

### Session 8: Go the Next Step to Develop a Rule of Life

Congratulations! We are in Session 8 of the EHS Course--“Go the Next Step to Develop a Rule of Life. We have sought to help you begin a new phase of your spiritual journey.

We have looked at: **PP**

- The Problem of Emotionally Unhealthy Spirituality
- Knowing yourself that You may Know God
- Going back to Go Forward
- Journeying through the Wall
- Enlarging your Soul through Grief and Loss
- Discovering the Rhythm of the Daily Office and Sabbath and
- Growing into an Emotionally Mature Adult

This session is intended to bring all our previous studies together.

One of the main reasons people turn away from Christianity is because of the many so-called rules that exist. Many of these rules lead to constraint, legalism and squeezes joy out of us. So associating Christian faith with rules seems counter-intuitive. But there’s a spiritual formation practice called “Developing a Rule of Life” within Christian faith that is not meant to constrain us. I actually liberates us. It is a “Rule” that has the purpose of infusing joy rather than squeezing it out. I’m referring to a “Rule of Life”.

So, our focus for this session is taking a small step to develop a personal “Rule of Life” to center your life around the love of God.

When most people reflect on their relationship with God, what we see is compartmentalization. That is -- we separate our spiritual life from other parts of our life – like home or work or recreation. Before God, however, every aspect of our lives is equally sacred. What we are missing is an intentional plan to live this out.

The background to this session is a recognition that powerful, external forces exist in the culture to cut us off from communion/abiding/remaining with Jesus. Behind these distractions and seductions to pull you and me away from Christ, the Bible says, are demonic evil powers. The challenge to resist the Beast (as the book of Revelation describes the problem) requires a radical solution. Simply committing ourselves to spiritual disciplines or try harder is not enough.

At the same time, within us is our own fallen flesh/nature that naturally resists God’s will. Our tendency is to do our own will, not God’s will – or at least twist His arm to do what we want.

For this reason, this final session is to introduce you to another ancient buried treasure out of the church history called a Rule of Life.

A Rule of Life finds its roots in the men and women who withdrew from society as hermits to the deserts of Egypt and Syria during the third to fifth centuries to seek God after the emperor had made Christianity legal in the Roman Empire. They wanted to free themselves from the worldliness found both inside and outside the church. They wanted to truly find God and thus bring Him to both the church and the world. They eventually formed communities and organized their daily life around an agreed up plan consisting of work, prayer, and the study of Scripture. They knew that to grow and mature spiritually, they needed both one another, and a thoughtful, conscious, purposeful plan. They called this plan a Rule of Life.

Again, please don't be intimidated by the word *rule*. The word comes from the ancient Greek word for "trellis." **PP** A trellis is a tool that enables a grapevine to get off the ground and grow upward, becoming more fruitful and productive. In the same way, a Rule of Life is a trellis that helps us abide in Christ and become more fruitful spiritually. It's been said that a rule of life is "an exterior framework for an interior journey': a kind of scaffolding to use to build the spiritual structure of our individual life with God." It is an intentional, conscious plan to keep God at the center of everything we do.

It includes our unique combination of spiritual practices that provide structure and direction for us to intentionally pay attention and remember God in everything we do. The goal - to be with God and to love him in everything we do.

The early church in Acts 2, as you shall see during your Bible study, gathered around a Rule of Life with particular practices that enabled them to prefer the love of Christ above all things – prayer, teaching, fellowship, breaking bread.

Each local church has a *trellis*, or a Rule of Life. God has raised up various local churches in different cities and communities. We finally commit to one that has a structure, a trellis, a “rule” that we believe will help us grow upward and deeper with Jesus. This may include midweek services, worship, preaching, small groups, ministries, and particular emphases.

On a personal level, however, few people have a conscious plan for developing their spiritual lives. Most Christians are not intentional, but rather function like cars on autopilot. We have an unconscious way that we develop our spiritual lives. That may include reading the Bible in the morning for few minutes, attending church and small group weekly, giving money, praying at dinner, etc. We come to church and interact with whatever is handed to us. We are, for the most part, passive and not intentional.

The invitation of this session is to intentionally take one step to develop your own personal “Rule of Life”. The key word here is INTENTIONALITY. It requires intentionally to anchor us in the hurricane pace and beast of our twenty-first-century world. Swimming against such a strong current, without the anchor of a Rule of Life, is almost impossible. Eventually we find ourselves unfocused, distracted, and adrift spiritually.

Intentionally thinking through my own personal “Rule of Life” has been life-changing for me. Each year I take a period of time to think through my “Rule.” This has served me in enabling to maintain a rhythm and balance for my entire life. In other words because I have a commitment to Sabbath, rest, delighting in life, cultivating my walk with Christ – I am much more aware of my limits. That when I say yes to add another work project or commitment to my life (like writing a book), I’m looking at the implications on how this will affect my time with God, myself, Geri, our girls.

This ancient spiritual discipline has helped put work in its proper place and helped me to slow down.

You will have time to do an exercise in this session to do some reflection around a story of getting lost, and dying, in a blizzard. You’ll be asked about the nature of your blizzard at this time, and what wonderful things in your life might be lost or obscured because you can’t see clearly where you are going. You will want to get a sense, not simply for this session, but for your life – what are the kind of external or internal things that send you into a blizzard. Why? So you can have intentionally and consciously craft a life that is about receiving and giving the love of God.

To get started in beginning to craft our own rule of life, it is important we see the Big Picture. The following is a suggested list of twelve elements consider as you begin to develop your personal Rule of Life. The challenge before you is for you to pick one or two and grow in that. Let me briefly take you through them one by one: **PP**

- 1. Scripture.** You may want to begin praying the Psalms. Or reading the Bible through in a year, or begin meditating on Scripture each day.
- 2. Silence and Solitude.** You may want to grow in taking 2-5 minutes a day to be in stillness before the Lord, or take a 3 hr retreat once a month.
- 3. Daily Office (Prayer)** – You may want to begin a second midday prayer time between 11 and 2 each day over the next few months
- 4. Study** – you may want to take a course at our church or nearby Bible school or commit yourself to read a Christian book every two months.
- 5. Sabbath** – You may want to begin setting apart a 24 hr period to Sabbath to the Lord. This may be your year project, starting with a ½ day and then building up.
- 6. Simplicity** – Maybe you want to remove distractions by downsizing your commitments or to being giving a percentage of your income - 5% or moving to a tithe of 10%.
- 7. Play and Recreation** – This may include finding activities that breathe life in you. Some of you may take up a hobby like hiking, cooking, art, music.

**8. Service and Mission** – It may be time for you to step out and begin using your time, or talents to serve others.

**9. Care for the Physical Body** – This could be getting 8 hours sleep or exercising, or shifting your diet.

**10. Emotional Health** – you may want to join a small group that deals with issues of mature relationships, or find a mentor, or begin journaling around losses you have not grieved well. You may want to find a counselor for a season.

**11. Family** – This area concerns itself with growing in your marriage, parenting, your relationships with the opposite sex as a single person. Maybe you want to get training so that you begin relating differently to your parents or siblings.

**12. Community** (companions for the journey). You may want to find a spiritual director or an accountability group, or again, a mentor

Some of you will want to add new elements (e.g., hospitality) and/or delete others. The choice is yours.

Developing an intentional Rule of Life takes trial and error, and time. You will need to learn a great deal about yourself. For example, what kinds of spiritual practices bring you closer to God? Which drive you away from him? How can you discern the right combination for your particular Rule of Life? You may also want to learn more about each of the twelve areas I just listed.

My personal Rule of Life is a constantly changing document. It is a “live” work in progress—always.

Give yourself lots of time for the slow development of what works best for you. As you examine your life, you may notice many areas that need work. The best approach is to start with only one or two elements for the first few months. Then, after you experience some success with those, you will want to add another building block to your Rule. Or you may want to stay with the same element to work on over a long period of time.

Be willing to make mistakes, try again, and learn new things.

And be careful to avoid any traces of legalism. You want to be careful that this treasure of a spiritual discipline, like all that we do, does not become a “Have to” rather than a “want to” out of love for Christ. If it feels like a heavy yoke for you or anyone in the group, throw it off. Jesus’ yoke is easy and light. His yoke and call to us fits our uniqueness, perfectly.

My prayer for you now is that this final session, along with the entire EHS Course will serve only as a beginning of a great journey with Christ that will you with such great joy and delight that it can’t help but spill over to those around you.

Remember, as Benedict wrote 1,500 years ago, “Your way of acting should be different from the world’s way. The love of Christ must come before all else.” Keep that before you and you won’t stray too far off.