



Living Intentionally

*A Workbook
for Creating
a Personal
Rule of Life*

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MONASTIC WISDOM
for everyday living

Monastic Wisdom for Everyday Living is a continuing series of sermons, workshops and teachings from the Brothers that seeks to distill the collective wisdom of the past and offer practical timeless messages to live by in today's world.

Want to think more about developing a rule of life? Check out "A Living Tradition," an online series of posts in which the Brothers reflect on the process of revising the SSJE Rule and offer guidelines to others interested in developing a rule: www.SSJE.org/monasticwisdom.

To order more copies of this workbook and other resources visit www.SSJE.org/goodnews.

To read and listen to the Brothers reading from the Rule, visit www.SSJE.org/audiorule. You can purchase a printed copy of the SSJE Rule at www.cowleypublications.org.

A rule of life allows us to clarify our deepest values, our most important relationships, our most authentic hopes and dreams, our most meaningful work, our highest priorities. It allows us to live with intention and purpose in the present moment.

Sometimes when people hear the phrase “rule of life,” they imagine a list of **rules** which they would be bound to follow. It’s not an inviting image for most of us, and more often leads to ‘death’ rather than ‘life.’ (Have you ever noticed how difficult it is to keep New Year’s resolutions?) But creating a list of rules to follow is *not* the intention of a rule of life.

The word “rule” derives from a Latin word, **regula**, which implies not so much a system of rules or laws, but rather a way of **regulating** and **regularizing** our lives so that we can stay on the path we have set out for ourselves. A rule is like a trellis which offers support and guidance for a plant, helping it to grow in a certain direction. A rule of life is **descriptive** in that it articulates our intentions and identifies the ways in which we want to live. And when we fall short of these intentions, the rule becomes **prescriptive**, showing us how we can return to the path that we have set for ourselves and recapture our original vision. It is not something fixed and rigid, but something which can and should be adapted to our present circumstances and shaped to fit our current needs and desires.

Rules of life grew out of the monastic tradition of the Church and have their origins in the 3rd and 4th centuries, when Christian monastic communities first came into being in the deserts of Egypt.

Even though rules of life were originally developed for communities, they can also be useful for individuals. In a rule of life an individual can put into words those things that he or she values most and can identify ways in which they can be achieved or lived. In the pages that follow, we suggest a number of questions to guide individuals and groups in developing their own rules of life.

We strongly recommend that you keep it *simple*, and that the goals you set be *realistic and achievable*. You might want to begin by identifying five or six principles that describe the kind of person you want to be and the ways in which you want to live. Writing these on an index card and keeping them nearby to remind you of your purpose may be a good way to start. You can always elaborate or add to your rule later, if need be. For now, start small and keep it simple.

Like any spiritual discipline, adopting a rule should *help* you to live more faithfully. It is a tool to aid you in living a rich and meaningful life. Designing a rule is not an end in itself, but rather a *means* to an end: namely, to live our lives for God with purpose and intention.

Two prayer exercises you might find helpful in beginning to design a rule of life:

In prayer, imagine yourself in a conversation with Jesus in which you describe to him what it is you value most and how you want to live faithfully in the world. Ask what he values most and how he wants you to live.

You might imagine yourself at the end of your life and reflect on what you would like others to think of you or say about you at that time. You might even write your own eulogy. This meditation helps clarify what is most important to us by helping us reflect on who and what we want to be/become.

Suggestions for Use

In the pages of this workbook, we offer some topics and questions you might want to consider in designing your own rule of life. Here are some suggestions for how you might use this workbook:

- **Invite God into the process:** Say a prayer for God's guidance as you sit down to meditate on these questions. You may want to pray about each question, or stop and say a prayer as you come to the end of each section.
- **Take time:** Allow yourself time to dwell with each of the questions here. You may not immediately know the answer and your answers may change over time. You might find it helpful to work through the workbook's sections over a series of days.
- **Be gentle:** Remember that this is a chance for you to celebrate and sanctify what matters most to you, not to berate yourself for what you aren't doing.
- **Be realistic:** Being honest about what you are capable of accomplishing and what your schedule allows is essential in creating a rule. An overly strenuous rule will not be sustainable or enjoyable to keep.
- **Write your goals down:** Putting pen to paper asks you to engage in a more concrete way than simply thinking about a theme or question. Use the space provided in the pages of this workbook to write down concrete goals.



My Relationship with God and with the Church

How would I describe the relationship with God that I desire and seek?

What spiritual practices or disciplines do I already know feed this relationship?

What spiritual practices or disciplines might I adopt that would help me grow in this relationship?

What pattern or rhythm of prayer (including times for silent reflection or for retreat) would fit my present circumstances?

How will I incorporate times for regular worship, alone and with others, into my life?

How can I take advantage of the sacraments of the Church (for example, the Holy Eucharist and the Rite of Reconciliation) to deepen my relationship with God?



My Relationship with Others

To what relationships in my life should I be giving special attention?

What guidelines can I identify that would help me grow in love for my spouse, my family, my friends, my colleagues in the workplace, and others?





What specific roles and responsibilities do I have?

How will I carry them out faithfully in my day to day life?

How will I carry them out faithfully over the long term?

How will I seek and serve God in others, especially in those who are different from me?

In what ways can I contribute to the work of God in the world, advancing the cause of peace and justice and bringing healing, reconciliation and hope to my community, my Church, my nation and the world?




My Relationship with Myself

Where in my relationship with myself do I recognize the need for change or balance?

How will I care for myself (e.g., by eating healthy foods and by getting regular exercise and adequate sleep)?





How will I preserve a “balance” in my life, so that one area of life (for example, my work) doesn’t dominate other areas?

How will I express my creativity and develop my mind (through study and reading, the arts, music, etc.)?

How can I incorporate times for rest and recreation into my day, my week, my year?

What commitment will I make to God and to the Church regarding my talents, time, and resources?

How will I care for the environment (e.g., by living more simply and avoiding wasteful extravagance)?

What cause(s) am I drawn to support?



Living a Rule of Life in Association with SSJE: *The Fellowship of Saint John*

The Fellowship of Saint John is comprised of nearly 1,000 men and women throughout the world who desire to live their Christian life in special association with the Society of Saint John the Evangelist. They have a vital interest in the life and work of the community and support it with their prayers, encouragement, and financial gifts.

Members of the Fellowship seek to live an ordered life of prayer and service in association with our community, and follow a rule of life which expresses a common commitment to faithful discipleship. The purpose of the rule is to strengthen our abiding in Christ by bringing rhythm, order, and balance to our discipleship. The rule helps us offer the whole of ourselves to God each day and keeps us open to God's love and purpose for us. Members are encouraged to adapt the Rule of the Fellowship to their particular life circumstances, describing for themselves how they will endeavor to live out its principles.

For more information on the Fellowship of Saint John and their Rule of Life, visit our website at www.ssje.org.



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