

12 RULES FOR A CHRISTIAN LIFE

GROUP GUIDE

DISCOVERING REAL LIFE (TOGETHER!) IN THE
PRACTICES AND PRIORITIES OF JESUS

CHRIS GREER



12 Rules for a Christian Life GROUP GUIDE

A companion guide for groups to Chris Greer's, *12 Rules for a Christian Life: Discovering Real Life in the Practices and Priorities of Jesus*. Get your copy of the book at Amazon today.

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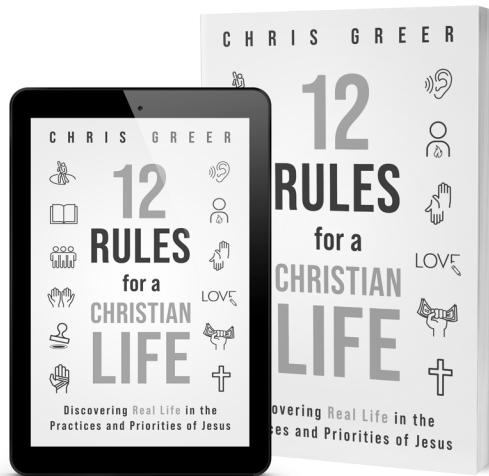
While all stories in this book are true, some names and identifying information have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals involved.

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GET THE BOOK

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GROUP GUIDE: WHAT AND HOW

INDIVIDUALISTIC SOCIETIES VALUE freedom very highly, and Christians can celebrate that fact. After all, God created us as individuals capable of belief, reasoning, and individual decision-making.

There is, however, a distinct divergence between Western individualism and orthodox Christianity. While a secular individualistic society leads its population to believe that autonomy is the key to freedom, Christianity teaches that dependence is the key to true freedom.

Rather than living solo lives unconcerned with how our choices impact others, we live our most dynamic, fulfilled, and beneficial lives in deep and mutually dependent relationships with God and other Christians.¹ The New Testament Church referred to themselves — and us — as the Body of Christ. Some are the eyes, others the ears. Some are like feet, others hands, some the mind, others the heart.² When we play our God-given roles, we grow and mature as we advance God's kingdom in the world together. We cannot do it alone.

And *that's* why this Group Guide exists. It's a primer for building those relationships as you walk with Jesus and read *12 Rules for a Christian Life* together. There's great power to comprehend and adopt the way of Jesus and great capacity to enjoy and thrive in the journey of faith when we explore and live out God's Word and these Rules as a community.

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I pray that God will grow you in substantial ways through your time together in his presence, meditating on his Word, and reading *12 Rules for a Christian Life*. May all of us, thanks to Jesus, “never walk in darkness” but “have the light of life.” (John 8:12)

Onward,

Chris Greer

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

TIMELINE

There are 14 parts to this Group Guide; one for the book's Introduction chapter, one for each of the twelve Rules, and one for the Epilogue.

Each Rule includes a spiritual practice (see the "How I Practice" subheading at the end of each chapter). Your group will be most fruitful if you try the spiritual practice *while* you read the chapter each week.

Three months is a significant investment of time and energy, particularly in our fast-paced, instant-gratification society. But God does not form us quickly, and your life with God will be greatly enriched as you make time to read, study, practice, and reflect together.

TIPS for a RICH EXPERIENCE

Each week includes an introductory story and four sections: Practice the Rule, Look at the Word, Talk with Friends, and Final Thought. Here are a few tips to help you meaningfully engage each Rule together.

TIP #1: Prepare — Group conversations are always easier and richer when you prepare for them. Read the chapter, try the practice, and proceed through each week's reflection and discussion questions.

It's recommended that you set the reading of *12 Rules for a Christian Life* and your shared group experience as your primary spiritual focus for the next 14 weeks. Those who do find it deeply meaningful and fruitful.

TIP #2: Practice — Begin each week by reading the "How I Practice" subheading at the *end* of each chapter in *12 Rules for a Christian Life*. Those sections include a description of a spiritual practice for that chapter's Rule. Each week this Group Guide begins with that practice

so you can try it out *while* you read the chapter. You'll miss out a great deal if you fail to challenge yourself – and the others in your group – to attempt the practice as you start reading each chapter in the book.

TIP #3: Pace — Practicing spiritual disciplines – the process by which we discover our real lives in the practices and priorities of Jesus – is always a slow, purposeful, and meditative process. Therefore, finding and writing down the “correct” answers is not the goal.

Lingering with and listening to God are the goals.

Because the goal is to linger with, listen to, and experience God,

- it's recommended you read the Bible, the book, and this Group Guide with a pen in hand so you can take note of what God says, your experiences, and your group members' contributions.
- it's recommended that you write out your prayers, ideas, and struggles in a journal as you try out each spiritual practice.
- you're encouraged to sleep, go for walks, and have long conversations whenever able or needed for the next 14 weeks!

God is rarely in a hurry. Let's follow his lead.

“LEADER” NOTES

There is no “Leader's Guide” or “Facilitator's Handbook” because your experience will be most fruitful if everyone considers himself or herself an equal participant. The goal is for everyone to learn and practice *together*, not for one person to teach.

With that in mind, here's something for you – and everyone else in your group – to commit to.

. . .

Take personal responsibility for the success of this experience. — Rely on yourself for the fruitfulness of your gatherings. Read the chapter, experiment with the practice, note what God does in your life, and share it with your group. Remember: Our faith is always personal, but never private. What God is doing in you will encourage someone else.

Give it time. — Set a weekly appointment of undistracted time to be with God, read, and try the spiritual practice. *And don't skip it.* If you do this from the start, your experience will be very fruitful *and* you'll develop a new, life-giving spiritual habit by the conclusion of your 14-week experience.

Commit to humility. — Most likely, people in your group have never tried the spiritual practices recommended for each Rule. If you have, share your experience openly, but resist the urge to tell others the “right” way to practice the disciplines. Instead, offer your experience as another way to learn and remain open to learning from others.

Invite others in. — Invite others to join your group. If your group grows to an unwieldy size (more than ten), that's good news! Multiply into smaller groups so others can participate equally. After completing the Group Guide, your group may sense God leading you to begin new groups. Follow his lead so you can help others experience their real lives through the practices and priorities of Jesus.

Let the Spirit lead. — Just as the goal in your personal study is to linger with God, not just answer all the questions, so too is the goal in your group. While it's important to stay focused on the weekly topic, it's also important for you and your group to sense when the Spirit of God is inviting you to focus on a particular Scripture, practice, question, or topic of discussion. Follow his lead.

YOUR FIRST MEETING

Review this “How to Use the Guide” section out loud in your first meeting. Discuss the questions and expectations your group has. This will go a long way to setting your group meetings on the right foot.

These questions can help you get started...

1. What interests you about reading *12 Rules for a Christian Life*? If you're *not* particularly interested in reading it, share why. (You might as well share honestly from the get-go!)
2. Have you ever read and discussed a book or book of the Bible with a small group of other Christians? If so, share one meaningful experience from a previous group. If not, share something that excites you or makes you nervous engaging with other Christians in this way.
3. What is one expectation you have for your engagement in the group? And what is one hope you have for everyone's participation in this group?
4. What questions do you have about the purpose and format of your group?

Keep sharing your hopes and expectations for this group experience, and pray for God's kingdom to come and his will to be done as you begin to read, discuss, and engage with God and each other.

May God bless you as you lead one another through *12 Rules for a Christian Life*.

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1. Luke 9:24, John 10:10, John 15:1-8, Acts 17:28, etc.
 2. See 1 Corinthians 12

INTRODUCTION: RULES AND CHRISTIANITY

THE LONGER I FOLLOW JESUS, the more deeply I am convinced that the heart and soul of the Christian life – of *Jesus'* life – is relational connection, not religious observance.

As mentioned in the book's Preface, I've done the religiously observant thing. And the life I lived as a legalistic, ritualistic, and judgmental "Christian" was far from the abundant and satisfying life Jesus promises for everyone in a relationship with him.

What religion at its best is trying to do, is to provide structure – scaffolding, if you will – for regular people like you and me to experience the Divine. Some who are religious don't know God at all. Some who know God well don't seem particularly religious. And that is where the rubber of "Rules" meets the road of a "Christian" life.

The Rules given here are spiritual disciplines, not a list of religious laws. They are habits for growing in our love and experience of God and our understanding of ourselves and life with others.

Imagine a husband and wife who never took intentional steps to spend meaningful time together, listen to one another, work together, and rest together. What if they never invested in specific activities that inspired them, challenged them, and brought their relationship to life? I dare say they would be married, but they wouldn't have much of a relationship. The steps we take and the habits we make open the door

to knowing and being known. The practices themselves are not our relationship, but they make relationships possible. The same is true with God.

Christ-centered spiritual practices open the door wider and wider to a deep relationship with God. The “rules” of the Christian religion that used to enslave me, have been replaced by a Rule for life with Jesus that sets me free in him.

I know that living by these twelve Rules for a Christian life will do the same for you and the others in your group.

The Introduction chapter in the book introduces you to our working definitions for “Rules” and “Christian, “ and the Group Guide begins by exploring both definitions.

PRACTICE THE RULE

There is no specific spiritual practice in the book’s Introduction, but here is a spiritual exercise to help you talk with God and each other about the Introduction chapter of *12 Rules for a Christian Life*. It will give you a taste of the types of practices included throughout the book.

Think and Write

Set aside 20 minutes of focused time this week to think and write about the questions below.

Resist the urge to treat the questions like “fill in the blanks.” Instead, treat them as prompts for writing out your ideas, feelings, beliefs, and perspective on rules and Christianity.

1. What is your relationship to the word “rules” and how does it make you feel? For example, do you consider yourself a rule follower, a rule-breaker, or something in between? Do rules make you feel safe or confined?

2. Have you ever thought about rules the way they're described in the book's Introduction? How might that description help you approach the twelve different Rules and spiritual practices?

3. When you say to someone, "I am a Christian", what are you trying to communicate? What does being Christian mean to you, and what do you hope it means to others who hear about your Christian beliefs?

LOOK AT THE WORD

First, let's consider the idea of "Rules" in light of God's Word. Remember, finding correct answers is not the goal. Linger with and listening to God are the goals.

Slowly read the Scripture passages listed below then consider the questions that follow.

- Mark 12:28-31
- Romans 12:9-18
- Matthew 7:24-29

1. What is the relationship between Christian belief and action represented in these New Testament passages?

2. What does the interplay of belief and action have to do with the ancient practice of developing a "Rule for Life" (book pages 3-4)? What might developing and practicing a Rule for Life have to do with discovering the lives we were made to live?

Now consider what it means to be Christian.

3. To you, what does it mean to be "Christian"? What makes a person Christian, and which Scripture passages inform your thinking?

The chapter highlights the following Bible verses for understanding what it means to be Christian. Give them a read, then linger with the questions below.

- John 3:16
- John 17:3
- Mark 8:34-35
- Mark 12:29-31

4. How does your understanding of Christianity line up with the Scriptures above and the description in the book? (see pgs 5-9)

TALK WITH FRIENDS

1. What was your initial reaction to the word “Rules” in the title of *12 Rules for a Christian Life*? Were you bothered that the words “Rules” and “Christian” appeared together? Why or why not?

The following sentences are on the first page of the book’s Introduction: *“The reality is no human being survives, much less thrives, without a set of boundaries that govern his or her thoughts and actions. We may bristle at the mention of ‘rules’, but we don’t dare live without them.”*

2. Do you agree or disagree with the idea that everyone lives by a set of rules? Why?

3. What’s a “Rule” that one of your friends or family members lives by? What’s one life rule you live by?

4. If you’re completely honest, do you think of the Christian life as a religiously observant one or a relationally connected one? What is the difference to you and what Scriptures, experiences, and people inform your thoughts?

FINAL THOUGHT

What other ideas, Scripture, or quotes from this chapter were important for you? Don't forget to bring them up in your group conversation!

“The world is fast, but life with God is slow. The world starves us, but God nourishes us. I invite you to slow down, to rest, and to take the Rules one at a time.”

12 RULES FOR A CHRISTIAN LIFE, PG 12

RULE #1: FIGHT FOR SPACE

PRACTICE AND STUDY



I'LL NEVER FORGET when a man named Tim asked me to set aside one full day a month to Fight for Space. He said, "I challenge you to reserve eight consecutive hours each month for quiet, devoted time with God and nothing else."

I thought he was nuts. As I wrote in the book, the moment he proposed the idea I grumbled, "That's impossible, you moron."

When I met Tim at the spiritual retreat he runs for business and church leaders, I was swamped by life's circumstances and needed to know how to lead better at home and work.

I didn't realize what a fight it would be to allot significant chunks of time to be with God, wait on the Holy Spirit, and listen to Jesus once that weekend retreat was over.

You might be a single mom, a stressed-out dad, or a young professional working 60 hours a week. If so, you understand how difficult it is to make ten minutes for God, much less a full day. You might think the ideas in this chapter are virtually impossible to implement.

You may be retired or single or between jobs, and your challenge is not finding the time. You have plenty of that. Your challenge is mental or emotional. Maybe your version of fighting for space begins by turning off the television. Or putting down your phone. Or finally

setting boundaries and saying ‘no’ to another family, church, or social obligation.

My encouragement – no matter which boat you’re in – is the same as Tim’s encouragement to me: *Start somewhere.*

Be completely honest with yourself and with the group you’re in about where you are personally. Then, once you’ve faced the fact that fighting for space is a *fight* ... start fighting. Enlist others in the battle. And don’t give up before you win a few skirmishes and begin to experience the rest Jesus provides when you make intentional efforts to be with him and him alone.

PRACTICE THE RULE

The goal of learning about a Rule for Life is to live by it, not just know about it.

To that end, practice the Rule as suggested in the chapter or design and practice a similar one. Keep in mind the following as you try a spiritual practice each week:

- **The practices are doors, not laws.**—Spiritual practices are doorways to a growing relationship with God, not laws we must obey to please God.
- **This is only a taste.**—Think of these week-long practices as snacks, not meals. Allow them to whet your appetite for more, remembering that they result in deeper experience and enjoyment of God when practiced over time.
- **Try other practices.**—The practices in this book are given as a starting point. Research and try other spiritual disciplines that work best for you. Remember that developing meaningful spiritual habits takes...well...*practice.*

In the chapter’s “How I Practice Rule #1” section, two ways to fight for space are mentioned: The Daily Pause and First Fridays.

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1. Which did you try? If neither, what other habit or spiritual discipline do you practice in your fight for space?
2. What physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual challenges do you foresee as you plan to fight for space in the future? With whom can you share your plans to fight for space so he/she can help you win?

LOOK AT THE WORD

Read Mark 1:29-37.

1. Why do you think Mark included this story in the first chapter of his Gospel? What does it reveal about Jesus' practice and priorities?

Read Matthew 14:10-23 slowly. Pay close attention to the transition moments in verses 12-13 and 21-23.

2. What do you notice in those transition moments? What do Jesus' decisions to Fight for Space at those specific moments reveal about him and his way of life?

Now, look at Genesis 2:1-3 and Exodus 20:8-11.

3. God rested after creating the universe and humanity. And then he instructed his people to rest from their work *long* before Jesus walked the earth. What does this say about God, us, and his design for rest?

Finally, read Mark 6:7-13 and 30-31.

4. How does Jesus' response (vs 31) to the disciple's ministry tour reflect God's rest in Genesis 2? And what does it say about the relationship between kingdom work and Sabbath rest today?

TALK WITH FRIENDS

1. On a busy-ness scale of one to five – with one representing boredom and five representing having more to do than can be accomplished – where would you rank your life right now? Why?
2. What cultural, social, and personal voices teach “more is more”? Are you ever tempted to believe them? Share your experience.

Read the following quote from the end of chapter 1 again: “*At the end of the day, we cannot relate to God without making time to be with him and listen to him.*” (pg 31)

3. Do you agree that fighting for space is the first Rule for a Christian life? Why or why not?
4. What do you think about the recommendations for how we can fight for space? (see *Calendar It, Get Out of the House, Make Repeat Visits, and Power Down* on pgs 28-29)
5. What is challenging about fighting for space in a constantly connected world? Why are our smartphones, the internet, and social media “*serious devils*” (see pg 29) when it comes to settling our hearts and minds? Share with your group your best practices for fighting distraction.

FINAL THOUGHT

What other ideas, Scripture, or quotes from this chapter were important for you? Don't forget to bring them up in your group conversation!

*“The pressure was on, but the precedent was set: Jesus would fight for space. He refused to allow his ministry to become manic. And it was his prioritization of space—and, more importantly, what happened in that space—that made his journey possible.
The same is true for you.”*

12 RULES FOR A CHRISTIAN LIFE, PG 19



RULE #2: LISTEN TO JESUS

PRACTICE AND STUDY

TWO MONTHS before writing this Group Guide I faced an important decision. I was torn between two equally responsible, respectable, and faithful options. The only significant difference between the two was that Option A is what I felt I *should* do while Option B is what I truly *wanted* to do.

Now, before revealing my choice, let me give you some context for why those two options paralyzed me.

Years of living as a legalistic and judgmental person has left a lingering residue of guilt and insecurity on my soul. The word “should” carries emotional weight for me, and I’m still occasionally troubled by questions like *Am I doing the right thing?* and *Are my desires good or sinful?*

As the time for a decision approached, I wrestled with my fear of making the wrong decision. But I continued to fight for space so I could listen to Jesus. Then, amid my lingering doubts, God spoke clearly through my wife and a stranger...on the same evening. Here’s what happened...

While out on a recent date night, my wife, Kerry, explained what she believes to be a major roadblock in my life of faith. She said, “Chris, this guilt you feel about doing what you love is not of God. I

think it's time for you to move past the guilt, make decisions, and get on with the good things God has for you."

God regularly speaks through my wife. This night was one such example.

With my wife's words still fresh in my mind, we left the restaurant and popped into a bookstore for some quiet book browsing. Eventually, we walked over to the Christian section, and I took a seat on the floor amid the tall shelves. On the bottom shelf, right where I sat down, the very first book to catch my eye had a bright blue cover. The title on the spine read *Your Blue Flame*.

That's a weird title for a Christian book, I thought. It must be shelved in the wrong section. I pulled it off the shelf to give to a store employee, but when I glanced at the cover I gasped (literally). I almost couldn't believe what the full title said. *Your Blue Flame: Drop the Guilt and Do What Makes You Come Alive*.

I stared dumbfounded at those words. Then I prayed, *God, you are too good to me.*

I immediately read the title to Kerry, and she flashed a knowing smile. I bought the book, and as you probably guessed, it was *not* on the wrong shelf. The author is not some new-age weirdo or prosperity gospel peddler. She's a Jesus-follower who believes wholeheartedly that God designed us to do particular things, and when we tap into that design we don't have to feel bad for doing it and loving it!

I read the whole book in two sittings, listening to Jesus as he spoke to me time and again through the author's words.

My decision was made. I chose option B and started making plans to do the joy-inducing, faith-producing, Jesus-obeying thing that makes me come alive. And I wasn't going to feel guilty for enjoying every good minute of it. Jesus spoke and I listened.

PRACTICE THE RULE

The goal of learning about a Rule for Life is to live by it, not just know about it.

To that end, practice the Rule as suggested in the chapter or design

and practice a similar one. As you try a spiritual practice each week, keep in mind...

The practices are doors, not laws, and this is only a taste.

On pages 35-36 are these words: *“The real purpose of making space (see Rule #1) is so we can listen to Jesus in it. But hard-fought battles for space are often wasted because most of us were not trained to listen for Jesus.”*

1. What do you think about being “trained” in the way of Jesus? How are spiritual practices related to training?
2. Which practice will you try this week to help you keep learning to listen to Jesus?
3. What were the challenges you faced while attempting to listen to Jesus this week? What was the fruit of it?

LOOK AT THE WORD

Read John 10:14-16.

1. In verse 16, Jesus says, *“They **will** listen to my voice.”* What does this say about what it means to be one of his “sheep”? Or what does it say about those who will not listen?

Read John 5:19, 6:38, and 8:28.

2. What do these verses teach us about Jesus’ practice of listening to the Father? And what do they say about the Father’s willingness and ability to speak to *us* and our ability to hear and understand him?

Jesus spoke in parables for a few reasons. Chief among them was his desire to paint pictures of the mysterious things of God and to sift the serious disciples from the looky-loos.

With that in mind, read Mark 4:23-25 in The New Living Translation. This translation is particularly helpful here.

“Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.” Then [Jesus] added, “Pay close attention to what you hear. The closer you listen, the more understanding you will be given—and you will receive even more. To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them.”

3. What does Jesus promise to those who work hard to listen? And what is the relationship between listening and understanding (vs 25)?

4. When you read a section of Scripture that is difficult to understand – like a parable of Jesus – what do you typically do? Have you ever tried any of the following to aid your understanding?

- Read the verses slowly and meditate on them.
- Intentionally journal about the difficulties.
- Ask God for insight and understanding.
- Put your Bible away, ponder the passage through the day, and return to read it carefully the next day.

What happened when you tried any of these things? What else have you tried?

TALK WITH FRIENDS

On the first page of the chapter is this quote by Tim from SeekWell.org: *“The Christians I know don’t need more Bible study. They don’t need to go to church more often or do more ‘Christian’ stuff. What they need to do is learn to listen to Jesus.”*

1. What do you think about what Tim said? And do you believe God can and will speak to *you*? Why or why not, and why does it matter?
2. What do you believe about when, how, and why God communicates? Which passages of Scripture inform your ideas?

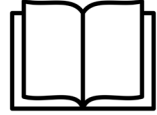
Chapter 2 includes eight of the ways Jesus communicates with us: the Bible, desires, doors, dreams, people, promptings, pain, and peace.

3. Why is the Bible number one on the list (More on this in Rule #3!), and why must we filter everything else we believe God is saying through his Word?
4. What other ways have you experienced God speaking? How did you know it was him?

FINAL THOUGHT

What other ideas, Scripture, or quotes from this chapter were important for you? Don't forget to bring them up in your group conversation!

“When you learn to listen closely, the result is an intimate walk with God himself.”



RULE #3: READ THE BIBLE...SLOWLY

PRACTICE AND STUDY

I'LL NEVER FORGET when James said, “Whoa. God just spoke to me...He just *spoke* to me!”

James was one of the students in a college ministry group I led years ago. I learned about *Lectio Divina* only a few months before taking a handful of students on a weekend retreat, and I tried it out with them. I don't recall the passage we read, but I'll always remember the mixed expression of joy and shock at James' personal experience with God.

The students in the ministry were all Christians. Most of them were raised, in one way or another, in a Bible-believing, Christian home. But it was all I could do to help them see that God is very real and personally knowable. I wanted them to know what I had been learning myself: The Bible is far more than just a religious book. It's *alive* and active, a tool for revelation and change in the capable hands of the Holy Spirit.

After our group practice of *Lectio Divina*, James was convinced. It wasn't so much that God's words came alive to him: God *himself* came alive to him.

Lectio Divina is not a formula. It's not a trick. There are other methods and practices for engaging God's Word purposefully and prayerfully. As with all the spiritual disciplines, the practice or “Rule”

is not the thing. Engagement with the living God is the thing. Our spiritual disciplines are just vehicles God has given to help drive us into his presence.

And once we are there, lots of good things can happen. We just might find ourselves saying, “Whoa. God just spoke to me.”

PRACTICE THE RULE

The goal of learning about a Rule for Life is to live by it, not just know about it.

To that end, practice the Rule as suggested in the chapter or design and practice a similar one. As you try a spiritual practice each week, keep in mind...

The practices are doors, not laws, and this is only a taste.

1. Share what you experienced and learned about the practice, yourself, and God as you read the Bible slowly this week. What was it like for you? How did God speak, and what did he say?
2. Now that you've read and practiced Rules #1 to #3, are you developing a rhythm of trying out the practice as you study the chapter each week? How do you feel about the practices, and how might your group help if you're struggling to attempt them?

At one of your group meetings, invite everyone to practice *Lectio Divina* together. Have three or four people in your group volunteer to read. Follow the steps on pages 70/71 to guide the group to listen to Jesus. When finished reading and listening, take time to share what you believe you heard from God through his Word.

LOOK AT THE WORD

Read Matthew 4:1-11.

1. What do you think about the way Jesus handles the Scripture when under physical temptation and spiritual duress? What does it say about him and his belief about God's Word?

Now read Hebrews 4:12.

2. To whom does the Word of God expose our innermost thoughts and desires? Does this kind of revelation happen quickly? Why or why not?

Psalm 1:1-3 includes a promise for those who "meditate"—think deeply and carefully—on God's Word. Read those verses before you consider the following questions.

3. Why would God ask us to meditate on his law or Word rather than just read it? What are the results according to the psalmist? Try expressing them in your own words.

TALK WITH FRIENDS

A portion of chapter three says, "*All of us...learned to read non-fiction for informational purposes. We read to master something, pass a test, learn a process, or recall a litany of facts.*"

1. Do you agree with that observation? Why or why not?

2. What are the reasons why you read the Bible quickly (or are tempted to)? How do the Information Age, the internet, and your smartphone impact the way you read God's Word?
3. How would you describe to a friend the purpose of the Bible?
4. What are some of the promises God makes to those who read and internalize its verses and message? (Refer back to Matthew 4:4 and Hebrews 4:12, or consider Psalm 1:1-3 and John 20:31)
5. Do you consider your Bible reading part of your prayer life? Why or why not?

FINAL THOUGHT

What other ideas, Scripture, or quotes from this chapter were important for you? Don't forget to bring them up in your group conversation!

"The ancient practice of slowly and repeatedly reading a short passage of Scripture with extended moments of silence between each reading... becomes more than reading: It becomes prayer. It becomes listening to Jesus."

RULE #4: BECOME A MYSTIC

PRACTICE AND STUDY



IN THE FALL OF 2015, I traveled to England for a ministry conference. Two colleagues and I met with church leaders from around the world to learn about an evangelism ministry called Alpha. The creators of Alpha were pastors at Holy Trinity Brompton, an Anglican church in the heart of London.

I had been a disciple of Jesus for twenty years and a pastor for five, yet I had never experienced the power of corporate prayer as I did in that old English church building with those faithful leaders. All of our prayer times – whether with all fifty conference attendees or a five-person break-out group – began with a very simple practice. We waited in silence on the Holy Spirit.

I still remember the conference leaders standing patiently in front of the group, hands out, eyes sometimes open and sometimes closed. They patiently watched and listened, seeking to recognize the Holy Spirit's presence and leadership. And inevitably, they did. Because inevitably the Spirit made his presence known. Some of my most palpable experiences of the presence of God happened in those rooms that weekend.

There was nothing particularly spectacular about those men and women. There was nothing particularly holy about the buildings of

Holy Trinity Brompton. But they shared something important: a true belief that God is real, his Spirit is with us, and there is more going on in God's world than just what we know or can see.

Those leaders were mystics. They believed in the miraculous power and mysterious presence of God himself, and they expected him to be present with us as Scripture promises.

They were in no hurry. They didn't act weird. And they never forced an "experience." They simply trusted, waited, listened, and responded to the movement of God in their midst.

I, for one, left there changed. The Holy Spirit convinced me he is a real person to be known, not just a trinitarian theology to be learned.

And that is what becoming a mystic is all about. There is far more to life than rationalism and emotionalism. God is real and he longs for us to open ourselves to know and experience him in ways that are too deep for words, too beautiful to imagine, and too mysterious to fully comprehend.

PRACTICE THE RULE

The goal of learning about a Rule for Life is to live by it, not just know about it.

To that end, practice the Rule as suggested in the chapter or design and practice a similar one. As you try a spiritual practice each week, keep in mind...

The practices are doors, not laws, and this is only a taste.

The "How I Practice Rule #4" section describes a two-step process for remembering God's miraculous action in your life.

1. When, where, and how do you intend to practice this Rule this week?

2. What miracles of God do you recognize around you? What is one of the miraculous moments or ways God has shown up or communicated in your life?

Ask God to help you engage in this practice, and he will help you identify miraculous moments in your life. If you still struggle to recognize them, ask God to help you identify miracles in someone else's life or the world around you.

LOOK AT THE WORD

Read Mark 9:1-13.

1. What were your first thoughts when you read, "*Then Elijah and Moses appeared and began talking to Jesus*" in verse 4? Share your initial reaction to this scene in which two dead guys join Jesus and his friends for a chat!
2. What does this scene tell us about the reality of life after death and the mysterious power of Jesus? How might it have helped those first disciples prepare for (and later trust) Jesus' resurrection?

John 17 is the final personal prayer of Jesus before going to the cross. He prayed it in earshot of his disciples and John recorded it in his Gospel.

Read it in full, paying special attention to verses 20-24, then consider the following to share with your group.

3. What stands out to you about Jesus' prayer, verses 20-24 in particular? Have you ever pondered the mysterious and miraculous possibility of spiritual unity with God himself?

4. What other Scripture verses, passages, or stories make you think of the miraculous nature of God and/or remind you of the miracles that are possible for those who follow Jesus and are filled by his Spirit?

TALK WITH FRIENDS

Page 76 includes this quote: *"A society built on rationalism or emotionalism leaves no room for God."*

1. What do you think about the description of rationalism and emotionalism given in this chapter? Which of the two are you ever tempted to operate in? Why?

2. Do you find the miraculous nature of Christianity difficult to believe, trust, engage with, or explain? Why or why not?

Beginning on page 82 of the book, there is a list of "Everyday Miracles" that every Christian experiences, whether he or she appreciates them or not. Review them before considering these questions.

3. Which of those "everyday" miracles are you most grateful for right now? How do you experience it? Which is most difficult for you to appreciate? (Trust your group and share why. It's unlikely you're the only one!)

4. Do you ever struggle with the fact that our faith is predicated on one particular miracle, the resurrection of Jesus? (see pages 81-82)

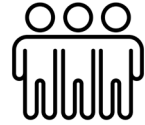
FINAL THOUGHT

What other ideas, Scripture, or quotes from this chapter were important for you? Don't forget to bring them up in your group conversation!



“This is where it all begins: the mysterious, miraculous, and mystical opportunity to be joined with God, filled by the Holy Spirit, and become his adopted son or daughter through faith in Jesus Christ.”

12 RULES FOR A CHRISTIAN LIFE, PAGE 81



RULE #5: JOIN THE CHURCH

PRACTICE AND STUDY

I'VE ALWAYS LOVED the outdoors. I grew up exploring the ravine and creek behind our home, playing sports, or fishing with my dad or friends. When I moved to California in my mid-twenties, I couldn't wait to explore the mountains, valleys, beaches, and deserts that grace the landscape of the most naturally diverse state in the country.

It was there that I fell in love with backpacking. Few things restore my soul like exploring the wooded slopes of the Sierra Nevada, gawking at the enormous sequoia trees, and sleeping under the twinkling stars. I nicknamed my multi-day backpacking trips "Worship Weeks" because immersion in the creation always leads me to praise the Creator.

Two books captured my attention during those years: Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air* (a gripping retelling of one of the deadliest Mount Everest expeditions in history) and *Into the Wild*. In *Into the Wild*, Krakauer explores the life of a curious and idealistic young adventurer named Christopher McCandless. McCandless longed for more than his wealthy, well-educated, East Coast pedigree promised. Though he befriended several people along his journey across the country, he ultimately sought solace alone. He traveled into the

Alaskan wilderness hoping the land and isolation would sustain him. Tragically, it didn't.

In one of his journals he wrote, "It is true that I miss intelligent companionship, [but]...it is enough that I am surrounded with beauty." His hopefulness turned to sadness when he realized that life was never meant to be lived alone. Another set of words was found scribbled by his dying hand in the final pages of his Alaska diary: "Happiness only real when shared."

This story may seem like a morbid introduction to the Group Guide for Rule #5, Join the Church. But the young man's words – set in the context of his tragic story – ring true. Happiness, like virtually all human experiences, is most beautiful, real, and rewarding when the experience is shared. We are designed to live and thrive within a community.

Does that mean we are meant to never be alone? No. As we discovered in Rule #1, Fight for Space, solitude is an important discipline. But solitude is not a way of life. Individualistic pursuits are a pillar of an American lifestyle, but not a Christian one.

All praise be to the Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – for giving us a community with whom we are to belong. It is a community after his heart, designed to live out his mission and enjoy his vision for the best life *together*.

The Church of Jesus Christ is a messy bunch. Like all human beings, each member is impacted by sin. But we are, first and foremost, God's beloved. We are chosen and called to glorify and enjoy him together, now and forever.

I've always enjoyed my solo trips into the backcountry. It's one of the ways I've fought for space. But I've never been alone there because God is with me, and since coming to faith I've learned that I'm never alone when I come home either. I'm designed to partner with you and others in God's Church to see his kingdom come and his will done. And when I do that, I find that I am living my real life.

PRACTICE THE RULE

The goal of learning about a Rule for Life is to live by it, not just know about it.

To that end, practice the Rule as suggested in the chapter or design and practice a similar one. As you try a spiritual practice each week, keep in mind...

The practices are doors, not laws, and this is only a taste.

The practice for Rule #5 is more vague than the other practices. That's intentional. How you practice this Rule depends on how many other believers you know, how connected you are to them, and whether or not you regularly attend a Christian gathering (local church) intending to build relationships with other Jesus followers.

Allow the following questions to prompt you as you listen to Jesus about your practice this week for Rule #5, Join the Church.

1. Who are your closest Christian friends? When was the last time you intentionally talked with those friends about life with Jesus?
2. Do you sense God calling you to participate, commit, identify, and extend yourself in a new way? What practical step will you take this week to answer his call?

LOOK AT THE WORD

Read Luke 5:1-11 and John 13:34-35 then reflect on and answer the following.

1. What does it reveal about God that he called Peter while Peter was in the presence of his friends and co-workers? And what does Luke 5:11 reveal about us—God's Church—when it's written, "*And as soon as **they** landed, **they** left everything and followed Jesus*"? (emphasis added)

2. How is the commission from Jesus in John 13:34-35 related to the disciples' initial calling in Luke 5:1-11? How do these two encounters with Jesus serve as "bookends" for the disciples' three-year journey with him?

The story of the Holy Spirit's creation of the first Church unfolds in the book of Acts. Read Acts 2:42-47 and reflect on the following questions.

3. What sorts of verbs are used in this passage? What words of emotion are included? What do they communicate about the community God built?

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-31. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you notice what you've not noticed before.

4. Why would God have Paul compare the Church to a human body?

5. How does Paul's exclamation in verse 19 ("*How strange a body would be if it had only one part!*") push against our individualized and self-centered culture?

TALK WITH FRIENDS

1. If you're honest, do you think of the Christian life *primarily* as an individual pursuit or a corporate one? Why?

2. What is a personal example or story you have about the fruitfulness of following Jesus with others? Go around the group and share the experiences that come to mind.

3. How is Jesus' call for us to love one another well a vital part of what it means to "Join the Church"?

Read the two statements below, then think and talk about the questions that follow.

- "I regularly spend time at my church, and I'm involved in several of its programs"
- "I can't be who I am without the Jesus-following friends I share life with, explore my gifts with, and impact others with."

4. What are the differences between those two statements, and why are they important? How are they intended to overlap?

5. How is your small group like the group of first disciples? How is it different? What is the point of reading this book and studying the Scriptures together?

FINAL THOUGHT

What other ideas, Scripture, or quotes from this chapter were important for you? Don't forget to bring them up in your group conversation!

"Joining the Church is rarely easy. Yet, the joys of sharing life and participating in the mission of God outweigh the difficulties. The glory it brings to God, the service it is to others, and the way in which God uses us to change the world is worth every bit of blood, sweat, and tears."

RULE #6: DON'T JUST SING THERE

PRACTICE AND STUDY



I GREW up attending a medium size church in Texas. On several occasions, foreign missionaries visited our Sunday gathering to share about God's work in faraway places.

Their stories were fascinating, and even as a youngster, I constantly thought about what they sacrificed to do what God asked. I imagined the strange villages where they lived, the difficulties of learning a foreign language, and the ridicule or isolation they might endure for being Christians in a vastly different culture.

I didn't realize then that they were living examples of God's Word in Romans 12:1-2. Those missionaries gave their lives as living sacrifices to the God of the universe. Uprooted from everything they knew, they deliberately gave everything to help other people know and worship God through a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Recalling their stories still moves me. As do the stories of those doing the same thing today. For instance, some friends of friends serve in Papua New Guinea. They're called by God to translate the Bible and will struggle to learn the tribal language for a decade *or two* before ever translating a word. Talk about sacrificing your life!

I've met a family that lives and shares the gospel in Syria. They live each day in a Muslim country where they are called to evangelize and

make disciples (just like us) but must be very cautious about how and when they talk about their faith and gather together in Jesus' name. Their safety and ability to stay in the country are always at stake.

Both families inspire and challenge me. That said, living as a missionary in a foreign country is not the *only* way to live out the biblical ideal of worship. Neither is state-side worship reserved for pastors and church staff or folks who work for Christian organizations or schools. Sacrificial worship is the design for *every* follower of Jesus.

But what I do see in the lives of the families described above is that their worship is far more than singing. It's far more than attending Sunday gatherings. It's far more than simply referring to themselves as Christian. They worship God by giving their bodies as living sacrifices. And no doubt, God is pleased by their worship, and they are blessed immeasurably by him.

We have the same opportunity, even without moving to Papua New Guinea or Syria. God provides us daily opportunities to worship in the offices where we work, the classrooms where we study, and the neighborhoods where we live. And God is greatly pleased and glorified when we give our lives to him in every place we are.

PRACTICE THE RULE

The goal of learning about a Rule for Life is to live by it, not just know about it.

To that end, practice the Rule as suggested in the chapter or design and practice a similar one. As you try a spiritual practice each week, keep in mind...

The practices are doors, not laws, and this is only a taste.

1. Which of the two practices under the "How I Practice Rule #6" subheading have you tried before? Which will you try this week?
2. What's another practice that might help you live out Rule #6 individually and together?

LOOK AT THE WORD

Read Romans 12:1-2.

1. According to the apostle Paul, what is *“truly the way to worship”* God? And can you list some people in Scripture who exemplified this kind of worship?
2. What does God promise to us when we refuse to *“copy the behaviors and customs of this world”* and let him *“transform you into a new person by changing the way you think”*?

Read Matthew 9:9-13 and Hosea 6:6.

3. How is Matthew an example of biblical worship and the Pharisees an example of something else? What do we learn from Jesus’ response? (vs 12-13)

God instituted the sacrificial system in the Old Testament and also repeatedly pointed out that true worship is about more than just religious sacrifices. (see 1 Samuel 15:22, Psalm 40:6-8, Psalm 51:16-17, Isaiah 1:11, and Jeremiah 7:21-23)

4. What does this reveal about the purpose of God’s law and the limits of legalistically obeying it?

TALK WITH FRIENDS

1. Before reading this chapter, what typically came to mind when you heard the word “worship”? Talk about what you used to think and why you thought it.
2. Who do you know that exemplifies biblical worship? How have you noticed them “*giving [their] bodies*” to God “*as a living sacrifice*?” (Romans 12:1) How does their example impact you?
3. Of the four problems with music as the sole definition of worship (see the list on pages 122-124), which problem most caught your attention? Why? What other problems occur when we think of singing – or any other single act – as the full definition of worship?
4. What other ways (besides music and singing) are we tempted, individually and culturally, to define “worship” too narrowly?

In your group meeting, have three volunteers read Romans 12:1-2 out loud slowly. Pause in silence for 60 to 120 seconds between each reading. In the reading and the silence, think about the following questions...

- In what ways is your worship of God limited?
- In what ways is it expanding and growing?
- Where do you see God in it all?

Honestly share your responses.

FINAL THOUGHT

What other ideas, Scripture, or quotes from this chapter were important for you? Don't forget to bring them up in your group conversation!

“Surrendering to the God of the Bible does not compromise the good life; it creates the good life.”

12 RULES FOR A CHRISTIAN LIFE, PAGE 125



RULE #7: GIVE YOURSELF AWAY

PRACTICE AND STUDY

THE MOST DIFFICULT thing I ever do is give myself away. I'm a selfish man who struggles with humility, grace, patience, and getting things my way. But early in my marriage, God sought to rid me of my selfishness and help me to become a man who more faithfully gives himself away for his glory and others' good.

During the first nine years of our marriage, my wife Kerry suffered from chronic pain and fatigue. Doctors were of little help as she sought to control her debilitating symptoms and still navigate the daily activities that healthy people (like me) rarely think about.

She lost the career she loved and the clientele she took years to build.

She was unable to care for our children in the ways she most wanted.

She was forced to forfeit many life-giving experiences, activities, and even relationships.

And God gave me – and me alone – the job of a husband: to love and serve her in sickness and in health. And for a long time, I failed at it.

I selfishly worried more about what her limitations cost *me* than what it was costing *her*.

I wanted people to have compassion for *my* plight, while I failed to be compassionate about *hers*.

I allowed friends and family to coddle *me*, instead of directing their sympathy and compassion toward *her*.

I sulked and whined when we were unable to do things *I* wanted, rather than helping Kerry experience more of what *she* wanted and needed.

(See, I told you I was selfish!)

But, praise be to God, Kerry is the strongest and most determined, patient, resilient, and faithful person I know. Through her, God shined a bright light on his grace, patience, and humility. Together, God and my wife slowly and patiently helped me to grow into a person who tries to give myself away.

Through Kerry's brutal trial, God taught me again and again that my life is not about *me*. It's about him, and her, and my children, and other people all around us. Humility, it turns out, truly is thinking about ourselves less.

Though still far from perfect, I'm finally understanding God's design for me to consider others' needs before mine, others' welfare above my own. It's a difficult thing to learn (as you likely know), but it's the heart of true discipleship to Jesus. (see Matthew 7:12, Mark 12:29-31, Philippians 2:3-5)

He gave himself away for us and wants us to experience our real lives when we follow his lead.

PRACTICE THE RULE

The goal of learning about a Rule for Life is to live by it, not just know about it.

To that end, practice the Rule as suggested in the chapter or design and practice a similar one. As you try a spiritual practice each week, keep in mind...

The practices are doors, not laws, and this is only a taste.

1. When you think of serving God and others, do you think it requires practice? Why or why not?
2. Which of the chapter's suggested practices will you try this week? If none, what is another way you plan to practice giving yourself away in the days to come?

LOOK AT THE WORD

Read John 13:1-17 then ponder and respond to the questions below.

1. Several Bible translations (NLT, NIV, CEV, MSG, etc) have "So" as the first word of verse four. In light of verse three, why is that significant? How do the two verses together help us understand the nature of God?
2. How is this scene a picture of Jesus giving himself away? How does Jesus' identity render this seemingly small act of service as not small at all?
3. What is God's promise for those who follow his example from this passage? (See verse 17) What do you think his disciples thought of his promise? What do *you* think of his promise?

Take fifteen to twenty minutes to read through the book of Jonah in one sitting. (Don't worry, it's only four chapters!) Then look at these questions and prepare to share your thoughts with your friends.

4. Share a time when you responded to God's call the way Jonah first did. (see Jonah 1:3) Is there any area of your life in which you are currently responding to him that way? (Don't be shy to answer this one. *Everyone* has done it.)

TALK WITH FRIENDS

1. What were your first thoughts when you read the chapter title, "Give Yourself Away"? What are some of your thoughts now?
2. What are the modern-day equivalents to the first-century act of washing another's feet? How does identifying those acts of humility and service help you understand Jesus' act in John 13:1-17? How does it help you follow his lead?

Several questions are posed in the first half of this chapter: questions like, "*To whom do you belong?*" and "*To whom do you owe your life?*" Recall or reread that section (pages 138-140) and talk about the following questions together.

3. Do you struggle to think of yourself and the stuff you own as belonging solely and completely to God? Why or why not?
4. When have you given yourself away for someone? When has someone given themselves away for you? Share one of your stories with the group.
5. In what way is God calling you to give yourself away? How has God been speaking to you through Rule #6 and Rule #7?

FINAL THOUGHT

What other ideas, Scripture, or quotes from this chapter were important for you? Don't forget to bring them up in your group conversation!

“Giving yourself away is realizing that everything you have and everything you are is not yours. It’s God’s, and God’s alone.”

12 RULES FOR A CHRISTIAN LIFE, PAGE 140

RULE #8: REDEFINE LOVE

PRACTICE AND STUDY

A WHILE back I read a startling headline. It alluded to the fact that an influential pastor whom I deeply respect took a leave of absence after admitting to an “inappropriate online relationship.”

In a day when far too many “mega-church” pastors are forced to leave the public ministry because of infidelity, addictions, sexual malfeasance, or power and control issues, I was immediately saddened by the possibility that one of my heroes in the ministry had succumbed to dark temptations.

Except, he hadn’t.

I soon learned his missteps were not as salacious as the indiscretions that have plagued denominations and church leaders in recent years. As it turns out, the headlines left much to the imagination. Unfortunately, my mind wandered to the darkest and most disappointing place.

But in reality, the pastor violated one of the high biblical standards his church set for elders and pastors: A standard that other folks might think is “no big deal”. What shocked me – and others I know – was not the misbehavior of this pastor (though I’m certainly not dismissing it), but rather the courageous acts of accountability provided by members of his congregation and fellow leaders.

I know, I know. You are probably very curious about the infraction.

But that's not the point for us today.

The point for our purposes is this: Most leaders and congregants would dismiss this seemingly minor compromise. They would give a quiet warning, call it a harmless mistake, and move on. But the pastor is so loved by his elders and congregation that they're doing the hard thing: holding one another accountable to the standards of God's Word, *even when it impacts their public reputation and Sunday attendance.*

They take seriously the fact that the leadership of God's church is a vital, important, and vulnerable role. They are willing to help their pastor see his blind spots so he can mature even more. They love him enough to help him remain a healthy leader for all those who attend their church and listen to his teaching.

Love drove the congregant to bring the misstep to the pastor's attention (no easy task!).

Love drove the pastor to immediately seek wise counsel from his wife and fellow leaders in his community (no easy task either!).

Love drove the elders' decision to recommend a leave of absence from teaching and preaching so he can adequately respond to the Spirit's and the community's correction (once again, no easy task).

If the first few headlines are any indication, he will not receive much "love" from the media, inside or outside Christian circles. But that's what this Rule is all about: redefining love according to *God's* good way, not our private or public preferences.

PRACTICE THE RULE

The goal of learning about a Rule for Life is to live by it, not just know about it.

To that end, practice the Rule as suggested in the chapter or design and practice a similar one. As you try a spiritual practice each week, keep in mind...

The practices are doors, not laws, and this is only a taste.

1. What is it like to ask God to help you become receptive to his and others' accountability and correction?

2. Has God convicted, challenged, or corrected you through his Word or his Spirit this week?
3. Who might be a godly source of Biblical correction in your life?
4. How has this practice opened your mind and heart to another way to receive God's love?

LOOK AT THE WORD

Read Mark 10:17-31.

1. The rich man in this passage expressed interest in "*eternal life*" and claimed to obey all of the commandments since he was young. (vs 17-20) Why, then, does the text tell us "*he went away sad*"? (see vs 22)
2. How does their interaction parallel what God teaches us elsewhere in Scripture about the relationship between religious observance and devoted obedience? (for example, see 1 Samuel 15, Micah 6:2-8, and Matthew 9:9-13, 12:1-14)

Now read and meditate on each of the following verses: Proverbs 27:5, 6, 9, and 17. Respond to the following questions for each verse.

- Why is this Proverb wise?
- How does the wisdom of this Proverb contribute to healthy, Godly relationships?
- How is the wisdom of this Proverb contradicted or supported by today's secular culture?
- How does each contribute to your understanding of this chapter's Rule, "Redefine Love"?

TALK WITH FRIENDS

1. If you were the man described in Mark 10:17-31, how would you have responded when Jesus told you “*You lack one thing*” (vs 21, ESV)? How do you respond to the Holy Spirit today when he lovingly points out something you lack (through his Word, other believers, or internal conviction)?
2. Do you believe our “hearts” are capable of defining what is loving? Why or why not? And what examples do you see in our culture that corroborate your point?
3. How tempting is it for you to operate according to our society’s definition of love rather than a biblical one? Why do you think social definitions of love are so influential?
4. The second half of chapter 8 focused your attention on how the 10 Commandments display God’s love. Have you ever thought of God’s 10 Commandments as loving instructions? Why or why not?

FINAL THOUGHT

What other ideas, Scripture, or quotes from this chapter were important for you? Don't forget to bring them up in your group conversation!

“It’s not that we understand God because we know what love is; we understand love because we know who God is.”

RULE #9: REMEMBER WHO YOU ARE

PRACTICE AND STUDY



ONE AREA of my life in which I carry a significant degree of self-consciousness and insecurity is my ability to communicate. Ironically, I feel capable of communicating to live audiences (as when preaching) or to readers (as when writing), but I sometimes struggle with interpersonal communication.

During conversations, particularly those in which I'm trying to communicate something I believe is important, I tend to repeat myself. I worry that the intentions of my actions, the ideas in my mind, or the feelings in my heart won't be clearly understood. So I "talk in circles."

But my true fear is deeper. At its core, my self-consciousness stems from the fear that I'm unworthy, unloved, and unlikeable. And when I recognize I'm repeating myself, those deep fears surface and I want to crawl into a deep, dark hole. (It's happening even now as I write this!)

Why do I struggle in this way? Because Satan long ago twisted a compliment into criticism. Here's what I mean...

When I was young, my dad (whom I love dearly and who loves me dearly) commented that I sometimes communicate "differently" than others in our family. He referred to my perspective as "unique." His observations were complimentary and intended to encourage, not discourage.

Unfortunately, the enemy of God (and us) twisted Dad's words and

intentions to injure my soul. And it's worked far too many times. After all, Satan is a liar and a deceiver (see John 8:44 and Revelation 12:9) hell-bent on leading us to believe untrue things about ourselves, one another, and God.

Thankfully, I now realize and recognize the enemy's work. The devil tries to convince me that my way of communicating is inferior and unappreciated because *I'm* inferior and unappreciated.

I wonder if Satan has ever tried to convince you of the same thing.

Thankfully, my earthly father and my heavenly Father continue to love, affirm, and encourage me. Following the Spirit's lead, I've fought a significant battle against the false beliefs that I am unappreciated, unloved, or unliked.

The enemy will try to reshape, twist, and conceal the truth that we might believe his lies. But *God's* words are true: he created us, knows us, loves us, and likes us. And you and I must hear, cling to, and trust them so we can always remember who we are.

PRACTICE THE RULE

The goal of learning about a Rule for Life is to live by it, not just know about it.

To that end, practice the Rule as suggested in the chapter or design and practice a similar one. As you try a spiritual practice each week, keep in mind...

The practices are doors, not laws, and this is only a taste.

All the practices in this book are important and life-giving. But I particularly encourage you to invest in the practice given at the end of this chapter. Asking God to help you identify your "Limiting Beliefs" and his "Liberating Truths" will help you remember who you are and can change your life. What we believe about ourselves and what God says about us are that powerful.

Use the questions and prompts below to help you live out the Rule and prepare for your group's conversation.

1. Which of your limiting beliefs strikes you as the most closely linked to your identity? Which limiting belief is the most crippling for you?
2. Which liberating truth do you most need to believe? Which has the most potential to free you in some way?

After working through this practice, spend intentional time talking with God about your list. Ask him to help you memorize and internalize his liberating truths.

LOOK AT THE WORD

Read Genesis 1:1-31.

1. What is the final step of God's good creation? (see vs 26) What is significant about being created in God's image (vs 26) and God's comment that this is "*very good!*"? (vs 31)

Read Psalm 139:1-6.

2. What do these verses say about God and us? And why are these verses important?

Read Luke 3:21-22 and then Luke 7:33-35. Note what is said about Jesus, who says it, and compare and contrast the two.

3. Why are God's words important for Jesus, particularly as he begins his ministry? How important was it for Jesus to believe and internalize

what his Father believed and said about him rather than what others believed and said about him?

Last, read 1 John 4:9-10 and 16.

4. Does God love us? How do we know?

TALK WITH FRIENDS

1. Did you have parents who regularly said things like “this is my beloved son/ daughter” and “you bring me great joy”? Or did you have parents that said something different? How have their words impacted you?

2. Of the four main ideas in this chapter – God made you, God knows you, God loves you, and God likes you – which is the easiest for you to believe? Which is the most difficult?

3. Has someone you know ever said something – positive or negative – that you believed for a long time? Why do you think you believed it?

4. When did you first begin to believe the things God says about you? If you don’t yet, what prevents you from believing and trusting what God says?

On page 190 is written, *“When we forget who we are – when we forget we are created, known, loved, and liked by God – we are prone to be tossed and blown by every wind in our cultural moment. Every new fad, new social demand, political power play, and unbiblical teaching or trend threatens to push us off the rails on which God made us to run.”*

5. Have you experienced anything like this before? How does remembering who we are center and stabilize us? Share an example from your life if you can.

FINAL THOUGHT

What other ideas, Scripture, or quotes from this chapter were important for you? Don't forget to bring them up in your group conversation!



“When you remember who you are, you become an active and unwavering participant in the only kingdom that will last forever.”

12 RULES FOR A CHRISTIAN LIFE, PAGE 191



RULE #10: NAME YOUR IDOLS

PRACTICE AND STUDY

I OFTEN MARVEL at the apostle Paul's words in Philippians 4. He wrote...

I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength. (Philippians 4:11-13)

I need to keep two facts in mind when I read these verses. First, Paul endured *a lot*. If you're tempted to believe Paul's life was a cakewalk, let 2 Corinthians 11:23-29 disabuse you of that notion. Give it a quick read to see how brutal Paul's life as a believer was.

Second, I have to remember that Paul's famous words – "*I can do everything through Christ, who strengthens me*" – were written in light of his preceding statements about experiencing contentment amid the most harrowing circumstances. Paul never thought of Jesus as a divine sidekick, aiding him in his efforts to do difficult things. Rather, Paul experienced Christ to be his *only source of life and hope* in every desperate situation.

With those things in mind, I'm convicted about how bad my atti-

tude turns when I'm the least bit hungry, tired, stressed, or inconvenienced. Though I hate to admit it, my grumbling about life's little irritations proves my thoughts are often more trained on my comfort than on the glorious goodness of God and all I've received in Christ. And just like that, an idol is revealed. I too often idolize comfort. And when my internal attitude is darkened by my temporary discomfort, my "tude" makes life hard for others around me. It's not good for *anybody!*

Yet praise God: He gently but resolutely helps me recognize my idols when I'm open to seeing them. He convinces me of my subtle but significant slide away from full reliance and worship of him and invites me back home. When I don't "*seek the Kingdom of God above all else*" (see Matthew 6:33) or "*set [my] sights on the realities of heaven*" (see Colossians 3:1) instead of the realities of earth, I'm grateful (and inspired by) God's endless patience and bottomless forgiveness.

Once I see my idols and summon the courage to name them, I experience the beauty, joy, and freedom of worshiping the one true God instead of impotent false ones.

PRACTICE THE RULE

The goal of learning about a Rule for Life is to live by it, not just know about it.

To that end, practice the Rule as suggested in the chapter or design and practice a similar one. As you try a spiritual practice each week, keep in mind...

The practices are doors, not laws, and this is only a taste.

This chapter includes three practices for recognizing and naming your idols. A *direct practice* is on pages 200-201 (under "A Devotion Test"). An *indirect practice* and a *relational practice* are on page 210 (under "How I Practice Rule #10). All three are valuable tools for growing in Christlikeness and important habits to develop.

Use the questions and prompts below to help you live out the Rule this week and prepare for your group conversation.

. . .

Pray, asking God to help you identify which practice to try first. Listen carefully for him. If he doesn't identify one for you, choose whichever you believe will be most fruitful.

1. If you focused on "A Devotion Test", were you surprised by the results? What do you feel God is asking you to do with what you discovered?
2. If you practiced the Daily Examen, what was it like? How was it helpful? What did God reveal?
3. If you chose to tell a friend, which friend is God leading you to share with? And when do you plan to share?

LOOK AT THE WORD

Read Mark 10:35-45 and carefully consider the following.

1. What does the conversation between Jesus, James, and John reveal about these two disciples' aspirations? (see vs 35-40) What do verses 41-42 reveal about all the disciples?

Mark's Gospel was written to reveal *Jesus' identity* as the powerful Messiah and Son of God and *his mission* as the suffering servant of God. With this in mind, read Mark 10:32-34.

2. What is significant about verses 32-34 coming just before James and John's question in verse 35? Can you think of any other places in the Gospels in which Jesus' disciples struggle to understand his true identity and purpose?

3. What does verse 45 reveal about who Jesus serves? And how does his rightly placed devotion shed light on who and what we are designed to be devoted to?

Revisit Luke 18:18-30. This time read it through the lens of idolatry and what you've learned so far about naming your idols.

4. What is the rich man's idol? Why do you think this idol in particular makes it difficult to "*enter the Kingdom of God*"? (see vs 24)

5. What does Peter's comment in verse 28 reveal about the disciples' devotion to Jesus? Did the disciples' devotion to Jesus (putting away all their idols) happen overnight? Why or why not, and how do you know?

TALK WITH FRIENDS

1. Why is idolatry so difficult to talk about?

2. Share your answers to the questions under the heading "A Devotion Test" on page 200.

- Who is the single most important person in your life?
- What's your most beloved possession?
- Which personal quality, characteristic, or accomplishment brings you the most satisfaction or pride?
- What's the one dream you most long to be fulfilled?

3. What was your emotional reaction to the possibility of losing your most important people and things? And, what was your honest response when you meditated on the questions on page 200?

4. What do you think about the four-step process given for naming and eliminating your idols? (see page 203 and following) Which step –

Recognize, Reject, Repent, or Replace – is easiest for you? Which is most difficult?

5. Do you believe it's important to regularly practice naming your idols? Or is it enough to just do it once? Why?

FINAL THOUGHT

What other ideas, Scripture, or quotes from this chapter were important for you? Don't forget to bring them up in your group conversation!

“When we live with Jesus as the undisputed champion of our lives we live in unparalleled vitality.”

12 RULES FOR A CHRISTIAN LIFE, PAGE 213



RULE #11: EMBRACE YOUR SUFFERING

PRACTICE AND STUDY

ONE OF THE first groups to utilize this Group Guide was a group of twenty-five women, some of whom attend the church I used to pastor. On occasion, I visited their group to hear about their experience with Jesus, the book, and the Group Guide.

During one visit in September, I asked everyone to share one significant experience from their summer. Several women shared about anniversary celebrations, time spent with their husbands and families, or their vacation travels. But one woman's comments caught my attention in particular.

She said, "My significant summer experience was the days I spent in recovery at a rehab hospital. I hated it. I was in pain and the staff treated people terribly. But, a friend reminded me that this was a great opportunity to be a light. I knew I needed to do whatever possible to help others, and *now I thank God for putting me in that situation*. God gave me this opportunity so I tried to use my time in that place to speak his Word to fellow patients and staff."

Though the group was only one-third of the way through the book, she perfectly summed up the heart and soul of Rule #11, Embrace Your Suffering.

First, she acknowledged the significance of her suffering. Suffering

is *always* significant, and we're never called to ignore or dismiss it. Rather, our acceptance of it, and our embracement of God through it, allows us to see his purposes in it.

Second, she candidly admitted that she hated it. As well she should! Suffering is tragic, and I believe God hates it too. The practice of embracing our suffering is about submission to God and his redemption of all things: it's not about pretending we're OK with pain.

Last, she embraced her suffering. How? She embraced God and his sovereignty, and she recognized – and took advantage of – the opportunity her suffering provided. Her pain-filled experience placed her in a position she would never have been in otherwise, and she used the situation to bear witness to God's goodness among other sufferers.

I cherished this woman's honest and faithful response to my question. I also appreciated the example she set for me and the others.

Recuperating from surgery while enduring pain and insufficient care is no one's ideal summer experience. But seizing the gospel-centered opportunities provided by God in our difficult situations is significant indeed.

PRACTICE THE RULE

The goal of learning about a Rule for Life is to live by it, not just know about it.

To that end, practice the Rule as suggested in the chapter or design and practice a similar one. As you try a spiritual practice each week, keep in mind...

The practices are doors, not laws, and this is only a taste.

The practice given for Rule #11 is simple, but it's not easy. If you are suffering right now, this may be particularly difficult. But trust the process. If you are not suffering right now, practice this practice anyway. Start to develop spiritual "muscle memory" so you can more easily turn to praise the next time you endure hardship.

Here are four Psalms of Praise to help you praise God this week:

- Psalm 34:1-10
- Psalm 100:1-5
- Psalm 103
- Psalm 145

1. Which Psalm most resonated with you? Why?

2. What was it like to praise your way through pain this week (if you are in a season of pain or suffering)? What can you do to remember this practice for future difficult seasons of life?

LOOK AT THE WORD

Read Matthew 26:36-46.

1. What happens between verses 38 and 45 that moves Jesus from emotional distress to active submission to his ultimate destiny? In other words, what steps did Jesus take to be able to embrace his suffering?

2. What else stands out to you as you slowly and carefully read these well-known verses?

3. Which other events in Scripture develop the theme of embracing our suffering? (see Genesis 37-50, Job 1:13-22, Isaiah 53, John 9, 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, Philippians 1:12-14) What do you notice when you read these?

Read the full account of Jesus and the man born blind in John 9.

4. What about these events helps us understand how God can use our suffering for his glory and others' good?

TALK WITH FRIENDS

Suffering is the most difficult aspect of the human experience. As you consider these questions and talk with your friends, be most careful to listen to others' experiences with compassion and empathy and without judgment.

1. What do you believe about God redeeming our suffering for his glory, others' good, and even our joy? If you've experienced this, encourage the group by sharing your experience.

2. Of the six ways given to embrace your suffering (see the "Active Embrace" heading on page 222) which resonates most with you? Which of them do you find most difficult to believe or experience? Why?

3. When you reflect as a group on Jesus' conversation with God in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46), do you believe it's possible to be like Jesus in this way? Why or why not? Do you know of anyone who is like Jesus in this way? Who is it, and how do you see it?

4. Share a time when you embraced your suffering for God's glory and another's good. What was it like? What did God do?

FINAL THOUGHT

What other ideas, Scripture, or quotes from this chapter were important for you? Don't forget to bring them up in your group conversation!



"As we grab hold of him, releasing ourselves to allow him to grab hold of us, we can accept our suffering as an opportunity to sink into his embrace and participate in his redemption of our darkest moments."

12 RULES FOR A CHRISTIAN LIFE, PG 221



RULE #12: SHARE THE GOSPEL

PRACTICE AND STUDY

I'LL NEVER FORGET one of the first times I sensed the Spirit of God prompting me to share the gospel with a stranger. I was flying alone from Los Angeles to Dallas, and as the other passengers and I stood in line to board the airplane, I felt compelled to talk with the woman in front of me. She was about my age and traveling alone.

The Spirit of God nudged my soul, but my mind put up heavy resistance. Though I longed to become a man who heard and obeyed the Spirit's call, I didn't particularly want to practice it at that moment. My mind reeled ...

What do I say?

What if she doesn't want to talk?

What if she thinks I'm flirting with her!?

I took a deep breath to calm my nerves, and I asked God to help me start a conversation naturally. It wasn't long before he answered my prayer. The woman and I made eye contact and I asked, "Where ya traveling to?" She laughed and said, "Dallas. You?" It took me a few seconds to realize my question was silly. We were boarding the same plane. I shrugged, smiled, and said, "Funny. Me too." We both laughed a little.

And just like that, we began a conversation. In my attempt to be faithful, I didn't waste much time before asking her about God. After all, if God prompted me to share the gospel with her, I needed to take the risk. I needed to obey.

I said, "I know this may seem out of the blue, but I wonder if you believe in God."

As soon as the words left my mouth, I was petrified. And though I felt a keen sense of loyalty to my Savior, I also wondered if I just alienated this stranger. She smiled gracefully and said, "I do, actually. What makes you ask?" I shared briefly that I believed the Holy Spirit was prompting me to talk with her and to share the gospel. I told her I wanted to be more faithful to God's leadership in my life.

As God would have it, our seats were next to each other on the plane and we talked about God and life for a large portion of our flight. In the end, she was encouraged by our conversation and I was grateful to God for the opportunity to practice sharing my faith.

Looking back, I think God was helping me "ease" into evangelism. I've since initiated other gospel conversations that were not so easy. I've spoken with people who certainly were not Christian and some conversations did not go very well. But I still ask God for opportunities, and I pray he will grant me the joy of seeing people trust Jesus when they hear his good news. Regardless of the outcome, I want to obey. I want to practice Rule #12, Share the Gospel. It's the message everyone – non-believer or believer – needs to hear again and again.

PRACTICE THE RULE

The goal of learning about a Rule for Life is to live by it, not just know about it.

To that end, practice the Rule as suggested in the chapter or design and practice a similar one. As you try a spiritual practice each week, keep in mind...

The practices are doors, not laws, and this is only a taste.

. . .

The practice for this Rule is one of the simplest: Pray for opportunities to share the gospel, then take them. With that in mind, consider these questions as you engage in the practice this week.

1. Who comes to mind as soon as you think about sharing the gospel with someone? As you pray for opportunities to share the gospel, pray specifically for an opportunity to share with that person.
2. What typically prevents you from sharing the gospel? Fear, uncertainty, lack of confidence or caring? As you pray, ask for God to give you the courage, confidence, and compassion to talk and share with others.
3. What happened when you prayed and shared the gospel this week?

LOOK AT THE WORD

Take a close look at Mark 1:15; John 3:16; Acts 2:22-25, 32-33, 36; and Romans 3:20-26, 4:25-5:2.

1. Why is the gospel good news? What is the bad reality that makes the gospel such good news?

Read John 17:3 in the NIV, ESV, NASB, KJV, or NKJV versions.

2. According to Jesus' words, what is eternal life? How does his definition of eternal life inform – or potentially change – your understanding of the gospel? And how does the good news about Jesus (the gospel) make this kind of life possible?

3. Have you ever thought of the Psalmist in Psalm 42 or Paul in Romans 7 as preaching to themselves? What do you think now? (see pages 249 and following)

For each passage below, jot down *Who* shared, *Why* they shared, and *How* they shared the gospel.

- Acts 2
- Acts 4:1-14
- Acts 8:26-40
- Acts 10
- Acts 11:19-24
- Acts 13:1-12

4. How do any of the “Who’s”, “Why’s”, and “How’s” of these passages parallel our lives today? Share examples in your group.

TALK WITH FRIENDS

1. Imagine someone asked you, “What is the gospel?” How would you answer? Practice writing the gospel succinctly in your own words staying true to the core message about what God has done in Jesus Christ. Share with the group what you wrote.

2. Have you shared the gospel with someone recently? If so, what did you do and how did it feel? If not, what has kept you from doing so?

3. Which of the three things the gospel does — it *Glorifies God*, *Reunites People with God*, and provides the *Gateway to Real Life* — stood out most to you? (see pages 243-248)

4. Why is preaching the gospel to ourselves the precursor to sharing the gospel with others? And how does the first lead to the second?

5. Who is the one person you most want to hear and receive the good news about Jesus? Share names and pray for them as a group.

FINAL THOUGHT

What other ideas, Scripture, or quotes from this chapter were important for you? Don't forget to bring them up in your group conversation!



“If you and I don’t share the gospel, who will?”

12 RULES FOR A CHRISTIAN LIFE, PAGE 253

EPILOGUE: WHAT NOW?

PRACTICE AND STUDY

IT'S a life goal of mine to visit all 63 National Parks in the U.S.A. So far, I've visited or backpacked in 23 of them. Only 40 more to go!

Five of the National Parks are in Southern Utah, one of the most beautiful and dramatic swaths of land in the entire Lower Forty-Eight. One of them – Canyonlands National Park – covers 300,000 acres of rugged and dramatic red rock terrain. Eons of wind and rain shaped Canyonland's unique spires and massive rolling mounds of solid red rock.

As I backpacked into the heart of Canyonlands, I quickly figured out why it can be one of the trickier parks to navigate for backcountry hikers. The trails that show up clearly in the sparse patches of dirt and wildflowers completely disappear on the giant areas of red rock.

The only way to identify and stay on the trail is by cairns. Cairns are small stacks of rocks – maybe 12 or 18 inches in height – intentionally piled by hikers and the park service to mark the trails. Without them, the backcountry route vanishes.

On more than one occasion I stood at a cairn and scanned the rock-meets-sky horizon searching for any sign of the next stack of rocks. At times I could see no cairn. I was forced to wander out and back, to and fro, some distance from the cairn behind me in an attempt to find the next trail marker.

When the cairns were few and far between, my prayers were not. I regularly asked God to help me see the way. And he did.

My Canyonlands journey mimics my day-to-day adventure with God. Many times on the journey I search the proverbial horizon for God's next waypoint. Sometimes I impatiently head down the trail, even though he has yet to tell me what the next step is. In my wiser moments, I wait in the spot I know he's marked, and I listen. And I rest. I enjoy my relationship with him. And I remain ready to head to the next spiritual, familial, or vocational cairn once he reveals it.

Thankfully, the Scriptures are replete with the promise that God guides his children, and my life is a living testament to that reality. So I trust, even when (*particularly* when) I must wait.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart," the Proverb writer wrote. *"Do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take."* — Proverbs 3:5-6 (emphasis added)

That, my friend, is my sincere encouragement for you as you stand at this spiritual marker. Don't attempt a deep dive into all twelve Rules yet. Rather, stand where you are, secure in God's love and desire for you, and ask him, "What now?" Don't depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do and he will show you the path.

Like the first two cairns on a well-worn trail, the first two Rules (Fight for Space and Listen to Jesus) are your starting point. Just as every trailhead begins with a sign and a map, so our spiritual lives begin with making space for God and then listening to him. Once you make it that far he will make you ready to see the next Rule he wants you to practice.

PRACTICE THE RULE

The Epilogue doesn't include a specific practice because the epilogue *is* a practice. The final spiritual practice of the book is to let "Jesus Pick the Rule." With that in mind...

1. When and how do you plan to Fight for Space and Listen to Jesus so he can tell you *“This is the way you should go”* (Isaiah 30:21b)?
2. With whom in this group do you plan to share what you hear from Jesus? And which person/people in this group do you plan to encourage as they listen to Jesus for their next Rule?

LOOK AT THE WORD

In Isaiah chapter 30, God rebukes his beloved children for seeking help from Egypt instead of him. Though it’s good they recognized their need for assistance, it’s bad that they planned to return to Egypt – the idolatrous and pagan nation that once enslaved them – for help, instead of God.

Beginning in verse 18 of chapter 30, God reminds them of the blessing that comes from waiting for his help. He promises to lovingly and compassionately guide them in their next steps when they *“ask for help.”* (vs 19)

Read Isaiah 30:18-22 with your situation and what you’ve learned from this book in mind. Consider the questions below.

1. God’s words through Isaiah were originally given to his people in Judah. But where and how is the same promise echoed elsewhere in Scripture?
2. How are God’s words through Isaiah instructive and helpful for you as you complete your reading of *12 Rules for a Christian Life*?

TALK WITH FRIENDS

In this last conversation with the group, encourage your friends to take concrete next steps on the journey with Jesus. It’s one thing to read a book and learn some things about God. It’s quite another to engage in spiritual practices that, as Dallas Willard put it, are activities that

“enable us to do what we cannot do by direct effort.” (Divine Conspiracy, pg 353)

In other words, we cannot transform ourselves, so we need spiritual practices and habits – like these 12 Rules – to open us up to God so *he* can transform us.

With that in mind, discuss the following and engage the final “Practice the Rule” section with intention, camaraderie, and encouragement.

1. Why is it important to emphasize Rule #1: Fight for Space and Rule #2: Listen to Jesus? Is it possible to rightly act on the other Rules or practices without these two? Why or why not?
2. What part of your life (heart, mind, or actions) do you hold back from the influence of Jesus? What would it look like for you to “Go All In”?
3. Why is it more difficult to let Jesus pick the next Rule than to just choose one on your own? Why is it also more fruitful to let him pick?
4. What aspect of your journey together through *12 Rules for a Christian Life* made the most impact? What has God said to you and shown you through this experience together?

FINAL THOUGHT

What other ideas, Scripture, or quotes from this chapter were important for you? Don't forget to bring them up in your group conversation!



“Jesus went all in. And he lived true human life because of it...When you go all-in with God, through Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, you will begin to live and enjoy the beautiful life God made for you.”

12 RULES FOR A CHRISTIAN LIFE, PG 262

CONNECT WITH CHRIS

Dear friend,

It's been quite the journey! I pray your experience with God and your friends was very, very fruitful.

What portion of the book made the most impact?

What did your group experience together?

I'd *love* to hear your answers! (*more on that below*)

Every book I write, all the content I create, and each experience I lead is designed to help you hear, understand, and experience God so you can live your real life. I believe that when we listen for God and actually know him, we can follow him into the rich and satisfying life he created us to live.

If your experience with *12 Rules for a Christian Life* helped you encounter God – or if any portion of the book or Group Guide was particularly meaningful, helpful, or *unhelpful* — will you send me a message? I love hearing from readers and enjoy responding to each comment or question (even if you just want to say “Hi!”).

Contact me directly at chris@chris-greer.com anytime.

I also invite you to visit Chris-Greer.com to find other books and tools to help you listen to and walk with Jesus.

Provide your name and email and I'll send occasional updates about my new books, how to become a member of my “Advance

Reader Team”, and other resources and experiences to help you walk with Jesus.

May the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit bless you as you let Jesus pick your next Rule and as you enjoy the journey with him and others.

Onward,
Chris

P.s. One more important request! Would you leave a review for *12 Rules for a Christian Life* on Amazon?

It’s a helpful way to get the book and this guide into the hands of others who need it. Just search for *12 Rules for a Christian Life* at Amazon.com then scroll down to the “Review this Product” link in the Customer Reviews section (and you can leave a review even if you purchased the book or guide elsewhere).

Thank you!