

HEART, MIND & SOUL CARE

Crafting a Rule of Life

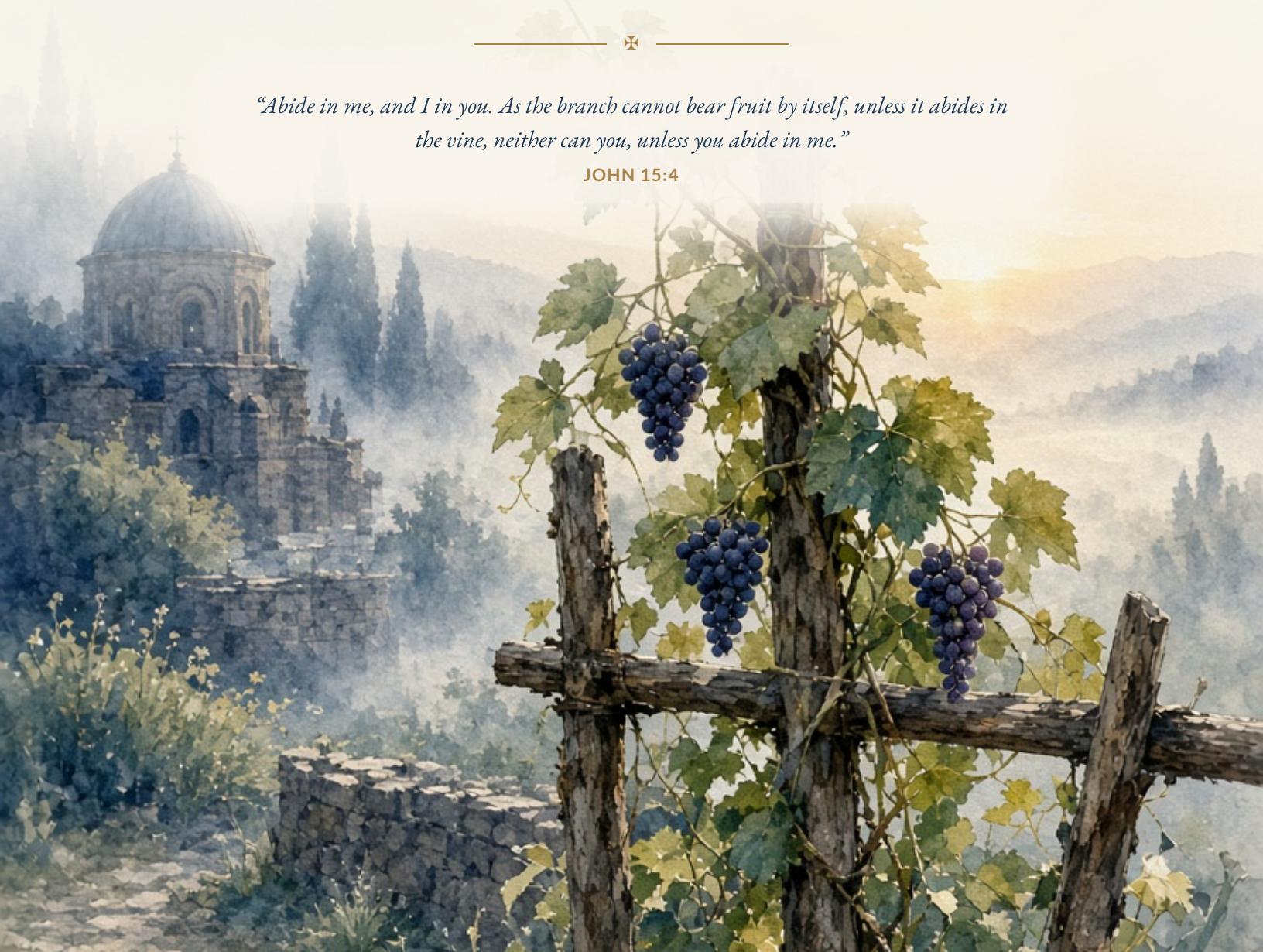
*A Scripture-saturated workbook for prayer and daily faithfulness,
drawing on Catholic and Protestant wisdom*

PSALMS • PROVERBS • THE GOSPEL OF JOHN



“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.”

JOHN 15:4



Heart, Mind & Soul Care

Brian Mackey, Chaplain & Spiritual Director

heartmindandsoulcare.org

A Word Before You Begin



Dear friend,

I am glad these pages found their way to you. In my years of sitting with people as a chaplain and spiritual director, I have heard the same quiet ache over and over: "I love God, but my days feel scattered." What most of us are missing is a simple, gracious shape for our days, one that keeps us near Christ when life gets loud.

The old word for that shape is a *Rule of Life*. Christians have kept Rules for fifteen hundred years, from St. Benedict's monks to John Wesley's Methodists to tired parents at a kitchen table. Think of a Rule as a trellis. The vine does the growing. The trellis gives it something to lean on.

I live and pray as a member of one family of God that, sadly, still eats at two tables. I was ordained in the Christian and Missionary Alliance, and I am also a Catholic in good standing. I have been fed by the Reformers and the Puritans, and I have been fed by the Mass, the Liturgy of the Hours, and the saints. This workbook draws water from both wells.

Where Catholics and Protestants pray the same way, I have simply set the practices side by side. Where we see things differently, I have tried to say so plainly and kindly, in short notes marked *Where we differ*, so you can pray with a clear conscience from wherever you stand.

Go slowly, and write honestly. Begin smaller than you think you should. If you would like someone to walk with you as you shape your Rule, I would be honored to hear from you. You will find how to reach me on the last page.

Grace and peace to you in Christ,

Brian Mackey

Chaplain & Spiritual Director, Heart, Mind & Soul Care

“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.” **John 15:4**

How to Use These Pages



You will walk slowly through the Psalms (the prayer book of God's people), Proverbs (wisdom for ordinary days), and the Gospel of John (Jesus' invitation to abide). Along the way you will learn or deepen practices Christians have kept for centuries: the Lord's Prayer, the Daily Examen, lectio divina and visio divina, the Liturgy of the Hours, the Rosary, the sacraments, silence, Sabbath, and quiet service. Saints and teachers from both the Catholic and Protestant traditions keep you company as older brothers and sisters in the faith.

- **Go at the pace of grace.** One section a sitting is plenty.
- **Write honestly.** The lines are for the life you actually live this week.
- **Begin smaller than you think.** A Rule you can keep will serve you better than an impressive one that collapses by February.
- **Find a companion.** Share what you write with a pastor, priest, spiritual director, or trusted friend if it helps you keep going.
- **Return and revise.** A Rule of Life is living, and so are you.
- **Using this with a small group?** Take one Part each week. Pray the opening prayer together, and let each person share only what they want to share.

Two traditions, one Lord

Catholics and Protestants share far more in prayer than we sometimes remember: the Scriptures, the Lord's Prayer, the Psalms, the Creed, and the conviction that every good thing in us is God's gift. When this workbook reaches a place where our churches teach differently, a short *Where we differ* note says so. Read it, take what helps, and talk it over with your own pastor or priest.

About the Scripture

Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV). Catholic readers may prefer the Revised Standard Version, Second Catholic Edition (RSV-2CE), which is very close in wording, so these passages will sound familiar in either Bible. Older Catholic Bibles such as the Douay-Rheims number most Psalms one lower (Psalm 23 is Psalm 22 there).

"The first and most basic thing we can and must do is to keep God before our minds. ... This is the fundamental secret of caring for our souls."

Dallas Willard, "Personal Soul Care," in *The Great Omission*

What Is a Rule of Life?



The word *rule* comes from the Latin *regula*, a straightedge or measuring rod, something that keeps a line true. Many teachers picture a Rule as a trellis, the frame a young vine leans on as it climbs toward the light. Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches" (John 15:5). A Rule does not make anything grow. It holds the branches up so they stay connected to the Vine and bear fruit.

Christians have always needed that kind of help. In the sixth century St. Benedict wrote a short Rule for monks that is still kept today (more on him on the next page). Later the Reformers, the Puritans, and the early Methodists recovered the same wisdom for ordinary believers. John Wesley gathered people into small classes and urged them to use the "means of grace," which he described as "outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels" of God's grace (Sermon 16, "The Means of Grace"). The young Jonathan Edwards wrote out seventy personal resolutions. In our own time Richard Foster, Dallas Willard, and Adele Calhoun have helped many Protestants rediscover the spiritual disciplines.

A Rule is a response to grace

Here Catholics and Protestants stand on the same ground. Nobody earns God's love by keeping a Rule. "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8–9). The Catechism of the Catholic Church says, "Our justification comes from the grace of God" (CCC 1996). In 1999 Catholics and Lutherans confessed together: "By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works" (*Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, 15). Methodist, Anglican, and Reformed church bodies have since joined that statement.

So a Rule of Life is simply one way a forgiven, beloved child of God says yes to the Holy Spirit in the ordinary hours.

Where we differ

Catholic teaching speaks of grace poured into the soul and of our cooperation with grace growing across a lifetime (CCC 1999, 2010). Reformed teaching stresses that our standing before God rests on Christ's righteousness counted to us, with holiness following as its fruit. Both insist that the first move and the whole power belong to God. You can keep a Rule wholeheartedly from either conviction.

Why a Rule now?

Love needs some form, or it drifts. Jesus kept a rhythm of his own: "He would withdraw to desolate places and pray" (Luke 5:16), and he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath "as was his custom" (Luke 4:16). Proverbs tells us, "Keep your heart with all vigilance" (Proverbs 4:23). Good feelings will not carry us very far. Practices will.

"Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people."

Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*

St. Benedict and His "Little Rule for Beginners"



Benedict of Nursia (about 480 to 547) left the noise of Rome as a young man to seek God. He later founded the monastery of Monte Cassino in Italy and wrote a Rule in seventy-three short chapters. It covers prayer, work, reading, meals, sleep, guests, and the care of the sick and the elderly. It is practical, humane, and full of Scripture. Benedict himself called it "this minimum Rule which we have written for beginners" (RB 73). That word *beginners* is good news for the rest of us.

"Listen, my son, to your master's precepts, and incline the ear of your heart."

The Rule of St. Benedict, Prologue

Benedict wanted his Rule to be firm without being cruel: "We are going to establish a school for the service of the Lord. In founding it we hope to introduce nothing harsh or burdensome" (Prologue). Here are a few threads from his Rule worth weaving into yours.

Prayer at set times. Benedict built the day around the "Work of God," the Psalms prayed together at fixed hours, morning, evening, and several times between. "Let nothing, therefore, be put before the Work of God" (RB 43). This is the root of the Liturgy of the Hours you will meet in Part 8.

Work and holy reading. "Idleness is the enemy of the soul" (RB 48). He gave set hours to manual labor and set hours to sacred reading. You may have heard the motto *ora et labora*, "pray and work." Those exact words come from later Benedictine tradition, but they sum up his balance well.

Moderation. "Let all things be done with moderation, however, for the sake of the faint-hearted" (RB 48). A Rule should fit real people.

Hospitality. "Let all guests who arrive be received like Christ" (RB 53).

Three promises. Benedict's monks promised stability, the reformation of their life, and obedience (RB 58). For the rest of us that might mean staying put with our people, turning toward God again each day, and learning to listen.

"Prefer nothing whatever to Christ."

The Rule of St. Benedict, ch. 72

Quotations from the Rule are from the translation by Leonard J. Doyle (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1948).

Which of Benedict's threads do you most need in this season, and why?

Scripture Foundations



Let the Word set the architecture of your Rule. The Psalms, Proverbs, and the Gospel of John will be the well you keep returning to. Benedict asked his monks to pray all 150 Psalms every week (RB 18). The Reformers set the Psalms to meter and sang them in their homes. Catholics hear a Psalm at every Mass and pray them through the day in the Liturgy of the Hours.

From the Psalms: pray what you cannot yet feel

“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither.” **Psalm 1:1-3**

“Be still, and know that I am God.” **Psalm 46:10**

“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul.” **Psalm 23:1-3**

“Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!” **Psalm 139:23-24**

“O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.” **Psalm 63:1**

“The Psalter is the prayer book of Jesus Christ in the truest sense of the word. He prayed the Psalter and now it has become his prayer for all time.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*

Which Psalm has carried you before? Write a line or two from it here.

Wisdom for the Day, an Invitation to Abide



From Proverbs: wisdom for the day's work

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.” **Proverbs 3:5–6**

“Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.” **Proverbs 4:23**

“The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.” **Proverbs 16:9**

From John: abide, receive, love

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” **John 1:1, 14**

“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” **John 15:5**

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” **John 14:27**

“Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.”

St. Jerome, quoted in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC 133)

“Resolved, to live with all my might, while I do live.”

Jonathan Edwards, *Resolutions*, no. 6

Which of these verses do you want to carry with you this month? Why that one?

Preparing the Heart



Before you write any commitments, tell the truth before God. Taking an honest inventory is a way of praying Psalm 139: "Search me, O God."

A prayer of opening

Lord Jesus, true Vine, I come as I am. I do not need a finished plan, only a willing heart. Teach me to abide. Show me what to prune and what to tend. Give me delight in your Word, and a Rule I can actually keep by your Spirit. Amen.

"Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves."

John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.1.1

1. Where do you most long to experience the nearness of Christ in this season?

2. Which practices already help you stay rooted, even imperfectly?

3. Where do hurry, comparison, or hiding most often steal your peace?

4. What would "fruit that abides" (John 15:16) look like in your home, your work, and your inner life a year from now?

5. What holy longing do you sense the Spirit stirring in you? (Ambition tends to be loud. This is usually quieter.)

A Simple Life Audit



Look at the flow of your days without shame. "The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight" (Proverbs 4:7).

Area of life	How it is going now	Where I sense God inviting me
Prayer & silence		
Scripture		
Worship, sacraments & church		
Body, rest & Sabbath		
Home & closest relationships		
Work, calling & service		
Joy, beauty & recreation		
Confession & accountability		

What one small shift would bless your soul this month?

"We must remember God more often than we draw breath."

St. Gregory of Nazianzus, quoted in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC 2697)

The Lord's Prayer as a Daily Rule



When the disciples asked Jesus how to pray, he gave them this prayer (Matthew 6:9–13; Luke 11:2–4). The early Christians prayed it three times a day (CCC 2767), and both Reformers and saints have treated it as a prayer to say and a pattern to live inside. Pray it slowly. Then pray each line again in your own words on the pages that follow.

The Our Father

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 trespasses,
 as we forgive those who trespass against us;
 and lead us not into temptation,
 but deliver us from evil.
 [For thine is the kingdom, and the power,
 and the glory, for ever and ever.] Amen.

Catholics end the prayer at "deliver us from evil. Amen." At Mass the people add, after the priest's prayer, "For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and for ever." Many Protestants pray the closing doxology as part of the prayer itself, and some say "debts" and "debtors," following Matthew 6:12. Every version is a faithful way to pray it.

"The Lord's Prayer 'is truly the summary of the whole gospel.'"

Tertullian, quoted in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC 2761)

Pray it once, very slowly. Which line stopped you, and why?

*"In a word, the Lord's Prayer is the greatest martyr on earth (as are the name and word of God).
 Everybody tortures and abuses it; few take comfort and joy in its proper use."*

Martin Luther, *A Simple Way to Pray* (1535)

Praying the Petitions



Our Father, who art in heaven

You belong. Like the son in Jesus' story, you are met by a Father who runs to you (Luke 15:20). What would it look like today to come to God as a child who is already loved?

Hallowed be thy name

Where is God's name treated as ordinary in your speech, your thoughts, or your hidden life? How will you honor him today?

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done

Where are you clutching your own little kingdom? What would surrender look like in one concrete decision?

Praying the Petitions



Give us this day our daily bread

Name today's real needs: material, emotional, relational. Ask for enough for this day. Tomorrow's bread can wait for tomorrow.

Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive

What do you need to confess? Whom do you need to release? Unforgiveness is a closed fist, and a closed fist cannot receive.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil

Where is the weak place today? Ask specifically for deliverance and for a wise path around it.

The Daily Examen



The Examen is a short prayer of review at day's end (or at midday). It comes to us from St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556), who taught it in his *Spiritual Exercises* in five simple points: give thanks for the gifts received, ask for grace to know your sins, review the day hour by hour, ask pardon, and resolve to amend with God's help. He closed it with the Our Father (*Spiritual Exercises* 43). Protestants have kept the same searching of the heart through Puritan self-examination, Wesley's small groups, and Dallas Willard's counsel to review each evening how we kept God before our minds. It is Psalm 139 made practical.

1. **Become still.** Sit and breathe. Ask the Holy Spirit to search you gently. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).
2. **Give thanks.** Name specific gifts from the day, the ordinary mercies. Gratitude steadies the heart before you look at wounds or failures (1 Thessalonians 5:18).
3. **Review the day with Jesus.** Walk back through the hours. Where did you sense his presence? Where did you resist, hurry, hide, or harm? Notice your feelings without rushing to fix them.
4. **Confess and receive mercy.** Speak plainly, and receive 1 John 1:9. If amends are needed, note the next step. (Catholics may also bring what surfaces here to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. See Part 8.)
5. **Look toward tomorrow.** Ask for light for the next small obedience. Entrust what you cannot control to God. Then rest.

Tonight's Examen

Gifts I noticed today:

Where I sensed the Lord near, or felt his seeming absence:

What I need to confess or release:

Grace I ask for tomorrow:

"Prayer does not fit us for the greater works; prayer is the greater work."

Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, October 17

Lectio Divina: Praying the Word



Lectio divina ("sacred reading") is a slow, prayerful way of receiving Scripture so that the Word begins to read you. It grew up in Benedict's monasteries. Around 1150 a Carthusian monk named Guigo II described its steps as the rungs of a ladder, and the Catechism sums them up in words from that tradition: "Seek in reading and you will find in meditating; knock in mental prayer and it will be opened to you by contemplation" (CCC 2654). Protestants have nothing to fear here. It is the meditation on Scripture commended in Psalm 1:2 and Joshua 1:8. Choose a short passage. A Psalm, a cluster of proverbs, or a paragraph from John is ideal.

Read (lectio): Read the passage aloud, slowly, twice. Notice a word or phrase that catches your attention.

Reflect (meditatio): Turn the word over. Why this word, on this day? What is the Spirit bringing to light?

Respond (oratio): Speak to God from that place: thanksgiving, confession, petition, surrender.

Rest (contemplatio): Stop talking. Sit with Christ. Let the Word hold you for a while instead of analyzing it further.

Live (a step many modern teachers add): Carry one concrete act of obedience into the next hours.

"Meditation engages thought, imagination, emotion, and desire. This mobilization of faculties is necessary in order to deepen our convictions of faith, prompt the conversion of our heart, and strengthen our will to follow Christ."

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2708

Suggested passages to begin

Psalm 23 • Psalm 27 • Psalm 51 • Psalm 63 • Psalm 121 • Psalm 139

Proverbs 3:1–12 • Proverbs 4:20–27 • Proverbs 16:1–9

John 1:1–18 • John 4:1–26 • John 10:1–18 • John 14:1–27 • John 15:1–17 • John 20:11–18

The passage I will pray this week, and the word that stays with me:

Visio Divina: Praying with Art



Visio divina means "sacred seeing." God speaks through his Word first and finally, and images never replace Scripture. They can slow the hurried eye, though, so the heart notices what the Word has already said. "The heavens declare the glory of God" (Psalm 19:1). The Catechism lists "holy icons" and "the great book of creation" among the helps for meditation (CCC 2705).

1. Become present. Quiet your body and ask the Spirit to teach your eyes.
2. Look. Gaze at the image for a full minute without analyzing.
3. Notice. What draws you? Color, light, a path, a figure, an empty space? What feeling rises?
4. Let Scripture meet the image (a verse is suggested with each picture).
5. Pray. Speak to the Lord from what you have seen and felt.
6. Rest and return. Carry one phrase or image into the day.

Where we differ

Catholic and Orthodox Christians have long prayed with icons and sacred art. Many Reformed Christians are cautious about images in worship out of reverence for the second commandment. Here, art is a help for meditating on Scripture and never an object of worship. If your conscience prefers, use only scenes from creation.

Visio I: The Good Shepherd



Bernhard Plockhorst (1825–1907), *The Good Shepherd*. Public domain.

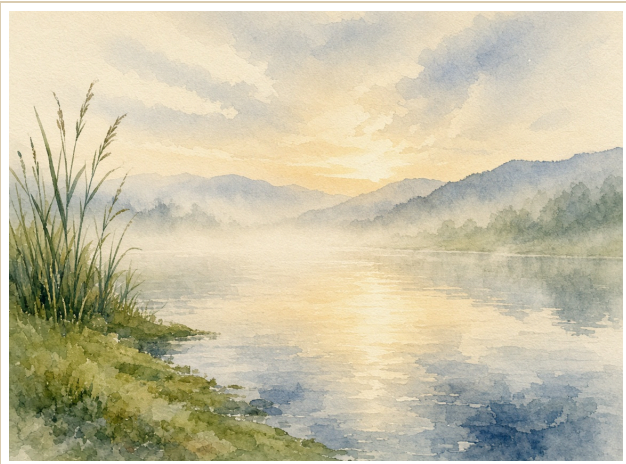
Gaze slowly. Then pray Psalm 23 and John 10:11–15.

What do I notice? Where is the Shepherd inviting me to lie down, or to follow?

Still Waters and the Path



Visio II: Still waters



*"He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul."
(Psalm 23:2-3)*

What in me is restless? What would restoration look like if I trusted God with it?

"Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow, it empties today of its strength."

Corrie ten Boom, *Clippings from My Notebook*

Visio III: The path



"In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths." (Proverbs 3:6)

Where does the path seem unclear? What is the next faithful step I already know?

"My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end."

Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*

The Vine



Visio IV: The vine



"I am the vine; you are the branches." (John 15:5)

Gaze slowly. Then pray John 15:1–11.

Where am I trying to bear fruit apart from the Vine? What would abiding look like before 9 a.m. tomorrow?

"Relying on God has to begin all over again every day as if nothing had yet been done."

C. S. Lewis, letter of September 1949, in *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*

Going further: choose a piece of sacred art, an icon, or a photograph of creation that speaks to you, and pray with it this week. What did you see?

Praying with the Church



You do not have to invent a life of prayer from scratch. The Church has handed down rhythms that carry us when our own words run dry. The Catechism puts it simply: "The Tradition of the Church proposes to the faithful certain rhythms of praying intended to nourish continual prayer. Some are daily, such as morning and evening prayer, grace before and after meals, the Liturgy of the Hours" (CCC 2698).

The Liturgy of the Hours

"Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous rules" (Psalm 119:164). Benedict built his monks' day on that verse (RB 16), and the Church still prays the Psalms at set hours so that, in the Council's words, "the whole course of the day and night is made holy by the praise of God" (CCC 1174). The Hours are not only for priests and religious. The laity "are encouraged to recite the divine office" too (CCC 1175).

Morning Prayer (Lauds): Psalms of praise, a short reading, and the Song of Zechariah (Luke 1:68–79).

Evening Prayer (Vespers): Psalms, a reading, and Mary's Song, the Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55).

Night Prayer (Compline): A brief examination of conscience, a Psalm of trust, and Simeon's Song (Luke 2:29–32).

Start with one Hour, morning or night. Free apps and websites lay out each day's prayers. Many Protestants pray the Daily Office of the *Book of Common Prayer*, which grew from the same monastic roots. The evening collect at the end of this book came into the Prayer Book from an ancient Latin prayer used at Compline.

The seasons of the Christian year

Your Rule can breathe with the calendar. **Advent** is for waiting and longing. **Christmas** feasts on the Word made flesh. **Lent** is forty days of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. **Easter** is fifty days of resurrection joy that end at **Pentecost**. **Ordinary Time** is the long green season of growth. "The cycle of the liturgical year and its great feasts are also basic rhythms of the Christian's life of prayer" (CCC 2698).

Which Hour might I begin to pray? How might my Rule change in the coming season?

The Rosary: A Walk Through the Gospels



Many people are surprised to learn how much Scripture lives inside the Rosary. Its prayers are the Our Father, the Hail Mary (built on Luke 1:28 and 1:42), and the Glory Be. While the lips pray, the heart walks slowly through events in the life of Christ called *mysteries*. The Catechism names the Rosary, alongside *lectio divina*, as a way to "meditate on the mysteries of Christ" (CCC 2708). Like Mary, who "treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Luke 2:19), we ponder Jesus.

"The Rosary, though clearly Marian in character, is at heart a Christocentric prayer."

St. John Paul II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, 1

Joyful

The Annunciation	Luke 1:26–38
The Visitation	Luke 1:39–56
The Nativity	Luke 2:1–20
The Presentation	Luke 2:22–38
Finding Jesus in the Temple	Luke 2:41–52

Sorrowful

The Agony in the Garden	Luke 22:39–46
The Scourging	John 19:1
The Crowning with Thorns	Matthew 27:27–31
The Carrying of the Cross	John 19:16–17
The Crucifixion	John 19:18–30

Luminous

The Baptism of Jesus	Matthew 3:13–17
The Wedding at Cana	John 2:1–11
The Proclamation of the Kingdom	Mark 1:14–15
The Transfiguration	Luke 9:28–36
The Institution of the Eucharist	Luke 22:14–20

Glorious

The Resurrection	John 20:1–18
The Ascension	Acts 1:6–11
The Descent of the Holy Spirit	Acts 2:1–4
The Assumption of Mary	Church tradition*
The Coronation of Mary	Church tradition*

*The last two Glorious mysteries come from the Church's tradition rather than from a Gospel scene. Catholics often pray them with Revelation 12:1.

A traditional pattern: Joyful on Monday and Saturday, Sorrowful on Tuesday and Friday, Glorious on Wednesday and Sunday, Luminous on Thursday (*Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, 38).

Where we differ

Catholics ask Mary to pray for us, much as we ask a friend to pray, within the communion of saints (CCC 2679). Many Protestants are uneasy addressing prayer to anyone but God, remembering that "there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). A Protestant friend can still walk through these Gospel scenes, praying the Lord's Prayer and reading each passage slowly.

Which mystery of Christ's life do I most need to sit with right now?

The Sacraments as Means of Grace



Both traditions believe that Christ feeds and heals his people through ordinary, visible things he gave the Church. The Catechism calls the sacraments "efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us" (CCC 1131). The Westminster Shorter Catechism names "the Word, sacraments, and prayer" as the "outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption" (Q. 88).

The Eucharist, the Lord's Supper

"Take, eat; this is my body" (Matthew 26:26). Catholics call the Eucharist "the source and summit of the Christian life" (CCC 1324). Wesley urged his people to receive the Lord's Supper as often as they could, and Reformed churches gather at the Table as a real feeding on Christ by faith. "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). Build the Lord's Day and the Table into your Rule as anchors.

Confession and reconciliation

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). "Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed" (James 5:16). Catholics bring their sins to a priest in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, whose "whole power" lies "in restoring us to God's grace and joining us with him in an intimate friendship" (CCC 1468). Protestants confess to God directly and often to a pastor or trusted friend. Either way, secrecy shrinks the soul, and a gracious hearing lets it breathe again.

Where we differ

Catholics believe Christ is truly, substantially present in the Eucharist, and the Church ordinarily asks that only Catholics receive Communion at Mass, out of honesty about our real divisions. Protestant churches understand Christ's presence at the Table in several ways and usually invite all baptized believers. Catholics hold that Christ gave the Church's ministers authority to absolve sins (John 20:23), while most Protestants see confession to one another as a help that does not require a priest. We can grieve these divisions together and pray for the unity Jesus asked for (John 17:21).

How will Word, Table, and confession find a place in my Rule?

Disciplines to Explore



Spiritual disciplines are not ladders we climb to reach God. They are means of grace, places where we show up so that Christ can form us. Explore these over months. Mark two or three for this season.

Silence & solitude. Jesus often withdrew to pray (Luke 5:16). Begin with ten quiet minutes, no phone, a chair by a window. St. Teresa of Ávila described this kind of prayer as "nothing else than a close sharing between friends" (CCC 2709).

Practicing the presence of God. Brother Lawrence, a Carmelite cook, said: "The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer; and in the noise and clutter of my kitchen ... I possess GOD in as great tranquillity as if I were upon my knees at the Blessed Sacrament" (*The Practice of the Presence of God*, Fourth Conversation).

Sabbath & the Lord's Day. One day, or a protected part of one, to stop producing and remember that you are not God (Genesis 2:2–3; Exodus 20:8–11). "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). Worship, rest, a simple meal, and unhurried time with people you love.

Fasting. Set aside food or another comfort for a set time to hunger for God (Matthew 6:16–18). Catholics keep Fridays and Lent as days of penance. Start modestly, and if you have a medical condition, ask your doctor first. Fasting is never punishment.

Journaling as prayer. The Psalms are written prayers. Your notebook can hold lament, thanks, and memory. Date the pages; you will want the record on harder days.

Breath prayer. A short phrase from Scripture on the inhale and exhale: "Abide in me" / "I am the vine." "The LORD is my shepherd" / "I shall not want." The ancient Jesus Prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God" / "have mercy on me, a sinner." Use it in traffic, at the sink, in the night.

Worship & the Table. Do not neglect meeting together (Hebrews 10:24–25). Hearing the Word and receiving the Eucharist or the Lord's Supper are how Christ feeds his body.

Confession to a trusted friend, pastor, or priest. "Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed" (James 5:16).

Hidden service. Wash feet where no one is watching (John 13:14–15). A note, a meal, an unnoticed kindness. Benedict asked that guests be "received like Christ" (RB 53).

Guarding the heart & the mouth. Proverbs is relentlessly practical. Watch what you take in, what you say, the comparisons you make, and the scrolling that forms you without your consent.

Intercession. Keep a simple list and pray people's names. George Müller ran orphanages in Bristol for decades while making their needs known to God in prayer.

"God does nothing but in answer to prayer."

John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*

Two or three disciplines I will actually try in the next thirty days:

Domains of Your Rule



A Rule touches the whole of life. For each area, write one or two practices that are specific enough to do and gentle enough to keep. St. Francis de Sales reminds us that each person's devotion should fit their own calling: "the devotion which is true hinders nothing, but on the contrary it perfects everything" (*Introduction to the Devout Life*, Part I, ch. 3).

1. Prayer & communion with Christ

A morning offering. The Lord's Prayer prayed slowly. A Psalm, or an Hour of the Divine Office. The evening Examen. Breath prayer in the in-between. The Benedictine monk Dom John Chapman gave wise counsel: "Pray as you can, and do not try to pray as you can't."

My prayer commitments:

2. Scripture: Psalms, Proverbs, John

A plan you can sustain: one Psalm a day; the chapter of Proverbs that matches the day of the month; a slow walk through John, one paragraph at a time, lectio style. Depth matters more than mileage.

My Scripture commitments:

3. Church, sacraments & fellowship

Lord's Day worship. The Eucharist or the Lord's Supper as your church celebrates it, and confession as your tradition offers it. A small group or one faithful friend. You were not saved into isolation.

My church & fellowship commitments:

Domains of Your Rule



4. Body, rest & Sabbath

Present your body "as a living sacrifice" (Romans 12:1). Sleep, movement, meals, and a protected day of rest are spiritual matters. A worn-out body rarely prays well.

My body & Sabbath commitments:

5. Home & relationships

The fear of the Lord shows up in tone of voice, unhurried presence, truth-telling, and forgiveness. Who needs your kindness first?

My relationship commitments:

6. Work, calling & hidden service

Paid work, caregiving, study, or art: offer the day's labor to God. "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men" (Colossians 3:23). Add one secret kindness a week.

My work & service commitments:

7. Beauty, joy & play

The God of Psalm 104 made cedars and "wine to gladden the heart of man" (Psalm 104:15). Beauty that turns you back toward praise is a gift. Guard your joy from grim religion and from numbing escape alike.

My joy & beauty commitments:

Write Your Rule



Step 1: A short vision sentence

Example: "I am a beloved child of the Father, abiding in Christ the Vine, learning to pray the Psalms, walk in wisdom, and love my people without hurry."

My vision, my identity in Christ:

Step 2: Commitments at a glance

Area	Practices I can keep
Prayer & Examen	
Scripture	
Worship, sacraments & fellowship	
Body & Sabbath	
Home & relationships	
Work & service	
Joy & beauty	

Step 3: A Simple Weekly Rhythm



Sketch an ordinary week. Use a word or two in each box. Leave some boxes empty on purpose.

	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
Morning prayer & the Word							
Midday pause							
Evening Examen or Night Prayer							
The Lord's Day & the Table							
Rest & Sabbath							
Service & people							

Step 4: Seasons and anchors

Monthly anchors (for example: a day of quiet, confession, a conversation with my spiritual director):

How my Rule will change in Advent and Lent:

What must stay flexible? What, by grace, will I protect?

A Sample Rule for an Ordinary, Full Season



Vision: I am a child of the Father, a branch in the Vine, learning to live unhurried and true.

Daily

- On waking: be still for one minute; pray the Lord's Prayer slowly; offer the day to God.
- Scripture: one Psalm (or a portion), plus a few verses of John or the day's chapter of Proverbs. Write one sentence of response.
- Midday: breath prayer. "Abide in me" / "Apart from you I can do nothing."
- Evening: a five to ten minute Examen, or Night Prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours. Release the day and receive mercy.
- Body: a reasonable sleep window, and a short walk when possible.

Weekly

- The Lord's Day: worship with my church, at Mass or with my congregation, and receive the Eucharist or the Lord's Supper.
- One unhurried conversation with a friend in Christ or with my household.
- A portion of Sabbath rest, with less proving and more receiving.
- One hidden act of service.
- Sunday evening: glance at this Rule and adjust it with kindness.

Monthly & seasonally

- Confession: the Sacrament of Reconciliation, or an honest conversation with a pastor or trusted friend.
- A meeting with a spiritual director or spiritual friend.
- Let Advent and Lent shape a small change: an added Hour of prayer, a fast, a gift to the poor.

When I fail: I do not make a new law. I begin again. "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22–23).

What might I borrow from this sample? What would I change?

"And never to despair of God's mercy."

The Rule of St. Benedict, ch. 4, the last of the "tools of good works"

Living the Rule: Mercy and Review



A Rule that produces shame has turned into a false gospel. Christ has already kept the law you could not keep, and his yoke is easy (Matthew 11:28–30). Your Rule is a way of staying near him. When you miss a practice, return. Returning is the practice.

Monthly review

- Which practices gave life? Which felt like a heavy yoke?
- Where did I notice growth in peace, honesty, or love?
- What should be simplified, dropped, or strengthened?
- How is the Word actually shaping the way I talk to myself?
- Who can walk with me in this for the next season?

Date of review: _____ Insights and adjustments:

Common pitfalls

- Ambition without capacity. Start smaller.
- Comparing your Rule to someone else's highlight reel.
- Using disciplines to avoid people or grief.
- Neglecting the body while stacking up spiritual exercises.
- Never revising. Living things grow and need pruning (John 15:2).

“So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.”

Psalm 90:12

Prayers to Keep



A morning offering

Father, I am yours. Lord Jesus, I abide in you. Holy Spirit, keep my heart. Let your name be hallowed in my thoughts, words, and work this day. Give me today's bread, today's mercy, and today's courage. Amen.

The Suscipe of St. Ignatius

Take, O Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and all my will, whatsoever I have and possess. Thou hast given all these things to me; to Thee, O Lord, I restore them: all are Thine, dispose of them all according to Thy will. Give me Thy love and Thy grace, for this is enough for me.

St. Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises* 234, traditional translation

An evening collect

Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord; and by thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night; for the love of thy only Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Book of Common Prayer (1662), Evening Prayer, from an ancient Latin prayer of the Western Church

A prayer of my own:

"Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless, until it repose in Thee."

St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Book I, trans. E. B. Pusey

"What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."

A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*

A Great Cloud of Witnesses



"We are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1). Keep a few of these friends on the shelf, starting, always, with the Psalms, Proverbs, and the Gospel of John.

From the Catholic tradition

- ✠ St. Augustine, *Confessions*
- ✠ St. Benedict, *The Rule of St. Benedict*
- ✠ St. Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*
- ✠ St. Teresa of Ávila, *The Interior Castle*
- ✠ St. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*
- ✠ Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*
- ✠ St. Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*
- ✠ Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*
- ✠ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Part Four, "Christian Prayer"

From the Protestant tradition

- ✠ Martin Luther, *A Simple Way to Pray*
- ✠ John Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, ch. 20, "Of Prayer"
- ✠ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* and *Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible*
- ✠ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*
- ✠ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* and *Hearing God*
- ✠ Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*
- ✠ Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*
- ✠ Corrie ten Boom, *The Hiding Place*
- ✠ Elisabeth Elliot, *Keep a Quiet Heart*
- ✠ C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm* and the Narnia books (for joy)

"For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy."

St. Thérèse of Lisieux, quoted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC 2558)

Where we differ

Catholics honor the saints and ask for their prayers, trusting that those who have gone before us still love us in Christ (CCC 2683). Most Protestants honor the same witnesses as examples and teachers without asking their prayers. Either way, we are not alone. The whole Church, in heaven and on earth, belongs to the one Lord.

And one more companion: a trusted pastor, priest, spiritual director, or friend who will ask you, from time to time, how it is with your soul.

An Invitation to Spiritual Direction



A Rule of Life is easier to keep with a companion. Spiritual direction is an old Christian practice of meeting regularly with someone who will listen with you for the movements of God in your life. A director does not hand you answers. We pray together and notice together, and over time you learn to recognize the Shepherd's voice. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27).

I offer spiritual direction to Catholics, Protestants, and anyone who is seeking God. If something in these pages stirred you, or you would simply like help shaping and living your Rule, I would be glad to hear from you.

Heart, Mind & Soul Care

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"Such a friendship should be strong and sweet; altogether holy, sacred, divine and spiritual."

St. Francis de Sales, on the spiritual guide, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, Part I, ch. 4

Abide. Begin again. The Vine is faithful.

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