

# Rule of Life - discipline six in our spiritual formation series

## PART 2: THE GIFT OF LIMITS



### MISSIONAL COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

#### Read this Overview Together

Our western culture has bought into the myth of unlimited freedom. Our world says the greatest good is pursuing our authentic self and the removal of anything that would limit us from this pursuit. The greatest evil is limiting others from being whoever they want to be.

Yet, this myth has been exposed. It promised we would find ourselves. It promised life and joy and peace when we were finally freed from the limiting rules others impose on us. Instead, we feel more lost than ever; more alone, anxious, and afraid. Ultimately, we still feel enslaved. We've removed one master only to be enslaved by another. And here's the worst part: our new master can't satisfy us and doesn't love us.

The reality is, we were created to live within limits. It's part of being human. We're not God. We were created to need...sleep, food, purpose, relationship, and ultimately, God. When we throw off these "limits," we don't "find ourselves", but ultimately will lose ourselves.

To some, the idea of imposing some kind of "rule of life" on ourselves sounds limiting and even oppressive. Why would we limit ourselves?

First, as we've already seen, we humans are limited. We have limited time, limited energy, limited emotional and relational bandwidth, limited attention...we're finite people. The problem is, when we think we can do it all, whatever we want, it's truly exhausting. And unlimited options actually overwhelm us. It's why we spend two hours trying to decide what to watch between the thousands of choices on Netflix, Disney+, Paramount+, etc...you get the point. We're paralyzed by unlimited options!

Justin Early, in his helpful book *The Common Rule*, says it well:

"Let me tell you what is overwhelming: a default, normal, unexamined American life. That is completely overwhelming. It's so much to take on, and we all do it simply by not doing anything else instead. [A Rule of Life] is a different way to live. It's meant to distill your habits, so you do more meaningful things by doing fewer things."<sup>1</sup>

Limiting ourselves and our lives through a Rule of Life acknowledges reality. It acknowledges the real limits we all experience, that we were designed by God to experience, and then helps us decide how to live within those limits by doing what we actually want

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1 Justin Early, *The Common Rule*, pg. 24

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MC Discussion Continued...

to be doing. Like Early says, "it's a different way to live." Instead of just trying to do more, we accept our limits as a gift from God. We then ask how God wants us to spend our days so that we can become the people He wants us to become.

The second reason we would limit ourselves is because limits actually give true freedom. The modern myth says limits restrict freedom. Yet, in reality, we experience greater freedom when we live within God's limits.

James Clear, in his book *Atomic Habits*, captures this idea well: "Habits do not restrict freedom. They create it. In fact, the people who don't have their habits handled are often the ones with the least amount of freedom."

Right now, Olympians across the world are preparing for the summer games. They are carefully regulating what they eat, how much they sleep, how they train, how they recover...they are living within some of the strictest limits. Yet, no one would ever look at an Ethiopian marathoner racing towards the finish line or an American swimmer taking her last lap in the pool and think they were "limited." No one would think they were constrained. As they perform incredible feats of athleticism, they are a picture of real freedom! Limits and rules don't inhibit freedom, they help us pursue the goal for which we were made. And this gives actual freedom!

This is exactly what a Rule of Life helps provide. It doesn't bind us. It helps free us to become the people God created us to be and live the joy-filled lives He made us to live. As Daryl Dash writes, "A Rule of Life is a set of rhythms and relationships designed to enable you to live with more freedom to love God and others well."<sup>1</sup>

For many of us, the word "rule" is a pill that's hard to swallow. Even if you're a natural rule-follower, the word "rule" may still bring to mind grace-less discipline, performance culture, and even legalistic church life. Yet, a "Rule of Life" actually comes from the Latin word "regula," which was also used to describe a trellis supporting a healthy vine. A trellis doesn't impede the vines growth, but instead helps support healthy growth by keeping it off the ground and able to receive enough oxygen and sunlight. In the same way, a Rule of Life isn't meant to be a legalistic set of rules that we have to keep to prove something to God. Quite the opposite! It is meant to be a guide and a support structure to help us stay attached to the vine and to experience healthy growth and produce fruit in every area of our life.

Jesus called His disciples to follow His way, which by implication was limiting to their life. But He also says that He came to give life abundantly (John 10:10). Later, Jesus calls His

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1 Daryl Dash, *How to Grow*

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*MC Discussion Continued...*

disciples to “abide in Me”, which implies limits. Yet these limits give life. You might say a branch that cannot detach itself from the main vine was limited. But what would happen to it if it did become “free” from the vine? It would wither and die! Attachment to the vine limits us, but brings life! Jesus then tells them, “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.” (John 15:11)

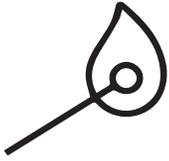
So, create your own Rule of Life knowing that it will actually help provide true freedom. Like a trellis supporting a healthy grapevine, a Rule of Life will help support life-giving connection with Jesus, the Vine. Accepting your limits, living with them, and being intentional with how you want to spend your days will not constrain you, but rather free you to become the person God created you to be.

## **Questions for Missional Community Discussion**

1. Discuss Justin Earley’s quote: “Let me tell you what is overwhelming: a default, normal, unexamined American life. That is completely overwhelming.” Does that resonate with you? Why or why not?
2. Where do you see the myth of “unlimited freedom” alive in Northwest culture? What about in our church or in your own life?
3. Where have you experienced limits that were actually freeing?
4. Reflect on the way Jesus’ way “limits” His disciples. Do you find these limits oppressive or freeing? Why?
5. Do you find yourself resisting the idea of creating a “Rule of Life” you commit to living within? Why do you think you feel resistant to this? If you’re willing, share some of your story with your group that may be connected to this. For those listening, be curious and explore alongside them.
6. Take some time to review the next individual practice, which will help you take the first, and most important, step to create your own Rule of Life.

*Individual Practice on next page...*

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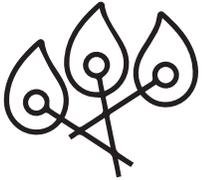


## INDIVIDUAL PRACTICE: IDENTITY & VISION

This week, we will start writing our own Rule of Life. Start by writing your “identity” and “vision” statements for who you are and who you want to become. As we saw in part 1, we must first think about who we are and who we want to become before we think about how we live. We must start with the end before thinking about the means.

1. Find a quiet time where you can spend about 20-30 minutes working on this.
2. As we did last week, start this time with God. Don't go into this time alone, but with God. Quiet your heart and mind and ask God to help you see your identity clearly.
3. Slowly read through the following list of identity statements. You can also find an even more robust list of “In Christ” identity statements [here](#). As you read through these, is your heart and mind drawn to any of them? Spend time meditating on this one. Is this who you are in Christ? Is this who you want to become?  
*In Christ, I am not condemned, but loved (Romans 8:1, 35-39)*  
*In Christ, I am pure and holy (1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Peter 2:9)*  
*In Christ, I am a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17)*  
*In Christ, I am a beloved son or daughter in whom the Father is well-pleased (Matt. 3:17; Gal. 3:26)*  
*In Christ, I am blessed with every spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3)*  
*In Christ, I am chosen and set apart by God in love (Eph. 1:4)*  
*In Christ, I am God's dwelling place (Eph. 2:22)*  
*In Christ, I will live forever and reign with Him (Eph. 2:6)*
4. In light of this, go to your Rule of Life Worksheet and fill out the “Identity” statement at the top of the Rule. Who are you in Christ? Who are you becoming through the Spirit's formative work in your life? *Example: My mind is drawn to my identity, in Christ, as an adopted son in whom the Father is well-pleased. Since I was a child, I've longed for affirmation from a father. So, this statement resonates with me on a deep level. All of the statements are true of me, but for this season, I am going to focus on this identity in my Rule of Life.*
5. Last, for each applicable life category, write out a short statement expressing Jesus' vision for who you are to become in that area of life (Column 2). See the Sample Rule of Life for examples.
6. Close your time committing this to God and asking His Spirit to form you into this person.

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## **DNA GROUP OR PERSONAL REFLECTION**

After you have tried the individual practice, find time to meet with your DNA group and reflect together on your experience. Let the conversation go wherever God leads; here are some questions that might be helpful.

1. Did you take time to do the exercise and start working on your Rule of Life? If not, why? Be patient and curious with each other.
2. Are you feeling any resistance to the idea of creating a Rule of Life? If so, why do you think that is? Do you feel the need for one? Do you chafe against the idea of a "rule" for your life?
3. Which of the "In Christ" identity statements resonated most with you? Why do you think that is? Which one of the identity statements feels untrue of you? (You may know it's true because God says it, yet still experience a disconnect with how you actually perceive yourself in Christ.) Why do you think you feel a disconnect with that particular statement?
4. Share your "Rule of Life" identity statements with each other. Share why you wrote what you wrote.
5. Share the "Jesus' Vision for Who You Become" statements you wrote for each life category.
6. Thank God for who you are in Christ! Pray for His Spirit's help to form you into the people you want to become.