

GROWING IN CHRIST TOGETHER



THE RULE OF LIFE



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“There is a great market for religious experience in our world; there is little enthusiasm for the patient acquisition of virtue, little inclination to sign up for a long apprenticeship in what earlier generations of Christians called holiness.”

— Eugene H. Peterson

Our Common and Ordinary Struggle.

At Grace Pasadena, our motto is that we exist “to experience and extend the life-giving grace of God in Jesus Christ.” We believe life with God is dynamic and that God is constantly drawing us into deeper intimacy with him and with his people. This dynamic life isn’t just a private and personal experience, but one that affects and renews our relationships, work, city, nation and world. Indeed, as the Apostle Paul says, through Jesus Christ, God is “reconciling to himself all things, whether in earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.” (Col. 1:20, ESV) God created all things in love and through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God has overcome sin and death and is re-ordering all things in love. This is cosmic good news!

Many of us who walk through the doors of Grace Pasadena, either as visitors or members, would agree. Yet, many of us struggle: we wonder how we can live into this cosmic good news; we wrestle with the disconnect between what we know intellectually and the sincerity of conviction in our hearts; we hear Jesus is our Good Shepherd, but we often have trouble seeing the paths of love he’s prepared for us and how he’s leading us on; we doubt if God is really renewing all things when our lives often feel so ordinary and, even, chaotic; we hear Jesus is the Lover of our souls, yet we don’t know what that feels like.

When we look at our mothers and fathers of the faith in the Old and New Testaments and all through the history of the church, we see that they shared our struggle: In the Garden, Adam and Eve doubted God’s good word (Genesis 3); Abraham and Sarah laughed when God told them they would have a son at their old age (Genesis 17-18); King David and the prophets often lamented over Israel’s persistent troubles and cried out “How long, how long?” (Psalm 89, Habakkuk 1); In the Gospels, the disciples saw Jesus’s miracles and heard his teachings, but wondered if he was truly the promised Messiah; as persecution broke out in the early church, many were disrupted from their lives and scattered as refugees (Acts 8). The Bible and the history of the Church are full of stories of God’s beloved struggling to know and experience God’s presence.

Finding Common and Ordinary Practices.

At the same time, their stories also show us how they responded and persisted in their lives with God day-to-day, in the ordinary and chaotic. The people of Israel gave themselves over to God’s prescription of rhythms, rituals, habits and celebrations that served to remind them daily, weekly, and yearly of God’s Word, his promises, and past actions to deliver. The early church gave themselves over to similar practices, but it reframed them based on the Good News of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

After Pentecost at the end of Acts 2, we see these practices taking root in the early Church in deep and vital ways. In the Epistles, the Apostles Paul and Peter constantly call fellow brothers and sisters into practices that keep them rooted and growing in the Gospel of Jesus of Christ. For ancient Israel and the early Church, individual and communal practices led a deeper understanding and experience of God's love and presence in all circumstances.

As the church grew, these practices continued and expanded. For example, Sunday worship looked different from community to community, but often followed similar patterns, or liturgies, to help the Church remember that God calls, cleanses, speaks, and strengthens his people to be witnesses of his love in the world. Sunday worship, thus, included a call, confession, multiple Scripture readings, hymns, Sacraments and blessings.

Another great tool that developed over time is the church calendar. The church calendar divides the year into seasons based on the coming, life, death, resurrection, sending of the Spirit, and the coming again of Jesus Christ. The calendar and its various feast days, or celebrations, remind us that Jesus is the King of all time and space, and nurture in us hopeful expectation for the present and future as it helps us remember God's faithfulness in Jesus.

Monastic communities of men and women took these daily, weekly and yearly practices and rhythms and developed them into a Rule of Life. Two influential rules were shaped by St. Augustine and St. Benedict. Centuries later, they

continue to influence the Christian experience of God's love for thousands and thousands.

The root meaning of "rule" is pattern. Simply, a Christian rule of life is pattern of practices that root us in and frame our lives with God's grace and love in Jesus Christ in a comprehensive, thoughtful and intentional way. In the monastic understanding, the rule was never meant to be legalistic or restrictive.

Instead, it is meant to give Christians a path towards connection with God and with God's people by ordering prayer, worship, work, relationships, money, and even recreation by the love of God. The rule is a way of affirming the relationship God makes possible with us through Jesus and nurturing it. The result are eyes and ears that can perceive more and more God's presence and renewing love in all moments of life, especially the ordinary ones. The result are hearts and minds that are integrated, and not at odds with each other.

This may sound like something only for super Christians. But, the Rule of Life, this kind of intentional ordering, was never meant for cloistered or "professional" Christians only. It has always served as a model to all Christians of a well-ordered life and an invitation into it. The Rule of Life is for all who desire to experience a life ordered and re-made by the Good News of God's love in Jesus Christ.

Now here's the thing: We all already live by a rule of life. We all have habits and patterns that have shaped and continue to shape who we are and what we believe. Our habits and patterns reveal what we truly love and where our hopes

and loyalties lie. As Jesus says in Matthew 6:21: *“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*

The rule of life shaping us may be obvious or not. Regardless, it comes into focus when we start asking ourselves the following questions: What do you do right when you wake up or right before you fall asleep? What do you spend most of your leisure time doing, reading or watching? With whom do you spend your social time and what do you do with them? What would do your Google searches say about your hopes and desires? Are you trying to fit/jam in prayer, worship and Scripture into your day or do they frame and inform your day?

Our Common and Ordinary Rule.

At Grace, we want to respond to our common struggles by pressing into a life-giving Rule. We want to confront patterns and practices that move us away from God. Instead, we want to encourage and cultivate patterns, practices, and habits that shape us in God’s love and move us towards God. We want to find a way of praying, worshipping, working, relating, giving, and resting that help us see and experience the way God is with us and blessing us in every ordinary moment. As Kathleen Norris says:

“It is a quotidian mystery that dailiness can lead to such despair and yet also be at the core of our salvation.... We want life to have meaning, we want fulfillment, healing and even ecstasy, but the human paradox is that we find these things by starting where we are.... We must look for blessings to come from unlikely, everyday places.”

To do this, we’ll spend the next 10 months walking through the Rule of Life. Each month, we’ll focus on a different aspect of the Rule. Each month, we’ll offer Prayer Guides, classes and seminars 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.

Here's the road map for the year:

September – Considering our Current Rule

October – Silence & Listening

November – Sabbath & Rest

December – Prayer

January – Habits of the Body

February – Spiritual Friendship

March – Fasting & Hospitality

April – Stability of Heart & Place

May – Work & Creating

June – Balance: Putting it All Together

As we consider our current Rule and ask the Holy Spirit to affirm the good parts and reshape other parts, please remember that this is about living into the identity God has already given to us by the grace of Jesus Christ. We do not engage in spiritual disciplines to become God’s sons and daughters, but to grow in our identity given to us by Christ as a free gift of love. Cultivating a life-giving Rule isn’t about perfectionism or our ability to keep it. It’s about submitting ourselves to God’s love over and over again day-by-day, week-to-week, and year-to-year.

“The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people or gifted people, but for deep people.”

— Richard Foster

One final thought about the Rule: think of the Rule as a *trellis*. Vining plants need a framework to grow and to flourish. Without one, they flop over and fail to grow. This is the same for us.

We tend to jam in spiritual practices and disciplines haphazardly: a little prayer here, a little Scripture there, hospitality when we have the time. There are disciplines we may not consider spiritual, but are spiritual indeed: such as habits of our body, work, and friendship. A robust Rule of life brings all of these practices together as a trellis.

A robust Rule gives structure to our lives not to constrict us, but to free us to flourish spiritually, emotionally, relationally, intellectually and physically. As we grow in one area, the Rule demands we grow in the other areas and helps us do that. A Rule of Life provides a framework within which we become free to flourish and grow in God’s love with others.

The Guide and Final Encouragements.

Like the Grace Pasadena Advent and Lenten Guides, this monthly guide has weekly prayers and daily readings from the Gospels (as taken from the Book of Common Prayer), as well as questions and exercises to help you engage Scripture and offer yourself to the Spirit’s formation. When possible, the Sunday Scripture readings will draw from the City Group Bible studies and discussions.

Use this guide on your own, with your roommates or spouses, and even your family.

Use the daily suggestions in their entirety or focus on parts. If this way of being with God is new to you, engage as you can, even if it’s for a few minutes, and build on it. Again, this isn’t about your performance, or how much or how little you do. This is about growing in Christ and his love starting where you are.

For the month of September, we’ll consider our current rule of life. The guide is designed to ask you about your current practices, patterns and habits. Some of us may not be accustomed to such self-awareness; it may be painful. As we walk together, let’s remember that our Lord is the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). His Spirit is in us, guiding us and re-shaping us in love because of love.

God is faithful to make us “deep people” of his love, so let’s give ourselves to him together.

With great love for you all,

The Pastors and Staff of Grace Pasadena

For additional reading:

- *"Seeking God" by Ester De Waal*
- *"Monk Habits" by Dennis Olkhom*

WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 1

OPENING SCRIPTURE — PSALM 150:60

“Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.”

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart and mind and strength. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. Forgive us and renew us, so that we so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways. In Jesus’ name, *Amen*.

For reflection: Pray through the confession again and ask the Holy Spirit to bring to mind practices, patterns and habits that have taken you away from God and from your neighbor.

GOSPEL READINGS FOR THE WEEK

Sunday	<i>September 1</i>	John 8:47-59
Monday	<i>September 2</i>	Mark 14:53-65
Tuesday	<i>September 3</i>	Mark 14:66-72
Wednesday	<i>September 4</i>	Mark 15:1-11
Thursday	<i>September 5</i>	Mark 15:12-21
Friday	<i>September 6</i>	Mark 15:22-32
Saturday	<i>September 7</i>	Mark 15:33-39

FOR REFLECTION: *Consider one or more of the following:*

- What does the passage reveal about Jesus? What does it reveal about yourself?
- If it’s the morning or afternoon, in what ways might the passage encourage you to spend the hours ahead of you? If it’s the evening, in what ways might the passage help you see and evaluate your day?
- With the words of Scripture in your hearts and minds, consider the daily exercises on the next page. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you respond honestly, remembering the Spirit is always leading us to new life.

CLOSING PRAYERS

Offer to God prayers for the day and its tasks, the world and its needs, the Church and her life. Conclude with the following Collect:

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. *Amen*.

QUESTIONS FOR THE WEEK

As you read and listen to scripture, consider the following questions regarding your current practices and attitudes of silence/solitude, listening and Sabbath keeping/rest:

- **Monday:** How do you spend your free time? With whom do you spend it? Do you feel rested afterwards?
- **Tuesday:** How much media do you ingest? How might the words and images you ingest affect the way you see yourself, the world, money, time, and God?
- **Wednesday:** How much sleep do you get? What influences your sleep patterns?
- **Thursday:** Would your friends and family say you're a good listener? Think back on several recent conversations and think consider how much you spoke v. how much you listened.
- **Friday:** How do you engage Scripture? Do you rush through reading? Is it a joy or a burden?
- **Weekend:** How are you filling your weekend? Are you as busy with your leisure as you are with your work? How regularly do you attend or skip Sunday worship services, and why?

WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 8

OPENING SCRIPTURE — ROMANS 12:1

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Merciful God, we confess how we have let worldly attitudes about power, money, bodies and relationships shape us. We confess how often we think of our own interests, status and well-being before the needs and cries of justice of others. We confess believing the lie that we do not need you, but should rely only on our abilities and self-determination. Forgive us and by your Spirit, renew and transform us, and set our feet in the way of our Lord, Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

For reflection: Pray through the confession again and ask the Holy Spirit to speak peace to any areas of your heart and mind that feel exposed and tender. Is there someone you need to ask for forgiveness and to extend peace?

GOSPEL READINGS FOR THE WEEK

Sunday	<i>September 8</i>	John 10:31-42
Monday	<i>September 9</i>	Mark 15:40-47
Tuesday	<i>September 10</i>	Mark 16:1-8
Wednesday	<i>September 11</i>	Matthew 2:1-12
Thursday	<i>September 12</i>	Matthew 2:13-23
Friday	<i>September 13</i>	Matthew 3:1-12
Saturday	<i>September 14</i>	Matthew 3:13-17

FOR REFLECTION: *Consider one or more of the following:*

- What does the passage reveal about Jesus? What does it reveal about yourself?
- If it's the morning or afternoon, in what ways might the passage encourage you to trust God with the day ahead of you? If it's the evening, in what ways might the passage help you enter evening rest by trusting God with what has happened?
- With the words of Scripture in your hearts and minds, consider the daily exercises on the next page. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you respond honestly.

CLOSING PRAYERS

Offer to God prayers for the day and its tasks, the world and its needs, the Church and her life. Conclude with the following Collect:

Grant us, O Lord, to trust in you with all our hearts; for, as you always resist the proud who confide in their own strength, so you never forsake those who make their boast of your mercy. *Amen.*

QUESTIONS FOR THE WEEK

As you read and listen to scripture, consider the following questions regarding your habits and attitudes regarding prayer and your body.

- **Monday:** When do you pray? Do you pray with others? In what ways does prayer, either alone or with others, feel like a burden or a joy?
- **Tuesday:** When you pray, do you spend any time enjoying his presence? Do you know how to enjoy his presence? In what ways are you comfortable or uncomfortable with the idea?
- **Wednesday:** Do you ever pray using the Psalms or the Lord's Prayer? Do you pray the Psalms or the Lord's Prayer with others? What kind of words or phrases do you tend to use with God?
- **Thursday:** How does the idea that spiritual practices include activities like exercise, sex, eating, drinking, etc...strike you?
- **Friday:** Consider your eating and drinking habits. How do they affect your relationship with God, others (friends, family, neighbors) and even yourself?
- **Weekend:** Think about your habits of exercise and self-care. Do exercise/self-care bring you joy? Do they feel like a burden? What is shaping your desire or lack of desire to care for your body?

WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 15

OPENING SCRIPTURE — ISAIAH 43:2

“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.”

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Lord, we have sinned, without considering how much you love us. You see our sins more clearly than we can ourselves. Lord, you know when we are indifferent to your Word, the Bible; how often we forget to pray; the times we come unwillingly to worship; and yet we turn to you when we are in trouble. Lord, you know when we are untruthful and when we think evil of others. You see our anger and unfairness to our friends. You know how often we desire evil things. Forgive us. Consume us with the fire of your presence and make us new. Through Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

Pray through the confession again. Where you feel the most conviction? Which words are you resisting? Offer these to God and ask the Holy Spirit for new life and freedom.

GOSPEL READINGS FOR THE WEEK

Sunday	<i>September 15</i>	Exodus 3:1-8; 13-15
Monday	<i>September 16</i>	Matthew 4:1-11
Tuesday	<i>September 17</i>	Matthew 4:12-17
Wednesday	<i>September 18</i>	Matthew 4:18-25
Thursday	<i>September 19</i>	Matthew 5:1-10
Friday	<i>September 20</i>	Matthew 5:11-16
Saturday	<i>September 21</i>	Matthew 5:17-20

FOR REFLECTION: *Consider one or more of the following:*

- What does the passage reveal about Jesus? What does it reveal about yourself?
- How might God be using the passage to shape your understanding and compassion for your neighbors, city and world?
- With the words of Scripture in your hearts and minds, consider the daily exercises on the next page. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you respond honestly.

CLOSING PRAYERS

Offer to God prayers for the day and its tasks, the world and its needs, the Church and her life. Conclude with the following Collect:

O God, because without you we are not able to please you, mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. *Amen.*

QUESTIONS FOR THE WEEK

As you read and listen to scripture, consider the following questions regarding your habits and attitudes regarding friendship, fasting (self-denial) and hospitality.

- **Monday:** How much time do you spend with Christian friends? Do you have intentional conversations about faith, struggles, money, sex, etc?
- **Tuesday:** Do you have meaningful Christian friendships with people who are different in terms of age, politics, economics, education, culture, etc?
- **Wednesday:** What are your habits of spending and saving money? What do your spending and saving habits reveal about what you value and love? What motivates your habits? What fears do you have regarding money?
- **Thursday:** What are your habits of giving? To whom or what do you give your money? Do you give regularly to Grace to support its work and mission? What motivates your habits?
- **Friday:** Do you ever fast? If yes, what motivates you to? If no, what discourages you from the practice of fasting?
- **Weekend:** How open is your home? Do you see your home as a refuge from the world or a refuge for others in your world? What fears do you have of opening your home? How does opening your home bring you joy?

WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 22 TO SEPTEMBER 30

OPENING SCRIPTURE — PSALM 119:92-93

"If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction. I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have given me life."

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

O condescending God: You have come to us in Jesus Christ to bring us peace, mercy, comfort and new life. We confess before you the evil of our hearts; we acknowledge that we are too inclined toward anger, jealousy, and revenge, to ambition and pride, which often give rise to discord and bitter feelings between others and us. Too often have we thus both offended and grieved you, O long-suffering God. Forgive us this sin and permit us to partake of the blessing you have promised the peacemakers, who shall be called the children of God. *Amen.*

For reflection: Pray through the confession again. Consider the practices and habits that keep you from receiving God's words of life. What other words do you listen to?

GOSPEL READINGS FOR WEEK 1

Sunday	<i>September 22</i>	Micah 5:2-7; Luke 1:30-37
Monday	<i>September 23</i>	Matthew 5:21-26
Tuesday	<i>September 24</i>	Matthew 5:27-37
Wednesday	<i>September 25</i>	Matthew 5:38-48
Thursday	<i>September 26</i>	Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18
Friday	<i>September 27</i>	Matthew 6:7-15
Saturday	<i>September 28</i>	Matthew 6:19-24
Sunday	<i>September 29</i>	Matthew 20:1-16
Monday	<i>September 30</i>	Matthew 6:25-34

FOR REFLECTION: *Consider one or more of the following:*

- What does the passage reveal about Jesus? What does it reveal about yourself?
- How does the passage help you see and experience God's great love and presence in the ordinary moments and happenings of your day?
- With the words of Scripture in your hearts and minds, consider the daily exercises on the next page. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you respond honestly.

CLOSING PRAYERS

Offer to God prayers for the day and its tasks, the world and its needs, the Church and her life.

Conclude with the following Collect:

Grant us, Lord, not to be anxious about earthly things, but to love things heavenly; and even now, while we are placed among things that are passing away, to hold fast to those that shall endure,. Through Jesus our Lord. *Amen.*

QUESTIONS FOR THE WEEK

As you read and listen to scripture, consider the following questions regarding your habits and attitudes about place (geography) and work.

- **Monday:** How well do you know your immediate neighbors? Do you know the history of your neighborhood and city, as well as the names of your local politicians? How often do you pray for them?
- **Tuesday:** How often do you think about moving; i.e. how often do you feel restless emotionally, spiritually and even physically? Why? What have you done in the last year to feel more rooted in here in Pasadena and at Grace?
- **Wednesday:** In what ways are you exercising stewardship and care for the environment? In what ways might creation care be a spiritual practice?
- **Thursday:** What do you enjoy about your work? What do you find challenging?
- **Friday:** What is the spiritual value of your work? In what ways do you see your work as a calling?
- **Weekend:** In what ways are you finding ways to use your work/vocational skills to serve the church and community?

As we wrap up the month, think back on the weekly exercises and map out your current habits on the chart provided on the next page. What do you notice? What might God be inviting you into in the next few months?

An Inventory of Current Habits

	Spiritual/Emotional	Intellectual	Physical	Work	Rest
Daily					
Weekly					
Monthly					
Yearly					

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September 2019
Grace Pasadena
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