



THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Formation in the Christian Contemplative Life

99: Creating a Rule of Life



Valerie's Rule of Life from ruleoflife.com

"The experience of the transforming union is a way of being in the world that enables us to live daily life with the invincible conviction of continuous union with God."

-Thomas Keating, *Invitation to Love*

Have you thought about what it means to live a contemplative life? When we are learning contemplative practices such as Centering Prayer, the Welcoming Prayer, or Lectio Divina, it may feel that we don't have enough time in our life for our practices. But this *is* your life. The spiritual journey is about living your life in collaboration with God, "with the invincible conviction of continuous union with God."

Living a contemplative life requires intention and commitment. Our intention is to surrender to the love of God, to the God who *is* love. Our commitment unfolds day by day in faithfulness to our Centering Prayer practice and other contemplative practices. This commitment is life-giving. It focuses, directs and gives purpose and meaning to our lives.

Many religious traditions practice a "rule of life," which is an intentional pattern or model of spiritual practices that provides structure, balance and a rhythm to life. A rule of life puts our intention and commitment into practical terms according to our current life situation. For example, if we are working full-time and raising children it is probably not realistic to expect to spend two hours a day in contemplative practice. A rule of life is meant to support us and is crafted in partnership with God through prayer and discernment. If we hope to live a balanced life, our rule of life considers all aspects of our life including spiritual, emotional, physical, social, family and work.

A rule of life is not meant to be a set of goals or resolutions. It is meant to help us become who God created us to be and to guide us in how to live fully. It is meant to help us live faithfully rather than perfectly. It is a statement that is flexible and fluid and revisited periodically – perhaps annually – as our life circumstances change.

"If we want to be anything other than what God has made us to be, we are wasting our time. It will not work. The greatest accomplishment in life is to be what we are, which is God's idea of what he wanted us to be when he brought us into being; and no ideas of ours will ever change it. Accepting that gift is accepting God's will for us, and in its acceptance lies the path to growth and ultimate fulfillment."

-Thomas Keating, *The Heart of the World*

A Meditation

Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well adjusted to our culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out.

Romans 12:1-3, *The Message*

To Practice

Designing a Rule of Life: Listen for the rhythm of the Spirit in your life and create a rule of life that fits your life circumstances. Consider what you might realistically commit to on a daily, weekly, monthly and annual basis. Be sure to include all aspects of life, especially those areas that need attention. You may wish to share your rule of life or your process of creating one with a friend or spiritual companion.

The following is an example to help you get started:

Daily

- Read the daily Gospel from the lectionary or some selection of Scripture
- Two 20-30 minutes sessions of Centering Prayer
- Written examination of conscience and gratitude list before bed each evening
- Daily conscious movement – walk dogs, yoga, weight training, Pilates
- Eat a healthy diet every day
- Make room for at least eight hours of sleep

Weekly

- Attend a prayer group
- Practice sabbath-keeping one day per week
- Spiritual reading three to four times per week
- Time with friends
- Set aside time to create – paint, collage, beading, writing
- Provide service to humanity through work or community service, or both

Monthly

- Get a massage
- Spend time in nature
- Email or phone contact with family
- Tithing income

Annually

- Attend a multi-day Centering Prayer retreat
- Trip to visit family
- Review my rule of life

Following are other examples from some rules of life that were made public:

Pope John XXIII (as a seminary student) –

- When rising: 15 minutes of silent prayer and 15 minutes of spiritual reading.
- Before sleeping: A general examination of conscience followed by confession; then, identifying issues for the next morning's prayers.
- Arrange the hours of the day to make the rule possible, setting aside specific time for prayer, study, recreation, and sleep (balance).
- Making a habit of turning the mind to God in prayer.

Martin Luther King, Jr. –

- Meditate daily on the teachings and life of Jesus.
- Remember always that the nonviolent movement in Birmingham seeks justice and reconciliation, not victory.
- Walk and talk in the manner of love, for God is love.
- Pray daily to be used by God in order that all might be free.
- Sacrifice personal wishes that all might be free.
- Observe with friend and foe the ordinary rule of courtesy.
- Seek to perform regular service for others and the world.

- Refrain from violence of fist, tongue, or heart.
- Strive to be in good spiritual and bodily health.

Notes and Reflections: