

A RULE OF LIFE

Cultivating Rhythms for Spiritual Transformation

We long to see our lives whole, to know that they matter. We wonder whether our many activities might ever come together in a way of life that is good for ourselves and others. Lacking a vision of a life-giving way of life, we turn from one task to another, doing as well as we can but increasingly uncertain about what doing things well would look like. We yearn for a deeper understanding of how to order human life in accord with what is true and good.

CRAIG DYKSTRA AND DOROTHY BASS,
PRACTICING OUR FAITH

Living into what we want in any area of our life requires some sort of intentional approach. Building a solid financial base, retirement planning, home improvements, career advancement, further education, losing weight or becoming more fit—all of these require a plan if we are to make any progress in achieving what we desire. The desire for a way of life that creates space for God's transforming work is no different. However, if we look closely at the way we live day to day, we may well notice that our approach to spiritual transformation is much more random and haphazard than our approach to finances, home improvements and weight loss! Many of us try to shove spiritual transformation into the

nooks and crannies of a life that is already unmanageable, rather than being willing to arrange our life for what our heart most wants. We think that somehow we will fall into transformation by accident.

Jesus had something to say about this. He used parables to picture a person who has searched long and hard for something very valuable and very special. In one story the prized item is a piece of land; in another it is a valuable pearl. In both stories, the merchant has been looking for this prize all his life, and when he finds it, he doesn't hesitate. He sells everything he has so that he can buy what he has been searching for.

Both the field and the pearl are metaphors for the kingdom of God—that state of being in which God is reigning in our life and his presence is shaping our reality. The kingdom of God is here now, if we are willing to arrange our life to embrace it. Paul speaks in passionate terms of using every ounce of his energy and intentionality to present every person mature in Christ—beginning, presumably, with himself. The only question, it seems, is, How bad do you want it?

Christian tradition has a name for the structure that enables us to say yes to the process of spiritual transformation day in and day out. It is called *a rule of life*. A rule of life seeks to respond to two questions: Who do I want to be? How do I want to live? Actually, it might be more accurate to say that a rule of life seeks to address the interplay between these two questions: *How do I want to live so I can be who I want to be?*

St. Benedict was the first one to develop a rule of life, to help monks who were living in community to order their days very simply around three key elements of their life in God: prayer, study and work. St. Benedict's Rule, like any rule of life, is simply a pattern of attitudes, behaviors and practices that are regular and routine and are intended to produce a certain quality of life and character. I prefer the language of rhythm because it speaks of regularity that the body and soul can count on, but it also speaks of ebb and flow, creativity and beauty, music and dancing, joy and giving ourselves over to a force or a power that is beyond our-

selves and is deeply good. Over time, as we surrender ourselves to new life rhythms, they help us to surrender old behaviors, attitudes and practices so that we can be shaped by new ones.

 **DEVELOPING A RHYTHM OF SPIRITUAL PRACTICES**