

THE RULE OF LIFE



HABITS OF THE BODY



TABLE OF CONTENTS

—

Introduction	1
Week of January 5	6
Week of January 12	8
Week of January 19	10
Week of January 26	12
A Liturgy for Evening Prayer	14
End of Month Reflection & Notes	16

Name: _____

THE FLURRY OF RESOLUTIONS MADE THIS TIME OF YEAR REMINDS US THAT WE REALLY DO LONG TO BE MADE NEW. BUT THERE'S ALSO A DARK SIDE. WE WASTE THE REDEMPTIVE DESIRE TO BE MADE NEW ON RESOLUTIONS THAT HAVE NO POWER TO CHANGE US. THIS WEEK, MANY OF US WILL MAKE AMBITIOUS, SWEEPING RESOLUTIONS; AND IN LESS THAN A MONTH OUR COLLECTIVE AMNESIA WILL SET IN...

SO HERE'S A CHALLENGE FOR NEXT YEAR: DON'T MAKE RESOLUTIONS—MAKE HABITS.

—JUSTIN WHITMEL EARLEY

THE EPIPHANY & THE LITURGICAL CALENDAR

At Grace Pasadena, we are committed to forming habits and practices—a Rule of Life—that root us in the love of God in Jesus Christ. As part of our common Rule, we follow the liturgical, or Church calendar. As we live into the different seasons of the church, the Holy Spirit invites us to live our lives with God and one another with a different rhythm and intention than our usual busy and frantic pace. So, what is the liturgical or church calendar?

The liturgical year was developed over centuries as a tool to help the people of God remember and celebrate the full mystery of the good news of Jesus Christ. The church year is divided into the following seasons of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost/Ordinary Time.

January not only brings us a new calendar year, but also the end of Christmas and the feast of the Epiphany on January 6th. Epiphany comes from the Greek work meaning “appearance” or “revelation.” The feast commemorates the Magi’s visit to Jesus. (Matthew 2; Luke 2). The Magi’s origins from lands far away from Israel is not an insignificant detail. This visit is the start of the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 46:9 that Jesus will be the salvation of both Israel and all the Gentiles.

The weeks after Epiphany are sometimes referred to as the Epiphany Season. It lasts until the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday and the start of Lent. Many Christian traditions spend this season re-examining the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. The color of the season is green, symbolizing the new life Jesus comes to give.

THE RULE OF LIFE - A REVIEW

In the Holy Trinity we witness an eternal community of love. A great mystery of Christian faith is the Triune God’s desire and faithful work to welcome humanity (you and me in all our frailty) into his great love.

At the heart of the Rule of Life is an invitation to encounter and experience the Triune God and his great love. The root meaning of “rule” is pattern. We all have a “rule of life” whether we know it or not. We inhabit patterns — or habits and practices — that either move us towards God and his love or move us away. Following the rich discipleship and spiritual formation traditions of the Church, we at Grace Pasadena desire to call one another into habits and practices that cultivate a deeper and life-giving awareness and experience of God.

These are habits that we build slowly and return to over and over. In sense, there’s no such thing as “advanced spirituality” since the Rule of Life invites to return to the basics and grow more deeply in them.

To that end, we are spending the year examining the Rule of Life. Each month, we are focusing on a different aspect of the Rule and leaning into practices that help us experience God's presence and root us more deeply in the God's gracious love.

Each month we will offer a prayer guide, classes and gatherings to help us explore different aspects of the Rule. Each ministry area will also find ways to integrate the monthly aspect into their own events and gatherings. Our goal is to make this an individual and communal effort, for God saves us as a people.

This month, we're exploring *habits of the body*. Scripture takes our bodies seriously and the Gospel offers us hope not only for our souls, but our bodies as well. Many of us believe this, but in practice, we emphasize and value the "spiritual" too heavily. This takes away from a fuller, deeper and richer experience of God's renewing love in Jesus Christ. To begin, let's begin with what Scripture says.

OUR BODIES — CREATION & INCARNATION

In the story of Creation—from the very first page of the Bible—we hear a profound affirmation of matter and the physical world. Like a musical refrain, God looks at his handiwork and says over and over, "It is good." The sun, stars, oceans, land, plants, birds, and all manner of animals and life are called good.

And on the 6th day of Creation, God makes male and female after his own image and says

humanity "is very good." (Genesis 1:31). God doesn't look at our souls only and then says we are very good. God looks at our entire beings—our hearts, souls *and* bodies—and says we are very good. Let this sink in for a moment: God sees *all* of you and says you are *very* good. The Psalmist echoes this fact, proclaiming: "*I will praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.*" (Psalm 139:14)

God's affirmation of the physical world and our bodies continues in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. In the Incarnation, Jesus comes to us as one of us. This is astounding when we remember who Jesus is. Echoing the language of Scripture, including John 1, the Nicene Creed reminds us that Jesus is the 2nd person of the Trinity. He is "God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God" and eternally one with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.

In the Incarnation, the God of the universe takes on human flesh! He becomes like the people he comes to save. He doesn't come as an untouchable disembodied spirit, but as a person who chooses to dwell among his creation (John 1:14). Human bodies are frail and insignificant compared to the ineffable glory of God, but Jesus doesn't look at our bodies with scorn or disdain. He becomes one of us, affirming the value he imbued in us at creation.

In his life and ministry, Jesus affirms the values and goodness of our bodies by embracing us and allowing himself to be embraced. He's

"THE WHOLE CONCEPT OF GOD TAKING HUMAN SHAPE HAD NEVER MADE MUCH SENSE TO ME. THAT WAS BECAUSE, I REALIZED ONE WONDERFUL DAY, IT WAS SO SIMPLE. FOR PEOPLE WITH BODIES, IMPORTANT THINGS LIKE LOVE HAVE TO BE EMBODIED. THAT'S ALL. GOD HAD TO BE EMBODIED, OR ELSE PEOPLE WITH BODIES WOULD NEVER IN A TRILLION YEARS UNDERSTAND ABOUT LOVE."

— JANE VONNEGUT YARMOLINSKY

critical of those who would keep children from playing with him (Mark 10) and who looked at his anointing with perfume and tears with disgust (Luke 7). He touches the untouchables of his society and brings them close (Luke 17).

Jesus not only embraces, he also heals bodies and feeds them. In the Gospels, Jesus is deeply concerned with our souls, hearts and minds. His concern, however, is not at the expense of our bodies. He sees the affects of sin manifesting in our bodies through hunger, disease and death; his response is to feed, heal and restore. In his life and ministry, Jesus shows over and over again that his aim is to bring life not just in a spiritual or emotional sense, but physically as well. As John writes, Jesus comes to bring us *life to the full*. (John 10:10).

SIN AND THE DISTORTION OF GOD'S AFFIRMATION

God's affirmation of our bodies is loud and clear, but many of us have trouble hearing it and receiving it. Many of us, if not all of us, struggle with our bodies. We see our bodies as sources of shame and weakness. We treat our bodies as something to master so that we can be truly free. We struggle to maintain youthfulness and shun aging as the enemy. We commodify and weaponize our bodies and those of others for the sake gain. We eat and drink to excess because we see our bodies as temporary and vessels with fleeting value.

All of this is because of sin. When we look back to the Garden of Eden, we see a vision of the way God meant life to be and the ways we were to inhabit our bodies. We see how Adam and Eve lived naked before God and one another. Naked, Adam and Eve were comfortable in their own skin. They lived and worked together without shame. They didn't fear being truly

seen. They could gaze at each other and enjoy each other in ways that reflected God's great joy in them.

Sin disrupted this way of inhabiting our bodies. It brought physical death and disease, and it made our bodies sources of shame. In Genesis 3, we see Adam and Eve hiding both from God and one another after they sinned. Nakedness and its vulnerability are things they can't stand anymore. God's gaze and their mutual gaze no longer brings joy, but fear and anxiety.

And since then, we've been inundated with competing stories about our bodies, stories that run counter to or fall short of God's affirmation. In one way or another, we hear that our bodies are bad and not as valuable as our hearts and minds. We hear how we have to master and transcend our bodies in order to be truly free and happy. We hear bodily pleasure is dirty, or it's so ultimate that we must be free to pursue it no matter the cost. We hear that we are only our bodies and our value comes from how youthful, strong, and beautiful they are.

In our day and age, we hear a lot about body positivity. In many ways, it's a breath of fresh air to the many destructive stories that shape our relationship to our bodies. There's much to be learned here. Indeed, we are all unique and wonderfully made as the Psalmist affirms. We ought to respect the bodies around us as God's creations. But while body positivity pushes for acceptance and celebration, it doesn't seem to offer redemptive hope for the deep brokenness and death we experience in our bodies. This is true for many of "positive" stories our culture throws our way about our bodies.

THE RESURRECTION: GOOD NEWS FOR OUR BODIES

Our ultimate hope is found in Jesus Christ and his Gospel. Jesus offers an expansive hope, one that encompasses our souls and all of physical creation, including our bodies. The great Christmas carol “Joy to the World” embodies this hope, especially the third stanza. Contemplate the words:

*“No more let sins and sorrows grow,
nor thorns infest the ground;
he comes to make his blessings flow...
far as, far as the curse is found.”*

Jesus comes to undo the chaos of sin as far as the curse is found! He brings new life to our souls, our bodies and all of creation. The Incarnation is a sign of this. Jesus takes on flesh (while remaining fully God) to save us all flesh. And this hope, this truth is repeated again in the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

On Easter Sunday, Jesus is *bodily* resurrected and the Gospels give us a sense that the resurrected body of Jesus has a different quality than before. It has, for lack of a better adjective, a heavenly quality. His body is somehow newly mysterious to the degree his disciples have trouble recognizing him (Luke 24, John 20:13ff). Jesus travels great distances in a flash (Luke 24:31). He seems to be able to walk through walls (Luke 24:36).

At the same time, the earthy physicality of Jesus cannot be denied. In the post-resurrection accounts, Jesus talks, eats, walks, and embraces

his disciples (John 21). His resurrected body even continues to bear his the scars of his crucifixion. In John 20, Jesus invites Thomas to touch his wounds and to examine them up close. As heavenly as his new body is, Jesus remains rather earthly.

This is all good news for us, and the Apostle Paul presses this point in his Epistles. In Romans 5-6, Paul states that if we receive Jesus Christ and are baptized in his name, then we are united to him in his death *and* resurrection like his. The implication is that this is not just a spiritual reality, but a physical one. We will die, but one day, we will be resurrected in both body and soul just like Jesus Christ. We will be made new. The very things we struggle with in our bodies and the scars we bear in our bodies will be transformed into signs of glory.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul continues to expound and make explicit this expansive hope of the Gospel. He urges the Church to embrace the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. For Paul, it’s the cornerstone of Christian faith. He says the resurrection is good news of our bodies and spirit. To say anything else is to lessen the Good News of Jesus Christ. To reject the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ and to denigrate our bodies as less valuable than our souls is unchristian!

HABITS OF BODY AND SOUL.

There is future hope for our bodies, but also present hope. Although our bodies are subject

DO YOU NOT KNOW THAT YOUR BODY IS A TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WITHIN YOU, WHOM YOU HAVE FROM GOD? YOU ARE NOT YOUR OWN, FOR YOU WERE BOUGHT WITH A PRICE. SO GLORIFY GOD IN YOUR BODY.

— 1 CORINTHIANS 6:19-20

MAY THIS FOOD RESTORE OUR STRENGTH, GIVING NEW ENERGY TO TIRED LIMBS, NEW THOUGHTS TO WEARY MINDS. MAY THIS DRINK RESTORE OUR SOULS, GIVING NEW VISION TO DRY SPIRITS, NEW WARMTH TO COLD HEARTS. AND ONCE REFRESHED, MAY WE GIVE NEW PLEASURE TO YOU, WHO GIVES US EVERYTHING. — AN IRISH BLESSING

to disease and death until our resurrection, our bodies have an important role in our present spirituality and Christian life. In 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, the Apostle Paul asks: “[Do] you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?” Furthermore, Paul uses the human body to describe our relationship to Jesus and to his people (1 Cor 12). By faith, we are temples of the Holy Spirit. God by his Spirit lives inside our bodies, though imperfect and broken. By faith, we are given a new bodies and a new body of people.

In this light, Paul urges us to live in ways that reflect this hope and reality. We can be sensual and sexual, but in ways that honor the image of God in us and others (1 Cor. 6). Whatever we eat or drink, whatever we do, we do to the glory of God. (1 Cor. 10:31). And like Jesus, we are to proclaim the new life of God by feeding, healing and honoring the bodies around us.

This month, you’re invited to contemplate the expansive hope of the Gospel as it pertains to our bodies. In doing so, you will be confronted with the practices and habits that reflect to Gospel or work in opposition to it. You will also confront the cultural stories that have shaped your understanding of your body and ask if they embody God’s affirmation and desires.

This prayer guide does not contain any advice about diet, exercise, etc...Instead, think of it as a tool for deeper engagement and a way to invite

the Holy Spirit to bring healing and wholeness. We hope the Holy Spirit will use this month to (1) nurture new freedom and habits that reflect that freedom; (2) give us new hope for ourselves and others; (3) help us receive our bodies and bodies of others as precious gifts; and (4) move us closer to one another as the Body of Christ.

Before we dive in, here’s a note of caution and encouragement: This is not easy or light work. Some of us don’t think about our bodies at all. Others think too much about our bodies. Our bodies may carry the scars of disease or violence inflicted by ourselves or others. Some may need to seek reconciliation and restitution.

Please remember that God’s desire is to bring all these things to light to redeem and renew you. Also, remember that you are not alone. Your church family is here to walk with you. Discuss the questions in this guide with your brothers and sisters. Pray about them together. Reach out to the pastors and staff for support, especially if you sense the need for therapy or counseling as different issues come to light. *Let us receive God’s new life for our bodies together as the Body of Christ.*

It is a great joy to be in community with you. We are so thankful that God has brought us together and we are honored to be able to worship and serve our Lord together with you.

With great love for you all,

The Pastors and Staff of Grace Pasadena

WEEK OF JANUARY 5

God is near! Pray as you are able and enjoy intimacy with your God.

MORNING PRAYER

OPENING PRAYER

I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. — *Psalm 16:8-9*

Take a few moments to rejoice in God's peace, comfort and safety.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Forgive me my sins, O Lord, forgive me the sins of my youth and the sins of mine age, the sins of my soul, and the sins of my body, my secret and my whispering sins, my presumptuous and my crying sins, the sins that I have done to please myself, and the sins that I have done to please others. Forgive me those sins which I know, and those sins which I know not; forgive them, O Lord, forgive them all of Thy great goodness. **Amen.** (from "Private Devotions", 1560)

MORNING READINGS

Sunday	1/5 (Christmas 12)	Ephesians 6:10-20
Monday	1/6 (The Epiphany)	Revelation 21:22-27
Tuesday	1/7	Colossians 1:1-14
Wednesday	1/8	Colossians 1:15-23
Thursday	1/9	Colossians 1:24-2:7
Friday	1/10	Colossians 2:8-23
Saturday	1/11	Colossians 3:1-17

FOR REFLECTION

- What phrase or verse strikes you the most? Take a few deep breaths and meditate on it.
- What do you hear about Jesus Christ? What do you hear about yourself?
- What hope do you hear for your community, city and world?

CLOSING PRAYERS

Offer prayers for the day and its tasks, the world and its needs, the Church and her life. Conclude with the "The Lord's Prayer" or the following from "Treasury of Devotion" (1869)

O Most loving Lord, I offer my whole self unto Thee. Take, I pray Thee, into the hands of Thine unspeakable pity, both my soul and body, my senses, words, and actions; vouchsafe in all things so to direct and govern me, that I may ever flee every occasion of sin, and may so constantly cleave to Thee and to Thy commandments, that neither life nor death, nor anything which may befall me, may separate me from Thee— **Amen.**

LOOK AHEAD AND MAKE TIME FOR EVENING PRAYER (PG. 14)

QUESTIONS & PRACTICES FOR THE WEEK

- **Wednesday.** Take some time to consider your own body.
 - When you hear that your body is a gift and a “temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 6:19), what is your reaction? How are you encouraged? How are you challenged?
 - Look at yourself in a mirror. Even try looking at yourself naked. What do you see? Do you see a wonderfully and fearfully God-made person? Why or why not? As you answer the questions, meditate on Psalm 139:14 and let the Holy Spirit minister to you: *“I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.”*

- **Thursday.** Think back on the resurrection accounts in the Gospels [John 20ff, Mark 16ff, Luke 24ff, Matthew 28ff]. Jesus’s resurrected body is familiar and material: he eats and he is touched. At the same time it is glorious and different: he is not immediately recognized and he travels great distances in a flash. We also see that Jesus continues to bare the scars of his previously broken body, but in the resurrection, his marks of shame and suffering become part of his glory. This is part of our own resurrection promise [Romans 6:5; 1 Corinthians 15:12ff]. What is your reaction? What good news do you hear, especially for the scars/brokenness we bear in our bodies?

- **Friday and Weekend.** Continue contemplating the above. Where you do feel the Holy Spirit wanting to bring you new life and freedom? How might God be asking you to see and value your neighbor?

WEEK OF JANUARY 12

God is near! Pray as you are able and enjoy intimacy with your God.

MORNING PRAYER

OPENING PRAYER

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. — Deuteronomy 6:5

Take a few moments to rejoice in God's love. How might you respond with all your being?

MORNING PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Lord, our God, great, eternal, wonderful in glory, who keeps covenant and promises for those that love you with their whole heart; who are the Life of all, the Help of those that flee unto You, the Hope of those who cry unto You; cleanse us from our sins, secret and open, and from every thought displeasing to Your goodness,— cleanse our bodies and souls, our hearts and consciences. *Amen. (from the Coptic Liturgy of St. Basil)*

Silence

MORNING READINGS

Sunday	1/12	Ephesians 4:1-16
Monday	1/13	Hebrews 4:14-5:6
Tuesday	1/14	Hebrews 5:7-14
Wednesday	1/15	Hebrews 6:1-12
Thursday	1/16	Hebrews 6:13-20
Friday	1/17	Hebrews 7:1-17
Saturday	1/18	Hebrews 7:18-28

FOR REFLECTION:

- In silence, ask: "What good news do I hear?"
- What questions do you have? What do you want to explore more?
- What words of hope, faith or challenge can you speak to bring to your neighbor?

CLOSING PRAYERS

Offer prayers for the day and its tasks, the world and its needs, the Church and her life. Conclude with the "The Lord's Prayer" or the following from Rev. Richard Daniel Henton (1983)

Heeeallll! Saaave! Lift! Heallll! Move Oppression! Lift the Burden! Move obsession! Move possession! in Jesus' Name. Let the hand of God be over the city. Let the hand of God be over every home and every hospital. Some-boddy. Som-body is looking for a miracle. You're a miracle worker. You're a miracle worker. Yeahh! Yess!

LOOK AHEAD AND MAKE TIME FOR EVENING PRAYER (PG. 14)

QUESTIONS & PRACTICES FOR THE WEEK

- **Sunday-Wednesday.** Taking a cue from last month, let's continue practicing prayer while being mindful of our physical posture. Consider the following:
 - Once a day, either in the morning or evening, spend a few moments kneeling in prayer. Take a few moments to kneel in silence, when confessing, or asking God for help.
 - If you are unable to kneel or want to try other prayer postures, try: laying prostrate, standing, lifting your hands, or looking up towards the sky.
 - Take note of your experience. Does your perception of God and yourself change? Does your listening change? Does your sense of expectation and receiving change?
 - How else can you be more mindful of your body in prayer and worship?
 - Consider asking your roommates, family or small group to try a different posture during communal prayer. What changes in the group experience of prayer?

- **Thursday-Friday.** Continuing being mindful of your physical posture in prayer. Also, make a note to thank God for your body and the good things God allows you to experience through it. Think about it this way: We often thank God for our meals, but how often do we thank God for being able to chew, taste, and experience pleasure?

- **Saturday.** Look ahead to tomorrow. On the Lord's Day, we gather for *corporate* worship. That is, we gather as the *body* of Christ. Perhaps there's a connection between our experience as the body of Christ and the ways we inhabit our own bodies.
 - In what ways do we embody Christ to one another in our worship? What do we lose in our experience of Christ if we neglect corporate worship? What do we gain when we worship regularly together as a body?
 - Every Lord's Day, we participate in the sacraments. Take a few moments to contemplate this: we use water in baptism; we eat bread and drink wine/grape juice at the Lord's Table. Through the Holy Spirit, God uses physical things to shape us with the spiritual truth that in Jesus Christ, we are united to him and to one another. As Paul says in Ephesians 4:4-6: "There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." What is your reaction to all this physicality? How might participation in the sacraments broaden and deepen our experience of the Good News of Jesus Christ?

WEEK OF JANUARY 19

God is near! Pray as you are able and enjoy intimacy with your God.

MORNING PRAYER

OPENING PRAYER

My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD, and let all flesh bless his holy name forever and ever. Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul! I will praise the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being. — Psalm 145:21–146:2

Take a few moments to remember the ways God provided for you yesterday. Recall, too, anything beautiful and good you experienced or witnessed in the world. Give thanks and praise God.

MORNING PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Praise to you, O God Almighty, you who makes the day bright with your sunshine, and the night with the beams of heavenly fires! Listen now to our prayers, and forgive us both our conscious and unconscious transgressions. Clothe us with the armor of righteousness; shield us with your truth; and watch over us with your power. *Amen. (adapted from the Greek liturgy)*

Silence

MORNING READINGS

Sunday	1/19	Ephesians 4:1-16
Monday	1/20	Hebrews 4:14-5:6
Tuesday	1/21	Hebrews 5:7-14
Wednesday	1/22	Hebrews 6:1-12
Thursday	1/23	Hebrews 6:13-20
Friday	1/24	Hebrews 7:1-17
Saturday	1/25	Hebrews 7:18-28

FOR REFLECTION:

- What surprises you in the text? What haven't you considered before?
- Where do you see God's grace in the passage?
- How might the passage speak to a current situation, relationship or desire?

CLOSING PRAYERS

Offer prayers for the day and its tasks, the world and its needs, the Church and her life. Conclude with the "The Lord's Prayer" or the following from E.B. Pusey

Most loving Lord, give me a childlike love of You, which may cast out all fear. Amen.

LOOK AHEAD AND MAKE TIME FOR EVENING PRAYER (PG. 14)

QUESTIONS & PRACTICES FOR THE WEEK

- **Sunday.** Consider your habits and practices that honor your body as gifts from God and temples of the Holy Spirit. What are they?
- **Monday.** Consider the habits and practices that dishonor and devalue your body. What are they?
 - We all have good and bad practices of eating, drinking, exercise, dressing, resting, etc... For some of us, our habits have become powerful and harmful addictions. If you feel trapped by harmful habits or addictions, please reach out for help. Grace Pasadena is here for you.
- **Tuesday-Thursday.** Consider the habits and practices that honor the bodies of your neighbors. If you look at the Gospels, Jesus is deeply concerned about the bodies of others and honoring them: he touches to heal the sick and welcome the outcast, he feeds the hungry, he washes dirty feet. In what ways do you embody this? And:
 - What practices do you have that nourish your neighbors? Do you eat/feast with others?
 - How do you support the Mercy Team and Deacons in providing physical relief to those in need in our congregation and city?
 - In what ways is your home a haven to or refuge to those in distress? How do you help others find rest and relief?
- **Friday-Saturday.** Continue considering habits and practices that honor the bodies of your neighbors. Whether your married or single:
 - How do you talk about and view sex?
 - What do you make of the boundaries Scripture places on our bodies and sexual behavior? Are you aware of the boundaries?
 - How do you talk about the bodies of others?
 - What are your standards of beauty and attractiveness? Do your words and standards affirm your neighbors as wonderful handiworks of God?
 - Is there anyone from whom you need forgiveness and reconciliation in this area?

WEEK OF JANUARY 26

God is near! Pray as you are able and enjoy intimacy with your God.

MORNING PRAYER

OPENING PRAYER

My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord;
my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God. — *Psalm 84:2*

As you pray Psalm 84:2, take a few deep breaths and remember that your body, soul and mind find rest and peace in the presence of God. Give thanks.

MORNING PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Almighty Father; we enter your presence confessing the things we try to conceal from you and the things we try to conceal from others. We confess the heartbreak, worry, and sorrow we have caused, that make it difficult for others to forgive us, the times we have made it easy for others to do wrong, the harm we have done that makes it hard for us to forgive ourselves. Lord have mercy and forgive us through Christ. *Amen. (From the Baker's Worship Handbook)*

Silence

MORNING READINGS

Sunday	1/26	Galatians 2:1-10
Monday	1/27	Hebrews 8:1-13
Tuesday	1/28	Hebrews 9:1-14
Wednesday	1/29	Hebrews 9:15-28
Thursday	1/30	Hebrews 10:1-10
Friday	1/31	Hebrews 10:11-25

FOR REFLECTION:

- In Matthew 22, Jesus says: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" How does today's passage spur you to love?

CLOSING PRAYERS

Offer prayers for the day and its tasks, the world and its needs, the Church and her life. Conclude with the "The Lord's Prayer" or the following Collect:

God our creator, who in the beginning commanded the light to shine out of darkness: we pray that the light of the glorious gospel of Christ may dispel the darkness of ignorance and unbelief, shine into the hearts of all your people, and reveal the knowledge of your glory in the face of Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. *Amen.*

LOOK AHEAD AND MAKE TIME FOR EVENING PRAYER (PG. 14)

QUESTIONS & PRACTICES FOR THE WEEK

- This week, spend time observing and noting the cultural stories about our bodies. What do you hear about our bodies in the shows, movies, magazines, Instagram feeds, blogs, etc...that you consume?
 - What desires do these cultural stories provoke?
 - Do these stories elicit any shame?
 - As you pay attention to the cultural stories around you, keep in mind God’s words to us: when he beheld us, he declared us “very good” (Genesis 1:31); we are his workmanship created to do good works in Christ (Ephesians 2:10). How do the stories you hear affirm or contradict this good news?

- For parents, guardians and caregivers: Pay attention to the stories your kids are hearing about their bodies in their media consumption and their peers. Also, consider how your practices and habits are influencing them.
 - How are bodies depicted and talked about in their media?
 - How do their friends talk about their bodies?
 - What are they learning from you, either explicitly or implicitly, about God’s love of their bodies, the goodness of their bodies and his desires to bring wholeness?

A SHORT LITURGY FOR EVENING PRAYER

OPENING VERSE & PRAYER -

Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." —John 8:12

O gracious light, pure brightness of the ever-living Father in heaven, O Jesus Christ, holy and blessed! Now as we come to the setting of the sun, and our eyes behold the vesper light, we sing your praises, O God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You are worthy at all times to be praised by happy voices, O Son of God, O Giver of Life, and to be glorified through all the worlds. *Amen.*

EVENING PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Almighty God, our heavenly Father: We have sinned against you, through our own fault, in thought, and word, and deed, and in what we have left undone. For the sake of your Son our Lord Jesus Christ, forgive us all our offenses; and grant that we may serve you in newness of life, to the glory of your Name. *Amen.*

Silence for reflection.

GOSPEL LESSON

See next page.

FOR REFLECTION:

- Re-read the passage. How does it speak to and help you see the day you experienced? How does it help you see Jesus in your day?

CLOSING PRAYERS

Offer prayers for the day ahead and its tasks, the world and its needs, the Church and her life. Conclude with the "The Lord's Prayer" and the following:

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." — Matthew 11:28-30

The Lord Almighty grant us a peaceful night and a perfect end. Amen.

LOOK AHEAD AND MAKE TIME FOR MORNING PRAYER

EVENING GOSPEL READINGS

1/5 - John 11:17-27, 38-44
1/6 - Matthew 12:14-21
1/7 - John 6:30-33, 48-51
1/8 - John 7:37-52
1/9 - John 8:12-19
1/10 - John 10:7-17
1/11 - John 14:6-14
1/12 - John 1:29-34
1/13 - John 1:1-18
1/14 - John 1:19-28
1/15 - John 1:43-51
1/16 - John 2:1-12
1/17 - John 2:13-22
1/18 - Mark 3:7-19
1/19 - John 2:23-3:15
1/20 - John 3:16-21
1/21 - John 3:22-36
1/22 - John 4:1-15
1/23 - John 4:16-26
1/24 - John 4:27-42
1/25 - Mark 7:31-37
1/26 - John 4:43-54
1/27 - John 5:1-18
1/28 - John 5:19-29
1/29 - John 5:30-47
1/30 - John 6:1-15
1/31 - John 6:16-27

REVIEW & LOOKING FORWARD

What has been most encouraging this month? Most challenging? In what ways have you experienced God's invitation to know his renewing grace in body, mind and spirit this month?

Remember, the Rule of Life is comprehensive, but it should be simple. What practices are you growing in? If you feel overwhelmed, what can you adjust and simplify?

The Rule of Life -- Looking Ahead

February – Spiritual Friendship

March – Fasting & Hospitality

April – Stability of Heart & Place

May – Work & Creating

June – Balance: Putting it All Together

OTHER RESOURCES

For further exploration:

- *Eat with Joy* by Rachel Marie Stone
- *Earthen Vessels, Why Our Bodies Matter to Our Faith* by Matthew Lee Anderson
- Christianity Today has a plethora of wonderful articles and essays regarding the body and Christian faith, practice and ethics. Visit www.christianitytoday.com and do a search.
- *Surprised by Hope* by NT Wright.

