

Christ Community Covenant Church
“Whoever you are, whatever you do . . . “ Colossians 3:18-41
Pastor Dave Scherrer - July 19, 2015

Living intentionally

Personal

Proactive

It has a design that ends in a life that is both satisfying and gratifying

A Rule of Life

A rule of life is a set of intentions on living . helping a person to live intentionally. You may think of it as goals, but often goals are performance based hope, whereas a rule of life is designed to give hope to becoming Christ like. To help provide framework that allows us to clarify our deepest values, our most important relationships, our most authentic hopes and dreams, our most meaningful work, our highest priorities. It allows us to live with intention and purpose in the present moment.

Sometimes when people hear the phrase %ule of life,+they imagine a list of **rules** which they would be bound to follow. It's not an inviting image for most of us, and more often leads to death rather than life. (Have you ever noticed how difficult it is to keep New Year's resolutions?) But creating a list of rules to follow is *not* the intention of a rule of life.

The word %ule+derives from a Latin word, **regula**, which implies not so much a system of rules or laws, but rather a way of **regularizing** our lives so that we can stay on the path we have set out for ourselves. A rule is like a trellis which offers support and guidance for a plant, helping it to grow in a certain direction. A rule of life is **descriptive** in that it articulates our intentions and identifies the ways in which we want to live. And when we fall short of these intentions, the rule becomes **prescriptive**, showing us how we can return to the path that we have set for ourselves and recapture our original vision. It is not something fixed and rigid, but something which can and should be adapted to our present circumstances and shaped to fit our current needs and desires.

A Rule of Life is an intentional pattern of spiritual disciplines that provides structure and direction for growth in holiness. A Rule establishes a rhythm for life which is helpful for being formed by the Spirit, a rhythm that reflects a love for God and respect for how he has made us. The disciplines which we build into our rhythm of life help us to shed the “old self” and allow our “new self” in Christ to be formed. Spiritual disciplines are means of grace by which God can nourish us. Ultimately a Rule should help you to love God more, so if it becomes a legalistic way of earning points with God or impressing others, it should be scrapped. If the traditional, ancient term “rule” concerns you because it sounds legalistic, think of “rule” as a “rhythm of life” or as a “Curriculum in Christlikeness” (Dallas Willard), or as a “Game Plan for Morphing” (John Ortberg).

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Illustration: Our 4Cs Relational Covenant . serves as a kind of corporate rule of life when it comes to doing business together.

Before we get to our study passage for this morning I want to examine the paragraph just before it.

Colossians 3:12-17

¹² Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual

songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

On Friday at Male Call some men of our church were looking at this passage and someone noted that this same set of verses could serve as a great set of hopes to live your life by. He didn't call it a Rule of Life, but that is what he was describing. %I could just live my life like this, I could die a happy man.+That is the idea of a rule of life.

But to establish an authentic working rule of life there has to be specific behaviors listed that serve as ways of monitoring or framing these intentions into not just intentions but reality. If we go on reading now into our passage for today we will see some of these behaviors listed quite clearly:

Colossians 3:17-4:1

¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

¹⁸ Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. ²⁰ Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. ²¹ Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. ²² Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³ Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. ²⁵ For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

^{4:1} Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

Practice the presence of God in every role of your life knowing you have a Master who treats you kindly.

17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything (all) in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Practice the presence of God . . .

Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection served as a lay brother in a monastery in Paris in the late 1600s. Christians commonly remember him for the intimacy he expressed concerning his relationship to God as recorded in a journal he kept along with some of his letters. He spent almost all of the rest of his life within the walls of the priory, working in the kitchen for most of his life and as a repairer of sandals in his later years. He was the quintessential nobody. Despite his lowly position in life and the priory, his character attracted many to him. He had a reputation for experiencing profound peace and visitors came to seek spiritual guidance from him. The wisdom he passed on to them, in conversations and in letters, would later become the basis for the book, *The Practice of the Presence of God*.

By practicing the presence of God moment by moment, he was able to turn the most simple and base of jobs and obligations into acts of worship. Washing dishes and fixing sandals could not be more humble, but done in the name of God they are now transformed from base to divine. From secular to sacred. Here is an excerpt from his journal:

%He does not ask much of us, merely a thought of Him from time to time, a little act of adoration, sometimes to ask for His grace, sometimes to offer Him your sufferings, at other times to thank Him for the graces, past and present, He has bestowed on you, in the midst of your troubles to take solace in Him as often as you can. Lift up your heart to Him during your meals and in company; the least little remembrance will always be the most pleasing to Him. One need not cry out very loudly; He is nearer to us than we think.+

Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*.

Dallas Willard was an American philosopher also known for his writings on Christian discipleship and formation and he was longtime Professor of Philosophy at The University of Southern California. He

wrote two wonderful books that are favorites of mine, *The Divine Conspiracy* and *Renovation of the Heart*. I am finding this little book, which I have not yet finished, to be equally inspiring and challenging and it is called ***Living in Christ's Presence***.

Spiritual transformation is not about behavior modification. It is about changing the sources of behavior, so the behavior will take care of itself. When the mind is right and the heart is right and the body and the soul and the relationships that we have in our social world are right, the whole person simply steps into the way of Christ and lives there with joy and strength. It is not a struggle. One of the lies about the spiritual life is that it is hard. No, no. It is not hard. It is the easy way.+

Dallas Willard, ***Living in Christ's Presence***

What Brother Lawrence and Dallas Willard wanted us to understand is that ***living intentionally*** under the authority ***of a rule of life*** is not a set of harsh rules and tedious obligations that makes our lives a monastic life of poverty and deprivation. In fact the Christian life becomes one of ridiculous freedom and hilarious adventure. Living intentionally so that everything you do is in the name of Christ is a powerful hope and an even more captivating legacy.

John 14:3-4

Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

The ~~u~~Name of God is a phrase filled with deep theology and is not to be taken lightly. It harkens back to the Old Testament where nations pit gods against each other; ~~u~~the name of Baal or Ashtoreth+as opposed to the God of the Hebrews whose name is hidden from them and far too glorious to write or say. The Jewish Christians of the 1st century would have well understood the weight of the phrase of living under the Name of God. It is not a magic word or a kind of spiritual abracadabra. Jesus even tells us this so that we are not confused.

Matthew 7:21

~~u~~Not everyone who says to me, ~~u~~Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, ~~u~~Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name? ²³ And then will I declare to them, ~~u~~ I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.

Doing something in the Name of Jesus demands our heart not our voice! It demands that we live intentionally to glorify Christ and Christ Alone! Let's keep going . . .

In every role of your life . . . v18ff (what are your roles?)

Wife

I Cor. 11:3 But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.

Husband

Children

Fathers

Bondslaves

Masters

Wivesō Husbandsō Childrenō Fathersō

¹⁸ Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. ²⁰ Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. ²¹ Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

- The family, the home, is a place of truth and love. It is a refuge against the storm of lies and indifference that crashes upon us in the world
(As for me and my house I will serve the Lord)
- This passage gives us a brief primer of applying a rule of life to our most powerful and intimate relationships
- The thinking is that if we can apply a rule of life, a set of standards that honor Christ, in our home then we can extend it into the rest of the world

Bondservants and slaves, more of the same!

Knowing you have a Master who treats you kindly.

Do you have a kind God who has treated you kindly? Have you deserved punishment/discipline for your disobedience and selfish behavior only to have him bestow you with His mercy? Have you received gifts and blessings from God that you did not deserve and feel have you felt the wonders of His grace?

You have felt this because He is this type of God. Turn to Psalm 103 with me.

Psalm 103:1-5, 8-14

Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
bless his holy name!
² Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits,
³ who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,
⁴ who redeems your life from the pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
⁵ who satisfies you with good
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
⁸ The LORD is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
⁹ He will not always chide,
nor will he keep his anger forever.
¹⁰ He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.
¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
¹² as far as the east is from the west,
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.
¹³ As a father shows compassion to his children,
so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.
¹⁴ For he knows our frame;
he remembers that we are dust

Perhaps if we were wrapped in thankfulness as our passage tells us, we must be. Perhaps if we lived our lives with Christian intentionality - maybe then we would stand out more different than those who live by worldly values and standards as opposed to how woefully the same we are all too often.

What many do not advance in the Christian progress because they stick in penances, and particular exercises, while they neglect the love of God, which is the *end*. That this appeared plainly by their works, and was the reason why we see so little solid virtue.+

Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God.*

Prayer/Benediction

Discussion Questions

Does it seem like time is just speeding by? Why do you think that is? Does the idea of living intentionally help us with this phenomenon? How so?

What comes through your mind when, as Dave put it on Sunday, we begin to live intentionally in our spiritual lives?

Have you ever heard of the idea of a rule of life before as Dave was talking about it on Sunday? This is what the CS Lewis foundation has to say . . .

A Rule of Life is an intentional pattern of spiritual disciplines that provides structure and direction for growth in holiness. A Rule establishes a rhythm for life which is helpful for being formed by the Spirit, a rhythm that reflects a love for God and respect for how he has made us. The disciplines which we build into our rhythm of life help us to shed the “old self” and allow our “new self” in Christ to be formed. Spiritual disciplines are means of grace by which God can nourish us. Ultimately a Rule should help you to love God more, so if it becomes a legalistic way of earning points with God or impressing others, it should be scrapped. If the traditional, ancient term “rule” concerns you because it sounds legalistic, think of “rule” as a “rhythm of life” or as a “Curriculum in Christlikeness” (Dallas Willard), or as a “Game Plan for Morphing” (John Ortberg).

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Have you ever written a set of goals or hopes for your spiritual growth or formation?

What kind of goals did you include? Do you think that this is a rigid way of approaching the spiritual life or does it seem that this is a way of living intentionally?

What does it mean to you to practice the presence of God?

How many roles in life do you have? Which ones are the most important? Did you write down that one of your roles is ~~Chosen~~ and to be ~~Beloved~~? Can you think of other spiritual roles we may have (ie, *Ambassadors*, 2 Corinthians 5:20, etc.)

Let's share about the times we have experienced the mercy and grace of God as the kind Master of our lives!