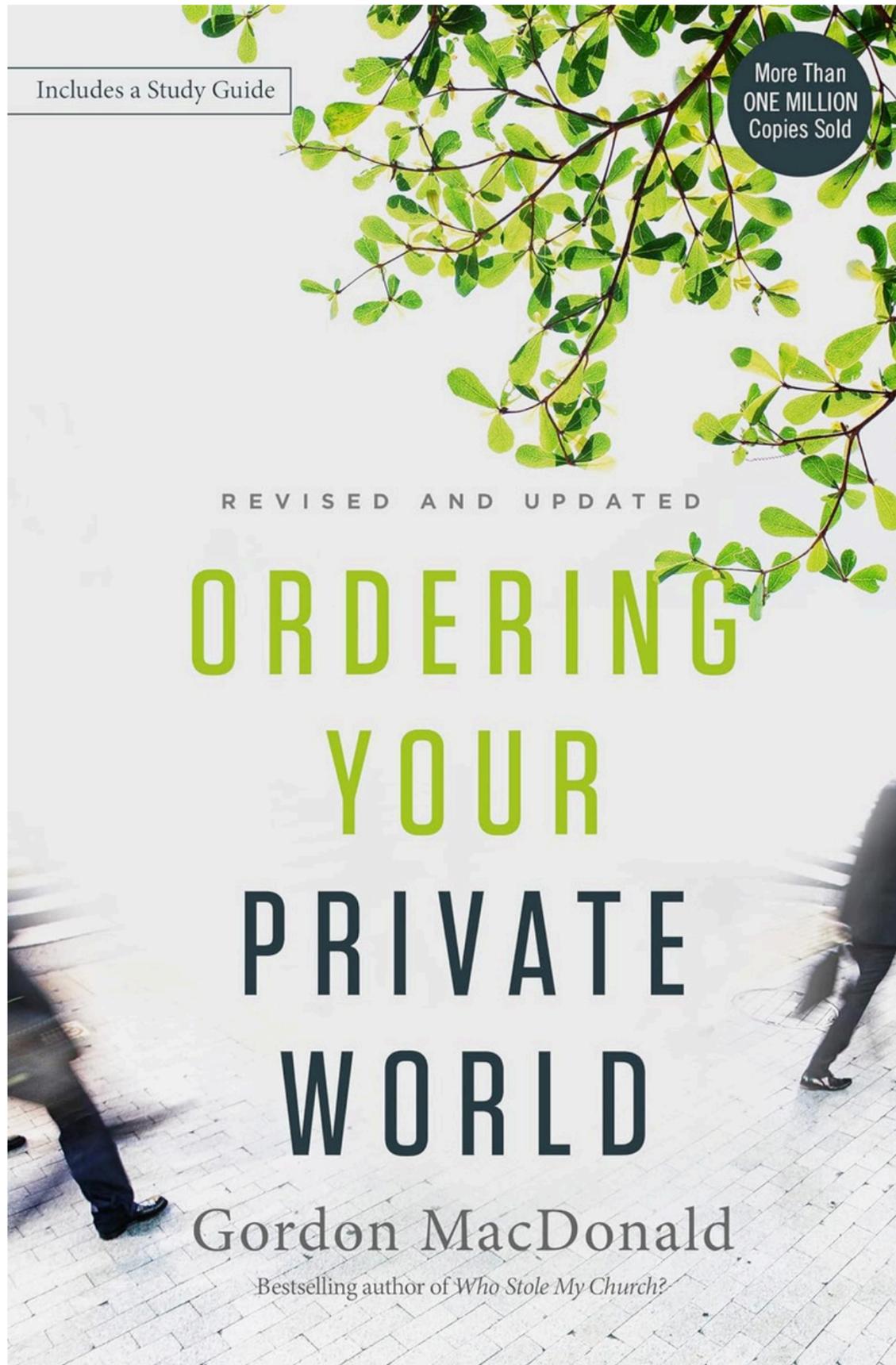
Faithful, fruitful parenting, like faithful ministry, involves becoming who you should be and staying close enough to your children [students, congregants, neighbors] so that they catch it.

Anne Ortlund, *Disciplines of the Home*

“

The sad thing when a leader . . . ‘fails’ is not just what he or she *did*, but the heart and life and whole person who is revealed by the act. What is sad is who these leaders have been all along, what their inner lives have been like . . . What really has been their relation to God?

Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*



*“What I was
actually seeking . . .
was a renovation
of life.”*



Acedia: “resistance to love’s demands”

“

Feelings live on the front row of our lives like unruly children . . . People are overwhelmed with decisions and can only make those decisions on the basis of feelings.”

Dallas Willard,
Renovation of the Heart

“

[Christ-followers] have the resources to do what they don't want to do and to not do what they want . . . they plan their path accordingly.”

Dallas Willard,
Renovation of the Heart

“

Planning and proportioning their time with care, not so much to keep the bad things out as to make sure that they got all the good and important things in . . . We today, who tend to live unplanned lives at random in a series of noncommunicating compartments and who hence feel swamped and distracted most of the time, could learn much from the Puritans at this point,” (xii).

**J.I. Packer, foreword,
*Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really
Were*, by Leland Ryken**

What is a rule of life?



“

A rule of life is a schedule and a set of practices and relational rhythms that help us create space in our busy world for us to be with Jesus, become like Jesus, and do what Jesus did.

John Mark Comer

“

A rule of life is an intentional ordering of life under the loving rule of Jesus. It's about submitting to the Spirit-empowered rhythms, practices and relationships that reorder our hearts and form our wills.

Rich Villodas

“

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

“

A rule of life is a way of ordering our life around the values, practices, and relationships that keep us open and available to God for the work of spiritual transformation that only God can bring about.

Ruth Haley Barton

“

A rule of life is a practice of regular habits that sustain creative, faithful response to God's loving voice.

Jen Pollock Michel

We all have a rule.

How is yours forming (or deforming) you?

“

The question then isn't *if* we are living by a Rule. It is simply whether we are intentional, thoughtful, faithful, and wise in the formation of our Rule. It is whether we are open to seeking God in what that Rule is and ought to be.

Tish Harrison Warren, foreword for *A Rule for the Rest of Us*, by Jen Pollock Michel (Sept. 2026)

STEP 1

*The taproot of a rule:
Keep company with Jesus.*





**I am the vine; you
are the branches.
Whoever abides
in me and I in
him, he it is that
bears much fruit,
for apart from me
you can do
nothing.**

John 15:5

**The hope of the GOSPEL provides
the FOUNDATION of a rule.**

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Gal. 2:20



Step One: What would it look like, in your life and ministry, if you were actively living *in and from* the love of God? What would you regularly practice? What would you resist and avoid?

STEP 2

*The realism of a rule:
Name your givens.*





**Only let each
person lead the
life that the Lord
has assigned to
him, and to
which God has
called him.**

1 Cor. 7:17

Given..

- 1 Season
- 2 Relationships
- 3 Roles
- 4 Places
- 5 Limits
- 6 Opportunities

**The GIVENS of life provide
the CONTEXT for today's faithfulness.**

And this is my prayer, that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment. Phil. 1:9

“

The practice of *fitting* time demands wisdom. What does this moment require of us? What opportunities, should we neglect them, might prove irretrievable?

Jen Pollock Michel, *In Good Time*



Step 2: What seems important to notice about your current life and ministry context? What might result from ignoring that context?

STEP 3

*The risk of a rule:
Attend your desires.*





**It is God who
works in you,
both to will and
to work for his
good pleasure.**

Phil. 2:13

**The DESIRES of the heart serve as
INVITATIONS: to turn, to return, to risk, to
trust, to ask, to pray, to hope.**

*For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for
his good pleasure. Philippians 2:13*

“

What are you seeking?

What do you want me to do for you?

Do you want to be healed?

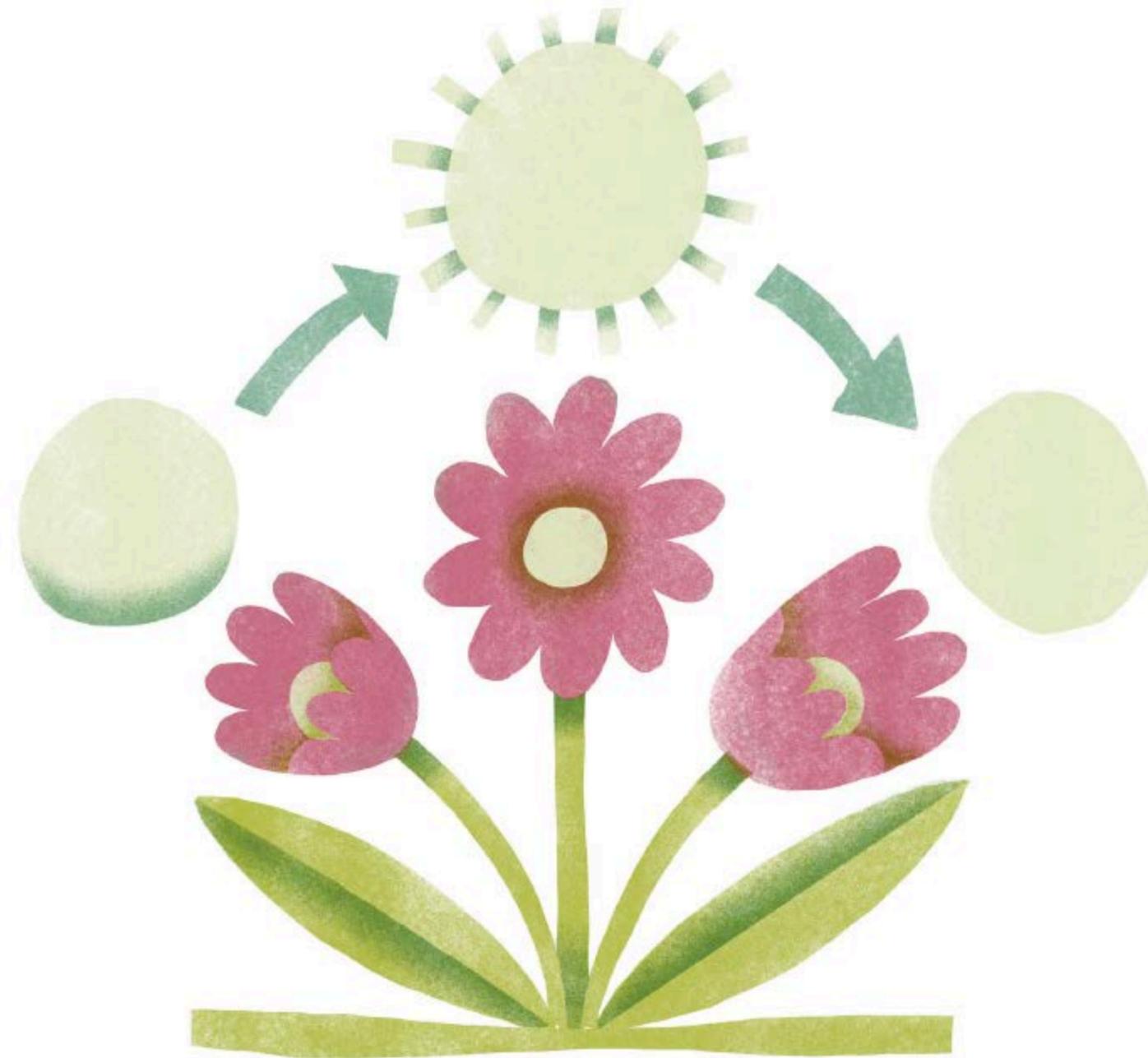
—Jesus



Step 3: What are you asking God to do in your life and ministry? What deeper desires do your prayers (and plans) reveal?

STEP 4

*The regularity of a rule:
Articulate faithful habits.*





Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress.

1 Tim. 4:15

**The HABITS of a rule serve as REGULAR
OPPORTUNITY to PRACTICE faithful
response to God's voice.**

*What you have learned and received and heard and seen in
me—practice these things and the God of peace will be with
you. Philippians 4:9*

Goals express outcomes.

1

**I will run a
marathon.**

2

**I will find a new
job.**

3

**I will publish a
memoir.**

ROL practices suggest regular habits.

1

**I will move every
day.**

2

**I will visit my
grandmother
every month.**

3

**I will not check
my phone before
I pray and read
Scripture.**

Goals are often self-actualizing.

1

I will earn a promotion.

2

I will lose twenty pounds.

3

I will start a side hustle.

ROL practices are oriented toward faith and love (Gal. 5:6).

1

**I will memorize
Scripture.**

2

**I will host my
neighbors for
dinner once a
month.**

3

**I will not engage
in political
conversations on
social media.**

Goals are aspirational.

1

**I will read 52
books this year.**

2

**I will climb the
Adirondack high
peaks.**

3

**I will learn
French.**

ROL practices are ordinary and routine.

1

**I will eat dinner
with friends 2
nights/week.**

2

**I will observe a
tech Sabbath
once a week.**

3

**I will fast and
pray the last
Monday of the
month.**

Jumpstart to a Rule of Life

1

VISION: the *why*
of your rule

2

STRUCTURE: the
meaningful
organization of
your habit
commitments

3

S.M.A.R.T.
Habits: specific,
measurable,
actionable,
realistic,
timebound

Help me to love you, as you first loved me;
and in my loving you, help me also to love my neighbor;
and in loving you and my neighbor,
help me to be saved from all false love of myself.

–A Diary of Private Prayer, John Baillie

vision

Love God

structure

“You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore,” Psalm 16:11

With God’s help, I will live a life of unhurried, grateful communion with God.

I will not check my phone for the first hour of the day, prioritizing Scripture and prayer instead.

I will practice Sabbath weekly, observing rest from paid work to worship and fellowship with other believers.

I will ask these discernment questions before spending money: *Do I need this? Can I share this without anxiety? Have I discussed this with Ryan? Am I buying what is truly valuable?*

habits

Help me to love you, as you first loved me;
and in my loving you, help me also to love my neighbor;
and in loving you and my neighbor,
help me to be saved from all false love of myself.

–A Diary of Private Prayer, John Baillie

Love Neighbor

vision

structure

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus. Phil. 2:3, 5

With God's help, I will prayerfully discern the relationships that matter in this season and will live from an overflow of God's love.

I will pray for my husband and children daily.

I will invite my mother to lunch every Sunday.

I will practice the hidden habits of hospitality (presence and prayerfulness).

habits

Help me to love you, as you first loved me;
and in my loving you, help me also to love my neighbor;
and in loving you and my neighbor,
help me to be saved from all false love of myself.

–A Diary of Private Prayer, John Baillie

Love Self

vision

structure

Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gently and lowly of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. Matt. 11:28-30

With God's help, I remember the care of my body, mind, and soul, faithfully living within the limits of a human life.

I will regularly invite God to release me from the shame and guilt that causes me to overcommit.

I will exercise 4-5 times/week.

I will connect regularly with friends who restore my soul and sharpen me like iron sharpens iron

habits



Step 4: What habits seem most important for “amending fault”? What habits seem most important for “safeguarding love”?

STEP 5

*The responsiveness of a rule:
Review and revise.*





**I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. Who will deliver me from this body of death?
Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!**

Rom. 7:18b, 24-25

A rule of life is not a goal. It is a practice.

**The ROUTINE REFLECTION of a rule
serves as a process to EXAMINE,
PROBLEM-SOLVE, and STAY PATIENTLY
HOPEFUL in slow transformation.**

*It is my prayer that you may . . . be pure and blameless for
the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that
comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.*

Phil. 1:11

What's the problem?



Unrealistic Expectations

I construct an all-or-nothing ideal I can't meet.



Functional Barriers

I lack practical skills, tools, know-how, support, accountability.



Heart Resistance

I am divided in my desire for change and my commitment to practicing a rule of life.



Distraction

My attention is absorbed by the trivial and unimportant. My digital life lacks boundaries.



**What might this
walled monastery
suggest about the
wisdom of a
rule of life?**

**Set a deadline for finishing a
draft of your rule of life.**

—————→ 45 days

Set a date to review/revise.

—————→ 6-9 months

PRAYER

It is You, O Lord, who determines
my destiny and the bounds of my habitation.

It is You who have put power in my hand to do one work and
have withheld the skill to do another.

It is You who keeps in Your grasp the threads of this day's life
and who alone knows what lies before me to do or to suffer.

PRAYER

**But because You are my Father, I am not afraid.
Because it is Your own Spirit that stirs within my spirit's inmost
place, I know that all is well.**

What I desire for myself I cannot attain, but what You desire in me You
can attain for me.

The good that I wish I could do, I do not do.

But the good that You desire to do in me,
You are able to give me power to do.

PRAYER

Dear Father, take this day's life into Your own care.

Control all my thoughts and feelings.

Direct all my energies.

Instruct my mind.

Sustain my will.

Take my hands and feet and make them swift to do Your bidding.

Take my eyes and keep them fixed upon Your everlasting beauty.

Take my mouth and make it eloquent in testimony to Your love.

Make this day a day of obedience, a day of spiritual joy and peace. Make this day's work a little part of the work of the Kingdom of my Lord Christ, in whose name these prayers are said. **Amen.**