

## Sacred Rhythms

### Chapter 9 ~ A Rule of Life: Cultivating Rhythms For Spiritual Transformation

You may recall that we have broached the subject of a rule/rhythm of life before...back in 2022 when we were going through James Bryan Smith's Good & Beautiful series (specifically, *The Good And Beautiful Community*, chapter 9). Additionally, when we had James Bryan Smith out to visit in November of 2022 he led a workshop on Rule/Rhythm of Life. So, hopefully, this will be a refresher and build on previous knowledge and experience.

*"Many of us try to shove spiritual transformation into the nooks and crannies of a life that is already unmanageable, rather than being willing to arrange our life for what our heart most wants. We think that somehow we will fall into transformation by accident."* Do we save for retirement by accident? No. Do we buy a house by mere chance? Nope. Neither do we unintentionally become spiritually mature/transformed. Of course, the question remains...is spiritual transformation/maturity something we actually want? (And how badly do we want it?) This book has been very clear from the beginning that the first question we need to answer is What do I want?

*"A rule of life seeks to respond to two questions: Who do I want to be? How do I want to live? Actually, it might be more accurate to say that a rule of life seeks to address the interplay between these two questions: How do I want to live so I can be who I want to be?"*

It could probably be argued that you and I already have a rule/rhythm of life. The question is, whether it is working for us and toward what end?

- What in your life are you quite intentional about? In what areas do you have goals, plans to meet those goals, and are in fact moving toward reaching those goals?
- In what area(s) of life would you say you need a goal and an intentional plan to reach that goal?

This book has presented a number of spiritual practices to us (eight to be precise) and over the past couple of years I've thrown a lot of spiritual practices your way as well (Soul Training Exercises during the Discipleship Moment at weekly worship services). I want to be very clear here. The goal is NOT to incorporate all the various practices/exercises into our lives. Rather, incorporate a few that fit who you are and that will best help you toward spiritual transformation. Spiritual practices are not a one-size-fits-all sort of thing. As RHB says, *"Your rhythm of spiritual practices will take into account you personality, your spiritual type, your season of life, the sin patterns you are contending with, the places God is trying to stretch you...at different times different ones need to be emphasized based on the need of the moment."*

- As you reflect on this series/journey we've been on, which spiritual practice seems to be a good fit, or what you need, at this stage of your life? Which spiritual practice are you most drawn to? Why that one? Which one do you want to avoid? Why?

- As you consider creating a Rule/Rhythm of Life, do you view it more as a chore or as an invitation? Explain. Or, what thoughts and feelings are you experiencing as you consider creating a Rule/Rhythm of Life?

Some practical advice that RHB offers is that our Rule/Rhythm of Life be realistic, balanced, and flexible. As one who enjoys structure and who can be prone to rigidity and legalism, this advice is both wise and freeing. For example, I enjoy solitude, silence, and stillness. I usually get up before the rest of my family so that I can enjoy these practices. But the unpredictable (and rather uncontrollable) factor in the equation is LuLu...our dog. She likes to invade and disturb/disrupt my time with the Lord. While I'm trying to engage in practices that bring me peace, I find myself agitated/irritated at this beast that's clamoring for my attention. I think God might be trying to teach me patience and how to handle interruptions with grace.



(Don't let the cuteness fool you...she's a demanding tyrant.)

In the section titled “A Simple Process for Cultivating Spiritual Rhythms” RHB offers more practice advice, suggestions, recommendations, and questions to consider. On one level all this could seem overwhelming. You may feel tempted to try to “get it all right” or, on the flip side, to simply not bother. Please give yourself a lot of grace in the process. That's why the word “cultivate” is so key. Think about gardening: it takes time; there are factors that are out of our control, though we want to be diligent about the factors that are in our control; there's generally a wide margin to play with–i.e. It's more about consistently applying general principles than specific techniques.

Additionally, it's vital to remember that spiritual practices and a rule of life are a means to an end, not an end in themselves...the goal is transformation. As RHB states, “*It is important to know, really know, that spiritual transformation at this level is a pure gift as we make ourselves available to God...a personal rule of life is a means of opening ourselves in a consistent manner to God's transforming work in us.*” (emphasis added) Spiritual practices and a rhythm of life are HOW we make ourselves available and open to God.

As you'll recall, this book came out just before smartphones and social media really took off, which makes the section “Fresh Disciplines for a Technological Age” almost prophetic. I would say all her points in this section are now magnified and all the more important for our

consideration. “[We need]...a whole new set of spiritual disciplines to deal with the contemporary reality of encroaching technology. Technology is not evil; it is how we use technology that determines whether it is a force for good or for ill in our lives. As we seek to cultivate spiritual rhythms, we do well to consider disciplines that correspond to the temptations arising from technology so that we can protect the elements of our lives that we value most.”

- How has technology affected you? How is it forming you? How is technology affecting your relationships?
- What patterns (or habits) do you have involving technology? Are they good/wanted/healthy patterns or negative/unwanted/unhealthy patterns? If the latter, what might you do to change that?

I have experimented, in relatively short spurts, with unplugging from technology. And I must admit, it’s very tough. Addiction might be the accurate word to describe the phenomena going on. It is also quite evident that I’m not alone in this dysfunction. Study after study is demonstrating the correlation between our use of technology and mental illness. (You can Google it...see what I did there...oh the irony.) Unplugging, even for short durations, is a modern age spiritual practice that needs to be strongly considered. (Lent is coming up...hint, hint.)

- What do you think/feel about the prospect of unplugging? What challenges do you envision should you try to make this a regular practice? What benefits can you envision?

God created life in such a way that there is a natural rhythm to it...the rising and setting of the sun each day; a seven day week with a “reset” at the beginning of each week (we call it Sabbath); the cycle of the moon phases as well as seasons, and so on. So as we consider creating our own personal Rule/Rhythm of Life, it would be wise to keep it within the natural rhythms of God’s created order. RHB’s example of her own Rhythm of Life reflects this harmony...that’s how she frames hers. The other example she offers (of the business executive) is framed/articulated more around the goal of keeping the Great Commandments of loving God with heart, soul, mind, and strength and loving neighbor as yourself.

As examples they are both pretty good. You will want to frame/articulate yours in a way that works for you and reflects your desires. The point is to have a plan. As Benjamin Franklin is noted as saying, “*If you fail to plan you are planning to fail.*” We don’t want to leave the deepest desires/longings of our heart to chance. While we’ll want to keep our Rule/Rhythm of Life flexible and adaptable, we also want to strive to stick to it as consistently as we can.

Additionally, we’ll want to take into consideration both personal/individual rhythms as well as relational/social/communal rhythms. You may find it helpful to set specific times (ex. 7:00 am) and/or to quantify your goals timewise (ex. For an hour...).

- As you looked over the examples RHB offered in this chapter (her own and that of a business executive), what stood out to you?

I've debated whether or not I wanted to share my Rhythm of Life with y'all here. It feels rather personal. Yet, I've been espousing getting to know one another more deeply, allowing ourselves to be known more deeply, being more vulnerable, blah, blah, blah. So in the spirit of that, I offer it below. (Most of it is pretty close to actual; some of it is still more aspirational and being worked out. It's always a work in process, but I have experienced the benefit of it forming me in a positive way. Feel free to ask me questions about it if you'd like.)

**CC's Rhythm of Life**

<i>Daily</i>	<i>Weekly</i>	<i>Monthly</i>	<i>Seasonally/Annually</i>
Sleep <i>(approx. 6-7 hours)</i>	Sabbath <i>(Fri to Sat)</i>	Spiritual Direction <i>(1 hour)</i>	Lent <i>(abstain from various things, determined annually)</i>
Morning Devotions <i>(approx. 60 minutes)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Silence, stillness, solitude, Scripture, journaling</li> </ul>	1-on-1 time with Angela <i>(Fri)</i>	Big Ask Dinner <i>(2 hours)</i>	Holidays
Exercise <i>(approx. 60 minutes)</i>	1-on-1 time with Sophia	Charitable Giving	Family Vacation
Work <i>(approx. 8 hours)</i>	1-on-1 time with Zeke		
Be available for family activities (dinner, groceries, taxi service, TV together, etc.) most nights	Spiritual Friendships & Cohorts <i>(approx. 3 hours per week)</i>		
	Table Group <i>(1 hour)</i>		
	Corporate Worship <i>(2 hours)</i>		

As you can see, my Rhythm is framed similarly to RHB's in the sense that it's broken down daily, weekly, monthly, etc. You don't have to do it that way...I just personally find it helpful. But along the lines of the business executive, allow me to explain what I'm trying to accomplish through my Rhythm.

What I'm after, what I'm desiring is wholistic health. By "wholistic" I mean spiritual, physical, emotional, mental, relational, financial, etc. I believe health can only be found by living in sync

with reality, and reality is Jesus and His Kingdom. So I try to order/orient my life in such a way that I'm in peace and harmony with Jesus and His Kingdom.

But that's me. What about you? Our hope and prayer for y'all through this series is that you'll be inspired and catch a vision (perhaps Reimagine...as we continue on the trajectory of last year) of life WITH Jesus.

I think it's fitting to sign off from this series with this quote from RHB...

*"I don't know about you, but I yearn for the freedom and beauty of a life that is completely oriented to the reality of God. I long to experience my soul hidden and content in the very depths of God, so that what is seen on the surface is transformed and energized by what takes place in those depths. The choice to orient our life to God's transforming Presence is always ours; sacred rhythms help us to say yes to this desire, day by day by day." (emphasis added)*

(Scroll down for Soul Training Exercise)

Soul Training Exercise ~ Reflecting On And Creating/Adjusting A Rule/Rhythm of Life

**Rhythm of Life**  
**(Current)**

<u>Daily</u>	<u>Weekly</u>	<u>Monthly</u>	<u>Seasonally/Annually</u>

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**Rhythm of Life**  
**(Planned/Aspired)**

<u>Daily</u>	<u>Weekly</u>	<u>Monthly</u>	<u>Seasonally/Annually</u>

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I've given you two blank forms to fill out (if you so choose). With the first, simply jot down the current rhythms of your life. Perhaps give the following some consideration...

- How is this rhythm forming/shaping me?
- Is it the rhythm and result that I want?
- What is my goal?
- What would Jesus like to change?
- What is life-giving to you? What is life-draining to you?
- What are life-enhancing practices that we tend to not think of as “religious” or “spiritual”?

- What am I doing to stir my affections for God?
- What am I doing to honor my identity as God's beloved child?
- What am I doing to spur my love for others?
- Does my rhythm reflect a healthy balance of personal AND communal practices?
- Pay attention to what you pay attention to. (For example: When you go online, what are you looking for? When your mind drifts in prayer, where does it go?)

With the second form, assuming you've identified changes you'd like to make or new goals for yourself, chart a new rhythm. Then, and this is VERY important, share it with others. (Definitely those who will be affected by it—family, those you live with—as well as spiritual friends...maybe even your Table Group.)

Keep in mind this quote from Dallas Willard, *"If you don't control your time, you don't control your life."*