



SESSION ONE CREATING A RULE OF LIFE

A few years ago entrepreneur Randi Zuckerberg described what she called the entrepreneur's dilemma:

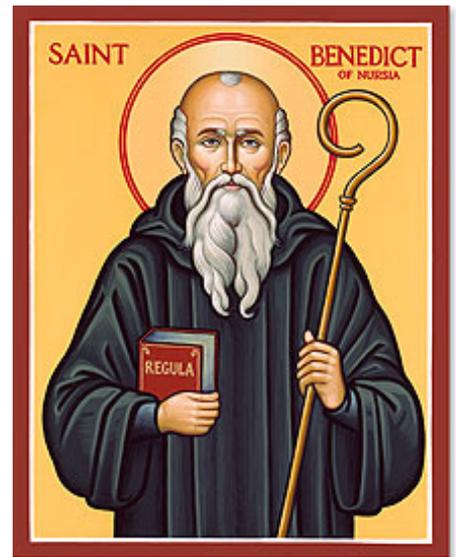
Work. Fitness. Sleep. Friends. Family. *Pick 3.*

Want to work hard, get a good night's sleep, and have a family? Forget maintaining friendships or staying fit. Want to have a vital social life, a family, and stay healthy and active? Forget a career. Chances are, this is not only the entrepreneur's dilemma. If we were to take an honest inventory of our lives, we might discover how true this dilemma rings for us as well. But is this the way we should live in relationship to ourselves, others, and God? If we're really being honest with ourselves, we might admit that our spiritual life sometimes feels either casual or haphazard. But it is highly unlikely that we will deepen our relationship with God if we treat it casually. What we need is a plan to lead more intentional, balanced lives.

Our spiritual formation shares much in common with planting a garden. Certain plants require intentional support in order to grow properly. Think of tomatoes and beans, both need special support. Without this support, these plants would wither or collapse on the soil. They would not have the space or sunlight they need to grow and flourish. When it comes to spiritual growth, human beings are much like these plants. We need support, intention, and structure so our spiritual life does not grow in a confused and disorderly way. In the Christian tradition, the name for this kind of support for our spiritual life is called a *rule of life*. It dates back to the sixth century with the Rule of St. Benedict. Benedict was a monk who created a monastery to invite others to live in prayerful community. His Rule has been a guide to the spiritual life of ordinary people since then.

There are many different ways to approach writing a rule. It is important to keep in mind that we are each in a different season of life, which calls for different kinds of support and intention. As a result, our rules will probably be different. The goal is still the same. Developing a rule fashioned after the Rule of St. Benedict is about seeking reconciliation with all things, including God, ourselves, others, and creation. Benedict's Rule articulates five practices aimed at this reconciliation: prayer, study, recreation, work, and hospitality. During the next five weeks we will consider how to organize our spiritual lives around these practices. We will ask what these practices reveal about our lives, which of them is missing or largely unnoticed, and how to recover them so that we might experience the kind of reconciliation God makes possible in Jesus Christ. **By the end of our time together, hopefully you will create your own rule.**

THE SPIRITUALITY
THAT EMERGES FROM THE
RULE OF BENEDICT
IS A SPIRITUALITY
CHARGED WITH LIVING
THE ORDINARY LIFE
EXTRAORDINARILY
WELL. ✦ JOAN CHITTISTER



CREATING A RULE OF LIFE | LISTENING

The Rule of Benedict begins by *listening*. In order to develop a *rule of life* we must practice listening to God's Word to us through scripture and prayer. We must also learn to listen to those who are in close relationship with us, mentors and exemplars, and the needs of the world around us. But we must first listen to our own lives. Listening is a deeply spiritual practice of self examination by which we pay attention to the present shape of our lives and consider what needs to change within ourselves and in the world we inhabit. **Ultimately, listening is about being willing to change.** So, as we begin this journey, let us take some time to share with each other about our lives.

GROUP REFLECTION

- Begin by sharing with each other a bit of your story. A helpful way to think about our stories is to consider the major transitions. We will share through out our time together, but take a few minutes now to share about a significant transition or experience that will help others get to know your story.
- Think about your story in its current season. Describe a typical day in your life. How do you feel at the end of the day? Why?
- Think about your typical week, month, and year. What are the things you intentionally do to maintain spiritual, emotional, and physical health?
- What in your life reflects spiritual stability and community? How can you tell?
- What would a life of balance look and feel like?

INTENTION FOR THIS WEEK

Benedictine Monks take vows of stability, obedience, and conversion when they enter the monastery and begin to observe Benedict's Rule. Instead of taking vows, you are invited to leave your time together each week with an intention for the week ahead that will benefit your spiritual life and possibly become part of your rule.

Practice listening to your life this week. Reflect on and consider the reflection questions listed above this week, alone and in conversation with others, as you prepare to develop a rule for your life.

PRAYER FOR THE WEEK

Holy God, thank you for friends old and new with whom I am able to journey through this phase of life. Grant me the courage and insight to reflect upon my own spiritual life and to be open and willing to change so that I might reflect the reconciliation which is made available to all of us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Amen.

WHY A RULE?

We are a community of Reformed Protestants. As a general rule, we don't like *rules*. Why should we develop a *rule of life*? Think of it less as a rule and more as a guide. Or better yet, think about it as a *covenant*. The Latin word for rule comes from *regula*, which refers to a covenant that makes known your intentions. Covenant is a word Reformed Protestants are familiar with. The word covenant describes the inner logic of our relationship with God and of our life together. So think about this less in terms of a rule and more in terms of a covenant!

LOOKING AHEAD

Session Two | Prayer

Session Three | Study

Session Three | Recreation

Session Four | Work

Session Five | Hospitality

RULE OF LIFE EXAMPLES

Pope John XXII (While he was a young seminary student)

- Fifteen minutes of silent prayer upon rising in the morning
- Fifteen minutes of spiritual reading
- Before bed, a general examination of conscience followed by confession; then identifying issues for the next morning's prayer
- Arranging the hours of the day to make this rule possible; setting aside specific time for prayer, study, recreation, and sleep
- Making a habit of turning the mind to God in prayer

Dorothy Day

Received the Eucharist Daily, read the Bible Daily, and kept a journal that was for her a form of prayer.

Martin Luther King Jr.

1. Mediate daily on the teachings and life of Jesus.
2. Remember always that the nonviolent movement in Birmingham seeks justice and reconciliation, not victory.
3. Walk and talk in the manner of love, for God is love.
4. Pray daily to be used by God in order that all might be free.
5. Sacrifice personal wishes in order that all might be free.
6. Observe with both friend and for the ordinary rules of courtesy.
7. Seek to perform regular service for others and the world.
8. Refrain from violence of fist, tongue, or heart.
9. Strive to be in good spiritual and bodily health.
10. Follow the directions of the movement and the captains of a demonstration.



SESSION TWO

THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER | RECONCILIATION WITH GOD

When asked which is the greatest commandment, Jesus responded:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Writing and following a rule of life is really about seeking to obey these commandments. After all, this is the goal toward which our spiritual life is directed. The love of God and neighbor is the standard we use to evaluate the health of our spiritual life. **We must continue to ask ourselves as we create our own rule: Is it helping me to grow in love for God, self, and neighbor?**

One way we love God is by living in communion with God, and prayer is the primary way we experience this communion. Prayer nurtures and sustains our relationship with God. Through prayer we open ourselves to the presence of God in our lives and make ourselves ready to be led by the Holy Spirit. We do this each week as a congregation when we meet for worship by confessing our sins and asking God to bring forth His kingdom into our world. When we do this, what we're really seeking is close communion with God where our wills and desires align with God's.

We learn from St. Benedict that regularity is fundamental to our prayer life. This is consistent with what we learn from Scripture. "Pray without ceasing," Scripture tells us (1 Thessalonians 5.17). How is this possible? We have too much other important work to do: jobs, homework, raising our families, volunteering, caring for aging parents, and driving carpools. If we were to pray without ceasing, we would not get much else done.

Interpreters suggest this passage refers to the regularity of one's prayer life, not whether or not one is able to pray all day without interruption. Joan Chittister writes, "Benedictine prayer is not designed to take people out of the world to find God. Benedictine prayer is designed to enable people to realize that God is in the world around them." Benedict called for prayer at regular intervals throughout the day so we would never forget who we really are—our fundamental identity as persons in relationship with God—even as we go about our busy lives. Regularity in our prayer life tempers the urgency with which most of us live our lives. Another reason Benedict urged regular prayer is that he knew most of us would never pray if we waited to be in the right mood or for the right time. Something will always be more important, more urgent, and more pressing. **If we wait for the right time to begin praying, we will simply never pray.**

OUR FATHER WHO
ART IN HEAVEN
HALLOWED BE THY NAME.
THY KINGDOM COME
THY WILL BE DONE
ON EARTH AS IT
IS IN HEAVEN.
GIVE US THIS DAY
OUR DAILY BREAD
AND FORGIVE US
OUR DEBTS AS WE
FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS
AND LEAD US NOT
INTO TEMPTATION
BUT DELIVER US
FROM EVIL. FOR THINE
IS THE KINGDOM
AND THE POWER AND
THE GLORY, FOREVER.
AMEN

PRAYER FOR THE WEEK

O my God, teach me to be generous
to serve you as you deserve to be served
to give without counting the cost
to fight without fear of being wounded
to work without seeking rest
and to spend myself without expecting any reward
but the knowledge that I am doing your holy will.

Ignatius of Loyola

DAILY EXAMEN

- 1) Become aware of God's presence. Spend time in silence in the company of the Holy Spirit, asking God to bring clarity to your day.
- 2) Review the day with gratitude. Gratitude is essential to our relationship with God. What gifts did you receive today? What people or experiences stick out to you? What gifts did you give?
- 3) Pay attention to your emotions. St. Ignatius of Loyola observed that we can sense the presence of God by paying careful attention to our interior life. Reflect on how you felt today. Were you angry or joyful? Did you feel compassion? Did you experience exhaustion or frustration? Surely we all experience moments when our emotions overwhelm us. What is this telling us? Who do we need to ask for forgiveness? What steps do we need to take toward the person for whom we felt compassion?
- 4) Choose one experience of the day and pray from it. Ask God to lead your prayer to something specific about that day. It might be a significant encounter or a feeling you experienced. Whether the prayer be repentance, gratitude, praise, or intercession, spend a moment praying.
- 5) Look toward tomorrow. Ask God to grant you the wisdom, courage, and grace you will need to meet tomorrow's challenges. Again, pay attention to your feelings about tomorrow. Are you anxious? Stressed? Cheerful?



SESSION THREE

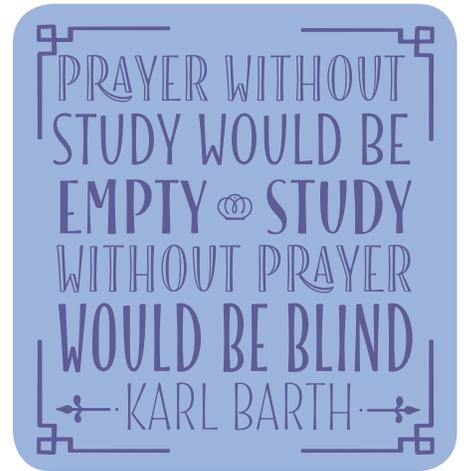
THE PRACTICE OF STUDY | RECONCILIATION WITH WISDOM

An underlying feature of the culture of authenticity in which we live is self-determined individualism, the idea that we are whoever we choose to be independent of others. In an individualistic culture, we generally treat wisdom imposed on us from any outside source, be it from society in general, a previous generation, or a religious or political authority, with suspicion. To be authentic to ourselves, we are told we must have the freedom and ability to create our own identity and sense of self from scratch.

By contrast, the writer of Hebrews tells us that we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses who have preceded us and whose faith has something to teach us (Hebrews 12.1). When the earliest Christians gathered together for the first time, they devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles (Acts 2.42). The early Christians help us see that our Christian identity is received rather than invented. This is quite a different story than the story of self-determined individualism.

We still need to translate ancient wisdom into our modern lives. This difficult work of translation requires humility to avoid what C.S. Lewis labeled as “chronological snobbery,” the uncritical acceptance of our modern age and the assumption that ancient wisdom has nothing to say to our current life situation just because it is “out of date.” Humility lies at the center of Benedict’s Rule. **Benedict believed that humility, rather than ambition or self-determinism, should be our guide as we navigate our spiritual lives.** One of the marks of humility, according to Benedict, is the willingness to allow others to speak into our lives. When we commit ourselves to study, this is precisely what we do: we allow for others to shape our minds and hearts.

In his letter to the Christians in Rome, Paul speaks of being transformed by renewing our minds so we will know how to discern where and how God is acting in the world (Romans 12.2). The assumption is that when we identify where and how God is working, we will join God in the renewal of all things. In the same way that prayer wakes us up to the presence of God in the world and in our lives, study makes us attentive to God’s transformational presence. *How do we renew our minds?* When we think about studying, many of us think about the process by which we become smarter or figure out the right answer. But this is only one dimension of study. Benedictine study takes the form of *lectio*, or sacred reading, which is prayerful, reflective reading rather than academic reading. *Lectio* seeks to hear God’s Word for us and to us in our own context. It helps us to carefully ponder the wisdom from the witness of scripture and to consider how it might change us and the world we inhabit. *Lectio* is not only suit-



able for reading scripture, it is also a helpful way to read Christian classics or contemporary works of wisdom.

CREATING A RULE OF LIFE | STUDY

You can incorporate study into your own rule in many ways. You may already be involved in a Bible study or study scripture on our own. You may enjoy reading classic Christian texts or listening to contemporary Christian voices. Consider using a mixture of these practices. If you discover you only read scripture by yourself, look for a group to join. Scripture was meant to be read with others. If you tend to read contemporary Christian authors and neglect scripture or classic texts, expand your horizon. **In all of this, the goal is the same, not to become smarter (though you may find you develop practical wisdom), but to be more attentive to God's presence in the world so that you may join God in the renewal of all things.**

GROUP REFLECTION

- Is there anything interesting or surprising in what you have read? What's missing?
- Can you recall a time when you felt your mind was “renewed” in such a way that led to transformation?
- What forms of study do you find helpful and refreshing?
- What practices of study do you want to include in your rule?

INTENTION

Benedictine Monks take vows of stability, obedience, and conversion when they enter the monastery and begin to observe Benedict's Rule. Instead of taking vows, you are invited to leave your time together each week with an intention for the week ahead that will benefit your spiritual life and possibly become part of your rule.

This week set aside some time to read a passage from scripture using the method of *lectio divina* (printed below). Consider how you want to incorporate other forms of study into your rule. For example, is there a devotional reading, a book of sermons, or a classic Christian text you often return to for spiritual formation?

In his short book, *On Christian Doctrine*, Augustine wrote, “For in this every earnest student of the Holy Scriptures exercises himself, to find nothing else in them but that God is to be loved for His own sake, and our neighbor for God's sake; and that God is to be loved with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the mind, and one's neighbor as one's self—that is, in such a way that all our love for our neighbor, like all our love for ourselves, should have reference to God.”

In other words, Augustine helps us see that the love of God and our neighbor as ourselves is the end toward which our study of scripture is directed. So as you think about how to incorporate study into your own rule, remember that the love of God and neighbor is the standard by which we evaluate the health of our spiritual life.

LOOKING AHEAD

Session Four | Recreation

Session Five | Work

Session Six | Hospitality

PRAYER(S) FOR THE WEEK

Ineffable Creator...

You are proclaimed
the true font of light and wisdom,
and the primal origin
raised high beyond all things.

Pour forth a ray of Your brightness
into the darkened places of my mind;
disperse from my soul the twofold darkness
into which I was born:
sin and ignorance.

You make eloquent the tongues of infants.
Refine my speech
and pour forth upon my lips
the goodness of Your blessing.

Grant to me keenness of mind,
capacity to remember,
skill in learning,
subtlety to interpret,
and eloquence in speech.

May You guide the beginning of my work,
direct its progress,
and bring it to completion.

You Who are true God and true Man,
Who live and reign,
world without end.

Amen

Thomas Aquinas

Prayer of Illumination (pray before you study)

Truth-telling, wind-blowing, life-giving spirit—
we present ourselves now
for our instruction and guidance;
breathe your truth among us,
breathe your truth of deep Friday loss,
your truth of awesome Sunday joy.
Breathe your story of death and life
that our story may be submitted to your will for life.
We pray in the name of Jesus risen to new life—
and him crucified.

Taken from Prayers for a Privileged People by Walter Brueggemann, 179

LECTIO DIVINA: READ, THINK, PRAY, ACT

- 1)** Read the text through for basic comprehension. What does the text say? Sometimes it can be helpful to use a commentary to fill out the context, but it is not always necessary.
- 2)** Think deeply or meditate on the passage. Circle or write down a word or phrase that jumps out to you. Think about what God might reveal to you about himself or about your life through the passage.
- 3)** Pray to invite God's Spirit to help you understand what you have read and to give you what you need to respond obediently. After meditating on the passage, you may feel like thanking God for a gift you have received, crying to God because of some injustice you see, or asking God for courage or compassion.
- 4)** Act! Our prayerful reading of scripture is not complete without the event of our participation in what God has called us to do. As James reminds us, we are to be doers of the word, not merely hearers (James 1.22).



SESSION FOUR THE PRACTICE OF RECREATION | RECONCILIATION WITH SELF

There is a crucial moment in the Genesis creation story that we modern people tend to quickly brush past. On the sixth day of creation God created human beings in God's image and then rested. But before God gives human beings any work to do, God invites them to rest. This is counter intuitive to our modern minds. The typical pattern in the modern world is the opposite. We work tirelessly hoping to someday take a vacation, believing our vacation will be meaningful because we have earned time away. But in the creation account, it is the gift of time spent resting in God's presence that energizes our response. Only *after* we have spent time resting are we able to take up the work God has for us. Thus, sabbath rest from the very beginning was an expression of God's grace to us.

Believing that Christ's resurrection set in motion the *new creation*, the early Church celebrated sabbath on Sunday, on the first day of the week, so that the week ahead would be shaped by worship and intentional time spent in God's presence. But sabbath rest can be much broader than a specific day. The early Christians believed that holy leisure, the sacred space for God in the midst of everyday life, was a form of sabbath rest. Benedict believed holy leisure to be essential to living a balanced life.

Leisure has at least two different forms which are important to distinguish: recreation and rest. In our busy world, we have fewer and fewer opportunities to play for the sake of nothing else but to refresh our tired bodies and renew our energy. Therefore, recreation is an important component of leisure. We need to be intentional about taking time to play so that we enjoy God's good creation and care for our own health. But what makes leisure especially holy for Benedict is rest. Benedict believed that without rest our work lacks meaning. In order for our work to feel meaningful, we need time apart from it to reflect upon it, to evaluate whether it is "good" just as God declared God's work in creation to be good. Most importantly, rest reminds us that our work makes up only part of our lives no matter how much we enjoy what we do, how much success we achieve, or how much good our work accomplishes in the world.

For Benedict, holy leisure is not idleness, but a contemplative practice through which our souls are restored so we have something to offer the world God loves. Much later, Bernard of Clairvaux, a twelfth-century Abbot, wrote that the wise Christian desires to be a reservoir rather than a canal. A canal pours out as quickly as it takes in, but a reservoir slowly fills up and overflows its surplus. Holy leisure is crucial to becoming the reservoirs of grace God invites us to be. When we are overwhelmed, exhausted, and overstimulated, we have very little margin to love our neighbor, our-

ONLY IN STOPPING
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DO WE TEACH OUR
HEARTS AND SOULS
THAT WE ARE LOVED
APART FROM WHAT
WE DO ✪ LYNNE BAAB

NO LIFE IS TO BE
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IS NO TIME TO TAKE
STOCK OF IT ✪
NO DAY IS TO BE SO
FULL OF BUSINESS
THAT THE GOSPEL
DARE NOT INTRUDE.
NO SCHEDULE IS TO
BE SO TIGHT THAT
THERE IS NO ROOM
FOR REFLECTION
ON WHETHER WHAT
IS BEING DONE IS
WORTH DOING AT ALL.
✪ JOAN CHITTISTER

selves, or God. **As we begin to write our own rules, may we be intentional to receive God's gift of time so that our bodies and souls might be restored in order to love God and our neighbors as ourselves.**

CREATING A RULE OF LIFE | RECREATION

Continue to keep in mind that we are each in a different season of life. For some, the invitation to rest will come easily while for others it will feel like a burden. As you consider how you want to include rest and recreation into your rule, here are a couple of helpful reminders. First, rest is a gift which is to be received, not something we earn or work toward. Second, rest does not need to be confined to one specific day or time (like Saturday or Sunday). Benedict scheduled almost six hours a day for eating, rest, and reflection. Many of us do not have the kind of structure or freedom to order our day like this, but we might be able to find one day a week where we are intentional about stepping away from our work. Or we might find time each day to spend in meaningful reflection. In either case, rest must be a conscious decision.

GROUP REFLECTION

- What typically keeps you from recreation and rest? What forms of recreation do you enjoy that you are neglecting?
- What brings joy and meaning into your life and how might you bring more of that activity into the balance of your life?
- How might you create space in your life for recreation and renewal?
- What refreshes you and energizes you for your work?

INTENTION

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Try to build margin into your calendar this week. Take time to be prayerful, reflective, and imaginative. Consider keeping one day as sacrosanct as possible. Try to use it for real refreshment instead of as a time for getting other things done (chores, errands, etc.).

PRAYER FOR THE WEEK

Gracious God,

In your grace you have sewn time for rest and recreation into the fabric of your creation. Forgive us for how often we believe that we are what we do. Help us to intentionally set aside time to be replenished by you so that we can take up the work you have called us to do.

FEELING OVERWHELMED?

We are more than halfway through exploring how a rule of life might bring stability, balance, and ongoing conversion to our spiritual lives. At this point you might be overwhelmed or feel that you are not doing enough to maintain the health of your spiritual life. It is important for you to keep a couple things in mind moving forward. First, developing your rule is an ongoing process. It is a highly customizable guide to help you be intentional about living your life before God. It will likely change in different seasons of life. Second, the rule is not meant to overwhelm you, but to help you pay attention to God's presence in your life so you might love God, self, and neighbor more faithfully. Be careful not to be overly ambitious when creating your rule. Begin with realistic intentions.

LOOKING AHEAD

Session Five | Work

Session Six | Hospitality



SESSION FIVE THE PRACTICE OF WORK | RECONCILIATION WITH CREATION

In Genesis we are told that God created Adam and gave him the vocation of cultivating and caring for the garden (Genesis 2:15). This is an extraordinary gift. God could have continued to develop creation on his own, but God invites human beings to collaborate with him to fill and care for the earth. This occurred *before* Adam and Eve's disobedience in the garden. Even in an ideal world free from sin, God expected human beings to participate in the co-creation of the world through work. St. Benedict believed that all work, not only so-called sacred work for the ministry of the Church, was a necessary part of living a holy, integrated life.

Yet many experience work as something that rules over them. Rather than accept work as a gift to cultivate God's good creation and to provide meaning to one's life, many think work is simply a burden to endure for the sake of providing for the needs of their family. In addition, many, due to unjust social structures, work jobs that feel meaningless or rob them of human dignity. Both these views of work are the result of sin and are a distortion of God's design for human work. Still others understand work merely as a means of gainful employment which provides an identity wholly dependent on achievement and salary. In our culture, work is commonly defined as a job for which you are paid. This definition of work is still too narrow. Many people work every day without pay, including students, stay-at-home parents, and volunteers. We need a definition of work that helps us see our work as something more than a burden or as a means of gainful employment.

Benedict reminds us that the purpose of our work is to continue what God wanted done. Just as God gave Adam the vocation of caring for and cultivating the garden, God has given to each of us the vocation of caring for and cultivating the communities in which we live. Through work God invites us to be co-creators. This definition of work is not exclusive to the marketplace and it seeks to restore God's original design for work. **As co-creators, work is not primarily something we do for ourselves but a medium for service to others.** Our work is an expression of neighbor love. Whatever form of work God has called us to do, the purpose is the same. Whether cultivating a safe home filled with love, running an honest business fair to both consumers and employees, or educating students to find dignity in their own work, we are offered the opportunity to shape the world according to the Kingdom of God. When we understand our work as something holy to which God has called us, we live integrated lives because we are able to connect our worship to the rest of our week.

IT IS PERFECTLY
CLEAR THAT GOD'S
GOOD PLAN ALWAYS
INCLUDED HUMAN BEINGS
WORKING, OR, MORE
SPECIFICALLY, LIVING IN THE
CONSTANT CYCLE OF
WORK AND REST
BEN WITHERINGTON

CREATING A RULE OF LIFE | WORK

We are each called to different kinds of work. Some of us work traditional jobs, some of us take care of the needs of our family and household, some of us are in school, and some of us are still discerning where God is calling us next. When you write your rule, keep this question posed by pastor and author Tim Keller at the forefront of your mind: *“How, with my existing abilities and opportunities, can I be of greatest service to other people, knowing what I do of God’s will and of human need?”*

GROUP REFLECTION

- Is there anything interesting or surprising in what you have read? What’s missing?
- How do you experience your work right now? Is it a burden? Is it merely a means to financial security?
- Is it easy or difficult for you to connect your faith to your work? Why?
- How might you approach your work so that it is a means of spiritual renewal, reconciliation, and formation?
- In what way is your work joining God’s work to care for God’s creation?

INTENTION

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This week imagine how your work might be an activity of God’s reconciling presence in the world. Ask yourself, in what way can my work be an expression of love for my neighbor?

PRAYER FOR THE WEEK

Creator God, deliver us from work which is done only in service to ourselves, that we may do the work which you have given us to do in truth and beauty for the common good. For the sake of Him who came among us as a servant, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

PURPOSE

“We are not to choose jobs and conduct our work to fulfill ourselves and accrue power, for being called by God to do something is empowering enough. We are to see work as a way of service to God and our neighbor, and so we should both choose and conduct our work in accordance with that purpose. The question regarding our choice of work is no longer “What will make me the most money and give me the most status?” The question must now be “How, with my existing abilities and opportunities, can I be of greatest service to other people, knowing what I do of God’s will and of human need?”

—Tim Keller

LOOKING AHEAD

Session Six | Hospitality

MANIFESTO FOR WORK

- 1) Work is my gift to the world. It is my social fruitfulness. It ties me to my neighbor and binds me to the future. It lights up the spark in me that is most like the God of Genesis. I tidy the garden and plant the garden and distribute the goods of the garden and know that it is good.
- 2) Work saves me from self-centeredness. It gives me a reason to exist that is larger than myself. It makes me part of possibility. It gives me hope.
- 3) Work builds up the Kingdom. It enables creation to go on creating. It brings renewal and reconciliation.
- 4) Work builds community. When we work for others, we give ourselves (and we are also able to give to others from the fruits of our labor). We never work for our own good alone.
- 5) Work leads to self-fulfillment. It uses the gifts and talents we know we have and it calls on gifts in us of which we are unaware. It makes us open to new dimensions of our own personalities and talents yet undiscovered.

—Adapted from *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily* by Joan Chittister



SESSION SIX

THE PRACTICE OF HOSPITALITY | RECONCILIATION WITH OTHERS

The earliest Christians had a habit of reserving a bed in their home and having a piece of bread ready for any stranger in need who might pass through. This kind of hospitality was common in the ancient world, where the threats of travel left people much more vulnerable than in the modern world. However, the early Christians practiced hospitality to seek Christ in every person, not only to observe cultural norms. Taking Christ's words seriously, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me," St. Benedict taught that all guests to the monastery should be welcomed as Christ.

Hospitality begins with God. God invited human beings to inhabit his creation. Through Jesus Christ, we are invited to belong to the *new creation* as well. These are divine acts of hospitality. Each Sunday, when we welcome one another into worship, we do so confessing that we have all been first welcomed by God. When we greet one another with a sign of Christ's peace, we are expressing God's hospitality to one another. Outside of the context of worship, hospitality is commonly seen as the practice of throwing a good party, hosting friends for dinner, or listing a home on Airbnb, a website which helps homeowners rent out their homes to travelers. All these certainly belong to the practice of hospitality. But the world is in need of a hospitality of the heart, which goes deeper. In Austin, refugees are coming from all over the world looking for a place to belong, vulnerable young people running from abuse or suffering from poor mental health wander the streets of our city, and countless undocumented persons are looked upon with suspicion and fear every day. Hospitality reminds us that everyone — everyone! — is received as Christ. Hospitality breaks down the barriers created by prejudice and fear, what the apostle Paul called the "dividing wall of hostility" (Ephesians 2.14).

Hospitality means welcoming others into our lives and spaces, often at a cost to ourselves. Joan Chittister tells the story of one Benedictine monastery that bakes bread every morning for their own needs and for the needs of their community. In the area surrounding the monastery, people are hungry and need something to eat. Joan observes that bread is probably just as cheap to buy as it is to bake fresh every morning. Why then do these monks put all the effort into baking the bread each morning? To practice hospitality. The bread is a reminder to them that hospitality is going out of our way to include the needs of others into our own lives.

BENEDICT SAYS, "BE HERE;
FIND CHRIST IN THE
RESTLESS TEENAGER,
DEMANDING PARENT,
INSENSITIVE EMPLOYER,
DULL PREACHER,
LUKEWARM
CONGREGATION."
CREATE A HOSPITABLE
SPACE FOR WHOEVER
AND WHATEVER GOD
SENDS INTO [YOUR] LIVES NOW.
— ELIZABETH CANHAM

HOSPITALITY IS
THE WELCOMING
OF NOT ONLY STRANGERS,
BUT ALSO OF THE
STRANGE IDEAS
AND BELIEFS THEY
BRING WITH THEM.
* PETER BLOCK *

CREATING A RULE OF LIFE | HOSPITALITY

Practicing hospitality has implications for every dimension of our lives, including our home, workplace, neighborhood, school, church, and city. When you consider how you want to include hospitality in your rule, begin by thinking about how you can be hospitable in your own home first and then move outward from there. Reflect on these questions to get you started. How are you fully present to those you live with? Hospitality at home creates a nourishing environment for mistakes to be made and forgiveness to be offered. If you have children, how are you modeling hospitality for them? At work, do you welcome other's ideas and concerns? Are you approachable? If you are a manager or supervisor, are you creating a hostile or hospitable work environment? In your neighborhood, are you, as Covenant member Kristin Schell asks, front yard people or back yard people? What gifts can you give and receive on your block? As a church community, do we seek Christ in *all* people? How do we accept and make part of our community those whom society marginalizes?

GROUP REFLECTION

- What is the essence of hospitality to you? What are the most important ingredients? Do you have an experience to share where someone was hospitable to you?
- What are the different communities you inhabit? How can you practice hospitality in each of them? What gets in the way of hospitality?
- How might your practice of hospitality lead to reconciliation with others?
- This experience with your Covenant Group has essentially been an act of hospitality. Have you learned anything about hospitality during this journey together?

INTENTION

Benedictine Monks take vows of stability, obedience, and conversion when they enter the monastery and begin to observe Benedict's Rule. Instead of taking vows, you are invited to leave your time together each week with an intention for the week ahead that will benefit your spiritual life and possibly become part of your rule.

This week practice seeking Christ in all persons. Allow yourself to be interrupted by others and welcome them as God's way to get our attention.

PRAYER FOR THE WEEK

Welcoming God,

By your grace, you receive us into your presence each new day. Help us to make space for others in our busy schedules. Interrupt our lives with strangers and guests who will lead us into new forms of compassion and care for the world. Help us to receive others as if we are receiving Christ, so that we might be witnesses of the reconciliation that you make possible in the saving death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, for he himself will say: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me!"

In the salutation of all guests, whether arriving or departing, let all humility be shown.

Let the head be bowed, or the whole body prostrated on the ground in adoration of Christ, who indeed is received in their persons.

Great care and concern are to be shown in receiving poor people and pilgrims, because it is especially in them that Christ is received.

—Rule of Benedict 53

WRITING YOUR RULE

Now it is time to create your own rule! As we have said all along, a rule of life is a highly customizable, living work-in-progress. Part of what will be most rewarding is finding a way for the rule to fit your life. Remember, the rule is not the point; it is a tool to help you pay attention to God's reconciling presence in the world and in your life. It is one way to help you live your life with intention.

Below are a couple of suggestions for structure, a few examples, and a bibliography so you can do further research on your own!

STRUCTURE A

One way to organize your rule is to take the intentions from each of the practices we explored, and find a way to include them into your daily and weekly life.

With God's help I will...

The Practice of Prayer

- Find ways to remind myself of God's guidance throughout the day
- Engage in a daily practice of prayer, such as the Daily Examen or reading a Psalm
- Pray each morning for my friends, family, and any in need

The Practice of Study

- Include *lectio divina* as part of my daily or weekly routine
- Regularly read other sources of spiritual wisdom and insight

The Practice of Rest and Recreation

- Spend some time each week doing something recreational
- Set aside time during the day or week to reflect upon where I have recently experienced God's presence

The Practice of Work

- Seek ways to be a reconciling presence in my workplace
- Look for ways to promote human flourishing through whatever work God has called me to (which may or may not be gainful employment)

The Practice of Hospitality

- Share a meal with family, friends, or neighbors on a regular basis
- Seek Christ in all persons

STRUCTURE B

Rather than organize your rule around the five practices, organize your rule according to your relationships to God, self, and neighbor. Then think intentionally about where each of the five practices (prayer, study, rest, work, and hospitality) fit into your relationships.

GOD

Daily

- Spend 10 minutes in silence
- Read a lectionary Psalm

Weekly

- Read a sermon
- Worship
- Practice Sabbath

Monthly

- Receive spiritual direction

Annually

- Retreat (solitude)

SELF

Daily

- Spend 10 minutes writing by hand (slow writing)

Weekly

- Meet with Carl for prayer (spiritual friend)
- Go to bed early (2x)
- Exercise (3x)

Monthly

- Read a novel
- Catch up on TV/movies

Annually

- Memorize a poem or Psalm
- Go snowboarding

OTHER

Daily

- Pray for needs of congregation
- Walking meetings

Weekly

- Cook dinner for family (2x)
- Intentional time with wife & son

Monthly

- Host guests at our home for a meal (2x)

Annually

- One-to-one meeting with member of community (5x)
- Family vacation

EXAMPLES—From *The Good and Beautiful Community* by James Bryan Smith

Example A

- count my blessings every Sunday before I go to sleep
- sew three times a month
- pray through Psalm 23 every morning
- take a drive every Sunday with my family to get ice cream
- give myself margin every weekend
- have dinner with friends two times a month
- pray for competitors every night before falling asleep
- go on a walk with my family once a week
- hospitality—serve others twice a month
- invite family and friends to our home for dinner twice a month

Example B

- doing dishes two times each day for fifteen minutes (a.m. and p.m.)
- practicing God's presence daily—6:45–7:00 a.m.
- guitar playing four times per week for twenty minutes—Monday, Tuesday and Thursday—9:20–9:40 a.m.
- contemplative/intercessory prayer once each week on Monday morning
- *lectio divina* two times per week on Tuesday and Thursday
- solitude once each week for two hours on Wednesday—7:20–9:20 a.m.
- welcoming prayer—review practice once each week on Thursday—8:30 a.m.
- go out with Catherine once each week—one hour on Thursday night
- sabbath three times per month Friday into Saturday
- service—three acts of service each week (hard to measure)
- spiritual direction once each month as scheduled

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