

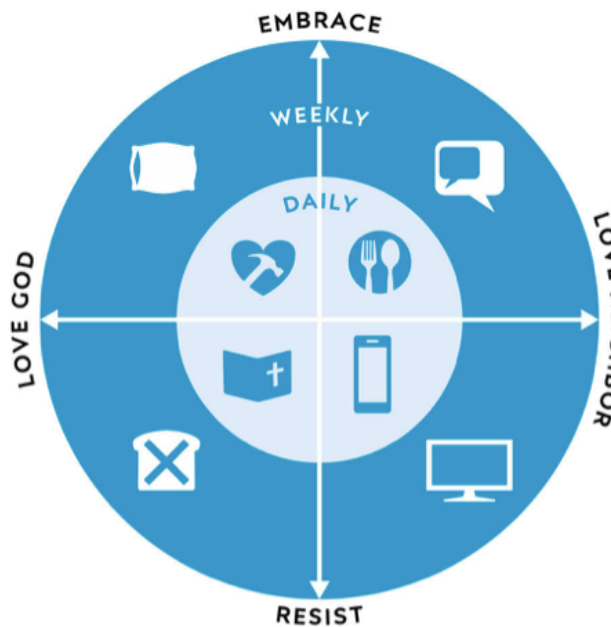
THE COMMON RULE

Taken from *The Common Rule* by Justin Earley

Our lives are full of habits that form us. A habit is a behavior that occurs automatically, over and over, and often unconsciously: we wake up and scroll Instagram, we get in the car and drive home without thinking twice, we get to a stoplight and check our messages. This wouldn't be so bad if it weren't for the fact that habits form much more than our schedules—they *form our hearts*. And so, like liturgies, these habits are actually quite central to our worship.

When we have no set of formational practices, we end up following those of our surrounding culture. Without bedrock habits of our own, we unwittingly abide by unspoken ways of life chosen by the contemporary western culture around us. Far from neutral, these practices can breed individualism, consumerism, vanity, and anger. In short, we are being formed in the worship of self, which isolates us from God and neighbor. If we want to be formed in the love of God and neighbor, we must take hold of our habits.

The "Common Rule" comes from an ancient practice called a *rule of life*, a set of communal patterns adopted for spiritual formation.



The Common Rule is a communal pattern of four daily and four weekly habits designed to counter the chaos of our modern life. These habits are meant to be done with other people and also to help us love both God and neighbor in our daily lives. They are designed to disrupt the individualism and consumerism that frame our lives, and to push us toward community, presence, and believing the gospel more deeply. We don't need new strategies or goals to become more Christ-like—we *need a better rule of life*, full of counter-formational habits that will invade our rhythms of work and life, and reshape our patterns of community. We need tiny habits that point us to the gospel of Jesus in *moments* both big and small.

It can be hard to make new habits. But anything worth trying is hard and involves failure. What is important in the pursuit of habit is to focus more on the rule than on the exceptions. The goal is not to check off some habits, but rather to fail together, experience grace, learn, and all the while become formed in the Gospel of Jesus. So grab a friend or a few and try a couple or all of the habits, and curate your new rule of life.

Daily habits



Kneeling prayer three times a day

The world is made of words. Even small, repeated words have power. Regular, carefully placed prayer is one of the keystone habits of spiritual formation. We will always wake up to some kind of prayer that makes the world about us, so we can use the words of prayer to frame each part of our day in love.



One meal with others

We were made to eat. Food is meant to bind us to God, neighbor, and creation, but we live in a culture where our eating habits keep us apart and increase our isolation. The habit of making time for one communal meal each day forces us to reorient our schedules and our space around food and each other. The more the table becomes our center of gravity, the more it draws our neighbors into gospel community.



One hour with phone off

We were made for presence, but so often our phones are the cause of our absence. To be two places at a time is to be no place at all. Turning off our phone for an hour a day is a way to turn our gaze up to each other. Our habits of attention are habits of love. To resist absence is to love neighbor.



Scripture before phone

Refusing to check the phone until after reading a passage of Scripture is a way of replacing the question "What do I need to do today?" with a better one, "Who am I and who am I becoming?" We have no stable identity outside of Jesus. Daily immersion in the Scriptures resists the anxiety of emails, the anger of the news, and the envy of social media. Instead, it forms us daily in our true identity as children of the King, dearly loved.

Weekly habits



One hour of conversation with a friend

We were made for each other, and we can't become lovers of God and neighbor without intimate relationships where vulnerability is sustained across time. In habitual, face-to-face conversation with each other, we find a gospel practice; we are laid bare to each other and loved anyway.



Curate media to four hours

Stories matter so much that we must handle them with utmost care. Resisting the constant stream of addictive media with an hour limit means we are forced to curate what we watch. Curating stories means that we seek stories that uphold beauty, that teach us to love justice, and that turn us towards community.



Fast from something for 24 hours

We constantly seek to fill our emptiness with food and other comforts. We ignore our soul and our neighbor's need by medicating with food and drink. Regular fasting exposes who we really are, reminds us how broken the world is, and draws our eyes to how Jesus is redeeming all things.



Sabbath

In a culture where busyness is a status symbol, sabbath teaches us that God sustains the world and that we don't. To make a countercultural embrace of our limitations, we stop our usual work for one day of rest. Sabbath is a gospel practice because it reminds us that the world doesn't hang on what we can accomplish, but rather on what God has accomplished for us.