

Small Group Material

Rule of Life: The Ancient Ways

Jeremiah 6.16, Deut 4.9

A. The Ancient Ways (20 mins)

Read Jeremiah 6.16

1. Thinking first of roads and paths, what makes an 'ancient way' an ancient way? Who recognises it as one - and why? Can you name any 'ancient ways' you have been along? What was their purpose?
2. Look at the verse. Why did the traveller want to find the 'ancient path'? How did they find it and what was the result?
3. In this context of spirituality and 'rule of life', what are 'ancient ways'? Can you name a few and their purpose?

Read Deuteronomy 4.9

1. What is God telling the Israelites (and us!) to do through this verse?
2. Why is this so important?

B. 'Rule of Life' (15 mins)

Here's an introduction to read out (4 mins)

A rule of life is a schedule and set of practices and relational rhythms that help us create space in our busy world for us to be with Jesus, become like Jesus, and do what he did—to live “to the full” in his kingdom, and in alignment with our deepest passions and priorities. (Bridgetown church)

'It is simply a handbook to make the very radical demands of the gospel a practical reality in daily life.' (St Benedict)

Why have a 'Rule of Life'?

The purpose of a Rule is to lay down working guidelines for the inner life and also provide a framework for the balanced ordering of work, leisure and social relationships. Hence a Rule of life is not only relevant to the monastic tradition: the principles can be used by anyone who is concerned about how they live their lives. They provide markers and guidelines, inspired by the Spirit, to help them on their journey towards God.

Henri Nouwen wrote, '*A Rule offers creative boundaries within which God's loving presence can be recognised and celebrated. It does not prescribe but invite, it does not force but guide, it does not threaten but warn, it does not instil fear but points to love. In this it is a call to freedom, freedom to love.*'

It becomes for us 'an exterior framework for an interior journey': a kind of scaffolding to use to build the spiritual structure of our individual life with God. It provides creative boundaries and spiritual disciplines whilst still leaving plenty of room for growth, development and flexibility. It is a railing to hold on to as we journey in our search for God, and, when we are blown off course, it is a signpost to a safe haven.

An illustration of the purpose of a Rule of life is to think of spectacles. We don't look at our glasses. The whole purpose of having a pair of glasses is to look through them to what we see in everyday life.

While the word "rule" may strike you as a strict or binding constraint, the Latin word we translate "rule" was originally the word for a trellis in a vineyard. A vine needs a trellis to lift it off the ground, keep it free of predators and diseases and bear as much fruit as possible. We need a rule as a kind of support structure to organize our life around "abiding in the vine".

Discuss (10 mins):

1. What do you think about the whole idea of having a 'Rule of Life'?
2. Which imagery of the 'Rule of Life' helps you?

3. How can having a 'Rule of Life' help us? What pitfalls or hazards do we need to avoid if we adopt one?

C. Getting Practical (20 mins)

Thinking Time (5 - 10 mins)

We all have 'practices' whether we recognise them or not.

Give everyone 5 - 10 minutes of quiet to reflect and write things down.

Put these categories in the Chat section of Zoom.

What practices do you live by in the following areas? They might be daily, weekly, monthly, annually or occasionally.

1. Abiding

2. Mind

3. Body

4. Relationships

5. Rest

6. Work & Money

7. Gospel & Hospitality

Say: It's important to be honest. Write down what you *normally* do rather than what you think you do or would like to do. Be gentle and kind to yourself. Remind people that we are all 'work in progress'. We are at the *start* of a six week series, a 'journey' as we look at different aspects of our lives.

(Leader: it would be really good if you can give people in your group some time to make a start on this exercise during your meeting even if you don't get very far. Encourage people to take it away and continue writing things down over the next week.)

Sharing time (10 - 15 mins)

1. What are you already doing that brings you nearer to Christ?

2. Is there anything you have been learning recently in any of these areas - perhaps about their interconnectedness?

3. Do you recognise any patterns/habits in your life which do not help you, take you further from Christ?

Remind people that there will be a practical suggestion in a video each week on the website (though not this first introductory week).

There is also a lot of material if people would like to read further about 'Rules of Life' on the Northumbria Community's website

<https://www.northumbriacommunity.org/who-we-are/our-rule-of-life/>

and through Bridgetown Church

<https://bridgetown.church/series/unhurrying-with-a-rule-of-life/>

D. Praying time (15 mins)

Let this song lead you into worship...Michael Smith, Ancient Words

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ouTgX9hcwk4>

Worship God together and thank him for the wisdom and experience of previous generations as well as his wonderful provision through Jesus, the Holy Spirit and Scripture.

Pray for God to lead and guide as we consider afresh how we seek to follow Jesus.

Pray for the church across the world and for its leaders as we all seek to follow Jesus.

'A rule of life is a schedule and set of practices and relational rhythms that help us create space in our busy world for us to be with Jesus, become like Jesus, and do what he did—to live to the full' (John 10v10) in his kingdom, and in alignment with our deepest passions and priorities.' Bridgetown Church