

# Small Group Planning

May - July 2020

Sunday	Sermon Subject	Passage	Midweek Meetings
	Hebrews: Higher, Greater, Holier		
May 10	Supreme: our sibling	Heb 1.1-4, 2.1-11	
May 17	Son: not servant	Heb 3.1-14	
May 24	Better than the best	Heb 5.1-4, 7.23-28	
May 31	<b>Pentecost</b>		<b>First Priority Prayer</b>
June 7	An answer, not a plaster	Heb 9.11-14, 10.11-14	
June 14	Higher, Greater, Holier: So What?	Heb 10.19-25	
	<b>Rule of Life</b>		
June 21	The Ancient Ways	Jeremiah 6.16, Deut 4.9	
June 28	Abiding	John 15.4-10	<b>First Priority Prayer</b>
July 5	Simplicity	Psalms 131	
July 12	Reaching Out	Luke 10.1-11	
July 19	Health	Isaiah 58.13-14	
July 26	Learning	Psalms 119.15-72	

**Rule of Life - rest, reflect, rhythm**



*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)*

## **Background:**

Many of us have lived very busy lives, or felt we have. Lockdown has brought everything into focus and allowed a break from much of the busyness, or at least a change. Many of our congregation have enjoyed the extra space and time this has allowed and have been trying to build in some of the spiritual practices that they’ve always wanted to. For them, this comes as teaching and scaffolding to help them do so. For all of us, lockdown presents an opportunity, and for many, a need or desire, to re-examine our lives and work out how we want to live. Of course we remain aware that this means something different to each one of us. Teaching into spiritual formation like this gives people a framework and Christian understanding of how to create and maintain new structures at a time when everything is up for grabs. So this is a series very much for now - in a kind of ‘how do you want to live when you can actually choose?’ way, and also a series for building lives of faith into the future as things begin to ease. Can we offer people disciplines and experiences that they will take with them into the new normal?

Of course, there’s nothing new here - this is an ancient practise of the church and as such, there’s a huge amount of possible material to draw from. It can feel a bit overwhelming and rather too rigorous when living through a crisis. So we need to keep things simple, achievable and guilt free! Let’s avoid this feeling like the inevitable ‘you should read your Bible and pray more’ message that burdens rather than releases. Sticking to and reinforcing the key message will help with that, so please try to do that each week. I’ve also included a list of interesting rules or communities that you may like to draw on. This should keep things interesting and give people some further material to look up if they want to. You’re free to use that as much or little as you like. The six things I’ve chosen are not exhaustive - they are designed to cover some element of head, heart and hands, but

because there's lots of material I've listed the kind of disciplines or areas that broadly fall into each 'value' so you can reference any of these if you want to, making sure we cover the main value properly.

This is not an expository series where we're teaching through a book, it's broad brushstroke and overview kind of stuff. The golden rule for thematic preaching (I'm learning!) is to make your key text the centre and then pin everything else around it - other scriptures, testimony, illustrations, disciplines, church history, application etc. Think of it like flower arranging! Doing it this way stops it just being our thoughts and opinions about the theme, but gives freedom to range a bit more widely or follow thread through scripture.

The hope is to support people to try it out as we go - perhaps with a weekly video for the website on the practicalities of a discipline, and then also making Small Group sessions practical 'try it out' times rather than Bible studies. We will also conclude the series with an invitation to join a 'write your rule' Zoom. All of this together will help us Rest, Reflect and grow a good Rhythm. It will be a '*curriculum for Christlikeness*' (Dallas Willard)

## **Key message:**

Now is a unique time to consider how we live.

A Rule of Life can help us be with Jesus, become like Jesus, and do what he did.

## **The sermons:**

### **1. The Ancient Ways (Jeremiah 6.16, Deut 4.9)**

Intro to Rule of Life idea - why we need one, what it is, where it's come from, why useful now?

- We all live by a rule, whether we know it or not. What is your current rule or rhythm leading you towards?
- Ancient practices that are tried and tested, not a fad. History of Rules.
- A Rule is a means to an end, not an end in itself. The end is to become more Christ-like so it's got to be simple, achievable and joyful.

See Northumbria Community's 'why do we need a rule?'

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

### **2. Abiding (John 15. 4-10)**

Includes: prayer, worship, presence of God, gratitude, dwelling in scripture

Discipline for website: practising the presence of God

How do we abide, dwell, live in and not leave, God? How do we promote our intimacy and awareness of God's presence in our lives? How do we join the dots of what we know and believe with what we feel and experience each day?

Abiding is about deliberately doing the things that answer these questions. It is about worship and soaking in the Spirit and the discipline to not wander away. This is the

absolute core of all the other values and disciplines. We cannot possibly become more Christlike and live lives of love without abiding in God's love ourselves.

### **3. Simplicity (ps 131)**

Includes: poverty, silence, prioritising

Discipline for the website: Examen

Simplicity is one of the values and experiences that people seem most to have cherished during lockdown. For some this is the absence of busyness, for others the fact of unhurried time with children or even the limited scope of decision making and choice. There's been respite from our crazy way of western living! So how can we hold on to simplicity as life gets increasingly unrestricted and full again? What does biblical simplicity look like - not having lots, leaving lots of space for prayer, making clear decisions that favour God and others so that our souls are 'stilled and quieted'.

### **4. Reaching out (Luke 10.1-11)**

Includes: mission, justice, relationships, community, generosity

Discipline for website: Giving

God made us to live with others, closely. To work with them, have company with them, be family to each other, and to serve and help wherever we can. Lockdown and isolation is not God's plan for humanity! The Christian faith is at once a personal and corporate experience - we do not exist only for ourselves, but to be agents of God's kingdom in the world. So we cannot rest in a bubble! There are people to love, listen to, feed and heal. This reading covers both the work that Jesus asks us to do reaching out, and the fact that we do it with each other, in pairs and communities of faith.

### **5. Health (Isaiah 58. 13-14)**

Includes: Sabbath rest, renewal, stability, mental and physical health, exercise and body

Discipline for the website: Fasting !

This is probably the least preached on value or topic in the evangelical church! The gnostic heresy of spirit (good) and flesh (bad) still looms large and many of us have an idea that our bodies are just vehicles for our minds rather than an expression of worship to the creator. So there's physical health implications here - you also can pray, read and worship better if you are well in your body. But we must also recognise the enormous strain that lockdown and the nature of a highly contagious virus have put on mental health. To combat this strain we need to deliberately promote wellness. By chance, these 5 values are very similar to the '5 ways to wellbeing', all of which are found in abundance by being part of a worshipping community. But the deeper wellness comes through entering God's sabbath rest - not a very popular idea at the moment, but an unchanging feature of Christian heritage and wisdom since the beginning of all time! Why is it so important?

### **6. Learning (Psalm 119. 15-72)**

Includes: study, creativity, skills, work, enquiry, humility

Discipline for the website: Lectio Divina

Deciding to keep learning means we are pliable and open rather than brittle and shut down. God has made us to change and grow, and given us bottomless stores of insight and revelation to be found in scripture. So we learn with our minds and apply them to good use as we study and meditate on the Bible which feeds us deeply. We also learn with our bodies and imaginations and have been made capable of great (and small!) acts of creativity and beauty. These things bless us and others and enrich our world and stop us stagnating. There is also reference here to the work we do each day - see the Rule of St Benedict, which can be summarised 'Pray and Work'! Encouragement to keep learning.

## **Rules:**

### **St Benedict**

<https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/study/module/benedicts-rule>

### **Northumbria community (celtic, modern)**

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

### **Modern monastic order**

<https://orderofthemustardseed.com/en/what-is-the-oms/>

### **Modern American church. Lots of material here**

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