

Rule of Life—C.L.I.M.B. each day

Rule 1: Connect with Christ

“Love the Lord your God with all your...soul.”

Rule 2: Learn something new

“Love the Lord your God with all your...mind.”

Rule 3: Invest in key relationships

“Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Rule 4: Move toward the vision

“Love the Lord my God with all your...heart.”

Rule 5: Better my physical health

“Love the Lord my God with all your...strength” (Mark 12:30-31).

In 2005, a concept penetrated my soul during a morning devotional that has transformed my daily pattern of living to this day. The book stated that holiness is best understood “when it is spelled (w)holiness. God is God of whole-life excellence” (Slaughter 29). Jesus did not sacrifice everything through his incarnation simply to give us a better eternity tomorrow but that we might experience the fullness of life today. With the desire to help equip the reader toward this goal, Pastor Mike Slaughter established an acronym DRIVE and guided us through the ancient Jewish pilgrimage songs—The Psalms of Ascent (Psalms 121-134).

With the metaphor of spiritual ascent toward wholeness in mind, I was convicted to make this concept my own. Through a time of prayer and discernment, I established the acronym CLIMB and have since allowed it to frame my decision making on a daily basis. Throughout the writing of this Rule of Life, it is my prayer that I can further solidify a pattern for healthy living that will move me toward a greater place of spiritual, mental, emotional, social and physical health that I might be able to better fulfill the Great Commandment of loving God and others.

Rule 1: Connect with Christ.

Jesus has promised me that he is with me always (Matthew 28:20). Therefore, every day my prayer need not ask the Lord to be with me but rather to make me aware of his presence. My daily goal is to connect with him through the following sub-rules:

Rule 1a: Spend time listening to the voice of God. In Mark 3, when Jesus called his disciples, he invited them to *be with* him and then to be sent out to preach and drive out demons. The order is vital to my soul. Be and then, out of that filling, go and do. I was convicted by the words of Father Damien at the Abbey of Gethsemani when he said that people can always tell when their pastor is merely a professional instead of living from an attitude of prayer.

Rule 1b: Spend time in family prayer daily. At the time of this writing, I am ashamed to confess that this has not been the practice in our home. My daughter Taylor is 12 and facing some of the most challenging years of her transformation into adulthood. My sons (Elijah, age 6, and Silas, age 9) both need more than just a quick head bow at meal time. Leighton Ford challenged me to take my questions deeper with them. For years I have asked them about their “high” and “low” during their day in order to connect with them concerning the events of their days. He offered a much better question that I have already begun to ask, “Where did you sense God most today? Where did you miss him?” (Ford 197). From those questions, we will be able to establish very honest and pure prayer together.

Rule 1c: Read God’s Word devotionally not just academically and professionally. My greatest pitfall during the past 15 years of ministry has been to consider my time of study as my devotional life. In order to better minister, I must allow the Scriptures to minister to my spirit before I can claim to teach them with any authority.

Rule 1d: Confess my sin in a weekly men’s accountability group. I have found through the years that the number one way to break an addiction or temptation in my life is through confession. As James 5 promises, through confession to another person, I will be healed. I have experienced the power of this promise first hand and must always remember this in the discipline of my life.

Rule 1e: Fast one or two meals per week. When I deny myself physically, my spirit comes alive in fresh ways. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus did not say “if” you fast, he said, “when” you fast. It is an expectation for the spiritual life in Christ.

Rule 1f: Internet fast one day per week. It is critical that I fast from the Internet one day per week. Since Friday has been my day of Sabbath rest for the past five years, it is my intent to avoid the internet on that day each week. While spending time at the Abbey, it was remarkable how freeing it was to be unable to catch up on e-mail and Facebook needs. I found at the end of my time there that the world actually survived without my connectedness to it. A day of fasting each week should keep this idea fresh in my spirit.

Rule 1g: Give generously. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “Hoarding is Idolatry” (175). I must be aware of the seductive danger of mammon becoming my idol at all times. As I connect with Christ daily, his Spirit will be prompting me to give and I need to be ready to be obedient. In my fifteen years of marriage to Christine, we have been a tithing family. However, I must remain willing to give extra at any time.

Rule 2: Learn Something New.

Learning must not end with institutionalized education. In fact, I would argue that the most effective learning in life happens outside of the classroom. John Wesley challenged his followers to an ever teachable spirit, “You should be continually learning from the experience of others or from your own experience, reading and reflection, to do everything you have to do better today than you did yesterday. And see that you practice everything you have learned, that you may make the best of all that is in your hands” (Outler 245). Each day is an opportunity to fulfill these words penned over two centuries ago as I grow in wisdom and knowledge through the following means:

Rule 2a: Learn from the Holy Spirit. The “mind of Christ” is in me (1 Cor. 2); daily renewal is necessary so that I can discern the will of God (Rom. 12:2). Each morning as I begin my day, I must pray for the Spirit to renew a right spirit in me that he may guide me in each decision I make. A.W. Tozer warned us against walking in the world’s thinking, “How I wish that all of the teachers in the church could understand that the realm of the Spirit is closed to the natural intellect...you see the Spirit is the agency by which we apprehend divine things...” (Tozer 27). I was recently so encouraged through this truth being found in the life of E. Stanley Jones as he knelt at his chair asking God for an answer and promising to obey. He described, “Very clearly the voice spoke, ‘It’s India’” (Jones 73). I believe herein lies the answer to an adventurous life. The Holy Spirit will teach and direct one who is listening.

Rule 2b: Always be in the midst of learning from a book. As I keep the teachable spirit that has opened so many doors through the years for me, it is a vital rule that I always have a book to educate me on the countless topics of everyday living in this world. It is critical that I learn from people with different worldviews and opinions. The Lord has provided a wide array of experts in areas I am yet ignorant. May I continue to discover greater insights through various readings that will help me be more effective in life and ministry.

Rule 2c: Learn from others in conversation. In my personal evaluation at the beginning of the Beeson program, one of the evaluative tools said that I may be prone to being unteachable. That was a shock to read because I have never viewed myself as being closed to learning from others. Therefore, I have added it to this Rule of Life as a reminder. Everyone has something to teach me.

Rule 2d: Learn from failure. In the early days of pastoral ministry, I had no problem risking failure, because I had nothing to lose. In fact, in some ways I thought it made me a bit

more approachable as I would highlight my shortcomings in my teachings. However, as I have experienced more success, I am concerned that I am wearing more of a mask and am “posing” at times. Failure is a good and natural part of leadership. As Seth Godin stated at the Willow Creek Leadership Summit, “when you fail, it’s important you try again because then you have just learned something no one else knows” (Godin).

Rule 2e: Learn about myself. I really cannot minister into a life until I know myself. If at any point I am not in an accountability group, I must seek out a close friend or mentor to ask me the pointed questions I will likely not ask myself. I once heard Bill Hybels speak about spiritual gifts. In his experience he found that his top gift energized him, the second gift was neutral (it didn’t add or take away from him) and the third gift often drained him. Thus he guarded his time in each gifting accordingly. I am currently rejuvenated by preaching, expend neutral energy in leading, and am drained by counseling. Though I do counsel well, it is important that I guard my time for longevity’s sake.

My current personality profile on the Myers-Briggs is ESTP. According to Reg Johnson, he refers to me as an “Energizer” (Johnson 43). In reading about this personality type, I must be on guard against three specific dangers: Self-aggrandizement, seduction, and expediency. These issues must be talked about in my accountability group or with a mentor on a weekly/monthly basis.

Rule 3: Invest in Key Relationships.

It is critical to note the word “key” in this rule. Being a natural extrovert, it is very easy for me to get distracted by the needs of others. However, in studying the life of Christ, I have learned that his boundaries are very clear. He gave the greatest amount of time to the primary relationships of Peter, James and John. From there, Jesus focused on the twelve, then the

seventy and the multitude. I am constantly surrounded by people in ministry, and must, therefore, be careful to guard my primary relationships.

Rule 3a: Nuclear family first. My first responsibility in ministry is to my wife and kids. It is from that place of stability in the home that can give the necessary support to minister to others. The words of 1 Timothy 5 warn me that lack of care for family members makes me worse than an unbeliever. My family members have not only physical needs but also emotional needs; therefore, it is imperative that my wife and each of my kids get some alone time with me on a daily basis.

Rule 3b: Connect with my extended family weekly. With Skype, texting and Facebook, there is no reason to neglect connecting regularly. My in-laws, sister, parents, nieces and nephews are a vital gift to my life. As the busyness of life attempts to pull us apart, I do not want to miss out on being a part of their stories.

Rule 3c: Forgive those who have wronged me. Ministry is a vulnerable lifestyle—period! I must continue to face my hurts directly. Steve Seamands said it well, “When we forgive, we relinquish the roles of judge, jury and executioner and turn them over to God” (Seamands 138). I must continue to obey the mandate of Christ to forgive seventy times seven and likewise seek forgiveness when I am in the wrong.

Rule 3d: Spend time with friends every week. It is necessary to make a list of all of the couples that Christine and I can bond with and to invite them over regularly. They are a rich part of our life and I must remember to make time for us to enjoy one another’s company. In addition, I need to keep making time for my tennis, running and golfing buddies.

Rule 3e: Pray for the needs in my church family. At this point in ministry, my role is that of teaching pastor and thus visitation is a rarity for me. We do, however, have a long weekly

prayer list in our church's prayer room. Once a week, I need to spend time in that room praying over our church family's needs.

Rule 3f: Care for those in my midst. While I previously explained the need to limit my time spent counseling, my office door yet needs to remain accessible. Likewise, when I am spending time in conversation, it is critical that I do not allow our words to remain superficial but that I look for inroad moments to help the person recognize the presence of Christ in his/her life.

Rule 3g: Serve where opportunity presents itself. Having stated the importance of care for my family, friends and church, it is necessary to also remember that ministry often finds the greatest opportunities in the midst of the interruption. I must guard my family and church time, however as I personalize the words of Wesley, "The world remains my parish." While that may be in my neighborhood or in downtown Grand Rapids, yet at other times that will be helping the greater United Methodist Church or a para-church ministry. Regardless of location, I must always be ready "to give even a cup of cold water" (Matt. 10:42).

Rule 4: Move Toward the Vision.

Just as our Hebrew ancestors got encouragement to continue climbing the steep incline toward Jerusalem through visualizing their feet standing in the gates of the Holy City (Psalm 122:2), so too am I influenced by a vision to keep moving forward. Currently, my vision is to study for this DMin program. However, the larger vision and goal is to continue preaching and leading at Cornerstone United Methodist in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Thus, I write this Rule with that ministry in mind.

Rule 4a: Remember Jesus is the Head of the Church. Any vision for the church comes from the Lord! Steve Seamands crafts this truth beautifully, "It is the ministry *of* the Son, *to* the Father, *through* the Holy Spirit." (Seamands 10). Christ died for the church. He is the head. I

am a steward of his desire for any church I serve. May I never forget this reality! In this truth I will find rest, refreshment, power and the courage to lead.

Rule 4b: Continue evaluating and clarifying my vision. The ability to keep changing directions and focusing the vision is a vital component to maturity. God gave Abraham a calling to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac (Genesis 22). That was the Lord's vision. However, had Abraham been unwilling to keep listening to the voice of God when the angel yelled, "stop," the bloodline of Christ would have been dramatically altered. My flexibility as a preacher, teacher and leader is a critical component toward fulfilling Christ's calling on my life.

As a teacher and leader, I have been coming to realize that sometimes it is not about how much I trust God, but how much God can trust me. If I am trustworthy with the small steps of obedience, I will likely be given more responsibility (Luke 19:17). It is critical that as I am directed by the Holy Spirit I must obey regardless of my lack of comfort in some situations.

Rule 4c: Receive preaching and leadership evaluation. Sometimes it can be difficult to receive feedback regarding areas of weakness—especially as it pertains to something as personal as a calling. However, without feedback, I remain blind to those inadequacies. Therefore, I will continue to give permission to trusted colleagues, mentors and friends to share their honest perspective with me. It is critical that I remain a lifelong learner. As long as I have air in my lungs, I hope the Lord will see fit to use me for ministry. Moses is a very tangible example of someone who was used most significantly in the latter years of his life. I hope to continue to expand my mind through new and insightful concepts for the rest of my life.

Rule 5: Better my Physical Health.

I have unknowingly had a dualistic worldview for years. In reflection on my life, I have found that I have either focused on my spirit or my body and have often seen them at odds with

one another as I have misinterpreted Paul's "flesh versus spirit" passages. I have come to realize that my physical body is a natural and important part of who I am and how I worship God. It is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) and it is the Lord's desire that I have a long life filled with good health (Psalm 128:5-6). As my physical body is enhanced so is my spirit.

Rule 5a: Eat more raw than processed foods. Raw foods are living. They are easily digested and add countless benefits to the body at the cellular level. In the Old Testament, Daniel understood this as he chose his raw food diet over that of Nebuchadnezzar's men. He and his men were found to be healthier and stronger after just ten days (Daniel 1: 12-15). I am given a limited number of days in this physical body. I desire to remain healthy and strong in be fit for service for my King.

Rule 5b: Flee the temptation of gluttony. It has frustrated me as I have watched some in the evangelical community cast stones on people struggling with their sexual sin or some other addiction and have yet missed the "plank in their own eye" as they gluttonously fill their plate during potlucks. Food is a gift and there are times in which it is to be used for celebration; however, that is supposed to be reserved for special occasions (i.e. Feasts for the Jews). It is important that I leave the table satisfied not stuffed as I heed Solomon's wisdom, "for the glutton and the drunkard shall come to poverty" (Proverbs 23:21).

Rule 5c: Be aware of damaging emotions. Under Rule 3c I stated that I must deal with issues of forgiveness directly. However, there are far more dangerous emotions and internal temptations that can have a devastating effect on my health as well. E. Stanley Jones stated it this way, "Anger, resentments, fear, worry, desire to dominate, self-preoccupation, guilt, sexual impurity, jealousy, a lack of creative activity, inferiorities, a lack of love. These are the twelve

apostles of ill health” (Jones 337). Having already addressed the need for accountability, this list needs to be a part of those discussions.

Rule 5d: Vigorously exercise at least four times per week. A little over a year ago, I presided over a funeral for a 38 year old man who left a wife and three children behind. Chuck died of a heart attack. He did not die because “it was the Lord’s time” as some stated at the funeral; I believe he died prematurely. He was significantly overweight and rarely exercised. While some may argue that he may have been genetically predisposed to heart problems, he could have extended his years through a healthier lifestyle.

While I am not afraid to die and am longing to depart and to be with the Lord, I prefer to live a full life in order to fulfill my purpose in this generation. I have a truth in Jesus Christ to share with this world and I would like as many years of vitality to do so. Therefore, I need to continue to run, bike, lift weights and participate in whatever other exercise opportunities come my way through the years.

Rule 5e: Sleep at least seven hours a day and honor the Sabbath. In the Genesis creation account, it is worthy to note that each day begins with rest; “It was evening and it was morning.” Rest is a gift. It is a time to slow. It is a time to reflect. It is a time to be still and know that God is God! Furthermore, while many studies have revealed the overall benefits of rest, I believe the greatest for me has been its ability to connect my body and soul.

This is my first attempt at a “Rule of Life.” I have prayerfully considered each and every Rule throughout and will do my very best to live according to them. I thank God for the desire and the will power to live by them and to let them guide me closer to the fullness of Christ as I CLIMB toward the Wholeness of Life.

Rule of Life: Overview

Rule 1: Connect with Christ.

- Rule 1a: Spend time listening to the voice of God.*
- Rule 1b: Spend time in family prayer daily.*
- Rule 1c: Read God's Word devotionally not just academically and professionally.*
- Rule 1d: Confess my sin in a weekly men's accountability group.*
- Rule 1e: Fast one or two meals per week.*
- Rule 1f: Internet fast one day per week.*
- Rule 1g: Give generously.*

Rule 2: Learn Something New.

- Rule 2a: Learn from the Holy Spirit.*
- Rule 2b: Always be in the midst of learning from a book.*
- Rule 2c: Learn from others in conversation.*
- Rule 2d: Learn from failure.*
- Rule 2e: Learn about myself.*

Rule 3: Invest in Key Relationships.

- Rule 3a: Nuclear family first.*
- Rule 3b: Connect with my extended family weekly.*
- Rule 3c: Forgive those who have wronged me.*
- Rule 3d: Spend time with my friends every week.*
- Rule 3e: Pray for the needs in my church family.*
- Rule 3f: Care for those in my midst.*
- Rule 3g: Serve where opportunity presents itself.*

Rule 4: Move Toward the Vision.

- Rule 4a: Remember Jesus is the Head of the Church.*
- Rule 4b: Continue evaluating and clarifying my vision.*
- Rule 4c: Receive preaching and leadership evaluation.*

Rule 5: Better my Physical Health.

- Rule 5a: Eat more raw than processed foods.*
- Rule 5b: Flee the temptation of gluttony.*
- Rule 5c: Be aware of damaging emotions.*
- Rule 5d: Vigorously exercise at least four times per week.*
- Rule 5e: Sleep at least seven hours a day and honor the Sabbath.*

Works Cited

- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich,. *The Cost of Discipleship*. New York: Macmillan, 1959.
- Ford, Leighton. *The Attentive Life : Discerning God's Presence in all Things*. Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2008.
- Godin, Seth. "Willowcreek Leadership Summit." Barrington, IL. 11 August 2011.
- Johnson, Reginald. *Your Personality Style and the Spiritual Life*. Gainesville, Florida: Center for Applications of Psychological Type, Inc., 1999.
- Jones, E. Stanley. *A Song of Ascents; a Spiritual Autobiography*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968.
- Seamands, Stephen A.,. *Ministry in the Image of God : The Trinitarian Shape of Christian Service*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2005.
- Slaughter, Michael, Warren Bird, and Kim Miller. *Momentum for Life: Sustaining Personal Health, Integrity, and Strategic Focus as a Leader*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005.
- Tozer, A. W. *When He is Come: Ten Messages on the Holy Spirit*. Harrisburg, Pa.: Christian Publications, 1968.
- Wesley, John, and Albert Cook Outler . *John Wesley; [a Representative Collection of His Writings]*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1964.