



A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

Monthly rhythms for small groups



LIFE GROUPS

our four-rhythm roadmap



The Mission

BUT BECAUSE OF HIS GREAT LOVE FOR US, GOD, WHO IS RICH IN MERCY, MADE US ALIVE WITH CHRIST EVEN WHEN WE WERE DEAD IN TRANSGRESSIONS—IT IS BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED. AND GOD RAISED US UP WITH CHRIST AND SEATED US WITH HIM IN THE HEAVENLY REALMS IN CHRIST JESUS, IN ORDER THAT IN THE COMING AGES HE MIGHT SHOW THE INCOMPARABLE RICHES OF HIS GRACE, EXPRESSED IN HIS KINDNESS TO US IN CHRIST JESUS.

**TO HELP THOSE WHO ARE FAR FROM GOD
FIND REAL LIFE IN CHRIST.**

Our RL Groups are built upon four different pillars. We call these the ABCDs:

- Accountability - People can depend on their RL Group to be consistent. Whether we host, lead, or attend —people can count on us.
- Belonging - We value people. Anyone who attends a RL Group will experience an environment where they are wanted, welcomed, and seen. We don't do criticism; we opt for compassion.
- Connection - We have fun. RL Groups are not intended to be boring. We commit to having fun outside of our regular meeting times and make it a point to share real life together.
- Discipleship - We set an example for what it looks like to experience Real Life in Christ. To do this, we commit to our **L.I.F.E model** on a monthly basis.



The L.I.F.E Model

THEY DEVOTED THEMSELVES TO THE APOSTLES' TEACHING AND TO FELLOWSHIP, TO THE BREAKING OF BREAD AND TO PRAYER. EVERYONE WAS FILLED WITH AWE AT THE MANY WONDERS AND SIGNS PERFORMED BY THE APOSTLES. ALL BELIEVERS WERE TOGETHER AND HAD EVERYTHING IN COMMON. THEY SOLD PROPERTY AND POSSESSIONS TO GIVE TO ANYONE WHO HAD NEED. EVERY DAY THEY CONTINUED TO MEET TOGETHER IN THE TEMPLE COURTS. THEY BROKE BREAD IN THEIR HOMES AND ATE TOGETHER WITH GLAD AND SINCERE HEARTS, PRAISING GOD AND ENJOYING THE FAVOR OF THE PEOPLE. AND THE LORD ADDED TO THEIR NUMBER DAILY THOSE WHO WERE BEING SAVED.

**EVERY MONTH, RL GROUPS WILL EXPERIENCE
REAL LIFE IN CHRIST IN 4 DISTINCT WAYS.**

- Using the acronym **L.I.F.E**, our model is built around the four basic activities of being *with* Jesus together:
 - R1: **Learning** who God is through Bible study
 - R2: **Investing** in family meals with others
 - R3: **Following** Jesus in practical ways
 - R4: **Engaging** the needs of our community



RL GROUPS LOW DOWN

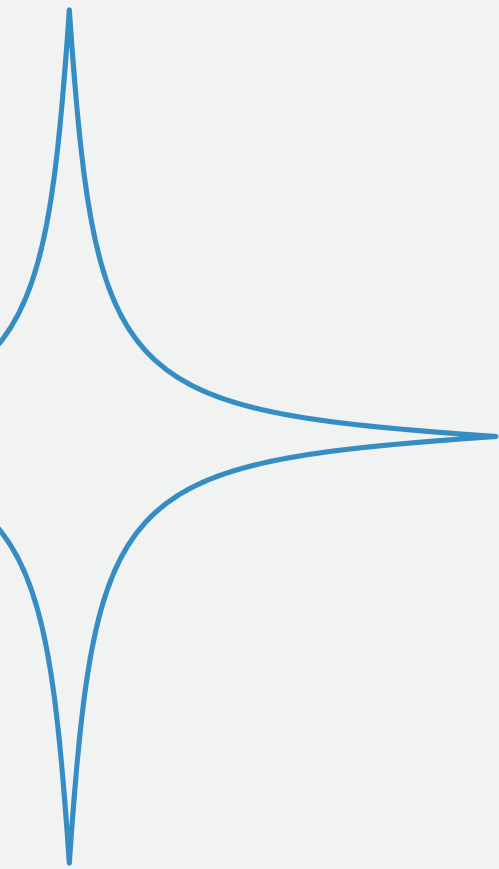
What do you mean by monthly rhythm?

To experience real life in Christ, we need to engage God and others the way that Jesus did. When we observe Jesus' life, we see that He makes each of these 4 things a priority in his life.



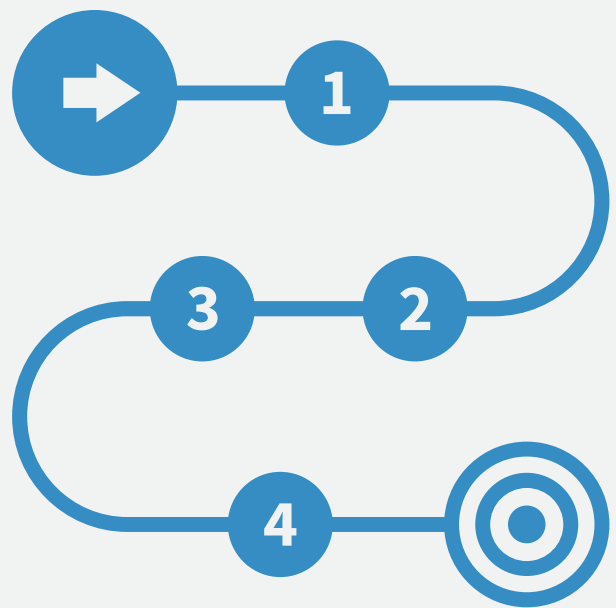
noun: rhythm;

a strong, regular, repeated pattern



THE 4 RHYTHMS OF REALLIFE GROUPS

Learn
Invest
Follow
Engage



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R1 - LEARN



One of the fastest and most reliable ways to experience real life in Christ is to study what the Bible says about who God is. That is why this is a consistent monthly rhythm for all our Groups. The easiest way to do this is to use our Sermon Discussion Guides on the app under the RESOURCES tab. The sermon discussion guides are built from the most recent Sunday sermon but do not require one to attend RealLife to learn about God and the Bible. We also have an entire library of sermon discussion guides available, so you can pick any topic that interests your Group and use them.

R2 - INVEST



One of the most profound and simple ways to experience real life in Christ is to share a meal together. Jesus ate with all kinds of people; most often, he ate with those others wouldn't associate with. We want to be the kind of church that shares meals with believers and unbelievers. The INVEST rhythm does not have to be limited to your Group participants; this can also be the one time a month you invite new people to the area or the church to join you for a meal. (*Note: You are welcome to share a meal every week, just not less than once a month.*)

R3 - FOLLOW



We must practice following in Jesus' footsteps to experience real life in Christ. We have two ways to do this: 1) You can utilize our sermon discussion guides and find the "follow" practices in each discussion guide. 2) If you are familiar with spiritual practices, use our Follow Practices material at the end of this booklet. Each practice is designed to be done over that month. If you would like more ideas on how to facilitate follow practices in your home, talk to your Group Care Leader.

R4 - ENGAGE



Every month we encourage our Groups to serve their community. This can look a lot of different ways. If you need ideas, here are a few:

- *Under the EVENTS tab, our ReallImpact team will post current or ongoing service opportunities on our app (app store: reallifencw).*
- *Nominate a new person every month from within your Group and serve them. This can look like weeding their garden, babysitting their kids, fixing a broken faucet, paying an outstanding bill, attending a special event, cleaning out their garage, or simply asking them how they would want to spend that time.*
- *You can choose a cause in the community and ask them if you can serve regularly.*

R1 - Learn

rhythm details



- ▶ **LONG TERM GROUPS**
Use the sermon discussion guide on the RL app to facilitate your learning time.
- ▶ **SHORT TERM GROUPS**
1) Discuss the sermon on the app, or 2) discuss the chapter, video, or teaching content that you have chosen to go through.



NOTE: Using our rhythm roadmap may take short-term groups a little longer to go through a study or book. We want to ensure you experience all four rhythms in your meeting times, so selecting shorter curriculums can make space for other ways of connecting and growing.

R2 - Invest



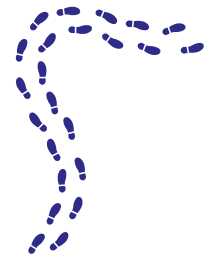
- ▶ **LONG TERM GROUPS**
Eat a meal together. We recommend sharing the responsibilities of hosting, cooking, and cleaning. The goal is to be around a table together without any other agenda or purpose.
- ▶ **SHORT TERM GROUPS**
Eat a meal together. You can still discuss the book or material you are going through, but the conversation should be more: what are you learning? instead of adding new material.



They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts. (Ac 2:46)

Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples ventured to question Him, “Who are You?” knowing that it was the Lord. (Jn. 21:12)

R3 - Follow



LONG TERM GROUPS

- ▶ The "follow" rhythm is not intended to be the entire focus of your night but rather a portion of your time. You can open or close your gathering with a meal or sermon discussion and end with a "follow" practice. If your gathering time doesn't allow time for the "follow" practice, you can do them individually during the week and discuss how it's going when you gather.

You can find practice options in 3 places: 1) at the end of this booklet in the **Follow Practices Section**, 2) in our sermon discussion guides, or 3) using Practicing the Way's Companion guide, which you can find online at www.practicingtheway.org.

SHORT TERM GROUPS

- ▶ We recommend using our **Follow Practices Section** at the end of this booklet, which lists practices and easy ways to start them. Depending on the length of your study or resource, choose one or two practices to engage in for the duration of your time together.

R4 - Engage



LONG TERM GROUPS

- ▶ You will engage with your immediate or larger community for your fourth rhythm. Ideally, you would meet at the location of your "engage" activity, but it isn't required. You can easily engage with your Group and prep for a service opportunity without going somewhere different. The goal is to ensure that our Groups are not solely focused on our well-being but on the well-being of others in this valley too.

SHORT TERM GROUPS

- ▶ For your fourth rhythm, have each attendee draw each other's names at the beginning of the gathering. The name drawn will be each person's "engage" focus for that week. Serving that person can look a multitude of ways. You can give them a gift, write them an encouraging letter, donate time to something they care about, babysit their kids, etc. The big idea is to give and receive without any strings attached.



NOTE: Short-term Groups can continue to cover their chosen material in the 4th week of their rhythms, however, make sure your "engage" week includes a tangible serve activity too.



Follow Practices

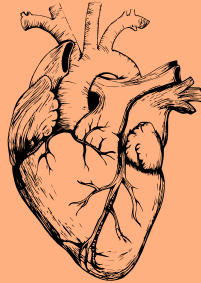
FOR RL GROUPS FOLLOW RHYTHM

Three Kinds of Practices

One Practice a Month



**MIND
PRACTICES**



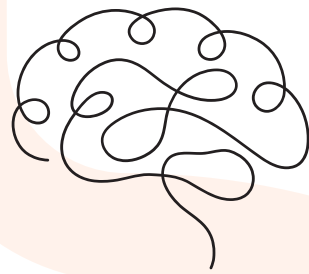
**HEART
PRACTICES**



**BODY
PRACTICES**

Each practice is meant to be done for a month. You should repeat the same FOLLOW practice each week for that month before you move on to a new one.

They can be done as a group when you meet or individually during the week, and you can discuss how it's going when you meet. Each FOLLOW practice is created to be flexible depending on how your Group chooses to engage and move through the L.I.F.E rhythms.



**MIND
PRACTICES**



Follow | R3

MIND PRACTICES



LECTIO DIVINA

Lectio Divina is an ancient way of reading scripture for deepening a relationship with God, not solely for information from God.

To prepare to engage with Scripture this way; we recommend these four steps:

1. Choose a passage of scripture no more than 6-8 verses.
2. Begin with a minute of silence to prepare your heart to hear.
3. Read the passage consecutively four times and work through these "four movements" as a group:
 - a. Listen for a word or phrase that stands out within those multiple readings.
 - b. Reflect on that by asking, "What is it in my life that needed to hear this word today?"
 - c. Respond: Is there an invitation or challenge for you to respond to?
 - d. Re-read the passage a fourth time and rest in the truth you discovered. Commit to repeating this passage in your head throughout the coming week.*



PRACTICE COMPLETE

*This practice was excerpted from the book Sacred Rhythms by Ruth Hayley Barton

2

MIND PRACTICES

SELF-EXAMINATION

Spiritual practice gurus call this practice the Examen of Conscience. It is a way to examine ourselves and ask God to show us where we have fallen short of who he has called us to be that week.

To begin the self-examination practice, do the following:

1. Open with silent prayer and ask God to bring to mind the activities, actions, and moments where you feel short of exhibiting the character of Christ or the fruit of the Spirit.*
2. As something comes to mind, ask God to help you clarify that behavior. Often we are blind to our sin patterns and need help recognizing them.
3. Allow yourself to be awakened to your sin in the presence of others, even as uncomfortable as that might be. Acknowledge the contradiction in your behavior and who you want to be.
4. Confess to the room what that sin was and verbalize what you were motivated by as much as possible.
5. Receive God's forgiveness as a group and pray John 8:32 over each other, "For you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free."



PRINCIPLE COMPLETE

*This practice was excerpted from the book Sacred Rhythms by Ruth Hayley Barton

3

Follow | R3

MIND PRACTICES



DISCERNMENT

Think of a decision you need to make. Invite God into the process of helping you make that decision. The practice of discernment helps us make decisions with God instead of in our strength. To begin the discernment practice, do the following:

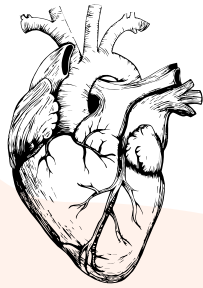
1. Open with a prayer and ask God to help you be indifferent toward the decision's outcome. *This can feel counterintuitive because our decisions shape so much of our lives, but the point is to prepare your heart to honestly say, "I am indifferent to anything but God's will."*
2. Ask this question: How does this choice fit with God's overall direction and calling on my life? Is there one word that captures my sense of calling these days? Does the current choice enable me to continue living into my calling?
3. Will this decision draw me close to God or further away?
4. Is there a particular scripture God brings to mind during this practice of discernment?
5. Is this choice consistent with what I know of the mind and heart of Jesus?
6. How will this decision nurture the fruit of the Spirit within me and help me grow in love?
7. Does this choice reflect the eternal value and not just the temporal value?
8. How will his choice fit with others' observations of my life and what God is doing in it?

After you have gone through these questions as a Group or on your own, ask God for confirmation. Share with someone what confirmation you received.



PRACTICE COMPLETE

*This practice was excerpted from the book Sacred Rhythms by Ruth Hayley Barton



**HEART
PRACTICES**



HEART PRACTICES



SILENCE + SOLITUDE

Silence and solitude are the most uncomfortable spiritual practices in our culture. We are addicted to noise and activity. We recommend you do this practice on your own every morning. Begin with 5 minutes and work up to half an hour or more.

Choose a place that feels comfortable and safe and allows you to be open and available to God.

1. Begin by being silent for a few moments and listening for your breath. Become aware of God's presence and your desire to be present with God.
2. Take notice of what comes to mind during this time.
3. Do not try to solve it, fix it, or analyze it, instead, sit with it in the presence of God. Try to do nothing about the thoughts that come into your mind except acknowledge them in God's presence.
4. The goal is to feel the difference between doing something with it and resting in it.
 - a. Feel the difference between trying to fight it and letting God fight it for you.
 - b. What may it mean to be still and let God work for you in that area?



PRACTICE COMPLETE

*This practice was excerpted from the book Sacred Rhythms by Ruth Hayley Barton



HEART PRACTICES



STEWARDSHIP

"The clock and the dollar are such substantial factors in so many parts of life that we must consider their role" in what it looks like to follow Jesus. Regarding stewardship, we want to focus this follow the practice on giving our time and money. The only rule is that it should feel sacrificial and generous.

To begin practicing stewardship, identify two things in your life:

1. How do you spend your time?

- a. Make a list of all the things you do on a typical day:
 - i. How much time do you spend on media, watching sports, working, reading, eating, recreation, sleeping, reading the Bible, praying, hobbies, and physical activity? Be very honest and specific.
- b. Ask God (or your Grop) what things you could swap out. Commit to removing one hour of that activity and creating margin for spending time with God or doing something sacrificial for someone else.

2. How do you spend your money?

- a. Aside from significant bills and everyday expenses, identify and write down your spending habits for expendable things like eating out, wineries, entertainment, clothing, accessories, hobbies, etc.
- b. What could you skip once a week to create a small overflow to give to a specific need in the church or someone in need at the end of the month?

Pick an accountability partner from your Group to do weekly check-ins for this month's practice.



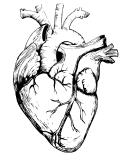
PRACTICE COMPLETE

*This practice was excerpted from the book *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* by Donald Whitney

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Follow | R3

HEART PRACTICES



JOURNALING

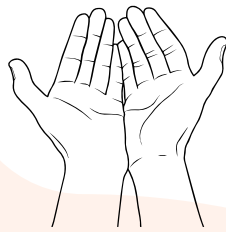
"Keeping a journal not only promotes spiritual growth but also a valuable aid to other aspects of the spiritual life." It helps us slow down and recount the day and postures our hearts before God in a way that keeps us present to him and the things we most deeply care about. You are not writing a diary, you are journaling toward God's ear.

1. You can get a journal specific to follow the practice or use a blank one you already have. You will set aside 15 minutes a day this month for journaling.
2. Take 5 minutes daily to write down what you plan to do that day, what you have already done, or what you hope to do.
3. Take another 5 minutes to write down the names of those you most want to pray for. Keep it short and straightforward, a sentence or two about how you would like God to meet them in their day.
4. Spend 5 minutes quietly waiting on God and listening for his voice. Write in your journal: "Jesus, what do you want me to know."
5. Whether you get a picture, hear scripture, feel prompted to write down a word or two, or even hear silence, God letting you know you can rest in his presence: write down what comes to mind.
6. If you have more time, reflect on what you experienced during the 5 minutes of listening to prayer.



PRACTICE COMPLETE

*This practice was excerpted from the book *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* by Donald Whitney



**BODY
PRACTICES**

1

BODY PRACTICES

FASTING



Most people want to avoid fasting because they fear they will suffer unnecessarily or it won't do anything noticeable for their spiritual life. But fasting creates space for God to surprise us with how He fills and satisfies us. It also invites our bodies to connect with Him in ways our minds and hearts can not.

CHOOSE YOUR FAST:

1. Partial fast - pick an activity or something you often do and abstain from it temporarily.
2. Absolute fast - fast from food, but not water for a specific period of time.

SUGGESTIONS:

Partial fast: Choose to abstain from sugar, alcohol, media, or shopping for a specific time. Write that down and tell someone in your Group for accountability. It can be daily or weekly.

Absolute fast: If you are new to food fasting, work up to fasting for an entire day. Instead, fast until lunch once a week. If you have fasted before, consider a 16-hour or 18-hour fast daily for the month's duration.

IMPORTANT: Pick your fasting days and tell someone about them.



PRACTICE COMPLETE

*This practice was excerpted from the book Sacred Rhythms by Ruth Hayley Barton

2

Follow | R3

BODY PRACTICES



HONORING THE BODY

Honoring the body helps us find our way between the excesses of a culture that glorifies and objectifies the body and the excesses of Christian tradition that have often denigrated and ignored the body. Learning to care for our bodies and what they may be telling us is an incredible way to connect with the gift of the body and all that God has designed it to do and be.

To begin this practice:

1. Take a deep breath and notice your breathing. Is it shallow? Deep? Heavy? Try to breathe deeper to notice your body.
2. Close your eyes and notice your body. *Do you feel embarrassed by it? Uncomfortable in it? Happy for how healthy it feels? Discouraged by its aches and pains? Do you enjoy your body?*
3. What is the condition of your body these days? *Have you been caring for it? Getting enough rest, sleep, healthy foods, exercise, medical issues, or chronic issues you are aware of?*
4. Is there anything your body is trying to tell you? *Pay attention to places of tension, pain, discomfort, or numbness.*
5. Ask God if there is anything he would like to say to you through your body or for you to notice.



PRACTICE COMPLETE

*This practice was excerpted from the book Sacred Rhythms by Ruth Hayley Barton

1

BODY PRACTICES

CELEBRATION



To practice celebration, we must learn to rest from work and mundane activities. Plan one day a week where you plan a party or personal celebration for the things you enjoy.

Limit this practice to things that require uncomplicated planning or stress. Instead, focus on simple meals, your favorite activity, and the people you love and enjoy most. Make it a point to slow down and celebrate your relationships and the blessings God has given you.

CELEBRATION IDEAS:

1. Identify something lavish or special to consume or share with others that you would usually tell yourself is too special for an ordinary day. A specific cut of meat, a bottle of wine, a specific type of setting, or an experience you've always wanted to do but are too busy.
2. You can set aside an entire day to enjoy what you're doing.
3. Notice throughout the day how much joy and connection you feel while not doing the mundane tasks of an average day.
4. Thank God for the memorable experience, the new tastes, the enjoyable conversation, and the abundance you feel while you share these things with others.
5. Try not to overthink the meals, the house's cleanliness, the presentation of the day- plan to celebrate God and the gifts he has given you intentionally and unusually that you usually wouldn't.



PRACTICE COMPLETE

NOTES





