

GROW INTENTIONALLY

Establishing a Rule of Life | Psalm 16:11; John 15:1-8 Base Camp (Part 2)

If I've learned one thing about the people who live in the communities that make up the Western Suburbs, it is that most of you are, in a beautiful sense, MOUNTAIN CLIMBERS. At your best, you are not content with a sedentary, stagnant life. There is nothing about the phrase "merely mediocre" that is appealing to you. You may get tired at times, but you are someone who wants to make the most of life's adventure. You want to scale the peaks of opportunity and experience. You want the quality of your character and the level of your wisdom and the capacity of your creative influence to keep rising as life goes on. You want this not only for yourself but for your kids and friends as well.

And you know what? So does Jesus. Jesus said, in effect, I don't want you to live an ordinary life. I don't want you to get stuck where you are today. **I have come that you might have life and have it to the full (John 10:10).** One of Christ's followers in the second century -- a theologian named, Irenaeus -- famously observed that the glory of God is a person fully alive. In other words, Jesus is pleased and God is glorified when you and I, or our kids and friends, rise to our full potential.

Which is why I'm so happy that you've come here today to BASE CAMP! The circle of a healthy church is a place of preparation for moving higher in life. It is sort of like the very important stopping place where those seeking to summit Mount Everest come to rest and to ready themselves to venture up the mountain. The climbers go out from Base Camp and return to Base Camp and each time they go out again, they are able to go a little higher. I love that image for the Church. Inspired by Jesus, people who made life's journey long before us, established this Church as a special community where you and I can seek and receive the power, perspectives, and practices that can help us rise toward our God-given potential.

As our preachers shared last week, the first thing we learn at Base Camp is how to **WORSHIP WORTHILY**. This is a place where we purposely take our eyes off of the trivial obsessions and terrible examples that can easily drag us down and lift up our heads instead toward the great GOD... the who is the supreme summit and source of life... the One who is truly **worthy of our worship**... the One by whose power alone we can become fully alive. We practice lifting our vision toward God HERE so that wherever we go out THERE, we're more likely to live with our heads up -- to live in a way that perceives and promotes the glory of God. This is why it is so important that you and your children keep returning to this circle of tents on a weekly basis. Worshipping God weekly will change the way you view and experience your daily life.

But there's more. At Base Camp, we also learn how to **GROW INTENTIONALLY**. I'll be blunt: I don't think that you, I, or our kids will grow the kind of wisdom and strength we need to reach the summit of our potential without becoming more

intentional. There are too many winds working against our health and progress to leave our journey to chance.

In his book, *A HIDDEN WHOLENESS*, author Parker Palmer tells of an era when farmers on the Great Plains would spot the signs of a coming blizzard and immediately go out and string a rope from their back door out to the door of the barn. Parenthetically, mountain climbers at extreme altitudes often string a rope between two points for a similar reason. Parker Palmer says that veteran farmers all knew they'd need to make the journey between those two locations – the back door and the barn. But they also all knew tales of people who had wandered off in a whiteout and frozen to death, having lost sight of home while still in their own backyards.

"Today we live in a blizzard of another sort," writes Palmer. "We all know stories of people who have wandered off... and been separated from their own souls, losing their moral bearings and even their mortal lives" – and sometimes taking innocents down with them. "The lost ones come from every walk of life... Some are lost at this moment and are trying to find the way home. Some are lost without knowing it."¹ (Mark 8:36)

How about you? How are you faring amidst the blizzard conditions of life today? In his book, *EMOTIONALLY HEALTHY SPIRITUALITY*, Pete Scazzero describes the weather through which many of us routinely walk: "Many of us are overscheduled, tense, addicted to hurry, frantic, preoccupied, fatigued, and starved for time. Cramming as much as possible into our handheld brains, day planners and to-do lists, we battle life to make the best use of every spare minute we have. Yet... our over-productivity becomes counterproductive. We end our days exhausted from work and raising children. And then our 'free time' on weekends becomes filled with more demands and an already overburdened life... But we can't stop. If we aren't busy, we feel guilty that we waste time and are not productive... Any sense of rhythm in our daily, weekly, and yearly lives has been swallowed up in the blizzard."²

Add to this the unexpected tempests or tragedies that blow into our lives, or the winds of pop culture and temptation that constantly buffet us, and it becomes easier and easier to see why so many of us become disoriented and lost. What we desperately need is to string a rope that leads us home.

For centuries before the modern era, followers of Jesus made a special point of traveling through life hanging on to just such a rope, figuratively speaking. They called this rope their "Rule of Life." When we hear the word "Rule" today we may immediately think of "rules and regulations" or "rules at school" and tend to say "No, thanks!" But the word "rule" originally had a much more benevolent connotation. The English word "rule" comes from the Greek word for "trellis" -- that structure made of rope, wire, or wood that a gardener employs to support the upward growth and greater fruitfulness of the branches of a vine.

Jesus said: **"My father is the gardener... I am the vine and you are the branches... This is to my father's glory, that you bear much fruit"** (John 15:1,

5, 8). God intends us to be wonderfully healthy, fruitful people. But, in fostering that life, we need a rope (a trellis of some sort) that provides an intentional structure for our growth and a way back home in times of storm.

I like the way Pete Scazzero puts it: "A Rule of Life is an intentional, conscious plan to keep God at the center of everything we do. It provides guidelines to help us continually remember God as the Source of our lives. It includes a unique combination of spiritual practices that provide structure and direction for us to pay attention and remember God in everything we do." ³

Let me offer to you today **FOUR PRACTICES** which, if you became a bit more **INTENTIONAL** about them could lead to even greater growth in wisdom and strength for your pilgrimage up the mountain in this year ahead. Think of them like the crossbars on a trellis that supports your growth or knots in a rope you travel along. Here are four elements for a good **RULE OF LIFE**.

First, get some better **Sight** (or vision) for the Pathway in front of you. I want to suggest that sometime each Sunday over the next year, you take just 30 minutes to take stock of where you are today when it comes to your spiritual and relational health – your connection with God, your key people, your own inner life. Evaluate what went well and what didn't in the past several days and then scope out where you want to go. Jot down a few notes on what you want to be different on the path ahead.

Secondly, you will benefit greatly from some regular **Training** for your Soul. You need some specific spiritual disciplines you are practicing to stay intentionally connected to the Vine of God's life or to keep walking with God when you're not around a church building. Pick up a copy of Adele Calhoun's **SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES HANDBOOK** and just try one of those soul-training practices each week and see how God uses that. Talk to one of the pastors about resources for personal Bible study, prayer, fasting or journaling.

Thirdly, be more intentional about getting some **Equipment** for Life. Pick an area in which you want to grow. It might be parenting, marriage, financial management, communication or conflict resolution. Equip yourself with books or classes, podcasts or other forms of content that point the way to living beyond your current level and help you progress up the mountain, so to speak.

And, finally, you need **Partners** for the Journey. You will travel so much further and faster, if you have some companions committed to helping you move ahead. This past week, I went away on a two-day retreat with four other guys from this church to process life together, pray for each other, and just enjoy one another. This is a terrific time of year to sign up for a small group or plan to be part of one of our church's spiritual growth communities. Again, you can ask a staff-person for help in making that kind of connection.

If you think about it, growth in almost any area of endeavor requires taking the STEP of getting more intentional about these four things. If I want to get better at golf, I need a vision of what a good swing looks like. I need to put some time into training that motion, probably with coaching. I will benefit from getting some decent equipment and finding some partners who will put up with me. This is also what you need to STEP forward on your adventure with Christ. Your Rule of Life is what ties it all together. Your Rule of Life is the particular set of practices, relationships, and experiences you choose to be your trellis for continued growth, or the rope you hang onto so you don't get lost in life's storm.

The pressing question each of us needs to ask ourselves, is this: "Is my present Rule of Life strong enough, given the forces I am facing?" Am I more faithful and fruitful than I was last year at this time? Would the people who know me best say that I am spiritually and relationally healthier than I was a few years ago? Or is the blizzard beating me? Am I so blown about or buried by the forces of sin or society that I frequently lose my way?

There is no shame in admitting as rock star, Leonard Cohen, does in one of his songs, that: "The blizzard of the world has crossed the threshold and it has overturned the order of the soul."⁴ But it is crucial to take some STEPs to recover that order.

1. Sometime this week, write down a list of the health-producing practices you've already put in place in your life.
2. Then, sit quietly somewhere and ask God to guide you to one or two new practices that stir a desire in you. [Supplemental resource?]
3. After giving them a good run, set aside whatever practices don't yield benefit.
4. Move on and experiment with another practice.
5. Review and revise your Rule of Life often.
6. Learn as you go and enjoy the walk up the mountain!

As I look back, I marvel sometimes at the great adventures God has led me on through the years. He has let me parachute out of an airplane, and scuba-dive through a sunken ship, and ride bareback over the continental divide. God has let me ski the Alps of Austria, and ride a camel in Jericho, and win a race before the royalty of England. He's led me to jobs on an offshore oil-rig and on a farm, in a maximum security prison and in the corporate headquarters of IBM. He's taken me to the refugee camps of Thailand and the skyscrapers of Hong Kong and the Forbidden City of Beijing.

I've eaten bugs in a South American jungle, shaken hands with a U.S. president, and barely missed being blown up by a bomb in Belfast. God has led me by the Sea of Galilee at sunrise and through the bazaars of Istanbul in the noisy noonday. He's let me see the Taj Mahal at sunset and the pyramids of Egypt by moonlight. He has left me with vivid memories of the great cities of Europe, and of the slums of Nairobi, and of the long-lost view from the top of the World Trade Center.

Yet of all the adventures on which God has led me, none has been as fulfilling or important as the one on which He has also been calling YOU – the journey toward

becoming just like Christ (John 10:10). This is the great goal of your life and mine: not just to survive but to thrive, not just to be momentarily happy but to be as magnificently healthy as Jesus is.

The Psalmist once rejoiced before God: **You have made known to me the path of life (Psalm 16:11)**. The good news is that Jesus is still making that path known to people. He is still issuing the invitation: **"Follow Me"** to a greater life (Matthew 9:9).

The question I want to ask in closing is: What Rule, what rope, are you planning to hold onto as you take steps toward that life? Hold on tight to it because there's a blizzard out there. But take heart in this: There is also a good and gracious God waiting for you when you leave this building. He is going to use the intentional STEPS you take to help you get healthier than you are today, to LIFT you toward your full potential, to advance you toward the summit (which is his dwelling place), and to make sure that you find your way home to Him.

¹ Parker J. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward An Undivided Life* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2004), p.1.

² Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006), p.154.

³ Scazzero, p.196.

⁴ Leonard Cohen, "The Future" (1992)