

A Brief Explanation of the New Life Rule of Life

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Introduction

At New Life we are exploring an ancient practice used by communities of Christians for almost 2000 years called a *Rule of Life*. The meaning of *rule* comes from the Greek word for “trellis.” A trellis is a tool designed to enable a grapevine to get off the ground and grow upward, becoming more fruitful and productive. In the same way, a *Rule of Life* can be the trellis that helps us abide in Christ and become more fruitful spiritually.

A *Rule of Life*, very simply, is an intentional, conscious plan to keep God at the center of everything we do. It provides guidelines to help us intentionally pay attention and remember God in everything we do.

The purpose of this *Rule* is to unite us as a local church, keeping us faithful to our *charism*, that is, our unique grace and calling. This *Rule* serves as an anchor for us, a kind of banister to support us as we move forward in our journey with and for God. It is how we do life together, intended to express the longings of our heart for God.

It is meant to be a framework for freedom, providing healthy boundaries while leaving plenty of room for flexibility and individuality. Remember, a good *rule* works best when it challenges us. A *Rule* cannot be so easy that we are not stretched. At the same time, it cannot be so demanding that we are overwhelmed and discouraged.

In many ways, this text is meant to be read slowly and reflectively as a devotional and spiritual formation guide that expresses the kind of people we seek to be for Christ in New York City in the 21st century.

New Life Fellowship Rule of Life

- Be a lover of God, seeking to live in the love of Christ above all else.
Deut. 6:4-9; Psalm 27:1-4; Matthew 22:36-38.
Jesus identified this as the greatest commandment and the summary of all Scripture. We want to be people who know God in our experience (heart and soul) as well as with our minds.
- Value my own dignity as a human being made in God's image through self-respect and self-care.
Genesis 1:27; Luke 15:17-24, Galatians 4:1-7.
An accurate, genuine grasp of Scripture and the gospel delivers us from self-hate into self-respect and self-care, out of which we can love others well. We are image-bearers of God. This is the greatest compliment that could be given regarding our value and worth. Then, in the gospel, we are no longer slaves or orphans, but adopted sons and daughters. Jesus took our sin record, taking our death on the cross. At the same time, we are legally declared righteous in Christ and treated *as if* our record were perfect before God.
- Love my neighbor as I love myself, giving first priority to my spouse and children as my first neighbors, OR embracing my singleness while bonding with others and bearing fruit for God.
Genesis 2:24-5; Matthew 19:1-12; Mark 12:31; 1 Cor. 7:25-38.
We recognize both marriage and singleness as valid vocations/callings. For those who are married, bonding with and serving our spouse comes before all else but Christ. For those who are single, voluntarily or involuntarily, we affirm our call to be the bride of Christ, bond in healthy ways to others, and serve as mothers and fathers who bear fruit for Christ.
- Savor the sacred in all I do -- at work, rest or play.
Psalm 104; Eph. 6:5-8; 1 Tim. 4:3-4.
All of life is a gift from God. The word *savor* carries the notion of pausing to taste the deliciousness of our work, rest and play. It is the God-like celebration of delighting over his creation, exclaiming that it is "very good" (Gen.1:31).
- Befriend silence.
1 Kings 19:11-13; Ps. 37:7; Ps. 62:1-2.
Our tendency is to be terrified or to avoid silence, not befriend it. Yet silence is one of God's great gifts to us in our noisy culture. What makes our silence unique is its quality of being "before the Lord."
- Allow Holy Scripture to shape and form Christ in me.
Ps. 19:7-11; Matthew 4:4; 2 Tim. 3:16-7.
We love the Word of God, affirming that maturing in Christ requires a life where we meditate, enjoy, study, and digest Scripture. Our focus is that Christ be formed in us, not simply the accumulation of more information about Him.

- Walk in community while respecting each person's uniqueness.
Prov. 27:17; 1 Cor. 12:17-31; Hebrews 10:24-5.
We hold a healthy tension at NLF. On one hand, we place a high value on community, in walking out our faith together as a local church family. The Scriptures make it clear that this is indispensable and part of our calling as Christ-followers. At the same time, we also affirm the biblical emphasis on each person's individuality, unique gifting, and calling in one's journey with Christ.
- Apply emotionally healthy practices in order to love well.
Prov. 21:23; Matthew 22:36-40; 1 Cor. 13:1-3.
Jesus made it clear that the second greatest commandment is to love others. Part of our discipleship here at NLF includes life in the family of Jesus with new skills and ways of relating - speaking, listening, clarifying assumptions and expectations, clean fighting, etc. These skills are called "practices" because they are easy to learn but a challenge to implement consistently, especially under stress.
- Listen more than I speak.
Proverbs 18:27-28; James 1:19, 26; James 3:1-12.
Scripture is very clear that we are to be slow to speak and quick to listen, and that maturity is closely related to our ability to control our speech. James goes so far as to say that if we are able to manage our tongues, we will be able to keep all our unhealthy passions in check. We can learn something from Agatho, one of the Desert Fathers in Egypt in the 4th century, who for three years kept a stone in his mouth in order to teach himself silence!
- Live in truth, asking the hard questions.
Ps. 145:18; John 8:31-32, 44; Ephesians 4:14-16, 25.
The emphasis here is that we ask ourselves the hard questions about truth first, not depending on others to do that for us. The commitment to live in truth, i.e. reality, is painful and difficult. The questions are *hard*. But we affirm that the kingdom of God can only come through truth in love, not through pretense, spins, or exaggeration.
- To integrate contemplative practices and rhythms (e.g. Daily Office, Sabbath-keeping) to slow down our lives.
Deut. 5:12-15; Psalm 119:164; Luke 5:15-16.
The great problem in Western culture today is our crammed schedules, our endless to-do lists, and our busyness. Powerful, often demonic forces, keep us distracted and adrift spiritually. Yet, we are called to order our entire lives in such a way that the love of Christ comes before all else. We recognize our humanity and our limits, choosing to integrate contemplative practices, like Daily Offices, and Sabbath-keeping, in order to slow down to be with God, ourselves, and others.
- Ruthlessly eliminate hurry.
Ps. 46:1-3,10; Prov. 19:2; 22:3; Luke 10:38-42.

These famous words by Dallas Willard capture one of the great challenges before us as we seek to live authentic spiritual lives in our 24/7, multi-tasking worlds. The word *ruthlessly* was chosen intentionally because that is what it takes to begin eliminating hurry from our lives.

- Remember the poor and marginalized.

Exodus 2:23-25; Matthew 25:31-46; James 1:27.

This is about a heart that carries the poor and marginalized, that *remembers* them like God. We are referring to a passion, not so much about a specific behavior or action. God *remembered* the Israelites in their groaning and suffering while in Egypt. His heart is with the poor, the orphans and the widows in a unique way since they cannot speak for or defend themselves.

- Bridge racial, cultural, economic and gender barriers for Christ.

Deut. 10:19; Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:11-22.

At New Life we recognize the power of the blood of Jesus in dissolving the divisions of race, culture, social class and gender in order to create a new family under His Lordship. We no longer regard anyone from a worldly point of view (2 Cor. 5:16), but rather see people through the gospel where there is no longer anyone who is inferior or superior.

- Share my gifts, talents, and resources, in and beyond our community.

Deut. 15:7-11; Matthew 25:14-30; Ephesians 4:7-13.

An encounter with Jesus transforms our view of possessions, goals, and time. In a culture absorbed with hoarding and fear, we give freely of our time, energy, and resources to others, trusting God to take care of our needs as He sees fit.

- Remember God's history of faithfulness with each new challenge.

Exodus 14:10-14; 1 Samuel 17:34-37; Ps. 106:6-14; 2 Tim. 2:13.

We each face "Goliaths" and "Red Seas" during our lives as we journey with Christ. God invites us to remember both His powerful acts through history and the specific ways He has delivered us from the "lion and the bear" (as done by David). Forgetting leads to unbelief while remembering fills us with courage to follow Him wherever He leads.