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*my
way
of life*

REFLECTING ON THE VALUES & PRIORITIES THAT GUIDE YOUR LIFE



about the author

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His books include *A Well-Worn Path: 31 Daily Devotionals for the Worshipping Life* (David C. Cook), *Perspectives on Worship: Five Views* (Broadman Holman), and *Songs are a Place We Go* (Wild Pear).

Dan is a husband, father, author, and artist, and is passionate about disciples of Jesus growing a sustainable faith – for a lifetime of wonder in worship and life, and for passing on a legacy of hope to generations to come.

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staying on track

“You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand” (Psalm 16:11 ESV).

Many years ago my wife and I went on a personal retreat together. Our plan was simple – following the idea of what is called a “Rule of Life,” a concept from the Benedictine tradition of church history that I studied in my Masters program – we would write our own “rule” – or as we and others called it, our own “way of life” – as a couple. The word “rule,” in this case, speaks of a list that directs ones patterns and practices. It is

a considered and discerned list of values, priorities, and practices that enable us to “stay on track” on becoming conformed to Christ (Rom. 8:29) over a lifetime. In short, a rule of life is a helpful statement of values, priorities, and practices to which one can return again and again to remember the kind of lifestyle we have chosen as we pursue the way of Jesus.

How could a rule of life help you, serve you, as you seek to stay on track with your own values, priorities, and spiritual practices over a lifetime?

a life-long plan

Stephen Macchia, author of *Crafting a Rule of Life*, provides an excellent resource for those wanting to develop their own rule of life. I would highly recommend his book if you as an individual, or as a married couple, decide to develop your own.

Mark Buchanan, in the introduction to the book, writes the following about a few individuals in his orbit of relationships who held to a defined and predetermined way of living:

“Spiritual robustness like theirs, so tenacious and subversive and attractive, doesn’t happen by accident. It doesn’t happen overnight. It doesn’t happen by wishing or trying. It is a long obedience in the same direction. It is forged in the daily and tempered in the ordinary. It is

a slow and steady and deliberate gathering of the years” (Macchia 12).

This “gathering of the years” speaks of having a plan that keeps us gathered and centered over time, a path that one is committed to walking out and walking on as days pass into years pass into a life well-lived in the presence of God.

And how does a life “plan” emerge? By guessing, letting others tell us how to live, or by haphazard reacting to life as it comes? Not for the follower of Jesus.

In such times as we live, writing out our values, priorities, and practices for becoming like Jesus – listing them so we remember them in the fray and follow them in a slow and steady,

incremental way – is absolutely crucial to us becoming who we want to become.

rules and recipes

Think about the rules that guide and regulate a recipe, bringing all the ingredients together so that they “work” – and provide a delicious result.

Or think about the rules that regulate a game, enabling everyone involved as both a player and a participant to enjoy the experience.

Rules can be incredibly helpful to us in many areas of life, and while we can become legalistic about those rules, they can also serve us powerfully over a lifetime if we understand their role.

Think about some of the helpful rules that you are using in your life right now.

Rules of the road keep us from running into one another.

Rules of conduct can keep people from hurting others intentionally or unintentionally.

Rules in our homes, especially in homes with children, can keep family members playing nicely together, speaking well of one another, and keeping the food on plates when it could be flying through the air!

A rule of life, or a way of life, can help us consistently stay with certain practices, priorities, and values, and to see our hopes for who we’d like to become in Christ realized over a lifetime.

where to begin

You can begin creating your own rule of life by following a few steps below. The following is just a summary of one way to create a preliminary rule of life, but I would suggest they are a good starter if a short runway is all you have time for right now.

These steps will help you to at least begin to get some thoughts down – so they are on paper and not just in your head. Good intentions are just good intentions until we act on our convictions. A rule of life can help us to act on our convictions.

First, you’ll want to get a journal, or a notebook, or something to write in that you enjoy using and don’t mind writing, rewriting, crossing out, and journaling honest thoughts in.

Second, find a quiet place, free from distractions, in which you can write without being interrupted for an extended period of time. I recommend you start by blocking off at least 2-3 hours. If you can’t do that right now, just getting started is a win on its own.

For me, I’ve needed to go away on a personal retreat to write my own way of life statement, and for my wife and I to write ours as a couple. Every year, we try to get away to both review our way of life statement, and to make edits as times and seasons change – and we change with them.

Third, use the following template to get started creating categories into which you can fit your values, priorities, and practices. Again, Macchia’s book is a

powerful workbook if you're ready to go the whole way with your first rule/way of life statement. But if you just want to open up to the idea, the following will help.

Get the big stones in first. Get your values down. Then create categories in which those values live. Then write down under each section, in each category, what practices you will do (this is not the time to guess; commit) to see each value in your life take on the strength you hope it will.

the results

Engaging in the writing of a rule, or way, of life statement is a commitment to an ongoing, prayerful survey of your lifestyle. It can be one of the most rewarding spiritual practices of your life.

The “way” we do life determines who we become over time. Jesus said “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life...” (John 14) and following His way of being and doing in the world is our goal.

Here are some of the results we've experienced doing a Way of Life statement over the past years.

1. A Way of Life statement is an ongoing reason to reconsider our lifestyle.

Revisiting our Way of Life statement enables us to have honest conversations about how we're feeling about where we are at – and how we got there.

2. A Way of Life statement is a tool to channel our prayer life.

As we pray each day, our Way of Life statement is ever in the back of our minds, helping to guide our prayers.

3. A Way of Life statement is a helpful discernment tool.

When it comes to decision-making, we are pretty methodical when we can be. Using Ignatian principles of discernment, we review our Way of Life statement when a big decision must be made so we stay aligned with it as we make choices.

4. A Way of Life statement can help you keep things in perspective.

There is nothing worse than losing perspective because circumstances around us are creating anxiety or confusion. A Way of Life statement can help you stay locked in on what God has invited you to do in the world.

5. A Way of Life statement is a navigational tool, and steering equipment, in a tumultuous world.

Imagine your life as a boat on an open ocean. The weather can change at any moment. The water we are navigating can move us any direction it wants – unless we have good navigational tools and steering equipment.

The ocean is made up of the cultural forces around us, be they our family (ever struggle to be who God called you to be when wider family pressures push you to be otherwise?), our workplace (we can become like those with whom we spend most of our time), or our social setting (the enemy of our souls is

always looking to devour us by winning us to the ways of this world).

Work with Jesus on creating that navigational tool and steering equipment, and involve the riches of Scripture throughout your statement. Then, hone it over time. Print it, for your own private use (it's a precious, personal document), so it becomes a navigational tool no matter the weather you face.

my way of life statement _____

A Way of Life Statement (or Rule of Life) is a tool you can return to, again and again, to keep yourself focused on, and faithful to, the life into which God has invited you. By following the simple pattern below, you can begin to write your own (again, I would highly recommend Macchia's book, noted at the end, if you want to go deep and long with this exercise). For now, this will get you started.

1. What Do I Value?

Take your journal and write down your answer to the question, "What do I value?" What attitudes and character traits do I value? For us, we came up with words like Family, Simplicity, Generosity, Creativity, Community, Hospitality, Contemplative Living (a slower and more reflective way of doing life; i.e. fewer activities with greater thoughtfulness).

2. What Categories Will Make Up My Way of Life Statement?

After you've written out your values, and the words that capture their essence, begin to organize them into categories.

Some of our categories are: My Devotional Life, My Resting Life, My Active Life, My Relational Life, and My Lifestyle. Under My Devotional Life, I have sub-categories like Scripture Study, Daily Office/Prayer, Wider Study, Personal Worship, Corporate Worship, and Dreams & Hopes. Under "My Resting Life" I have sub-categories like Sabbath, Play, Pace, and Dreams & Hopes. Under "My Active Life" I have Occupational Work, Missional Work, Stewardship, Creative Work, Health, and Dreams & Hopes.

Why do I keep adding "Dreams & Hopes" to each category? Here is where we practices we'd like to have in our lives, but may cost too much or involve a purchase that we're not ready to commit to right now. This sub-category will keep you dreaming about the preferred future into which we believe God has invited us (see Practices below).

3. What Practices Embody Those Values?

Once we've clarified what we value, then we can talk about what we can "do" to keep reinforcing those values. How will we handle the minutes and hours of our day? How will we handle each week, and the days within it? How will we handle money so we can be generous? How can we make our home more hospitable? What you practice, you become over time; these habits keep you on the rails – they become your best friends.

4. Set a Yearly Rhythm to Revisit and Review

Every year, set aside time to review your rule of life, and edit it to match the season you are in noting any adaptations you need to make it really work for the life season you are in.

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works cited & recommended

Macchia, Stephen. *Crafting a Rule of Life: An Invitation to the Well-Ordered Way*. InterVarsity Press, 2012.

The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001.