

# EPISODE 002: RULE OF LIFE

BY NANCY RAY

## Intro

I don't know about you, but I love to imagine my life working seamlessly as I ease into the day, transitioning in and out of work without any stress. Me, walking with God and listening to Him throughout my day., breathing deeply and contently as I drift off to sleep at night. Does that happen in reality? Well, no, but there are simple practices that we can embrace throughout our days, weeks, months and years that will point us back to the Lord in a rhythmic way. It's called a Rule of Life. While all of our days won't be perfect, because that's just how life is, they can be more in tune with what God is doing. I'm excited to share my Rule of Life with you today.

You're listening to Work and Play with Nancy Ray, Episode 2.

Much of our daily lives can be divided into two categories: Work and play. Simply put, that is where are life and our legacy take place. This is a podcast all about learning to Work and Play well, which leads to a healthy soul and a fulfilling life.

Let's get to it.

## Content

So, I was introduced to this concept of creating a Rule of Life a few years ago when I read the book Emotionally Healthy Spirituality. It was such a great book and it helped me understand the importance of putting rhythms and practices in place in my life to constantly reorient myself to the Lord. Because here's the bottom line: I'm forgetful. I'm very reliant on myself. I love to achieve things—I'm an achiever—and often times, I find my self-worth in those achievements. But when I put a Rule of Life in place, it's a humble practice of reminding myself on a daily, weekly, monthly and yearly basis that God's presence is the most important thing and that I am completely dependent on Him. And that's what life is all about: doing life with Him. It's not about my achievements or failures or anything in-between.

So, what is a Rule of Life? Matt Chandler said it this way: *"A rule of life is kind of looking at the broad spectrum of our lives and considering years, months, weeks and days and then filling those natural transitions and seasons with things that orient or re-center the heart around the presence and power of God, acknowledging that our drift will not be toward those things but self-reliance."* I feel like that is the perfect way to summarize the Rule of Life.

So ,here's what we're **not** going to do today:

- We're not going to beat ourselves up. If you don't have anything like this in place in your life, if you've never heard of it before or you feel like "Man, I've missed the mark"—nope. we're not beating ourselves up about it today.
- We are not going to be legalistic. We aren't going to take this as the only way to live a life in relationship to God because God has already purchased the way to have a relationship with him through Jesus. We can't do anything else to earn that.
- And we're not going to miss the point. The whole point of having a Rule of Life is just to simply reorient and refocus ourselves back on the Lord.

Here's what we **are** going to do: We are going to glean the rich message of the Sabbath. We're going to glean it's message of rest, and how it is something that God gave us from the beginning of time just to re-sync our lives with Him. We're going to focus on the heart of God, and His heart is always for us. We're just going to welcome this rest and rhythm back into our lives.

So today, I'm simply going to walk you through my Rule of Life as an example and, honestly, I often call it a Rhythm of Life because I like the way that sounds a little bit better. Because it's not about keeping rules, it's really about setting up a rhythm of your life to walk with the Lord.

But before I do, before I walk you through that, I have to make a confession. Honestly, I feel like it's just best to go ahead and get this over-with now early in this podcast because it's probably going to apply to a lot of the content you're going to be listening to here. So, here it is: This is not original content. I wish it was, I wish I came up with the Rule of Life, but I didn't make it up. It was created by St. Benedict somewhere around 500 AD—so, a long time ago. But, instead of you thinking of me as someone who isn't going to provide original content or something, I want you to think of me and this podcast as your content curator. I feel like that's a better way to put it. I plan to share words and messages and life-changing lessons that I've gleaned from books, sermons, friends and life, and through the medium of this podcast, present those same life-changing lessons to you. So, before I share my own Rule of Life, here are a few resources for you some content that I've curated that will help you dive deeper into this topic, and I'll be sure to link to all of these in the show notes for you.

- I've already mentioned the first one: the book Emotionally Healthy Spirituality. Now, along with that book there is a devotional guide that's called Day by Day Emotionally Healthy Spirituality. it kind of accompanies the book and it's fantastic; I've really enjoyed it. It's kind of a devotional in the morning and then another one that you can read in the evening for 40 days.
- Also, a sermon by Matt Chandler. He's a pastor in Texas, and in the sermon he shares his own Rule of Life and I have been so encouraged by listening to that. I also am just fascinated with other people who have a Rule of Life. I'm fascinated with how they live it out. The way he presents it in that sermon is very real and very encouraging.

- And finally, Emily P. Freeman. She's a fellow podcaster and she just released her book called *The Next Right Thing* and she has an online course called *Discern and Decide* that is about creating a Rhythm of Life. Full disclosure: I actually have not gone through the course or read the book because as I'm recording this hasn't been released yet, but I know she talks a lot about setting up a Rhythm of Life so that you can be set up to make great decisions. So, I'm excited to actually read that book and jump in but I wanted to leave it here as a resource for you.

I hope that you explore those resources and that they are beneficial to you.

Now, as I walk you through my own Rule of Life, I want you to know a few things. I'm still currently very much in a season of adjusting to life with three little humans. My sweet boy just turned 3 months old at the time of this recording, so I do not do this everyday. Far from it. I just do what I can and I don't worry about the rest. I know that my relationship with God is not based on my actions. Honestly, now that I think about it, even way before I had any kids and I was trying to implement a Rule of Life, I did not do it perfectly then. You just never will. You're never going to do this perfectly so the sooner you can grasp that and accept it, the better. Same goes for my weeks, my months, my years. Not every year is the same, not every month is the same. I am not a perfect human. The goal is not to implement this perfectly, the goal is to do life with God, to re-establish a connection with Him through these practices and to reorient our focus back to him when it naturally drifts as we go about life.

So, here it is: my Rule of Life.

## I'M GOING TO START BY TAKING YOU THROUGH MY DAY.

Every morning, I do my best to wake up and start my day with silence. It's my quiet time that I have with the Lord, it's where I pray, it's where I journal and I try to choose one scripture or maybe a chapter on to focus on to read through to meditate on and then to carry with me the rest of the day. After having a baby, I really try to simplify this. I usually try to pray and find one Bible verse that will stay with me through the rest of the day. I might even write that Bible verse out in my journal, but I really just try to think on it throughout the day, so super simple you know when you were that sleep-deprived I feel like your brain doesn't have its normal capacity to take in a lot and so my advice especially in the early days of motherhood is just to keep this very simple to offer up an honest prayer to the Lord with how you're feeling and to find one verse to meditate on. Before I had kids or when I have more time to sleep and I feel a little bit more like myself and I can wake up before the kids and have more of a routine, I typically spend about 30 minutes to an hour and I always start off with 2 minutes of silence and then I read some scripture. I journal a prayer and I really try to listen to the Lord before my day

begins. Now do I do this everyday? No. I try to, I would love to. But do I sleep in sometimes and miss this? Absolutely. Especially with a little baby. I mean, sleep hard to come by so I prioritize that when I need to because I know I'm going to be better for my family and honestly better connect with the Lord when I feel well rested. So don't get down on yourself if you miss this, but if you're in a season where you can wake up and this is the first thing you can do it is an amazing way to start your day grounded and really aligned with God's heart for you and just connecting with him is so important.

When I get to work, I have a team of just a few people that work with me. I lead the team and we start our day with a Morning Huddle. This is a way for me to begin my work day and reorient myself back to the Lord then. This is how we do it: We sit around a table, one of us prays, one of us shares a scripture, usually just one Bible verse, maybe two or three at most, and then we share our priorities for the day. We each choose three priorities and we share those for the day and we say these are the three things I'm really going to focus and work on getting done that day and that's it. And it has been so sweet. There have been mornings where I've missed my quiet time, but I've gone into work and had this morning huddle and either I've shared a scripture or one of them has shared scripture and it has really been the thing that has grounded me before beginning my work day and really prioritized my day.

At the end of my work day I do this thing that honestly seems a little silly, but it's kind of great. I read about this when I was reading this book called *Deep Work* by Cal Newport, and it's literally a small paragraph in this entire book and it stood out to me so much. He says at the end of every day he has a Shutdown Routine: about 15 minutes before he ends his work day, he scans his emails to see if there's anything urgent left to reply to. He closes that. He looks over everything that he didn't get done that day and then he writes down on his planner for the following day everything he didn't get done in order of priority. and after that 15 minutes is over, his work day is up and he closes his computer and literally says out loud "shutdown complete." I know this sounds so silly but it is so helpful for me! I've really loved it because when you say it out loud and you do that routine at the end of every day it signals to your brain, "Okay, leave the work at work. Don't bring any of it home," and that way you can be home and walk in the doors of your house and be really present. Now, I am in a unique situation: I have a studio building that is like 10 feet from my house so I literally walk to work every day. But, I have that time to just walk home, so after I do my shutdown complete routine, I step outside and this is something new that I've been trying: I take a deep breath and again I just reorient myself back to the Lord. I say this prayer out loud: "Lord I've never had a day just like this one, and I never will again and my prayer is that as I come back home, I would be very aware of the needs of my family and how I'm feeling and mostly aware of Your presence," (and of course I don't say it exactly like that every time but I basically acknowledge that there's never going to be a day like this again and I want to do my very best with the day that I've been given) "and so help me to put work aside. Help me to be fully at home now and be the mom that I need to be." Then I walk inside my house. Something about taking that deep breath outside and just refocusing myself on the Lord before I enter those doors has been so grounding and so good for me.

Okay, the last piece of my daily Rule of Life is the *evening examine*. This is simply a prayer that walks you through your day where you're reconnecting with God. I usually do this as I'm laying down in my bed at night. You ask Him to make you more aware of His presence, you kind of think "What am I feeling? What have I felt all day today?" You reconnect with your feelings, you review your day in your mind all the things that you did or didn't do and did or didn't accomplish and how that makes you feel. And then you think "Did I walk with the Lord today? What are some ways tomorrow that I could connect with Him or be a little bit more aware of His presence?" So, that's my daily Rule of Life. Just a few times in my day where I try to stop and pause and connect with the Lord.

## NOW LET'S TALK ABOUT MY WEEKS

Every week it's really important to me and my family that we attend our church, and as we attend church that we're serving, that we're learning, and that we're instilling that habit into our children as well. It's an important part of our lives and our family to be part of the local family of God.

In addition to church, I like to take a Sabbath once a week. This is something that there's a lot of different opinions on. There's a lot of different ways you can do it, but I'm just going to share with you what I try to do every week. Again, keep in mind that this is not perfect. I am a wedding photographer so there are several Saturdays where I'm actually working really long days, but for the most part, when I'm not working on the weekend, I embrace what God established for us in the beginning, which is 6 days of work and one day of rest. He commanded us: "Six days you shall labor and do all of your work and on the seventh day you shall not do any work." Literally, Sabbath means *a cessation of work*. You cease to work. You stop working and you just rest. This is extremely hard for me as a doer, but it is so important. Whenever I take a Sabbath, I try to do four things every time:

1. I stop. I stop working.
2. I rest.
3. I delight. I choose one family activity to do where it just causes us to delight in each other and creation and having fun together,
4. and I contemplate. I think about what God's done for us. I think about how he's blessed us and I'm thankful.

I try to choose which day I'm going to keep the Sabbath ahead of time. Usually it's a Saturday and this works well because we have all week to prepare for it and look forward to it and for us personally, Sundays a lot of times are a reset day. It's a lot of work to get the kids to and from church and then meal planning and trying to figure out what our week looks like— Sunday can kind of feel like a reset day. But Saturday we can totally check out and just be together which is really nice.

Here are some ways that I keep the Sabbath:

- I try to do all of my household work ahead of time.
- I try to order out on Saturday or plan my meal far in advance or do a crockpot meals it's a little bit easier.
- I use paper plates because it minimizes the cleanup that we have to do in the kitchen.
- I consciously let the laundry pile up that day unless I absolutely need to throw something in the wash to get a stain out immediately. I just avoid doing laundry at all— no folding, no washing, nothing.
- Then, like I mentioned, I just try to plan one simple family adventure.

When you can do that, when you embrace a Sabbath as part of your weekly rhythm, it can change everything. When I started embracing this in my life a few years ago, it left me so refreshed and so rejuvenated for the work ahead. So don't get crazy or legalistic about this. I know that life happens. I know that sometimes there's going to be something you've got to do on a Saturday and it's okay. I'm coming out of three months of maternity leave right now. I'm exiting an extended season of raising this tiny human with two other little humans and there wasn't really a day of rest for me like for a few months and I didn't worry about that. I didn't get worked up about that. You just have to know life happens and that's okay. But once you can get into a cadence of working 6 days and resting one, you will find out why God gave that to us. It is a gift. That day of rest is such a gift to set us up to strengthen our spirit & strengthen our body, so that we can continue to do the work He's given us to do.

## LET'S TALK ABOUT MY MONTHS

Honestly there's just one thing that I try to do every month, and that is just to get out of the house and have a day for me. Does it happen every month? No, it doesn't, and that's okay. Sometimes it's a whole day, sometimes it's just me getting out for the afternoon, but whenever I can, just take some time to be by myself. I journal. I try to listen to the Lord. I move. I really make it a priority to get out in nature. I try to eat a nourishing meal and I just listen. It's like my Sabbath but it's like Sabbath to the extreme because I'm totally alone and totally resting and totally listening, and that silence can weird you out at first and it can be so hard for people like me—so hard!—but it's so so good to do. It's something that my husband is very generous to do for me. He's sent me out of the house before. He's watched the kids so I can do this and it's such a blessing, but you just have to ask for help. You have to make time for it and make it a priority, and if you can do that every month, it's a game changer. It's so good.

## NOW, YEARLY

What is my Rule of Life year-to-year? I'm going to walk you through my year starting with the Christmas season. We believe in celebrating Advent. We believe in celebrating the coming of Jesus, when he took on flesh and came and walked among us. We celebrate that as a family, doing lots of fun traditions which I won't get into, but Christmas season in our home is a

season of feasting; it's a season of fun; it's a season of generosity and giving. But it's also the season when I begin looking ahead to the following year. So, I don't plan and start my year on January 1st. I actually begin that process in December. Now, I have a unique situation because after Christmas, on New Year's Eve, when everyone in the world is so excited to celebrate the new year— it's my birthday. So, New Year's Eve is definitely another day for feasting and celebrating. I get a big cheesecake from the Cheesecake Factory every year and do all my favorite things of my favorite people and it's so fun to kind of finish the year with a bang and celebrate not only the end of the year but my birthday too. And then January comes and usually in January we do some sort of reset and spiritually speaking my church often times hosts a fast in January for two weeks or one week or three weeks and we always try to participate in some way with that fast in January. Again, just re-setting, reorienting our lives toward the Lord.

Then there's the season of Lent. This is something that I really hope to embrace as a family every year moving forward in one way or another. I'll be honest, the last 20 years I have been a believer but I have never actually participated in Lent until this year. I wanted to add it in as part of my Rule of Life and kind of try it out and see what it was like and it's been so beautiful. As I've given up things, the thing that I've really taken from it this time is that it has caused my eyes to look forward towards Easter with a greater anticipation—which is the point of it. So I'm really excited to start incorporating Lent as part of my Rule of Life every year because it plants seeds of anticipation of my heart for Easter and I'm really excited because as I look towards Easter, I know it's going to be this great day of feasting as we celebrate what Jesus did and it's such an important day for a Christians, super important for us. We are going to really make that weekend the most fun, like the biggest weekend of feasting and fun! I want our kids to grow up remembering the Easter is amazing and it's just a way to experience God's goodness because God loves celebrating. He loves feasting and that's what Easter's all about. We're not at this point yet, but my husband and I have talked about other ways to make Easter super special in our family and one thing that I want to do when they get a little older is to load everyone up in the car and go see the sunrise. We'll find a big hill or somewhere in our city that we can watch the sunrise every Easter together and that is going to be a reminder and just a rhythm and tradition that we have, reminding us that Jesus gave us new life. His mercies are new every morning and just reminding us about the morning that he rose. I'm really excited just as our family grows to continue to make Easter a super special day.

Now, I'm sure your family has vacations that you take every year, but it's really important in a Rule of Life to make sure that you are doing something every single year that you can look forward to that's longer a longer period of rest than just a Sabbath. There's a couple of things that we do. We always celebrate Independence Day—4th of July—at our our same favorite Beach town. We always take a weekend and go camping with friends, which is a wonderful way to make time feel like it just stops and get out in nature with the kids. And we always try to just take a night or two away for our anniversary. But in addition to these vacations that allow us to get away from the normal routine for longer periods, one thing that we are going to try to do is to take a one month sabbatical every year. I know a lot of work situations won't allow this, and that's okay, I'm just sharing what we are trying to do, because if I'm honest my husband and I both really love to work. We just like to get after it, and taking a one month sabbatical every year is incredibly hard and feels somewhat impossible. We had laid out these great plans to do

that this past year and then I found out I was pregnant so we actually ended up just taking what was going to be the one month sabbatical and pushing that out and turning it into my 3 month maternity leave. So, I'm not totally foreign to it because I've had three maternity leaves, which are sabbaticals in a sense, but I'm really looking forward to the future and implementing a one month sabbatical every year where my husband and I just take off work to spend time with our family travel and just take an extended time to be together.

So that's my Rule of Life, or my Rhythm of Life.

Here's the bottom line: *creating a Rule of Life is just creating practices that help us walk with God.* Now, I cannot state this clear enough: how we implement our Rule of Life has absolutely nothing to do with what God thinks of us. He loves us and doing this or not doing this isn't going to change that. It won't make him love us any more or any less. So, I encourage you to think about your own. Start with you are now. What do you want to keep with how you're living? What do you want to change?

## I'M GOING TO LEAVE YOU WITH THREE ENCOURAGEMENTS:

- Think through your own first. Don't try to just copy mine. You absolutely can take anything from mine and make it your own if you want to, but if you're in a different season of life or if you connect with God in different ways, yours will look different. So I encourage you make it your own.
- Second, be very aware of how this affects your relationship with God. Like I said in the beginning we're not going to be legalistic about this, we're not beating ourselves up about this if we don't measure up or you don't have one in place. We completely miss the point if we do that. The point of this is to redirect our focus back to God on a regular basis as we walk with Him. To abide in Him. To do life with Him, not apart from Him, relying only on ourselves.
- Third, don't try to change your entire life after hearing this podcast episode and implement an entire rule of Life all at once if you've never had one before. My encouragement to you is just start with one thing. Just one little thing. Do that one little thing for a while and then add another one. Then after that, add another one. And then after that, another one, and pretty soon you're going to have a cadence and a new rhythm of Life so today as you listen to this your life is moving forward. Right now, it's probably moving at a hundred miles per hour, you are in the middle of it and you likely have a lot of plans made for the rest of your day, your week, your month or even your year, so take a moment think about ways that you can just start today. That's it. Maybe you want to turn off your music and add in a prayer out loud as you drive home from work every day. Maybe you can grab a journal and write down three things you're thankful for every night before you go to sleep. Maybe you want to fold some extra laundry so you're caught up before the weekend and you can actually rest. Whatever it is, my prayer is that you would find your heart a little more focused on the Lord today and, ultimately, every day.

Thanks for listening to Episode 2 of Work and Play with Nancy Ray.

I hope today's episode has caused you to zoom out a little bit on your life, to really think about the life that you want to build for a brief moment in the busyness of your day. All of the links that I mentioned can be found in the show notes at [www.nancyray.com/podcast/2](http://www.nancyray.com/podcast/2) and you can find me as always at [nancyray.com](http://nancyray.com) or follow me @nancyray on instagram or facebook almost daily. I also want to thank Jess Ray for the wonderful music provided for this podcast and I'd love to close this episode with a quote from Richard Foster:

*“The life that pleases God is not a set of religious duties;  
it is to hear His voice and obey His Word.”*

Thanks for listening and I'll see you next time.