

HOLD ON.  
How do I find rest?



✕  
Name

.....

✕  
Place

.....

✕  
Date

.....

✕  
My motto

.....

.....

.....

.....

## Dedicated to:

Rest seekers, God seekers, God avoiders, agnostics,  
busy bees, thinkers, and doers.

For those of you who are attracted to the monastery but don't live there.

Yes, for you, who want to proactively accept life and the responsibilities it  
brings in order to achieve a calm and rich holistic rhythm of life.

Hold On

*How do I find rest?*

J. Huisman-Karels

Graphic Design: Fijnzinnig Ontwerp

Foto Credits: Different guests at the retreats at the Monastery, Nieuw Sion, Diepenveen, the Netherlands and Unsplash.com.

The bible verses used in this workbook are from the English Standard Version.

Copyright: ESV: English Standard Version 2016

© Janneke Huisman-Karels March 2024

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the author.

# The vine grows towards the light.

Years ago, I was still learning how to keep a garden, and I was happy when a tiny sprout emerged above the soil after planting. Often, I stopped caring for it and gave it no more attention. The plant received water when it rained and sunshine when the sun shone. It continued to grow but often became wild. The plant grew in all directions, and without finding support, it proliferated over the ground. The fruit ripened but rotted in the mud.

So is it with the vine. The grape vine often does best if you guide it along a fence or trellis. Then it climbs towards the sunlight, where it gets its energy. When it blooms, each flower can get enough sunlight, hang freely, and yet remain connected to the vine and supported by the trellis.

Structure provides stability and direction. It should not be oppressive. If you tie the vine with a string, it is important that you do it loosely; the branch wants to grow and breathe. But the connection to the branch is life-giving and therefore important. Eventually, when it's time, that little grape plant will give a beautiful, ripe, nutritious fruit.

I have developed this workbook for a Rule of Life with my own Christian perspective as a foundation.

As a Christian, you are standing in a long tradition stretching back 2000 years and strongly connected to Jesus Christ as the Redeemer of the world. He called Himself the True Vine. In connection with Him, (in different ways, which can be a lifelong search) we can wait for the fruit to form and be beautiful at every stage of its growth.

# Table of contents

Foreword: A real workbook <i>Work in progress</i> (by Wil Derkse)	9
Welcome	13
Part A: The What, Why, and How of a Rule of Life	17
Part B: Your Personal Rule of Life	25
 <b>H – Holy Ground:</b> A good start, a solid foundation	28
 <b>O – Organizing:</b> Standing still and not moving yet	36
 <b>L – Let’s get started!</b> Done with planning; time for action	42
 <b>D – Dear ones around you:</b> Our beating heart for others	48
 <b>O – Oh!—my body:</b> Caring for your body through nutrition, exercise, rest, and sexuality	54
 <b>N – Nurturing</b> your soul and sensitivity	62
 <b>◆ – Wrapping up</b> in a good way and calling it finished.	70

Part C: Write Your Personal Rule of Life in Seven Steps.	74
Step 1. What are the different roles and obligations that you have?	75
Step 2. What is important in your life? What are your core values?	79
Step 3. Formulate your goals.	82
Step 4. Create rhythm in all areas of life.	84
Step 5. What does your ideal day look like?	87
Step 6. What does your ideal week look like?	91
Step 7. Schedule evaluation moments.	95
One example of how to live attentively using all seven domains in one week.	96
One example of how to live attentively using all seven domains in one day.	100
Rule of Life Literature List	105
In closing, I play with the wise words of St. Benedict.	107



# Foreword

*A real workbook – work in progress*

Benedict of Nursia wrote a rule for monks in the 6th century. He calls it ‘a small rule of life for beginners’. In more than 1300 monasteries worldwide, where nuns and monks form a living community, a portion of that rule is still read every day. In one year, the entire rule is read, including those chapters that no longer seem to fit our times at all but still contain deep experiences and insights. Such chapters also help you stay focused. The word ‘lesson’ fits a sentence from Benedict’s foreword, the Prologue. In it, he calls the monastery ‘a training school for the service to the Lord’.

But even in the monastery, the Lord usually does not appear directly. Rather, He is in the guest who knocks at unexpected hours; in that fellow sister singing rather off-key next to you in the choir stall; in your, although partly chosen by yourself, sometimes too-demanding abbess; in the work ahead of you, and in the question in an email that you’ve left unanswered for too long. But we are all, in one way or another, in training for service, which includes service to yourself. Every task, even the most mundane task, deserves attention and love.

What you are now reading aims to contribute to that.

I once asked an older monk at the Sint-Willibrord Abbey in Doetinchem, where I have been connected as an oblate for more than thirty years, when he would finally finish his work as a monk. We walked around the abbey grounds and were passing by its beautifully maintained cemetery. He pointed to it and simply said, ‘When I get there and have been carried away.’

That’s why it’s called ‘work in progress’ or ‘practice time’. This workbook is an invitation to practice.

In September 2000, I published *A Rule of Life for Beginners – Benedictine Spirituality for Daily Life*. In it, I try to translate elements from the Rule of Benedict into non-monastic contexts. The kind but cautious publisher only

*Wil Derkse (Nijmegen, 28 July 1952) is a Dutch philosopher. As an associate member of the Benedictine St. Willibrord's Abbey near Doetinchem, he became familiar with the rule of life as a source of spiritual vitality. He tried to draw on it in shaping his everyday life, and also in his work as a manager. He was a professor at the Eindhoven University of Technology, Radboud University Nijmegen and the Open University. Derkse is an oblate or lay member of the Benedictine Willibrord's Abbey in Doetinchem. This resulted in the successful book *A Rule of Life for Beginners - Benedictine Spirituality for Daily Life*, which was reprinted more than thirty times. "A blessed life" is also from his hand.*

printed a small edition. He turned out to be too careful! The book was in its 33<sup>is</sup> correct edition last year translated into English, French and Polish.

I continue to receive many sympathetic responses, sometimes in very domestic contexts: ‘Since reading your book, I have been trying to fold the laundry in a more Benedictine manner’ (Hey, you should practice that yourself,’ my sister would say to me). But it is also possible to work with a Rule of Life at the level of a large company. Someone said: ‘I have the attitudes of *stabilitas*, *conversio morum*, and *obedientia* secretly implemented in the meetings of our management team.’

While my book was indebted to many others (which I have mentioned), Benedict’s Rule is also the product of a lot of cutting and pasting (particularly from the Bible and previous monastic rules).

The workbook that Janneke Huisman wrote is of a different nature. I am hardly quoted by her, and it has clearly inspired her, but above all, it shows her own ‘handwriting’.

Janneke found inspiration in a monastery where Carmelites live (they do not follow the Rule of Benedict) in Austria. She wrote a rule of life for her own use, playful, light-hearted and practical. And she noticed that others could be encouraged by writing and discovering their own rules of life.

And it is perhaps no surprise that this workbook is also being continuously worked on: through updates from Janneke and by every reader who longs for a ‘light-hearted rule of life with peace and rhythm’. It’s literally a work in progress. So keep practicing.

*Wil Derkse*

Den Bosch/Nijmegen, 24.8.2023



# Welcome

*“Restless is our heart until it finds rest in You.”*

Aurelius Augustine

Who does not recognize themselves in this well-known statement by the monk Augustine? I cannot give you the rest that can only be found in God. What I can do, however, is to teach you a Way of Life based on rest and rhythm. This practical workbook is an attempt to do just that.

Now, you are here; it is nice to *arrive* consciously, *to be conscious*, and to *leave consciously*. The base, the beginning, and end point is rest. In between, you live a life that fits the season in which you live and pay attention to seven areas of life.

Everyone has a Rule of Life, but most people do not write it out. The noise and turmoil of life can make it hard to see what really matters and what doesn't. The expectations and demands we place on ourselves are often excessive and unrealistic.

## My Rule of Life was born out of despair.

It was Spring 2019, and we were about to move from Osijek, Croatia, back to the Netherlands. It was our fifth international move in fifteen years. I should've mastered moving around with the family by then. *Nope!*

I felt extremely overwhelmed by all the tasks that still needed to be done, even apart from the move as a family: Food needed to be put on the table for our family of six—every single day. The school year needed to be finished at four different levels for each kid. We needed to wrap up our local work. We wanted to stay in touch with our family. Plus, we needed to find a house and jobs while figuring out what to do with our current house and belongings. We had to find good rituals to say good-bye and settle on the other side of Europe. I won't get into the emotional rollercoaster we were on.

Then and there, it happened at our kitchen table. I found the key for something that had been growing very slowly and deeply as a tiny seed inside me.

And finally, it was coming to the surface: A Rule of Life – *my* Rule of Life. And now, I am happy to share this Rule of Life with you, who may also be feeling overwhelmed by daily life and asking yourself, *How can I live a holistic, full life more attentively?* Your situation is different from mine at the time, but the desire is the same.

A rule of life offers you a framework to live mindfully in a time of distraction. You do this by learning to reflect, to live consciously, and to adjust in small steps. You can start over and over again. That is so gracious. In this way, your rule of life is also healing and circular.

### Who is this workbook for?

This workbook will help you to look at your life with some distance, think about whether you are doing what you are on this earth for, and decide whether that requires adjustment. It is particularly suitable after a major change in your life. It does not matter whether you are in the middle of life and have many roles to fulfill, are just starting a new study, have just started a new job, or are long-term ill. It is for everyone who wants to proactively take control of the helm themselves instead of constantly reacting to changes from outside.

You can work with this framework *playfully*—repeat it, start over, and keep looking for improvement. A rule of life implicitly breathes the word “*grace*.” Living with a light-hearted rule of life has helped me to live with more focus, rest and rhythm. It gives me a grip on what I value and helps me live attentively. I distinguish between what I can influence and what I cannot influence. After all, for every human being, there are lots of factors that influence your life and make your situation unique.

### The structure of this workbook teaches you in seven steps:

- Gain insight into the different roles you fulfill.
- Deal with 7 areas of life, starting from rest and moving to completion.
- Write and evaluate your personal rule of life in 7 steps.
- Develop rhythm and live in a holistic and circular and healing way.
- Formulate clear, accessible goals for the time you set.
- Gain insight into your ideal *daily* rhythm.
- Gain insight into your ideal *weekly* rhythm.

Each explanation of a life domain starts with a short story from the monastery in the Alps, where I locked myself in a vault (monastery cell) for a week to write this workbook. Then, you read what the life domain entails and how you can get started with it. There are a few questions that you can think about in order to clarify how you want to get started with this life domain. Once you have learned all seven domains of life, you take the seven concrete steps to write out, evaluate, and refine your rule of life.

The rule of life that you will find in this workbook is a framework. You may place accents that belong to your unique life and the gifts and obligations given by God that go with it. I hope that you can enjoy the creative process that you surrender to as you work through this book. Get started openly and calmly, find your basis on holy ground, and remember your connection with the Source and Origin of life.

*Janneke Huisman-Karels*



P.S. This workbook is suitable for going through independently, but it comes into its own even better during a retreat. Feel free to contact me if you have any problems or need tips:

**[TheWorldAroundTable.com/contact](https://TheWorldAroundTable.com/contact)**



*Part A:*

**The what,  
why and how  
of a rule  
of life**

## PART A:

# The what, why and how of a rule of life

“The Lord is exalted, for he dwells on high; He will fill Zion with justice and righteousness; and He will be the *stability of your times*, the abundance of salvation, wisdom and knowledge.” Isaiah 33:5–6

The basis, the beginning and the end of a Rule of Life, is rest. In between, you live a life that fits the season in which you live, in which you pay attention to seven areas of life.

God is our support as long as we live – the stability in everything that changes. As a spiritual person, you work together with God (Create with your Creator) on your rule of life. You may believe that He is the Author of your life, but you also bear full responsibility yourself and constantly consult with the Source of Life.

## What is a rule of life?

The use of rules of life originates from the monastic tradition. Within the monastery, certain values are important. These values are like the bars of the rack on which your life plant finds support, and you can therefore use them as the basis for your rule of life. In the Benedictine tradition, the following values are of great importance: *obedientia*, *stabilitas* and *conversio morum*.

### *Obedientia* (“Obedience”)

This means that we obey what is asked of us. We take time and listen carefully to ourselves, those nearest us, and our environment.

### *Stabilitas* (“Permanence”)

This challenges us to stay true to who we are – something you constantly (re) discover if you live consciously and plan moments of reflection and meditation in communion with God.

*Conversio Morum* (“Daily improvement of attitude and lifestyle”)

In Benedictine spirituality, this means a positive, growth-oriented lifestyle in which you learn good habits with small steps.



When writing your rule of life, you can always keep these values in mind. You can check out **TheWorldAroundMyTable.com/values** for a deeper explanation and examples of values.

A rule of life is like a rack that provides stability and direction and helps you to grow attentively towards the light. It can provide support and consistency in your life. A rule of life is a framework that you use to shape your life with God. In doing so, you give attention to seven areas of life (holistic) with repetition (circular), setting goals for a realistic time period that you determine for yourself. You playfully implement this space in your daily and weekly rhythm. By regularly evaluating, you can continue to refine the rule of life and adapt it to your changing situation. In this way, your rule of life grows with you, and you have a lasting framework to *hold on to*.



“A rule of life is not a prescription,

it’s an invitation.

It’s not a force, it’s a guideline.

It’s not threatening, but it’s alert.

It shuts out fear and points to love.

In this it is an invitation to freedom.

A freedom to love.”

*H. Nouwen.*

## Why would you want to live with a rule of life?

Living attentively with a rule of life can help you find an answer to the question: what is important for me to live in a healthy balance and to give the people around me and myself the attention that is needed?

Developing a rule of life can help you to reflect on what needs more attention and what needs less. It helps to formulate the desires you want to be occupied with over a certain period. It helps you to make a distinction between things that you can influence and things you can't. Sometimes you experience intensely sad things, such as grief, loss, sickness or unfulfilled desires. Your goal is not that somehow the impossible happens, over which you have no influence – although you may of course continue to hope for that. But your intention may then be learning to receive peace, tranquility and acceptance.

A rule of life also helps to organize and implement your tasks with intention. A written rule of life brings order to the hectic pace of life. Live like the leaves, airy and loose on the branches and yet deeply connected to the trunk, the Source of life.

Nature also starts over again every time. That's an encouraging thing. You can leave it for a while and pick it up again tomorrow. It's wonderful that there is always a new beginning; it gives courage.

But beware: Everything you give your attention to grows. And what you decline does not grow. It does not proliferate, or it becomes wild and doesn't flourish in the way it was meant to flourish. It comes less into its own. You can influence this. The choice is yours. May God guide you and give you insight so that we live as He intended.

## How does this rule of life work?

*"Your faithfulness is new every morning,"* it says in Lamentations 3. In the same way, we may also start over every day.

The rule of life HOLDON. is holistic: it pays attention to all areas of life. It is also circular: you may start over every time. And because of this, it is also healing. This is in line with the Rule of Benedict, which excelled in strictness but

also in grace. By evaluating regularly, you live consciously and implement your rule of life in everyday living.

The word 'grace' comes from the Greek word *charis*: which also means 'gift'. Every new day full of life is a gift from God. The sun rises for free (whether we see it or not). You may unfold every new day with God, so that you can enjoy the sun, the wind, the light, a meal and music.

That is grace.

The greatest gift of God's grace is His Son, the Lord Jesus. Through Christ, God reveals his love for us. Grace is the goodness of God that is offered to you for free. Together with God, you may face the new day and everything that it brings.

*"God does not impose more on you than you can bear."* Writing from prison, Bonhoeffer was a theologian who stood against the Nazi regime. He was waiting for death. There seemed nothing left for him to do but surrender to the evil powers around him. He had to leave all the tasks he so loved to perform. He clearly saw the balance between accepting what we cannot change, what is still on our path, and what we can do to live life to the fullest.

You may always start over with a rule of life, according to the principle of *conversio morum* (*daily improvement*). God's grace is endless. So too is your rule of life circular. You may always start over and refine your rule of life with small steps, focused on God.

When writing your life rule, always pay attention to the following seven areas of life:



**H** of **Holy Ground**: A good start, a solid foundation.



**O** for **Organizing**: Standing still and not moving yet.



**L** for: **Let's get started!** No more delay, and get moving now.



**D** for: **Dear ones around you** – your beating heart for others.



**O** for: **Oh!—my body!** Pay attention to your body: nutrition, exercise, rest and sexuality.



**N** for: **Nurture your soul and sensitivity.**



◆ for: **The art of wrapping up in a good way and calling it finished.**

The acronym of the phrase '**HOLD ON**' is loosely based on the text from Isaiah 33:5–6 that is quoted at the beginning of this chapter. *He will be the stability of your times. The One to hold on to.*

By the time you have worked through this workbook, you will have thought about each of these seven life domains. You will have developed a daily and weekly routine in which you give all life domains sufficient space and attention. You will know for yourself which domain needs extra attention and how you are going to offer it. In doing so, you always start and end from rest.



*Part B:*

# **Your personal rule of life**

## PART B:

# Your personal rule of life

What is the season of your life, and what are your roles?

What are the tasks and responsibilities that God has given you? What do you have to deal with? A rule of life is a framework that you can adapt to the circumstances that are unique for your life. It is good to know which of the seven areas you want to highlight and give more attention in this season of your life.

Our lives have seasons, and the season you live in makes quite a difference – if you're a student or recovering from an illness, just became a parent or entered into retirement. Therefore, living with a rule of life is a living skill that will change over time; you can shape and adapt it in each season of your life.

Your characteristics and roles also influence how your life rule will look. If you are a workaholic, then you will be fine with making lists. But how much attention do you pay to sensitivity? How good are you at starting from rest? Do you run like crazy and tackle too much at once? Do you understand the art of stopping? Do you know your body? People tend to go through cycles – do you recognize yours? Your emotions – do you know where they come from, and do you recognize patterns? What is your weight?

Are you more of a thinking person who finds it tougher to take action? Are you a multitasking mom or a self-employed person with a sea of freedom that you can organize yourself? Or are you a salaried employee? Are you single with the challenges that come with it? Perhaps you are a caregiver or fill a combination of these roles.

When you start writing out your rule of life, the roles you fill create your unique, personal starting point.

But now we are going to learn what HOLD ON. signifies and how we can develop our rule of life in a stable, balanced way. Using the characters H-O-L-D-O-N-. we will discuss the seven domains of life, which require attention every day and week. After that, you will be able to write a holistic rule of life, with attention for each domain, fitting your roles, standards, and values.



Go attentively through each chapter and mark a weekly moment in your agenda to evaluate what you wrote down. Never hesitate to ask me a question:  
**[theworldaroundmytable.com/contact](http://theworldaroundmytable.com/contact)**



## Holy ground, a solid foundation.

“Come, let us bow down in worship,  
let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;”

Ps. 95:6

*It is a long journey from the Netherlands to the Alps. The sleeping places on the night train are fully booked, so I am stuffed into a compartment with four young ladies and a man. Sleeping on a chair is not conducive to a good night's sleep. Finally, at the last train station, I climb a high mountain full of snow. The world around me becomes increasingly quiet. When I arrive at the monastery that evening, I say to God: 'Wake me up if you think I should go to the morning service.' I lie down peacefully, utterly tired, the arch in my vault surrounding me like a wreath. The window is open despite the freezing cold outside, -18 degrees Celsius. The fresh mountain air infuses my vault. But the snow apparently insulates, or otherwise the thick blankets do. At 6:15, I open my eyes and know that it is exactly on time to go to the morning service. God speaks in the silence – and in the pealing church bells.*

*The sisters here are of a contemplative order. This means their main task is to be in silence in the presence of the Lord. All sorts of things happen during such a service, which easily lasts two hours. In one week, the sisters sing all the psalms together, and at a certain point, the 27 sisters, dressed in white, kneel on the white tiled floor. Their habits (the nuns' garment) have under-and-over aprons. The over-apron has two flaps, one at the back and one at the front. When a sister kneels, she can place the front of her apron on the floor like a rug. She can then place her Bible, hymn book or prayer chain on it. Practical. And so the sisters all quietly kneel at the feet of the Lord.*



*A prayer to live our lives one day at a time.*

Dear God,

From where I am standing now, I find it hard to see into the future.

How is this adventure unfolding?

I can think about how I want things to go,

but I believe You are the Author of my life.

I acknowledge You as my Lord, King, and Master.

I know that You have dominion over my life

and recognize that Your Word is a light to my path.

Thank you for inviting me to take one step at a time

so that I don't have to look far ahead

but may trust You in everything.

Please give me that confidence in everything.

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.



## Holy ground, the best foundation.

Moses is just doing his God-given job of tending sheep when God appears through the burning bush. There Moses stands on sacred ground before he is given a particularly large assignment. (Exodus 3)

God hears the cries because of the slavery of the people of Israel in Egypt and remembers His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (Ex. 2:24). God has mercy on them. Moses faces a daunting task, but he receives a promise: *“I will be with you, and on this mountain, you will serve the Lord!”* (Ex 3: 12). The memorable moment there at that bush becomes a stepping stone in his life because he receives it as a sign on his journey.

Moses has all sorts of objections: *“What shall I say then? Who am I to take on this task?”* But God is there and says, *“Tell them: ‘I AM’ sent you.”* He asks permission from his father-in-law, who gives him the blessing for the journey and says: *“Go in peace.”* Moses goes on his way with a difficult task before him, but God keeps His promise. Later, they come along Mount Horeb with all the people of Israel to serve God, as promised, 1300 years before Christ was born. (1300 BC)

And there, the first Rule of Life was born, in Exodus 20.

## The Ten Commandments

This is the oldest rule of life from the top-selling book in the world.

Moses led a gigantic group of people through the desert for years (around 1300 BC) from Egypt to the land of Canaan. He has no business plan, but everyone knows they are headed to “the land flowing with milk and honey.” They experience everything you can read in the book of Exodus. Chaos ensues soon after they leave Egypt. To regulate life and bring some order, Moses is given the Ten Commandments by God.

The first four commandments are about dealing with God and keeping calm: I am God, and I am first; put your trust only in Me, and do not misuse My Name. Rest regularly. (Don't walk too long now; tomorrow is another day on the road!)

Commandments 5 through 10 address relationships with others: Respect your parents, don't kill anyone, be faithful in your marriage, stay away from others' property, speak the truth, and don't be jealous.

It's centuries later.

*"I AM" is still there. God said to Moses and so to us: "I am with you."*

## Open hands

You put each new day in the hands of God and then let it unfold with Him. Whether it's making your bed or having a quiet cup of tea at an empty kitchen table, walking your dog or taking a dip in the river, starting the day from tranquility with a gentle but powerful morning ritual is the key to more meaningful and effective productivity.

Spend a little time with Jesus in your mind. Do it with attention and love. Think about the past and now. Invite God to be tangibly present. In this way, you can be open to the fulfillment of God. You are like a candle that spreads light; do so generously. See other Christians as a source of inspiration. See Christ in the other.

## Questions for you:

What is a good start to the day for you?

.....

.....

What is your morning ritual? (week, month, year)

.....

.....

How do you start from rest? Together with the Lord?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

To what extent does your phone interfere with your peace? Do you take it into the bedroom? How many hours a day are you offline?

.....

.....

.....

.....

*An exercise for you:*

Create a quiet corner in your home – an empty table with a candle, a prayer chair from the flea market – a breathing place as holy ground in your home.





To organize,  
you must stand still;  
do not move yet.

“It takes a certain courage to be specific,  
because the more specific we are, the  
more we expose ourselves  
to objections or obligations.”

Make a List, Marilyn Mc Entyre

*The prayer times give the day its backbone  
At the entrance to the church in the Nieuw Sion monastery in Diepenveen in the  
Netherlands, there is a large wooden plate that says:*

*'Seven times a day I sing Your praise.'*

*This text from Psalm 119 has always been close to the heart of the monastery.  
The sisters in the monastery in the Alps also take this Bible text literally and  
pray seven times a day.*

*The Lauds at the beginning of the day are at 6:45 am and the Compline at the  
end of the day at 5:00 pm. The prayer times run like an uninterrupted heart-  
beat through the monastery life, giving life here structure. The practice of ora  
et labora (pray and work) takes shape in this way, because between services  
snow is shoveled, food is prepared, laundry is done, icons are painted, dishes are  
handmade, and everything else is done that is needed. The joy and peace on the  
faces of the young sisters surprises me. It is definitely not a sleepy affair here.  
The freshness is infectious and makes you feel like your life out in the world is a  
poor one indeed.*

*While I am staying in the monastery, I participate in the prayers. That takes  
me about five hours a day, but I notice that coming to rest in the church is  
actually very functional. It is as if the dust settles for a moment, and I take a  
step back from my writing. Many fragments of ideas are born while sitting still  
– but also while climbing the mountain to the church, and don't underestimate  
the sledding down!*

## Ideal daily routine

The booklet “*Surprised By Joy*” was sitting on our kitchen table one day, and that was probably not by accident. The conversation during the meal soon turned to the ideal daily rhythm as described by C.S. Lewis in this book. He talks about his transformation from Atheist to Christian and how he thereby came to know a joy that was surprising to him and that he did not know before—hence the title. He writes:

*“We now settled into a routine which has ever since served in my mind as an archetype, so that what I still mean when I speak of a “normal” day (and lament that normal days are so rare) is a day of the Bookham pattern. For if I could please myself, I would always live as I lived there. I would always choose to have breakfast at exactly eight o’clock and be at my desk at nine o’clock to read or write there until one o’clock. If a cup of good tea or coffee could be brought to me about eleven, so much the better. A step or so out of doors for a pint of beer would not do quite so well; for a man does not want to drink alone, and if you meet a friend in the tap-room, the break is likely to be extended beyond its ten minutes.”*

“At one precisely, lunch should be on the table; and by two at the latest, I would be on the road. I would like to be on my way by two o’clock at the latest. Not, except at rare intervals, with a friend. Walking and talking are two very great pleasures, but it is a mistake to combine them. Our own noise blots out the sounds and silences of the outdoor world; and talking leads almost inevitably to smoking, and then farewell to nature as far as one of our senses is concerned. The only friend to walk with is one that shares your taste for every mood of the countryside that a glance, a halt or, at most, a nudge is enough to assure us that the pleasure is shared. “

On his ideal day, C.S. Lewis had a quiet walk, time for reflection and writing, and hot meals served to him while he read something lighthearted. (Who doesn’t want that?)

The English tea-time is around 4 pm, while the Dutch evening meal is served around half past five. Furthermore, it doesn’t sound like Lewis did the shopping, had to run a household, or was responsible for fixing any leaking taps either.

Still, C.S. Lewis closes his description of his ideal day with an interesting conclusion:

*“That’s my ideal day, and that was (almost) the reality of a ‘quiet, calm bon vivant’. It is no doubt for my own good that I am so prevented from living it, for it is a life that is almost wholly selfish.”*

This is how the great writer of the twentieth century puts his own ideal daily rhythm into perspective. An ideal day is a bit removed from reality, but that does not mean we can’t attempt to approach it. So go ahead!

### What does organization entail?

A clear, practical organization serves a deeper purpose, namely that you know what you have to do, when you have to do it, and why you have to do it. The organization is not intended to be a stumbling block; it provides a framework, like the frame of a house. You can already see the contours, but it is still bare. The decoration and content are yet to come.

By developing your rule of life, you will place your tasks in different domains, one at a time. Leaving other tasks aside for a while allows you to give each one allows you to give each one your focus and attention.

The purpose of organizing your different tasks is that you know which tasks you have to do and with what urgency. The most urgent tasks are given priority, but you also keep the tasks that are less urgent, those that you keep putting off, in sight. Like changing the flat tire on that bike that hardly anyone uses, but which is still useful.

### How do you organize?

Which tasks are on your shoulders?

For me it can be divided into a few categories: family, work, garden, writing and retreats.

At the beginning of the week, I map out what needs to be done in which area and with what urgency. I have a clear view of all domains represented by the characters HOLD ON. written on a piece of paper in front of me on the table.

You organize your week and keep an eye on sacred ground, organization, time

to perform your tasks, connection with others, your body, your soul and the completion of your tasks.

Those are the seven balls that I want to keep in the air. Holding one ball at a time, with the attention it deserves, is sufficient.

*A question for you:*

Consider the ideal day of C.S. Lewis. How is yours different from his?

.....

.....

.....

.....



But the fruit of the Spirit is

*love,*

joy, peace,

*patience,*

kindness, goodness,

*faithfulness,*

gentleness, self-control;

*(Gal. 5:22)*



## Let's get started!

Be attentive!,  
Be intelligent!,  
Be reasonable!,  
Be responsible!,  
Be in Love!

Barnard Lonergan S.J; Canadian Philosopher

*It is 8:00 in the morning when I open the door of the wooden cupboard where the bread is stored. The delicious smell of home-baked bread greets me. It does not come out of the blue: there is a lot of work behind it. Ora et Labora. The sisters do not only sit at Jesus' feet, like Mary; they also get moving like Martha.*

*There is no kitchen here in the guesthouse – only a place where the meals are served. Everyone eats in silence and solitude in their own vault with attention, at the feet of the Lord. At home I have to work harder to prepare a meal. I could also make myself available here to participate in all kinds of work, but these days, I have chosen to keep my focus on writing.*

## What does this focus on getting started involve?

Focusing on your tasks means completing them with attention. You are present in the moment. All the energy you have may be focused on the one task that lies in front of you. Everything else may wait. No matter how hectic or quiet your life is, do everything you do with attention and love. And use the wise five: be attentive, be sensible, be reasonable, be responsible, be in love.

## How do you carry that out?

Once upon a time, there was a woman who lost her husband. Mealtimes became less pleasant. Yet she cooked day in and day out and ate in solitude – but not without care. The table was set with attention. A bunch of dried lavender adorned the table. A plate, simple cutlery, a glass of water and a simple meal were the fixed rituals that determined the rhythm of her days. This rhythm gave the woman in mourning stability. Her life went on, although it took on a different shape without the man who had stood by her side for decades. She did what she had to do and faithfully took care of herself. She took responsibility, she was sensible, she set her table with attention. She was reasonable in acknowledging pain, but also in living through it soberly and tackling everyday tasks. She did it with love.

Are you able to focus on what you want to do now? Or are you often busy with all sorts of things? When evening comes, do you wonder what you actually did all day? Then it is good to look at your responsibilities in combination with your goals. Are your goals SMART (Specific, Measurable, Acceptable, Realistic and Time-bound)? Do your goals fit in with your God-given tasks?

Do what you have to do. Respond to unforeseen circumstances and move with them. That's all. Park for the next day what you don't get to, and constantly refine your To Do list. Keep moving. You know what your duties are.

## What *can* you change, and what can you *not* change?

It is important that you distinguish between circumstances that you can influence and circumstances that are out of your hands. Do you not know where to start? Then look at a dot on the horizon and start with Step 3.



“Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are those who mourn,  
for they shall be comforted.

“Blessed are the meek,  
for they shall inherit the earth.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for they shall be satisfied.

“Blessed are the merciful,  
for they shall receive mercy.

“Blessed are the pure in heart,  
for they shall see God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they shall be called sons of God.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted  
for righteousness' sake,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and  
utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven,  
for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

*Matth. 5 : 3–12*

## *A question for you:*

Do you carry out the plans you make? Or do things often get left behind?

.....

.....

What stands in the way of performing your tasks?

- too many obligations
- too much time
- too little time
- too tired
- no overview
- other.....

Did you tick more than two?

Tip: Contact me to discuss this at [Theworldaroundmytable.com/contact](http://Theworldaroundmytable.com/contact).

We'll find a date and spar together online.

.....

.....

.....

## *An exercise for you:*

Close your eyes and sit quietly for a moment. Think of yourself in your old age. How would you like to look back? What is the one thing you would like to have done in the time God gives you?

Do you have any influence on that? Is it feasible? (It could also be making peace with a difficult situation.)





Dear ones around you;  
the beating heart  
for other people.

Gracious words are like a honeycomb,  
sweetness to the soul and health to the body.

Proverbs 16 : 24

*'Peace be with you!' said the sister, holding both my hands firmly in hers and looking me in the eyes. I saw the hearty twinkle in her eyes. During the Eucharist celebration, the word of God is read first. It is often sung, with clear, pure voices somehow reminding me of stars in the sky.*

*After the reading comes the greeting. All the sisters stand in two rows. The priest who leads the service offers both hands to the two sisters in front, who receive them warmly. They then pass the blessing on to the back. From above, where I am sitting in the place for guests, I have a beautiful view of dancing habits and the cheerful faces of the sisters who wish each other so warmly 'the peace of God'. Greeting the sisters, with them taking both your hands and looking you happily in the eyes, creates a deep connection.*

*As a guest, I also receive that blessing, and I accept it gladly. The underlying reason is that you cannot celebrate the Eucharist without living in peace with each other. Hatred, envy and friction must be resolved. It is a clear form of conflict management.*

## What is connection?

How complicated relationships can be, and how much can go wrong in this area. Disturbed relationships in families; it is something that almost no one can ignore and most of us have to face. This chapter brings us to the heart of the rule of life. You may also be experiencing a bit of heartache.

Did you know that the shape of the cross has a deeply symbolic meaning?

- A cross goes from above to below, from God to us.
- A cross goes from below to above, from us back to the source of life.
- A cross also has arms to the right and to the left, in order to embrace the other.
- Or to indicate a boundary to the other: thus far and no further; this is my boundary.

## How do you ensure connection?

When developing your rule of life, you take into account the relationships you have in the different phases of your life. Caring for someone close to you is more intensive at certain times than at others. Relationships are constantly changing, and you may consciously change along with them. You have a different relationship with a twelve-year-old child than with a twenty-year-old child. You shape your relationships by consciously looking at them. You will sometimes want or need to intensify some contacts, while you want to distance yourself a bit more from others – for example, in the process of maturing and reshaping the parent/child relationship, but also in the event of illness, death or old age.

What matters is that you know what you must do and that you do it faithfully. The previously mentioned monastery values are particularly applicable here:

*Obedientia:* You may not feel like visiting that older relative, but it is a good habit to keep family ties warm. And it is a form of obedience and respect for the other.

*Stabilitas:* You show stability by being there for the other. But you also show stabilitas when you indicate your boundaries. You are allowed to indicate your boundaries (and you owe it to yourself). Have you identified any wrong patterns in this? Don't be afraid to seek help and confide in someone.



Holding fast by letting go

*The less longing, the more presence*

*The less we bang on the door, the more it opens for us.*

*The less we demand, the more we see the beauty of the gift.*

*The less we expect, the more the joy of the surprise*

*The more selfless, the more self*

*Clamorous need shuts us off from the needed*

*“It is our clinging which is our death.”*

*The less we cling, the more we embrace*

*The less we fear, the more we love*

*All joy reminds us*

*It is not a possession but leads us onwards*

*Our love is a taste of things to come*

*Go lightly*

*Go simply*

*Feel the beauty of the balance*

*A breathing out*

*A breathing in*

*A shared breath*

*A letting go, so that we may be held forever.*

*Conversio Morum*: You adjust your lifestyle depending on the change you face. Some contacts become more intensive; with others, it is healthier if you give each other more space.

Good manners are an affirmation of the connection between two people—whether it's your neighbor, your friend in the street or your roommate. Remember that with every cup of tea you pour, you are in communication with Jesus, who shares the bread and pours the wine. This is how you can also bless the people around you if you set the table for yourself or for your housemates; feed a toddler who is learning to eat; do the dishes or other daily activities around meal times. Each meal is a reference to the Last Supper, the Supper of the Lamb.

## *Some questions for you:*

What do you need to have a healthy relationship with your family and friends?

.....

.....

.....

Which relationship would you like to intensify or reduce?

.....

.....

.....

How do you want to handle this?

.....

.....

.....

## *An exercise:*

Set the table with an extra place and imagine that an uninvited guest is joining you. Who would you like to have at the table, and why? Is it an idea to send an invitation?

Will it affect your habits at the table?



## Oh! My body!

“Take care of yourself, so you can take care of others.  
A bleeding heart is no help to anyone.”

Fr. Buechner

*It is 7:30, and the morning light falls through the high, round windows. In a procession, the approximately thirty sisters walk to the dining room after lauds, singing. On Sunday morning, we female guests are allowed to eat the main meal of the week. It is the climax of my stay: together at the table.*

*The first sister carries the candle from the church and places the light in a prominent place in the middle of the circle. We are sitting in a large square. Four times three tables of three meters touch each other at the four corners. At the head, opposite the guests in their colorful clothing, sits the lively prioress. To her right and left sit the sisters in their white habits. The prioress is not eating now but is reading from a writing from the first century about Mary's desire to become the Mother of the Lord. A large wreath stands in the middle of the dining room. The fourth candle is burning today. The Advent season is heavily pregnant with the promise of the coming of the Child. 'How shall I receive you? How do you want to be met?'*

*The fresh snow is visible on the conifers that surround and shelter the monastery. I take a sip of the fresh herbal tea, drinking in and savoring everything around me at the same time. For me, it is breakfast, but for the sisters, who started the day four hours ago, it is the hot meal. The food is on handmade plates, the tea in earthenware vessels. Everything is prepared by hand.*

*The details! How do the sisters get flowering branches to the table in the middle of winter with forty centimeters of snow? The smell of incense and the meal, the sight of the icons and the candles, the hearty greetings with hearts and hands, the sounds of singing and reading – being here is a feast for the senses.*

*It is not only my stomach that is filled here. My heart is overflowing.*

## Why is it important to pay attention to your body?

Your body often knows before your head when something is wrong. If you listen to your body, you can also understand certain emotions better – and then you can respond to them appropriately. In some cases, you learn to recognize the reason behind your behavior.

After all, you constantly receive signals from your body. You yawn when you are tired, your stomach growls when you are hungry. Your bladder is full when you have to go to the toilet. You may cry more easily when you are tired or going through an intense period. You are a bit more lively when you are in love; you can also notice feelings of desire, affection and happiness in your body. You might like to be closer to someone at some point, which may or may not be a good choice; it is important to take action in one direction or the other.

As a woman, you can learn to follow your cycle by listening to your body. If you are in a relationship, it is particularly beautiful if this is treated with respect and care. In this way, you can respond to it by expressing it out loud.

Another example: in our family, we know the word hangry. It is used when someone is short and a bit angry because they are hungry. It is not always useful to point it out in others, because that can add fuel to the fire. However, you can suggest eating, and in this way, you can take action on a signal from your body, or that of someone else.

When you pay attention, you can more quickly recognize diseases, skin disorders or new aches and pains. You can also know your personal weak spots and take precautions there. For a child, it is sometimes wonderful to romp around a bit before going to sleep – like the young foals hopping in the meadow while the sun is setting.



# 10 Ten good habits that can be a playful mostly daily part of a rule of life

- 1** One glass of lemon water to start the day. If you really want a detox, a liter of water with a quarter of a squeezed lemon on your empty stomach is an old remedy that I discovered in Croatia. At the beginning of the day, I look for a good start somewhere and then sip away.
- 2** Two hours before sleep: Go offline. Set a limit to your online life and go offline regularly for a few days. A short while ago, our GP told us so many young adults have sleeping problems because of their time spent online. How can you limit yourself?
- 3** Three times a day, brushing your teeth and then not eating for an hour or two will help your gut settle down. I also enjoy fasting between 7:00 in the evening and 7:00 in the morning. (Weekends are the exception).
- 4** Eat meat four times a week instead of every day. Using tasty alternatives is no problem.
- 5** If you fancy a snack, fruit and vegetables are the oldies, and you don't get tired of those quickly.

- 6 This only applies to women, but it's good for men to be aware of. If you have your period, go with the flow. Listen to your body, and do not push it. Need more sleep? Take it! Be gentle with yourself. This hormonal change can be intense.
- 7 A 7-minute workout every day can be a good habit. Finding a fixed time every day might help. Three times a week can be a good start. Making a routine will help. What you do doesn't matter. Just do something!
- 8 It's liquorice time at half past four. My mother introduced it to us in the early 1970s. If you are not Dutch, you might hate it. Choose something else instead. A small pleasure each day is the joy of the moment, after all.
- 9 Go outside every day: cycling, walking, sports – do what suits you. Not using the car and the internet regularly for a day or so gives peace of mind and promotes life with attention.
- 10 Do a BMI check every now and then.

*Daily:*

Kneeling prayer three times a day

One meal with others

One hour with phone off

Spend time with scripture before picking up your  
phone in the morning



*Weekly:*

One hour of conversation with a friend

Curate media to four hours

Fast from something for twenty-four hours

Sabbath

(From "The Common Rule" by Justin Whitmel Early)

## *A few questions for you:*

When you see Justin Whitmeal Early's good habits, is there anything you would like to adopt?

---

---

Which body part needs extra attention from you?

---

Do you eat healthy? What can be done better? Do you need help?

---

---

Do you have enough exercise? How do you want to implement that as a daily habit?

---

---

Do you take enough rest? How many hours of sleep do you need?

---

---

How do you use the internet? Where do you have limits?

---

---



## Nurture your soul and sensitivity

“Beauty and harmony are basic needs for my creative soul. They provide a breeding ground for the true, the good and the beautiful, which I like to cherish in the most intimate space of our home. One is a feeding place for the other.”

My journal

*The pure singing of the sisters, in the wooden church with the conifers waving in the background, is like balm for my soul. You get a psalm bath and heaven and earth touch each other. I know most of the texts, but in another language, I receive them differently.*

*I sled down again and totally enjoy it.*

## What is cherishing your soul?

The senses are the tentacles with which you perceive life around you. They form a bridge between us and our environment. In nature, all our senses are used. You feel the wind, the rain, the sun. You grope in the dark. Through our senses we come into contact with everything and everyone around us.

By using your senses you promote cognitive skills such as memory, language and concentration. A pleasant atmosphere can give joy, peace and a feeling of connectedness. That is why cherishing your sensitivity and knowing yourself and what makes you happy is so meaningful. It is a silent force that recharges your battery.

## How do you cherish your soul?

It is good to know which sense gives you this small feeling of happiness. Try to cherish it daily. This is not about addiction, scrolling through the internet or zapping on the TV. That also gives a certain feeling of pleasure, but that is not what is intended here.

You may recognize it: you climb a mountain, and after all those hours of struggle, you finally reach the top. There you are. Satisfied. And also small. There is something bigger going on here than just what you can see. You hear the silence. A bird whistles in the distance. You feel the wind blowing over your arms and take a big sip of water to quench your thirst. You are silent, or maybe everything in you wants to sing or let out a cry of happiness.

Only you don't climb a mountain every day. So the question is: how do you translate this into everyday life? What gives you that feeling of being part of something bigger than yourself?

For some people it is listening to music by Bach. For others it is studying a work by Vermeer; for another it is solving a math problem and being amazed by the power of geometry. For someone else it is gardening, and for another one it is cooking delicious food. When you see, hear or taste so much beauty, you notice that a chord resonates deep inside you with this hunger for the good, the true, and the beautiful.

Using your senses to connect to your Creator gives a deepens our felt union with something bigger than ourselves. All this offers a glimpse of a blessed life. and we may cherish that with everything in us. Day in, day out.

There are things you can influence that you can shape in your rule of life. There are also many things that you can't influence. Pain and suffering are often not far from here. It's good to acknowledge your deepest desires and what it is that makes you happy. The two prayers on the next pages might be helpful.

The bedroom is often the place where your deepest desires take shape.

*If you have your own room:*

“Oh God,  
You made me, formed years ago in my mother’s belly.  
Here I am. I invite you into my bedroom.  
Fill my room with Yourself,  
and may I be aware of Your presence around me.  
Make me as You intended me. I lay all my desires,  
dreams and thoughts at Your feet.  
And thank You for being with me here in this room  
whether I feel it or not.  
Fill every corner of my house with Your presence.  
Thank You that You do not sleep or slumber.  
In connection with everyone who now watches  
and prays, I call on you. Be with me.  
In the Name of the Father and the Son  
and the Holy Ghost.

*Amen.”*



*A prayer for those who share a bedroom:*

“Oh God,

You made us. Here we are inviting you  
into our bedroom.

May all words and deeds that sound  
and take shape here culminate in Your glory.

Make us as You intended us.

You brought us together. Thank you for that.

\*May we always influence each other  
into intimate fellowship with You.

We pray for the fruit of our being together.

We return that to You as an offering.

We pray for peace, love, unity and fellowship.

Fill every corner of our home with Your presence.

Thank You, Father and Creator of all good.

In the Name of Jesus Christ, Thy Son.

*Amen.”*

\* Line from a letter written by Jim Elliot to his fiancé Elizabeth

## *A few questions for you:*

What makes you happy?

---

---

---

---

---

Can you cherish that every day or every week?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## *An exercise:*

Sit on a chair and make sure your feet touch the floor.

Close your eyes and breathe in and out deeply four times.

Try to observe what you feel, smell, hear and notice.

Now open your eyes and observe what you see.

This quick observation exercise increases your awareness.





## The art of wrapping up.

“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,  
according to Your word.”

The prayer of Simeon, from Luke 2:29

### **Wrapping up attentively**

*Simeon's hymn is sung every evening in most monasteries. The day may be placed back in the hands of God, and we can sleep peacefully.*

*As I fall asleep, the thirty 'amens' of the sisters still resound in my ears – the amen of each sister who receives the Eucharist and thus lets Christ become one with her body. It reminds me of Isaiah 55. Just as the snow here steadily drifts down and soaks the earth and ends up in the deepest pores of the earth, so the Body of Christ unites with the recipient of the Eucharist.*

*“So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:11). And even more: it will prosper in the thing for which He sent it.*

*The world is carried by the prayers of nuns and monks who rise at all hours of the night and intercede with the Savior of the world. Their prayer is like a heartbeat. What a comfort. We can sleep through it, because all over the world, there are other Christians who are awake and watch. Above all: The Guardian of the world is also watching.*

*May you feel deeply connected to this heartbeat and be comforted in difficult hours.*

### **Finally**

*I travel back. My bag is ready, I clean my vault,  
close the door of my vault behind me  
and walk into the mist.*

*Satisfied I descend the mountain again,  
a two-hour walk to the station.*

*My place is not here, I go back into the busy world,  
but take a few things with me.*

The movie *The Soloist* is about a homeless man in Los Angeles. His name is Anthony, and he has nothing but an old shopping cart filled with junk and a cheap violin. Not one single day is the same, and yet each day is the same.

Every evening, he looks for a place on the porch of an empty shop in the heart of the metropolis. He sleeps in the noise of the nightlife. Every night, the police pass him, because there is violence nearby. An ambulance picks someone up. A little further on, someone throws his stomach contents on the sidewalk. No night is the same, and yet all nights are the same.

Every morning, he lifts his head, gathers himself and his things, rolls up the garbage bag that serves as a mattress and starts the new day. Every evening, he finds a place. Nothing is the same. And yet, everything is the same: although he doesn't put words to it, he has a beautiful evening ritual. As he learned from his mother as a little boy, he gets ready for the night.

It's not a warm bed in a safe house with a family around him; it is a plastic bag, but he unrolls it with attention and care. He lays down his tired head. Another day is over. He folds his hands on his chest, stretched out in the porch on the street, and says to his Unchanging Friend just before he falls asleep:

*Our Father in Heaven.  
Let everyone honor you.  
Let Your new world come.  
Let Thy will be done on earth,  
just as happens in heaven.  
Give us the food we need today.  
And forgive us what we've done wrong,  
for we have also forgiven other men their faults.  
Help us never to choose against You.  
And protect us from the power of evil.  
For You are King, You reign with great power,  
forever.  
Amen.*

And in this way, Anthony creates his unwritten Rule of Life, turning the filthy street in the heart of Los Angeles into Holy Ground.

*Finally, a question for you:*

What is a good ritual for you to complete? How do you relax before going to sleep?

.....  
.....

Are you able to call it quits? Or do you tend to get stuck? What can you do about that in concrete terms?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

*A happy exercise:*

Make a trash list for the tasks you have completed. Place the trash can at a distance of one meter (about three feet for you Americans).

Throw your trash in the can with a cheerful arc from a distance. Congratulations!

Next time, start again at Sacred Ground after, hopefully, a good rest.



*Part C:*

**And now, get  
started!**

**Write your own  
rule of life**

*in seven steps*

## Step 1:

# Map your roles

You start by mapping out your roles. These are your personal starting points, and this is what makes your rule of life fitted to you. Think of work, hobbies, volunteer work, care functions and all other things you spend time on.

In the second column, write down how much time you spend on average per week on that role. In the third column, indicate what this does to your energy. Does it drain your energy? Then write down one or two minus signs. Does it give you energy? Then write down one or two plus signs. If it is neutral, then use an equals sign.

Try to analyze as neutrally as possible; do not judge yourself or your activities.



Step 1 | Map your roles

Roles

	Time (hours/days/full time)	Energy (++)/+/=/-/--)



## Step 2:

# Define your values

What value(s) do you want to live by? Visit [www.theworldaroundmytable.com/values](http://www.theworldaroundmytable.com/values) for a list of possible values.

Choose a maximum of three that are really important to you, and write them down here. Is there a value that you want to pay more attention to?

My values:

1 .....

2 .....

3 .....

Name a number of daily habits that you have, and try to divide them into the seven domains. Which domain gets the least attention?

\_\_\_\_\_ →

Step 2 | Define your values

<b>H</b> -Holy ground	
<b>O</b> -Organize	
<b>L</b> -Let's get started!	
<b>D</b> -Dear ones around you	
<b>O</b> -Oh!—my body!	
<b>N</b> -Nurturing your soul and sensitivity	
◆ -Wrapping up in a good way and calling it finished	


### Step 3:

## Formulate your goals

Look at the previous assignment. Which domain is underexposed and needs the most attention? Formulate your goals in all areas of life for a certain period of time (e.g., a year, a quarter, a month).

Think SMART (specific, measurable, acceptable, realistic and time-bound).

<b>H</b> -Holy Ground	
<b>O</b> -Organizing	
<b>L</b> -Let's get started!	
<b>D</b> -Dear ones around you	
<b>O</b> -Oh!—my body	
<b>N</b> -Nurturing your soul and sensitivity	
◆ -Wrapping up in a good way and calling it finished.	

**Tip:**

Are your goals quite big, such as 'I want to renovate my house'? Then first look at how long it could reasonably take to achieve this goal (e.g., seven months). Then break this goal down into small, bite-sized pieces: What can you do this month? What can you do this week? What can you do today?


Step 4:

## Create rhythm in all areas of life

	H-Holy Ground	O-Organizing	L-Let's get started!	
Dagelijks				
Wekelijks				
Maandelijks				
Kwartaal				
Jaarlijks				

Write down for each area of life how you want to pay attention to it daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly and/or annually. You don't have to fill in every box; see what suits you and your goals. It is not binding; you can always adjust it later to changing insights or circumstances.

	<b>D</b> -Dear ones around you	<b>O</b> -Oh!—my body	<b>N</b> -Nurturing your soul and sensitivity	<b>◆</b> -Wrapping up in a good way and calling it finished



*Step 5:*

## Design your ideal weekly schedule

Write down for each day how you want to pay attention to the different domains that day.

You can choose to focus on one domain each day – then shade the box of that domain.

Make sure you pay sufficient attention to all domains during the week. Formulate as concretely and verifiably as possible. Need inspiration? Look at the back of this book; there is an example of how to pay attention to all areas in a week.



Step 5 | Design your ideal weekly schedule

	<b>H</b> -Holy Ground	<b>O</b> -Organizing	<b>L</b> -Let's get started!	
Sunday				
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				

	<b>D</b> -Dear ones around you	<b>O</b> -Oh!— my body	<b>N</b> -Nurturing your soul and sensitivity	<b>◆</b> -Wrapping up in a good way and calling it finished



*Step 6:*

## Design your ideal daily schedule

How can you break down your goals (from step 3) into daily ten-minute moments and implement them into your daily routine?

This is where you can really make a difference: the key to your rule of life. If necessary, draw a vertical line halfway through the table and write out two daily routines, one for workdays and one for days off.

Need inspiration? Look at the back of this book for an example of how to pay attention to all areas in a day.



Step 6 | Design your ideal daily schedule

H	7.00	
	8.00	
	9.00	
O	10.00	
	11.00	
L	12.00	
	13.00	
D	14.00	
	15.00	
O	16.00	
	17.00	
N	18.00	
	19.00	
•	20.00	
	21.00	
	22.00	





## Step 7

# Schedule evaluation moments

Choose a weekly time for Rule of Life evaluation in your calendar. Over time, you'll get the hang of it, and you can switch to monthly.

Each quarter is a very nice long-term season for evaluating your Rule of Life. You might want to hold on to an end-of-year reflection as well.

Over time, you will find that your Rule of Life becomes embedded in your spinal cord. It will become the backbone of your life and will help you to hold on.

Evaluating is done with time and attention, with pencil and eraser, walking through the worksheets in prayer



It can also be good to have someone to evaluate your Rule of Life with. Perhaps there is someone in your circle who has also designed or wants to design a life rule. Otherwise, you are very welcome to connect with me, and we can do it together online. Just contact me: [Theworldaroundmytable.com/contact](https://theworldaroundmytable.com/contact)

## My example of living attentively with seven domains in one week.

I work from home each Monday. On Monday mornings, I plan out the rest of my week. When the last other person has left our house, I clear the kitchen table and turn on the washing machine. This is urgent, because on Sunday I usually take time off from household chores that can wait.

Then I drink a cup of coffee and start from holy ground. It is short and powerful. I usually combine prayer and pilates. I find that a good mix. I want to get started, and the Lord of heaven and earth understands that too. Sunday is a day of rest for me, and that is now over. On Monday, I put my shoulders to the wheel!

On most Monday mornings (exceptions aside) I put three things on my empty kitchen table:

1. My agenda. And it is a big one (almost A4 size). I do not have an online agenda, but for more than ten years I have been buying a large HEMA agenda that folds open like a book. It is manageable per week and that gives you plenty of writing space per day. It is unfussy and practical.
2. Four to-do lists that are related to the roles I have to fulfill:  
(Family, Work, Writing, Garden)
3. Six day cards (Mon, Tue, Wed, Thu, Fri, Sat)



Every day I look at what external appointments I have and then fill in my day cards, which get a place in my phone case.

The date is at the top right. The day is in the top middle. The cards are as big as a playing card or business card and fit perfectly in my phone case.

I fill them in lightly. Not everything has to be full; I'll see how it goes afterwards. I check them and adjust them throughout the day, or at least each evening.

These are the four subjects that I pay attention to during the week (organize and execute):

- Family: register child for school (job for the Monday when I work from home)
- Work: there is a special to-do list with tasks that I do during my working hours and try to limit to those hours (Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday)
- Garden: Weed the square beds this week and put three different seeds in pots (four evenings this week)
- Writing: Thursday deadline blog post

**In a nutshell:**

- Monday: Family, chores etc.
- Tuesday: Work
- Wednesday: Work
- Thursday: Writing and retreat tasks; on Thursday afternoon in the warmer months, I have a tea garden where connection, attention to my body and nurturing my soul come together.
- Friday: Work

In the evenings and on weekends I can be found in the garden.

Furthermore, there are the remaining domains:

(D) Connection with others, (O) Paying attention to my body, (N) Sensitivity, nurturing my soul.

Some tasks touch multiple domains. For me, for example, that is gardening in the evening. I certainly cherish my soul (N), live in connection with the earth, am constantly moving and thus pay attention to my body (O). I'm also chatting with neighbors who walk by (Connection with others) and winding down the day calmly (Period).

At the end of the week, I can see where the gaps have appeared: which tasks I wanted to complete but did not get to. This is not something to worry about or to beat myself up about. It is a neutral analysis and review of my week. This is called 'examining' in monastic terms. And the words 'grace' and 'Conversio Morum' sing in the back of my mind. I can start over every day.

I can see my 'win' moments, that which is finished, and celebrate those mo-

ments by crossing them off. I rip the little To-Do card in two pieces and throw them in the paper bin.

I can see what I did not get around to and what can be carried over to the next week. If it has not been completed in three weeks, then I think about why it was not done.

If you have a bigger goal, make sure that you give it a reasonable amount of time, each week. In this way, it is manageable to shape it – especially when the goal is bigger (studying, writing a paper, writing a book, learning a language, learning a skill).

Here you can see the contours of the healing, circular and holistic nature of the rule of life. Answering the questions I ask is also part of finishing with a full stop and reflecting: period – *examen*, as it is sometimes called. I often do that in the evening after dinner or the next day at the beginning of the new day. In this way I take my pulse twice a day. I only do that with the little day cards.

At the end of the week, I ask myself these questions:

- Did I start from a place of rest, or did I immediately rush into work?
- Did I have enough connection with housemates and others in my direct or indirect circle?
- Did I pay enough attention to my body?
- Did I cherish my soul, or was I just efficient? (How efficient is it really if you forget to cherish your soul?)
- How did I finish off my days?

I strive to go offline every day at 9 p.m. I do not always succeed, but it remains my ideal. I do not give the phone a place in our bedroom; it sleeps in a drawer downstairs.

Ending the day outside in the garden during the summer months is, for me, the most wonderful way to end the day. There under that open sky watching the sun set, watching the flower petals close, hearing the birds sing their song and knowing that our part of the world is laying down to rest, with the monks and nuns here and there across the world watching and praying through the night... All this fills me with a deep peace.

And so I cycle home. 'Now, Lord, let your maid go in peace to her house.'



# One example of living attentively with seven domains in one day.



**H:** Holy Ground



**O:** Organizing



**L:** Let's get started!



**D:** Dear ones around you.



**O:** Oh! My body!



**N:** Nurture your soul and sensitivity



**◆:** The art of wrapping up.

**Each day:** In the morning, take a note or a small notebook. I use little cards and write the characters **HOLD ON.** in capital letters, vertically. I go through all the letters and try to formulate in a single word what I want to pay attention to today. That way I have a coat rack list.



## Holy ground

It is a new day, rainy and gray outside. The sun is hiding. I just finished my breakfast and tea. I am a bit restless. What do I have to do today? Let's sit down first. I read a bit, listen to some music, and pray. I also start the morning with some exercises. I use an app: Pilates for at home. The day is still ahead of me. I am free, but there are a few things that I must do today. What are they?



## Organize

I make a quick list on a piece of paper. I write the characters H-O-L-D-O-N- from top to bottom.

H: Do it the way I like today; reading and writing my journal.

O: Just what I am doing now: Sit and write before going into action.

L: Fill the gas tank, write a letter

D: Call my neighbor, send a card.

O: Work in the garden.

N: Listen to my favorite music.

- : Go to bed on time. I have to get up early tomorrow, so I want to be sure to get enough rest.

I put my pen aside and begin.

Looking at your goals from Appendix 3, how can you implement those into your day in ten-minute segments? This way, you slowly grow towards your goals in the Benedictine style – with small steps in the right direction. Enjoy it and sing your life song.



## Let's go

I clear the table, get the car keys and fill the tank.



## Dear ones around me

I would actually like to stop by my neighbor's. Let's see how she is doing and if she needs help.





## Oh! My body!

I work in the garden. I deliberately don't put in earphones, but enjoy the silence around me and the cold wind on my cheeks. On the way back, I stop by the store to buy some groceries for tonight's meal.



## Sensitivity, nurture it.

I stop to examine a small flower growing between the tiles. I nearly missed it. I stand still for a minute and look up to the sky to watch how the clouds are moving. I savor the moment.



Time to wrap up the day and call it finished.

Here you see a day in more detail. If you can implement your goals from step three in ten-minute moments in your day, you will slowly grow towards your goal – in Benedictine style, with small steps in the right direction. Enjoy it and sing your song of life. (For example, fitness training, learning a language, or... fill in what you like or need to do on a daily basis).



P.S. If you like to download the worksheets yearly, you can do that here:

[theworldaroundmytable.com/holdonruleoflife](http://theworldaroundmytable.com/holdonruleoflife)



Or, if you would like to order a new up-to-date- copy every year, feel free to contact me:

[theworldaroundmytable.com/contact](http://theworldaroundmytable.com/contact)



# A Rule of Life Literature List

You soon discover that you stand in a long tradition when you develop a rule of life and realize that we are surrounded by a cloud of wise people that lived before us. I hereby give you 12 books that have been important and influential to me in developing this rule of life over the past few years.

- Nr. 1     *The Ten Commandments*  
Exodus 20, The Bible
- Nr. 2     The Rule of St. Benedict  
Author: Benedict of Nursia
- Nr. 3     Surprised by joy  
Author: C. S. Lewis
- Nr. 4     Crafting a Rule of Life  
Author: Stephen A. Macchia
- Nr. 5     The City is My Monastery: A Contemporary Rule of Life  
Author: Richard Carter
- Nr. 6     The Common Rule  
Author: Justin Whitmel Earley
- Nr. 7     Liturgy of the Ordinary  
Author: Tish Warren
- Nr. 8     Make a List: How a Simple Practice Can Change Our Lives and Open  
Up Our Hearts  
Author: Marilyn Mc. Entyre
- Nr. 9     A Blessed Life:  
Author: Wil Derkse
- Nr. 10    Emotionally Healthy Spirituality  
Author: Peter Scazzero
- Nr. 11    Spiritual Journaling  
Author: Richard Peace
- Nr. 12    Reclaiming Quiet  
Author: Sarah Clarkson



[Theworldaroundmytable.com/RuleofLifeLiteratureList](http://Theworldaroundmytable.com/RuleofLifeLiteratureList)



# The limitation of this rule of life

In the style of Benedict,  
I would like to close this workbook with a sentiment of his:

You, whoever you are, who want to live life to the fullest,  
who seek guidance – take to heart the Rule of Life laid down here.

Work it out, adjust the framework to the responsibilities  
your life gives, and come back to it weekly, monthly,  
and each season of the year.

As a small plant grows slowly, I hope your rule of life grows too.

As long as I enjoy the daylight,  
you can contact me to talk about it together.

(At the kitchen table or on Zoom)

Until then, may God hold you in the palm of His hand.



**All nations,  
praise the Lord.  
Hallelujah**

*Laudate Omnes Gentes, Laudate Dominum*

*Ps. 117*









