

Personal Growth and Forming a Growth Plan (Rule of Life)

I. Essential Ingredients of Growth: Vision, Intention, Means

- Vision: understanding the goal of growth (head)
- Intention: choosing to commit to growth (heart)
- Means: pursuing growth in practice (hands)

1. Vision

What are the characteristics of a mature follower of Jesus?

- Up: Growing life with God
Increasingly beholding and savoring the greatness and goodness of God in Christ in ongoing communion with God through Christ and the Holy Spirit.
- In: Growing life with self
Increasingly becoming more like Christ inwardly in the thoughts, attitudes, and desires of one's mind and heart
- Out: Growing life with others (inside and outside the church)
Increasingly becoming more like Christ in relationships with others, pouring out one's life to be with others and serve others in love.

2. Intention

Does our salvation involve our intention, choices, commitment, and effort?

- No, in the sense that our salvation in relationship with God comes from God and not from us. We cannot earn or even enter or continue in a saving relationship with God apart from his foundational work and continual sustaining presence and provision.
- Yes, in the sense that God's salvation sets us free from the domination of sin. He heals broken minds and hearts, liberates our will, and makes us able more and more to desire and to choose to follow him in obedience to his good will and purpose for us in Christ.
- See the balance in Ephesians 2:8-10 and Philippians 2:12-13.
- God's grace is opposed to earning, not to effort (Dallas Willard).

3. Means

What was the process or steps you went through to learn a skill?

In what ways is spiritual growth like that process of learning a skill?

- It requires our active choices and effort.
- It happens through relationships.
- It starts with listening and observing as an apprentice to learn from skilled people.

- It happens through means of practices of time, planning, and practice, e.g., spending time with God in conversation (talking & listening), reading, engaging in relationships within the church, doing actions that follow Jesus' example, obeying God's law, etc.

The means of pursuing spiritual growth is being an apprentice to Jesus: life with Christ that makes us like Christ.

Being with Jesus

- clarifies vision
- cultivates intention, commitment

Being like Jesus

- expresses faith through the means of growth
- imitating & obeying Jesus, doing what Jesus does

See both factors in John 15:1-11: abiding in Christ in order to bear fruit like Christ.

II. Forming a Plan to Grow as an Apprentice of Jesus

- We need a **plan** for spiritual growth.
 - God calls us to think and act in applying his word.
God doesn't spell out the details. Application involves reasoning from biblical principles to the particular aspects of our situations.
 - A plan brings our vision and intention down where we actually live to transform the concrete habits and practices of our lives.
Does any important change happen in your life if you don't plan for it and arrange your life to pursue it? Especially when we have obstacles within and without? Sanctification is always uphill.
- We can learn from **patterns from past**.
 - Monastic rules of life
Communities of monks and nuns formed a rule (standard) of life together that named the commitments they made to practices that would enable them to be with Jesus and become more like Jesus in all dimensions of life.
 - Protestant spiritual reform
Protestants rejected the idea that monks and nuns had a special calling from God to be more holy than the rest of the church. The Protestant goal was (and is) to help all Christians everywhere to follow Jesus faithfully in all dimensions of life wherever God has placed them.

John Calvin had a "vision of Christian discipleship as an immersive path of practical formation. For Calvin, monastics are mistaken only insofar as they make elite, difficult, and rare what should be ordinary, accessible, and common in Christianity communities: namely, whole human lives formed in and through the church's distinctive repertoire of disciplines." (Matthew Bouton, *Life in God*, 13)

- We must pursue spiritual growth in **all dimensions of life**.

Spiritual growth is not just one dimension of life. It is bringing all of life into greater alignment with God's design for us as human beings, bringing all of life into greater alignment with the character/mission/purpose of Christ to redeem every aspect of life.

(1) Up: rhythms for growing life with God

- Knowledge of God's word, Christian beliefs, and reasons to believe
- Scripture & prayer (all 4 kinds) aimed at communion with God
- Sunday worship
- Daily worship: face-to-face & side-by-side with God

(2) In: rhythms for growing life with self

- Knowing my personality & abilities
- History: family of origin, pattern of emotions
- Healthy heart: killing vices & cultivating virtues (character of Christ, fruit of the Spirit)
- Care for my physical body

(3) Out: rhythms for growing life with others

- Cultivating healthy relationships: family, friends, co-workers, neighbors
- Peacemaking: biblical conflict resolution
- Sharing our faith with others
- Work as service to God & neighbor (paid & unpaid)

- We pursue spiritual growth by **setting goals and changing the rhythms of our life** in incremental ways beginning where we are.

- Focus on practices, habits
 - breaking habits of sinfulness
 - cultivating habits of holiness
- Specific/concrete
- Achievable but stretching
- Aimed directly at weaknesses & sins
- Adapted to personal circumstances
- Flexible to change with different seasons of life
- Discerned in community
- Practiced with patience and grace

“Therefore, we intend to establish a school for the Lord's service. In drawing up its regulations, we hope to set down nothing harsh, nothing burdensome. The good of all concerned, however, may prompt us to a little strictness in order to amend faults and to safeguard love. Do not be daunted immediately by fear and run away from the road that leads to salvation. It is bound to be narrow at the outset. But as we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God's commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love.”
(Rule of St. Benedict, prologue)