



EXCERPT



Rhythms for Life
Spiritual Practices for Who God Made You to Be

September 29, 2020 | \$16, 220 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-3197-5

"At once deeply personal and immensely practical, Alastair has written a powerful book that can change the way we move through the world. He inspires us to cultivate rhythms that enable us to experience deep contentment, joy, and peace in our everyday life with God."

Ken Shigematsu, pastor of Tenth Church, Vancouver, British Columbia, and author of *Survival Guide for the Soul*

An Intentional Pursuit of God

Jesus invites us on a journey. Two disruptive words alter the course of our lives: "Follow me." Fishermen lay down their nets. Tax collectors leave their booths. Revolutionaries lay down their arms. And countless people throughout the millennia have reordered their lives around the gospel.

We go wherever Jesus goes.

The invitation doesn't come with a road map laying out the specifics of how the rest of our lives will go, however. But that's okay. What matters most on the journey is that we go with him. Because as we get our feet dusty on the path, we walk with none other than God himself. No wonder Frederick Buechner put it like this: "I think of my life and the lives of everyone who has ever lived, or ever will live, as not just journeys through time but as sacred journeys." Much like the excursions of my youth, the journey with Jesus is full of wonder and joy. Because this is the most sacred path we can tread. He has pioneered and opened up the only path to life with God.

Even though we are not handed a road map for this journey with Jesus, we can still create some guidelines to help us stay on course. I have found that a plan for growing in Christlikeness helps. And I am hardly the first to make this discovery.

Originating in the monastic tradition in the fifth century, the practice of living by a rule of life has sustained Christians throughout the ages. Essentially, in a rule of life you identify habits, disciplines, and practices to keep you moving in the direction of Jesus with your community. We have St. Benedict of Nursia to thank for his contribution to this practice. Benedict taught that a rule of life was not meant to be burdensome but could help us remain in "the ineffable sweetness of love." Intentionality sounds pretty good when you put it like that.

The practice of crafting a rule of life is hardly exclusive to the monastic life. For example, the Book of Common Prayer (BCP) from the Anglican tradition suggests, "Every Christian man or woman should from time to time frame for themselves a Rule of Life in accordance with the precepts of the Gospel and the faith and order of the Church." Benedict created a communal rule. The BCP invites us to create a personal rule—personal, that is, but not individualistic. It can help anchor us to the gospel and to the shared practices of our community.

Yet I prefer the language of "rhythm for life" over "rule of life."

Life moves along with seasons of rigidity, flexibility, spontaneity, and discipline. What works for six months may not work for the next six months. Life is dynamic, not static. As the BCP suggests, we should sometimes revise our plans for spiritual formation. The word *rhythm* reminds us that life changes. We need to assess our habits and practices in light of our phase of life and to wrestle with what is best for us at our particular moment in time. There are seasons for everything under the sun.



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Alastair Sterne is the founding and lead pastor of St. Peter's Fireside in Vancouver and serves as canon of church planting for the Anglican Network in Canada. He previously worked in communications and design. He is a graduate of Asbury Theological Seminary and is currently working on a doctorate in intercultural studies at Fuller Theological Seminary. He also serves on the board of Always Forward, the church planting initiative of the Anglican Church in North America.

My own rhythm for life has changed multiple times. It changed drastically when my children were born. As a new parent, it became much harder to carve out the same amount of time in the morning and evening for Scripture, prayer, and journaling, let alone the same amount of undistracted quality time. I barely had any contemplative capacity. When I tried to sit quietly with Jesus, I fell asleep. Initially I tried to double down and make my routine work. But it didn't work. And I fell into the mistake of feeling "far" from God solely because of my slipping discipline. But God's presence isn't contingent on my performance. Instead of lingering in guilt, I sought to discover new expressions of practices for that sleepless season. As my children have moved out of the "destroy any resemblance of adequate sleep for mommy and daddy" stage, my practices have changed again.

A few years ago, I experienced a prolonged season of depression. Once again, my practices changed. Part of my recovery involved discovering new practices of self-care, such as running and medicine, along with renewed disciplines of gratitude and encouragement. Although my depression made it hard to feel "close" to God, saying thank you for something as basic as a warm home helped me remember that all of life is grace. I also pressed into a vision bigger than the here and now, which kindled my hope in a difficult time.

Because of how life unfolds and changes, our spiritual practices need to be dynamic. This means a rhythm for life is always open to revision. It isn't set in stone. And it's never a measure of our success or failure in spiritual growth. If we treat it this way we can become prideful based on our performance or crushed by shame because we aren't living up to our ideals. But there's no need to perform or evaluate ourselves in this way. We are accepted and loved by Jesus. A rhythm for life is simply a way to bring intentionality into our pursuit of him.

—Adapted from the introduction "Rhythms for the Journey"



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