

Evotional – 27 October 2013 – Developing a ‘rule of life’ (EHS8)

What’s this about rules?

You are right! Christianity is not about rules; ‘it is for freedom that Christ has set us free’ (Galatians 5:1); ‘since you died with Christ ... why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules ...?’ (Colossians 2:20); ‘you are not under law but under grace’ (Romans 6:14). Paul wrote those words because the early church struggled with the truth that we don’t find acceptance with God by keeping rules. And most of us still struggle with that at some level.

So today we are not talking about that sort of rule!

But imagine growing runner beans with no frame, or a vine with no trellis; it would flop over and die. In the same way, if we are to grow as Christians we need a framework, or structure, to help us grow. To ensure we hear God and not just ourselves or what we want to hear. So a ‘rule of life’ refers to a framework of spiritual discipline; a structure to help us grow up spiritually.

Or, to look at it a different way, to help us to keep in step with the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:42

This verse follows straight after the account of the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came on the church and 3,000 people got saved. What happens next? The early church structures itself to help these new believers to grow. The structure was based on four activities; and it is generally accepted that these hold true today:

1. Teaching
2. Fellowship
3. Breaking of Bread
4. Prayer

The word ‘spirituality’ gets used to mean lots of things today, but these four activities are at the heart of true Christian spirituality. Without them we will not grow up. Tom Wright in his commentary on Acts says that some of us who are used to going to church may sometimes think they are quite humdrum and ordinary, but without them life would be bleak indeed.

Acts 2:43-47

Other exciting things were also happening in the early church; signs and wonders; living in a commune; meeting every day not just Sundays; people being converted daily.

Today people argue whether we should expect Christian life still to be like that. You may look at some of the things in these verses and say ‘we should have more of that’ and look at others and say ‘no, that’s not applicable today’. But maybe you should challenge your preconceptions, which can often stop us seeing what God wants to do in us.

What are you and God working on together at the moment? How is God challenging you? How are you growing up?

The point of a ‘rule of life’ is to create a framework where we can hear God telling us surprising things, not just the things we want or expect to hear.

A rule of life

Scazzero suggests 12 areas which we need to incorporate into a healthy spirituality. But in practice the best approach is to start with only one or two elements, and put them into practice.

Here is his list. *(I have added a few questions; I also made a few practical suggestions for each one in the sermon which you can listen to via the church website, but the important thing is to reflect yourself on what are God’s priorities for your life.)*

1. Bible (How could you step out in faith in the way you read the Bible?)	7. Play (How do you make sure you don’t work all the time?)
2. Silence and Solitude (How do you make sure you would hear God if he spoke to you?)	8. Service and Mission (Do you do things, not because you are good at them, but to grow in faith?)
3. Daily Office (What rhythm could you include in your day?)	9. Care for the Physical Body (How could you body be more truly a temple of the Holy Spirit?)
4. Study (Do it ‘not simply for information but for the purpose of formation in Christ’)	10. Emotional Health (What are you going to do differently following this course?)
5. Sabbath (Do you have a day each week which is about your relationship with God?)	11. Family (How could you do any of the above as a family, or help another family to be spiritually healthy?)
6. Simplicity (Is there too much stuff in your life for you to be able to be close to God?)	12. Community (What would make people say ‘see how they love one another?’)

Questions:

1. What place do rules have in Christian spirituality?
2. Do you agree that the four things listed in Acts 2:42 are the key elements of a healthy spiritual life?
3. Which things in Acts 2:43-47 do you instinctively react against? Could God be challenging you to be more open to them?
4. What are you and God working on together at the moment?
5. What one or two things are you going to focus on to make sure you grow up healthily?