

A Rhythm of Life

Ordering Body, Soul, and Spirit Around the Presence of God

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”

— Mark 12:30 (NIV)

What Is a Rhythm of Life?

A rhythm of life is a personal, intentional framework of practices and habits that shape how you move through each day, week, and season in response to God’s presence. It is not a rigid schedule or a spiritual performance checklist. It is a living pattern — chosen, revised, and returned to — that keeps the whole person oriented toward God.

The ancient Benedictine tradition called this the “rule of life” — ora et labora, pray and work. The idea is older than Benedict: the Psalms open with an image of the blessed man who meditates on God’s law “day and night” (Psalm 1:2). Jesus himself had a rhythm — he withdrew, he gathered, he prayed, he served. A rhythm of life asks you to do the same: to structure the ordinary hours so they become the ground of spiritual formation rather than an obstacle to it.

It is not about doing more. It is about doing what matters — sustainably, faithfully, and in the right order. As Dallas Willard wrote, “Grace is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to earning.” A rhythm of life is the effort of a person who has stopped trying to earn and started trying to abide.

Three Dimensions of a Whole Person

Scripture addresses the whole person — body, soul, and spirit — as distinct but inseparable. A healthy rhythm of life attends to each dimension without collapsing them into one another.

Dimension	What It Encompasses
Body	Physical health, sleep, movement, rest, eating, sensory experience, the rhythms of the created world
Soul	Mind (thought, attention, imagination), will (choices, habits, desires), emotions (feeling, affect, response)
Spirit	The innermost self in relation to God — prayer, worship, Scripture, spiritual direction, communion with the Holy Spirit

Caring for the Body

The body is not merely a vehicle for spiritual activity — it is the place where spiritual formation happens. Ignatius of Loyola understood that consolations and desolations arrive through embodied experience. Paul speaks of offering the body as a “living sacrifice” (Romans 12:1). The Incarnation itself insists: physical things matter to God.

“Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?”

— 1 Corinthians 6:19 (NIV)

Practices for the Body

- Sleep and rest — honoring the Sabbath principle at the daily scale. Sufficient sleep is not laziness; it is trust.
- Movement and exercise — walking, gardening, physical work, caring for animals. Creation itself is a means of grace.
- Eating with intention — not restriction, but gratitude. Meals can be liturgy.
- Fasting — the voluntary setting aside of food (or another appetite) to create physical space for God’s voice.
- Sabbath — one day per week set apart from productivity, screens, and striving. Rest is a spiritual discipline, not a reward.

“He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul.”

— Psalm 23:2–3 (NIV)

Caring for the Soul

The soul — encompassing mind, will, and emotions — is the seat of personhood and the arena of spiritual formation. It is where we believe, choose, feel, and respond. A rhythm of life that neglects the soul produces spiritual activity without interior transformation.

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

— Romans 12:2 (NIV)

The Mind

The mind shapes everything it attends to. What we read, watch, consume, and dwell on forms us — for good or ill. Intentional practices for the mind create the conditions for wisdom.

- Scripture meditation — slow, repeated, attentive reading (hagah, Psalm 1:2). Not information gathering; rumination.
- Reading good books — theology, biography, history, poetry. C.S. Lewis noted that reading lets us “become a thousand men and yet remain ourselves.”
- Limiting consuming media that agitate without nourishing.
- Journaling and reflection — writing slows thought and reveals what we actually believe.

“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right ... think about such things.”

— Philippians 4:8 (NIV)

The Will

The will is not merely the faculty of decision — it is the deep orientation of desire. Formation of the will means learning to want what God wants: to have our desires reshaped by grace rather than governed by appetite.

- Daily surrender — beginning each day with a simple act of yielding: “Lord, this day is yours.”
- The Daily Examen — reviewing the day with God, noticing where you chose well and where you drifted.
- Accountability — a spiritual director, confessor, or trusted companion who speaks honestly to the patterns they observe.
- Simplicity — resisting the accumulation of things, commitments, and distractions that crowd out desire for God.

“Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.”

— Psalm 37:4 (NIV)

The Emotions

Emotions are not obstacles to spiritual maturity — they are data. Ignatius called them “movements of the soul” and taught that the spiritual director’s task was to help a person discern what God was saying through consolation and desolation alike. A rhythm of life creates space to notice, name, and bring emotion honestly before God.

- Lament — the Psalms model honest grief, anger, and confusion before God. Permission to lament is permission to stay.
- Gratitude — a daily practice of naming specific gifts. Gratitude is the antidote to anxiety and the soil of joy.
- Silence and stillness — creating enough quiet to hear what the soul is actually carrying.
- Spiritual direction — a regular hour with a trained listener who helps you attend to God’s movement in your interior life.

“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”

— 1 Peter 5:7 (NIV)

Caring for the Spirit

The spirit is the deepest dimension of the person — the place of communion with God. It is not accessible by effort alone; it is opened by grace, sustained by the Holy Spirit, and nourished by the classical disciplines of prayer, Scripture, worship, and sacrament.

“God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

— John 4:24 (NIV)

Practices for the Spirit

- Daily prayer — set times of prayer anchor the day in God’s presence. Morning and evening prayer are ancient and proven rhythms.
- Scripture — not merely studied but received. Lectio Divina, memorization, and praying the Psalms are all means of letting the Word dwell in you richly (Colossians 3:16).
- Worship — gathered worship with the body of Christ is not optional. “Let us not give up meeting together” (Hebrews 10:25). Corporate worship relativizes private experience.

- Solitude and silence — Jesus regularly withdrew to pray alone (Luke 5:16). Solitude is not isolation; it is the place where the False Self loses its grip.
- The Examen — a brief daily review of where God was present and where you drifted. See also the Examen handout.
- Spiritual direction — a monthly or bi-monthly conversation with a trained spiritual director who listens with you for God’s movement in your life.
- Retreats — an extended withdrawal (half-day, full day, or weekend) for unhurried listening. See also the Personal Retreat handout.

“Be still, and know that I am God.”

— Psalm 46:10 (ESV)

Building Your Rhythm of Life

A rhythm of life is personal — shaped by your season, temperament, vocation, and the particular ways God has wired you to encounter Him. What follows is not a template but a scaffold.

Daily Anchors

Choose one or two practices that will bookend each day. They need not be long. Consistency matters more than duration.

- Morning: prayer, worship, devotional reading, Bible reading, Journaling, etc. (30–60 minutes)
- Evening: the Daily Examen, a moment of gratitude, or quiet review with God (10–20 minutes)

Weekly Rhythms

- One full Sabbath day — rest, worship, beauty, people you love
- Gathered worship with your church community
- One intentional act of service or hospitality
- Physical movement and time in creation

Monthly and Seasonal Practices

- A personal half-day or full-day retreat
- A session with a spiritual director
- Review and revision of your rhythm — what is bearing fruit? What needs adjusting?

A Guiding Caution

Begin small. One new practice sustained over months will form you more deeply than five practices abandoned in weeks. The goal is not an impressive rule of life on paper — it is a life slowly conformed to the likeness of Christ.

“Let us throw off everything that hinders ... and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus.” — Hebrews 12:1–2 (NIV)

Questions for Reflection and Consideration

Body

- ▶ What is one area of physical life (sleep, rest, movement, eating) that most needs attention right now? What would it look like to honor your body as a temple of the Holy Spirit in that area?
- ▶ Do you practice Sabbath? If not, what would you need to release in order to make one day genuinely restful?
- ▶ How does your body signal stress, depletion, or spiritual dryness? Do you pay attention to those signals?

Soul — Mind

- ▶ What are you regularly feeding your mind? Is it forming you toward God or away from Him?
- ▶ Is there a pattern of thought — anxiety, comparison, resentment, fear — that consistently competes with your awareness of God? What practices might address it?
- ▶ When did you last read something that stretched your understanding of God, Scripture, or the life of faith?

Soul — Will

- ▶ What do you most deeply desire right now? Are those desires being formed by Scripture and prayer, or primarily by culture and circumstance?
- ▶ Is there an area of your life where you have been trying to manage rather than surrender? What would surrender look like in practice?
- ▶ Who has permission to speak honestly into your patterns and choices?

Soul — Emotions

- ▶ Are there emotions you habitually suppress or avoid bringing to God? What would it mean to bring them honestly into prayer?
- ▶ Do you have a regular practice of gratitude? If so, is it specific enough to be genuinely formative?
- ▶ Is there grief, anger, or fear that needs to be named before God — perhaps in the form of lament?

Spirit

- ▶ What does your current prayer life actually look like — not what you wish it looked like, but what it is? Where is there life in it? Where has it gone dry?
- ▶ When did you last experience a genuine sense of God's nearness? What were the conditions that allowed for it?
- ▶ Is there a spiritual discipline you have been drawn to but have never sustained? What is one small, concrete step toward beginning it?
- ▶ Have you ever worked with a spiritual director? If not, what is holding you back?

An Invitation

You do not need a perfect rule of life before you begin. You need a willing heart and one next step. The God who called you is faithful — and He is the One who will sustain what He has begun.

“He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion.” — Philippians 1:6 (NIV)