

15. Developing a Rich Spiritual Regula (Rule of Life)

Many of us try to shove spiritual transformation into the nooks and crannies of a life that is already unmanageable, rather than being willing to arrange our life for what our heart most wants. We think that somehow we will fall into transformation by accident.

Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms*

What is a Regula?

A *Regula* is an organized set of practices we collect or create and use to develop some part of our life on a regular basis. It is also called a *Rule of Life*. Rule comes from the Latin word, "*regula*", which means pattern or model.

St. Benedict was the first to develop a *Rule of Life* to help monks living in community to order their days simply around three key elements of their life in God: prayer, scripture and work.

St. Benedict's Rule, like any rule of life, is a pattern of attitudes, behaviors and practices that are regular, routine and intended to produce a certain quality of life and character.

A Rule of Life asks two questions:

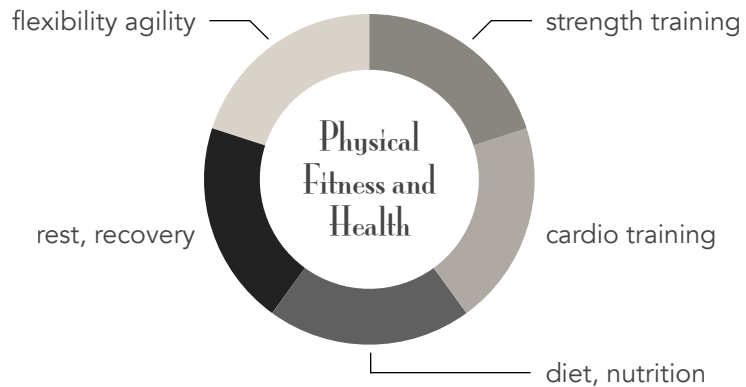
1. Who do I want to be?
2. How do I want to live?

In other words, how do I want to live in order to be who I want to be, or whom God created me to be?

Establishing a good *regula* helps us be attentive and intentional about our aims and ideals. Most of us have regulas without realizing it. We have certain patterns and ways of going about our morning, day and

evenings. To be specific, let's consider the example of physical health and exercise.

In order to be a high performing athlete or even a healthy and fit person, you must have a strong *regula*. You would blend and balance strength-building exercises with cardio training, those developing specific skills or areas of the body, aiding flexibility, agility and so on. You plan rest periods and consider your diet (what foods not to eat and to eat, and how much). You consider what types of exercise to do on what days and times, usually in weekly patterns. You realize if you skip one or two elements or begin to slack off, your condition will deteriorate. Ideally, a good physical health *regula* produces the kind of body and life you desire. This is a good analogy for a spiritual *regula*, a *Rule of Life*.



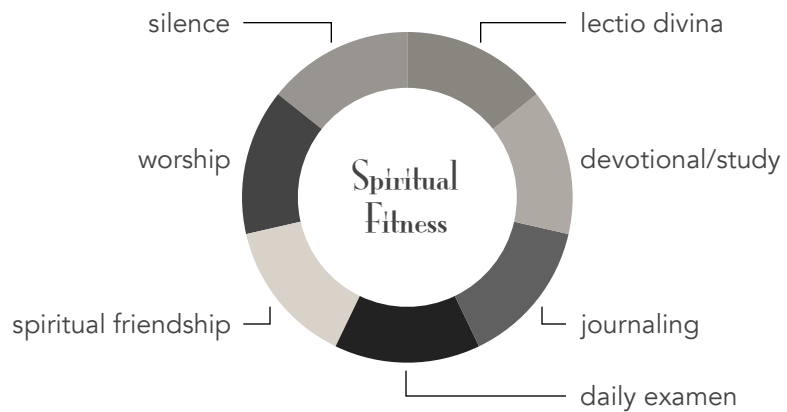
A spiritual *regula* is composed of the practices, approaches, spiritual disciplines and perspectives that are meaningful and useful for developing our spiritual life. It is the way we practice what we believe. It is a disciplined way of living out our truest desires. It is personal and communal. And, the desired end is that our *regula* leads us to "being awake" to God and His steady work of transforming us more and more into the image of Christ our Lord.

When we think about our week and the days within a week, where will we slow down and give attention to our desires, to God's Word, to prayer, to enjoying time in our natural pathways to draw near to God?

A good spiritual *regula* is not meant to be confining or legalistic in any way. It is simply a prayerful intent to make space for the things we feel will best nurture our walk with Christ at the time. The old adage

applies here: “You will hit close to where you aim.” If you aim at nothing, you will reach nowhere close to your best desire.

As I gave serious thought to arranging my life for what my heart most wanted, I found it very helpful to shape a pattern. Here is a diagram of my spiritual *regula* with some elements for each day and some for twice a week (or more). The bottom line for me is to make time and space for these spiritual disciplines so that I have a spiritual *regula* suited to who I am and who I want to become, as best as I can discern.



Any time you make a major change in your environment like a job change, a geographical move, or even moving into a different season spiritually, you will want to revisit your spiritual *regula* and discern what spiritual disciplines and practices will be most helpful. In other words, review and optimize your spiritual *regula*.



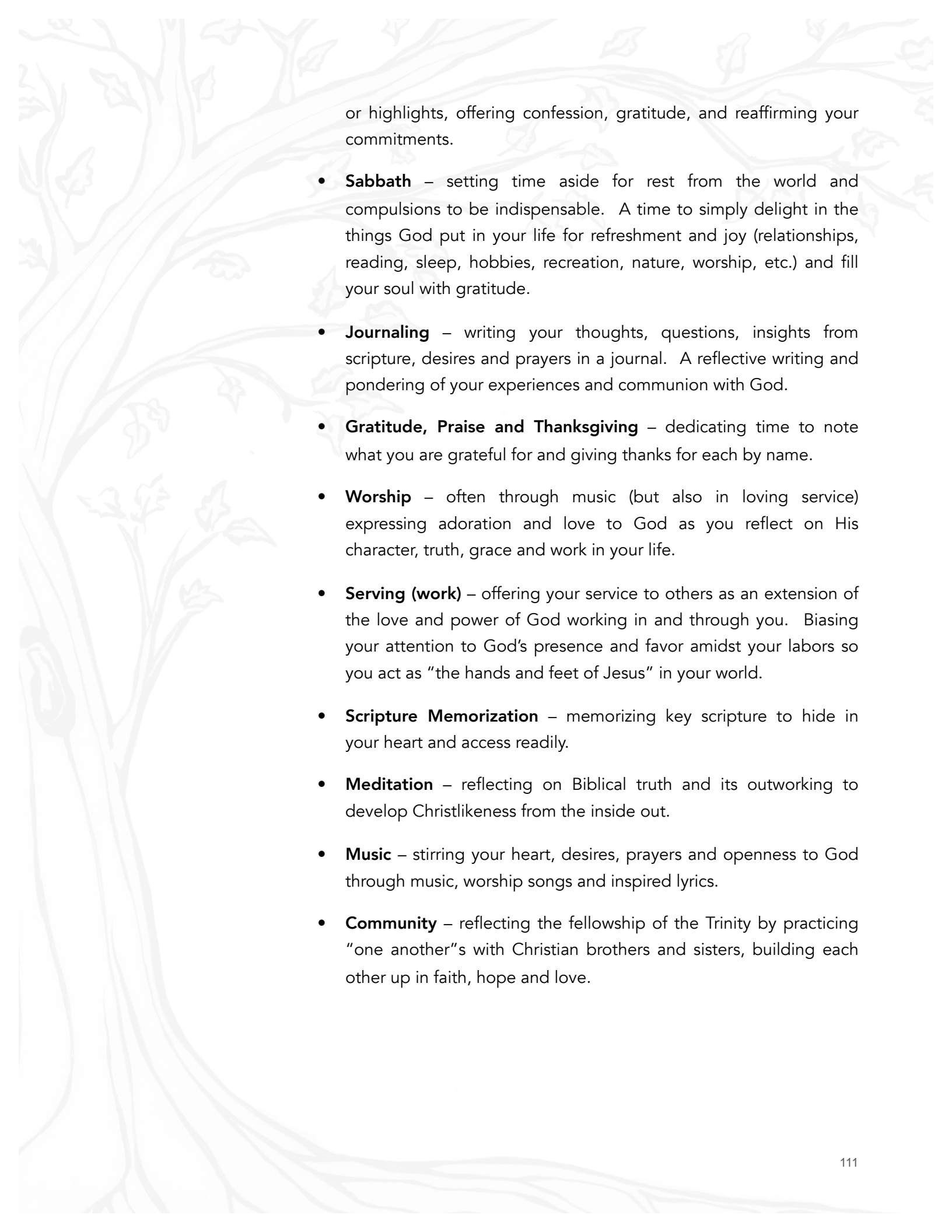
Your Spiritual Regula (Rule of Life)

The following process may help you develop or update your spiritual *regula* (Rule of Life). Take an hour or more to consider how you want to be with God.

Step 1 – Spiritual Disciplines

Reflect on your experiences with spiritual disciplines you have explored and note those that worked well for you and those to which you sense God drawing you. Remember the goal is opening yourself up to God, enjoying and hearing from Him. Which spiritual disciplines seem to facilitate this? Which seem to hinder the process? Highlight ones from the list below or add others not listed but life-giving for you.

- **Solitude and Silence** – abiding in a quiet, peaceful setting before God without distractions (people, music, computer, phone, television, internet, etc.) Start with 5 minutes a day and increase it as the discipline bears fruit. Occasionally extend day-long or even over several days.
- **Bible Study** – allowing scripture to reveal who God is, who you are, His purposes, themes and truths vital to your current life. Study the Gospels to be an apprentice of Jesus, observing and adopting His ways of being *in* the world without being *of* it.
- **Lectio Divina** – reading for relationship and formation; prayerfully reading scripture asking the Holy Spirit to highlight a word or phrase for extra attention, contemplation and application. Seek not only the voice and thoughts of God but His face and heart towards you, penetrating the depth of your whole being (mind, body, spirit and soul) so the Living Word authors your life.
- **Prayer** – dialog with God in various forms (praise, thanksgiving, communion, supplication, lament, petition, intercession) that deepens intimacy but also empowers engagement with His world.
- **Prayer of Examen** – A process of walking back through your day discerning God's presence with you, listening to His commentary



or highlights, offering confession, gratitude, and reaffirming your commitments.

- **Sabbath** – setting time aside for rest from the world and compulsions to be indispensable. A time to simply delight in the things God put in your life for refreshment and joy (relationships, reading, sleep, hobbies, recreation, nature, worship, etc.) and fill your soul with gratitude.
- **Journaling** – writing your thoughts, questions, insights from scripture, desires and prayers in a journal. A reflective writing and pondering of your experiences and communion with God.
- **Gratitude, Praise and Thanksgiving** – dedicating time to note what you are grateful for and giving thanks for each by name.
- **Worship** – often through music (but also in loving service) expressing adoration and love to God as you reflect on His character, truth, grace and work in your life.
- **Serving (work)** – offering your service to others as an extension of the love and power of God working in and through you. Biasing your attention to God’s presence and favor amidst your labors so you act as “the hands and feet of Jesus” in your world.
- **Scripture Memorization** – memorizing key scripture to hide in your heart and access readily.
- **Meditation** – reflecting on Biblical truth and its outworking to develop Christlikeness from the inside out.
- **Music** – stirring your heart, desires, prayers and openness to God through music, worship songs and inspired lyrics.
- **Community** – reflecting the fellowship of the Trinity by practicing “one another”s with Christian brothers and sisters, building each other up in faith, hope and love.

Step 2 – Consider Your Sacred Pathways

Which sacred pathways can you incorporate into your daily, weekly, monthly or seasonal *regula*? What do you feel you will most need in the coming weeks and months?

Step 3 – Form a Plan

Consider all the elements of life composing who you are right now: your personality, gifts and talents, passions, sacred pathways, vocation, relationships, sin patterns, limitations, season of life and family. Assess your context, living arrangements, responsibilities and opportunities. Then ask God:

1. Who do You want me to be? What are You inviting me into?
2. How do You want me to live? What do You want me to do?
3. How do You want me to prioritize my time, energy and life? What matters most?

You may have discerned some if not all answers. Continue praying over them as you proceed, but now begin shaping a pattern of practices that facilitate growth into becoming whom you believe God is making you.

4. Which will I seek to engage on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis (i.e., on a half- or full-day retreat)? What time of the day, week or month? Which deserve an extended focus seasonally or annually (i.e., in a multi-day retreat)?
5. Where will I engage in these disciplines? What environments bring me rest and attentiveness of heart? Given my personality, physicality and facility in switching modes, what complementary activities should I not overlook (i.e., exercise, naps, healthy food, comfortable chair, views of nature, sunshine, etc.)?

Use the chart on the next page (adapted from Stephen A. Macchia's *Crafting A Rule of Life*, 2012) to draft your personal *regula* for this season of life.

	spiritually (silence & solitude, lectio divina, prayer of examen, journaling, study, memorization, worship, praise, thanksgiving, meditation, serving, etc.)	relationally (spouse, family, community, friends, mentor, neighbors, team, disciples, the poor, church, supporters, social media, etc.)	physically (rest, recreation, exercise, fasting, retreat, outdoors, travel, etc.)	financially (possessions, supporters, tithes, alms & offerings, newsletters, accounting, etc.)	missionally (personal goals, development, , being mentored, ministry goals, team, partners, neighborhood or city, region, etc.)
daily/ regularly					
weekly					
monthly					
quarterly/ seasonally					
annually					

Step 4 – Implement and Integrate Well

1. How will I need to adjust my schedule to consistently choose this rule of life?

What arrangements do I need to discuss with people I live or work with?

If married, how can I help my spouse with changes I am making?
How may I support his/her *regula*?

2. How can I integrate aspects of my *regula* with journeying in spiritual community? What spiritual disciplines can I share with a spiritual friend or group so we can grow together? Do I need a mentor for my prayer life and deepest formation in Christlikeness?
3. What resources (worship music, devotional book, printed prayer of *examen* or *lectio divina* questions, etc.) do I need to best accomplish a good rhythm? Where and when can I gather them? (Note: having these on hand helps you fulfill your best intentions).

Now, take a break. After some time, come back to what you have developed with fresh eyes.

Step 5 – Review and Commit

1. How does it look and feel to you now? Is it personal enough? Balanced? Realistic? Would starting small and going deep be a way to gain courage and stamina for moving into a robust *regula* over the long haul?
2. Are you able to think of it as a flexible undertaking rather than a legalistic straitjacket? Are you able to implement this plan out of a desire for God rather than a sense of obligation?

3. Arrange to share your *regula* with a spiritual friend, mentor or accountability group. Encourage them to journey with you as appropriate.
4. Present yourself and this *regula* to God in prayer, expressing your desire to grow in love, grace and Christlike presence in the world.

Re-Evaluate After A Little Time

Feel free to explore and experiment with your rhythms and make adjustments along the way. Avoid making it a legalistic straightjacket.

After a few months, take some extended time in God's presence to evaluate how it is going and if larger adjustments need to be made. Growth and life dynamics evolve the needs, priorities and rhythms of our spiritual disciplines.

1. Have you observed an increasing rhythm of grace as you settled into these patterns and priorities? What has been most life-giving? What difficulties or resistance have you encountered? Present these to God in prayer.
2. How has your sense of God's presence, activity and vitality changed in these months?
3. Do you observe yourself becoming more the person God designed you to be? Are you experiencing a pattern of life more fully nourishing you and those God put in your relational sphere?
4. How is the world around you experiencing increased love, grace and truth as God flows through your life? How is ministry flowing more from being than doing?

Flourishing in Prayer



Reaffirm with Christ your desire for and commitment to the abundant life and graceful rhythm He has for you in this season.