

SPIRITUAL FORMATION: RULE OF LIFE

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Scripture Reference: Psalm 62:2 and John 15:4

Good morning, Doxa family. My name is Ken Flower. If I haven't met you, I'm a part of our team here. I get to give a lot of my time towards developing some of the resources and pathways we use to make disciples here at Doxa. And today I get to introduce what will be for us the next quarter of spiritual formation practice as a church. If you're new to Doxa, every quarter we take time to focus on a spiritual formation practice because we believe to be a disciple of Jesus means that we need to be with him so that we can become more and more like him, and then be able to do the things that he's called us to do. And these practices that we're talking about each quarter are the means through which the spirit will graciously form us to become more like Jesus.

So today we will be talking about our next one, which is a Rule of Life. Now, this one may be new to many of you. We started off last year as we went through these different practices, really focused on the foundation disciplines. We talked about silence and solitude and prayer and Sabbath and Bible reading. And most recently reflection. This one, a Rule of Life, is one that the church and Christians have been practicing for centuries, really since the beginning, but maybe one that you may not be as familiar with. And so I do want to talk this morning about what this is and how we engage in this practice, but really before that, and I think us, this is probably the most important thing, I want to talk about why we need this. Why does this matter? Why do we need to engage in a Rule of Life?

There's a stretch of beach in Pacific County on the Olympic Coast, and I haven't been there, I know maybe some of you have, but it's nicknamed Wash Away Beach. This beach has long suffered from probably the most extreme coastal erosion along the whole Western coast of the US. The rate of erosion at this beach has been traditionally more than a hundred feet per year. In just a few decades since 1990, the steady advance of ocean waves and erosion has taken out a cannery, a lighthouse, a school, the community center, the post office, and a bunch of homes. What seemed to be this immovable landmass, which is why they built a town there, has nothing against the steady, constant, reshaping work of water. Know over the history of our planet, water has slowly but surely carved out mile deep canyons, right? You think of the Grand Canyon, glacier-carved valleys. All you need to do is go visit the North Cascades to see these amazing rock formations like the sea stacks at Ruby Beach. There's almost nothing on earth as powerful as the steady reshaping work of water.

I love the author John Steinbeck, in one of his last novels that he wrote, "The Winter of Our Discontent," he tells the story of Ethan Hawley. Ethan was a grocery store clerk in a small town where it seemed to him like everyone in the town was getting ahead through lies and through corruption. All right. The bankers, the politicians, which probably shouldn't have been a surprise, but even his own friends are taking shortcuts to get ahead in life. Eventually, even his own son plagiarizes on his school essay, which was an award-winning essay. And Ethan's left wondering

like, "Can I get ahead in this world? Do I have to take the shortcut? Do I have to fall into the corruption and lies? Do I have to cheat to make it ahead?" Slowly but surely the powerful waters of this corrupt town erode Ethan. And in the end, he joins them, taking his own shortcut and finding his own corrupt way to get ahead in life. And Steinbeck writes at the end of this novel, "Men don't get knocked out, or I mean they can fight back against big things. What kills them is erosion; they get nudged into failure."

Here's the point for us, friends, this American life that we are all living in, it is the water in which we swim. And this American life is eroding us, just like the ocean eroded Wash Away Beach and carves out rocks. The water of this life is eroding us to become less like Jesus and therefore less human. And if we just go with the flow of 21st century American life, substitute any other century or any other culture, if we just go with the flow of life, we won't become more like Jesus, but less like him. And when we become less like Jesus, we become less human.

The apostle Paul understands this reality. In Ephesians 6, where he is commanding the church to put on the whole armor of God, he says that "We don't wrestle against flesh and blood, but we wrestle against the rulers." And he's not talking about physical earthly rulers. He's talking about spiritual authorities. He says "Against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in our heavenly places." You see Paul had a very real and a very firsthand understanding of the deforming and eroding power of the water that surrounds us. We don't live in a neutral world. Paul understood that we live in a world with active spiritual forces, active, evil forces, working through any means possible to deform us and erode us. He captures this even more clearly back in chapter two of this same letter, where he says that we were "Dead in the trespasses and sins in which we once walked." Then he says, "Following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air." You see Paul understands that this world has a course. And that the world's course is directed by the prince of the power of the air, the evil one, Satan himself. And when we're swept along in the course of this world, when we just go with the flow of this course, it's not going to make us more like Jesus. That's why in chapter five, verse 16, he says, "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil."

You see, our days are not neutral. Paul says they're evil. And it's not possible for us to be swept along through life and to just go with the flow of our days and somehow in the end become more like Jesus. He's not here making a moral statement about time itself. He's making a statement about the direction that this world is set up to shape us. The natural flow of our life does not make us more like Jesus. The present world, under the curse of sin and the power of the Evil One, is set up to erode us, to deform us, so that we become less and less human, less and less like Jesus.

Now here's what it may look like for us right now. Here's what it looks like in some ways to go with the flow or the current of this world on the Eastside. Maybe we've been swept into the current of busy-ness. You know, we live in a world that never stops. And if you ask someone how they're doing, probably the most common response you'll hear, and I do this all the time myself, is I'm busy. I'm just busy. We're defined by what we do and what we produce and we can't stop. Maybe we're being swept into a current of distraction. Life on the Eastside is noisy. And part of this is because silence is scary. Silence gives space to voices that we don't know what to do with. And so we fill the silence with noise, 24/7 news, podcasts, social media, Netflix. We fill the silence with noise. Maybe we've been swept into a current of a temporary mindset where we've begun to believe the story that this is all there is to life. And maybe we would say we believe there's eternity, but functionally, we believe that this is all there is and so we need to

get the most out of it that we can, whatever it is, money, time, adventure, travel relationships. We have a short window of life and we just need to get the most out of it while we can.

Maybe we've been swept into a current of outrage and fear. In our polarized, highly politicized culture in a 24/7 news culture, which is reinforced by the echo chambers of our social media, maybe we've been shaped to live in constant fear and anxiety over our world, and we either respond with anger or withdrawal. The point is, if we just go with the flow of life on the Eastside, if we're just swept into the current of life on the Eastside, we won't become more like Jesus. Instead, these evil days, as Paul calls them, will form us. We will be formed. You can't escape that, but we will be formed to become more anxious, more lonely, more depressed, more tired, more divided, more afraid, less human, less like Jesus.

About four years ago, I was on the edge of complete burnout. I was tired. Maybe some of you are feeling this now. I was overwhelmed. I was anxious. I felt disconnected from Jesus. Rather than becoming more like him, I felt like I was becoming less and less human every day. And here's the thing. It wasn't like I was involved in a drug trafficking ring, erosion wasn't happening because I was spending my days with evil characters, plotting the overthrow of the world. I was just a normal dad with three young kids who was swept into a current of busy-ness. And I was doing a lot of good things, I thought. I was coaching my kid's soccer team, involved in some of the nonprofit boards in our cities, I was serving as an elder in our church, trying to build relationships with our neighbors, I was working to provide for my family. But slowly, the powerful water of busy-ness was eroding my life. I'd been swept into believing my life was defined by what I produced. And I had no real rhythm of connection with Jesus, no real rhythm of connection with my wife. Slowly but surely I was becoming more and more tired and anxious, less loving and less joyful. As I went along with the current of our busy world in a church version of that, that looked really good on the outside, I was becoming less like Jesus and less human. And that's the reality underneath all of this, is that we are all in the process of formation. All of us are being formed in some way. You can't avoid it. And we've talked a lot about spiritual formation this past year. And I know some of us maybe are skeptical thinking, "This is just mystical stuff" or like "This is us trying to earn our salvation." That's not the case. Spiritual formation is happening to all of us, whether we realize it or not. All of us are being formed in one direction or another. We're either becoming more like Jesus or less like him. The question is who, who are you becoming? If we're going to resist the erosive power of our world, and if we're going to actually become like Jesus, we need a way of life strong enough to help us resist erosion and to form us into the image of Jesus. We can't just go with the flow of life. We need a way of life that will form us to become more like Jesus.

John Tyson in his book, "Beautiful Resistance," tells the story of the German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, many of you have probably heard of Bonhoeffer, are familiar with some of his works, some of his books like "Life Together." Well Bonhoeffer was helping to lead the German confessing church in resistance to the Nazi movement in Germany, in the 1930s and 40s. And to help do this, to really help the church resist what the Nazis were trying to accomplish, he was, he had created this underground seminary at a place called Finkenwalde, where he was forming and intentionally training the next generation of leaders for the church to lead a church that could stand resistant to the Nazis and as a light for Jesus in the midst of them. Now, friends of his were often very skeptical about what he was doing at Finkenwalde. And these friends loved Jesus, but they just thought, "This was too intense. Bonhoeffer, what are you doing? This is too much. Having all these people come and live in community at the seminary and training and being formed together. Like this is just too much." One friend had said that this

was too much spiritualism. But one of these friends, a friend named Wilhelm Niesel, came to visit Bonhoeffer to see what was happening here. And Bonhoeffer takes him out on this canoeing trip. Imagine this, they're in this canoe out in this place called the Oder Sound, and he takes him then to this hillside, where they go, they hike up this hillside and look down into this valley. And there Bonhoeffer shows him this huge German encampment. And it was a training ground for the German army for the Nazis. And as they look at this encampment, they see planes taking off and landing. They see troops marching, thousands of them marching, in order. And as he looks at this, he then looks back to where Finkenwalde is and where he is trying to form the next generations of leaders for the church. And he tells his friend, "This," in other words, this training ground at Finkenwalde, "must be stronger than that. The formation that's happening in our seminary for the future of the church must be stronger than the formation that's happening at this Nazi training ground." Tyson concludes in his book, "What (Bonhoeffer) was doing in Finkenwalde had to be stronger than what Hitler was doing with his army. Discipleship must be stronger than cultural formation. This must be stronger than that."

You see, we need a discipleship that is stronger than the formation of our world. We need a way of life that is stronger than the course of our world. Now it'd be tempting here for me to just jump right into talking then about what a Rule of Life is because a Rule of Life is essentially a way of life that helps us be resistant to the erosive power of our world, and instead follow the way of Jesus in every area of our life. It's a set of habits and rhythms we commit to, to resist erosion and become more like Jesus in every area of her life. And it'd be tempting just to jump in and say, "We need to build strong habits and rhythms, and that's how we can resist erosion and how we cannot go along with the course of this world." But the reality is, if we're not careful, we can begin to think that our practices and our habits are enough. We could begin to think of a Rule of Life then as some kind of like P90X for our soul.

If we just do this, then this result is guaranteed, but we are not strong enough. No habit or rhythm is strong enough. You are not strong enough by yourself. And I just want you to hear that so clearly this morning, because as we talk about this, we are going to talk about what habits and rhythms we commit to, to resist erosion and become more like Jesus. We're going to talk about tangibly what we need to commit to and what rhythms we need to put in place. But please do not hear me saying that you are strong enough. You're not. There's only one who is and that's Jesus. So before we talk about this Rule of Life, I think it's really, really important and helpful for us to remember who Jesus is. Specifically, there's two pictures of him that we see in scripture that are really important for us as we talk about this practice of a Rule of Life.

The first one is Jesus the Rock. Now throughout scripture, we see God described as a rock. This picture of an immovable fortress in the midst of a chaotic world. Think about Psalm 62:2, which says,

"He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be greatly shaken."

To withstand the erosive power of this world, we need to be anchored to a rock that cannot be moved. We need to be anchored to something that cannot be eroded. That the water of this world cannot do anything to change. 1 Peter 2:6 then talks about Jesus, saying, "Behold," and this is a prophecy from the Old Testament, but it was fulfilled and came true through Jesus himself. It says,

"Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

You see, Jesus must be to us a rock in the midst of this chaotic world. And we must anchor ourselves to him as we stand firm against the spiritual forces that are set on eroding and deforming us. We must anchor, connect, stand firm on Jesus the solid rock.

How do we anchor ourselves then to this rock? What does that look like? Well, Jesus, in both Luke and Matthew tells his disciples,

"Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock."

You see, a life built on Jesus the rock equals a life lived in obedience to Jesus. Another way to say this is obedience to Jesus' words creates a life resistant to erosion. Let me say that again, obedience to Jesus' words creates a life resistant to erosion. That is how we actually establish ourselves on the solid rock of Jesus is we hear and obey his words. We'll talk more about that in a second.

The second picture we have of Jesus that I think is really helpful for us this morning is of Jesus the Vine. And this captures something really key for us. You know, Jesus is a rock on whom we stand firm against the eroding power of this world, but he's also a vine who gives life to his branches so that they grow and bear fruit. Because our goal is not just to resist the erosion of this world, but to actually grow and to be formed more and more to become like Jesus and bear fruits. In John 15, which I know we've been in a lot this year, this is such a crucial passage for us as we think about how we're being formed, Jesus tells his disciples,

"Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me." He says, "I am the vine and you are the branches.

Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit."

Now think of this image Jesus is painting for his disciples, a healthy vine with branches extending from it in all directions, full of fruit, and each branch gains its life, the water and the nutrients it needs from the vine itself. Life flows from the vine into each branch. And any branch that becomes detached from the vine will die. Attachment to the vine means life and fruitfulness. And this is the image Jesus uses then to describe our connection to him as we, the branches are attached to him, the vine, his love flows in us and through us and we produce fruit abundantly. But Jesus makes it clear that we actually have to actively abide. I mean, the word here is a command. He says abide, it's a command. We have to actively attach ourselves to him to receive life from the vine.

So just to review, right? Jesus is a rock that is immovable against the eroding forces of our world. But we are called to anchor ourselves to that rock. How? By hearing his words and obeying them. Jesus is a vine that roots us, right? That roots us and forms us and gives us life, but to stay attached to that vine and to grow and bear fruit, we must actively abide in him. The key here is that Jesus is clearly calling for our active participation in resisting erosion and deformation and seeking to be formed into His image. In other words, we will not become like Jesus, if we just float along. We have to actively abide, actively hear his words and obey. That the Spirit is the one who works. It is all the Spirit's work in us, but the Spirit will use our hearing and obeying and abiding to do that work.

Church, let me just be even more clear. If you don't abide in Jesus and obey him in every area of your life, you cannot expect that you will be magically transformed and become more like Jesus over time. Quite the opposite. If you're not actively abiding and seeking to obey him in every area of your life, and you just go with the flow of life, rather than become more like him, you will be deformed and become less like him, more anxious, more afraid, more sad.

I know for us, a lot of us, the trials of this past year have been revealing. It's been a hard year in a lot of different ways. And I don't want to minimize the trauma that a lot of us have experienced this year and the real suffering that has happened. And sometimes suffering just happens because we live in an incredibly broken world. The Father's heart breaks for us when we suffer like that. But the Father also often uses suffering to expose our foundations and our attachment. As we think about this past year, was your life built on Jesus, the rock? Did you stand firm on him so that when the waves of this year came, you weren't washed away? Was your life attached to Jesus, the vine so that when the scorching heat of this year came, and his life and love continued to flow from the vine into you, the branch, so that you didn't wither and die? Did you have a way of life that anchored you to Jesus the rock, that kept you attached to Jesus the vine, so that you were able to resist the deforming power of this year? Now if we're honest, and we honestly look at our own lives. There were areas of our life that were exposed this year as becoming more and more like the world, and less like Jesus. The question is, how did we get there? We've been shaped more by the course of this world. We went with the flow. We lived as if our days were neutral. We were slowly but surely shaped by the powerful water of our age and when the wind and the waves and the scorching heat came, it revealed how weak our attachments were. It revealed how shaky our foundation was. We didn't have a rhythm of life stronger than the eroding power of our world. We need then a rhythm of life that attaches us to Jesus. That anchors us to him the rock that attaches us to Jesus the vine. We need a way of life that's strong enough to withstand the eroding power of life. This is why we need a Rule of Life.

Now throughout church history, Christians have created, what's been called now a Rule of Life, to make a purposeful plan for how they will resist the erosive power of this world and attach themselves to Jesus in every area of their life so that they become more like Him. Churches and Christians have done this for centuries. St. Augusta and even back to the third century had created a Rule of Life for his community. And I want to encourage us this morning as a church that we need this more than anything right now. Especially at this moment, when life is starting to kind of go back to normal in some ways. And all the changes that have happened this year are starting to be undone. And maybe we are envisioning a future, maybe the summer, where we can get back to normal. And before we just get back to normal, before we just jump back into the flow or the current of life, we need to stop and ask ourselves, who are we becoming? Who are we being formed into? And do we have a way of life that will help make us more like Jesus in every area of our life? That's what a Rule of Life is. Specifically, a Rule of Life is a plan for resistance. It's a plan for formation in every area of our life. It's an intentional plan for the habits and the rhythms the Spirit will use to help us resist erosion and become more like Jesus in every area of life.

I love how Ruth Haley Barton talks about it. She says, "A Rule of Life will answer this primary question: How do I want to live so I can be who I want to be?" A Rule of Life starts then with this question, "Who do I want to be?" Who do I want to become? Just to remind us, we already have a Rule of Life, right? You may not have intentionally sat down to think about what habits or rhythms you're going to commit to, but you already have some habits and rhythms. You already have a way of life that is forming you in one direction or another, that you're becoming someone. You can't avoid it. And what we're talking about this morning is actually taking the time to stop and to ask yourself, who am I becoming? Who do I want to be? Is my way of life, are my rhythms of life, forming me more and more to become like Jesus? Are they attaching me to the vine? Are they anchoring me to the rock? Or am I becoming less like him? And as a result, less human?

So the question is, who do I want to be? And I hope for all of us, the answer is more like Jesus, right? And that's where life is found. That's what we were created for. So then what does more like Jesus, and this is where we go next, when we think about a Rule of Life, what does more like Jesus mean for every area of our life? We need to think carefully about every area God has given us. Our relationships, starting with our relationship with God, but then our important relationships that we have, our spouse, our kids, if we're married and have kids, our close friendships, church family, the neighbors and coworkers we have our relationships, our work. We need to think about our rest, our money, our time, our technology. And with each of these areas then, we need to ask the question, what is Jesus's vision for who I am in that area of life? What does it mean to become like Jesus in every area of life? Instead of just going with the flow then in each of these areas and being swept up into the way that the world engages in these areas, we need to stop and let Jesus shape us in each of these areas and roles. So then after we ask the question who I want to be, we need to ask the question, how do I live?

Remember the question we said earlier, how do I live so I can be who I want to be? Jesus uses our rhythms of life, our habits and practices, to form us. So if we have a vision for who Jesus wants us to become, we need to commit to specific habits and practices that Jesus will use to form us into that vision. And this is where it gets really, really tangible. And we're going to have a worksheet that you can download at the end of today, and actually start working through this on your own. But let me give just a few really quick examples. One of the first ones that all of us need to have on our Rule of Life is that we have a relationship with God. I hope that that is the primary relationship we have in life. And so God's vision for us is that we are attaching ourselves to him and growing more intimate with him every day. So then we need to ask the question, what habits or practices do I commit to in order to see Jesus connect me more and more to him the vine? Maybe it's a pattern or a habit of daily prayer. Maybe it's just saying, "I need to not pick up my phone first thing in the morning, but start my morning with a time of quiet and prayer."

Another role that some of us have as we have kids. And so God has made us parents. This is an of life that he's given to us, a calling we have. And so if we ask what is Jesus' vision for that area of my life? For me practically, it's for me to be a father who leads my three kids to become the men and women that God created them to be through how I father them. That's his vision for me. That's who I want Jesus to help me become. So what are habits and practices then that I'm going to commit to as a father? Maybe it's that I need to commit to just set aside a time every day to pray for my kids. Maybe it's that I carve into my schedule a weekly time to check in with them and hear from them and see how they're doing. This is really, really simple, but we have to be intentional about this, Church. We need to do this in every area of our life. As we think about how we steward our finances, are we thinking about what Jesus' vision is for us as stewards of the resources he's given us and what practices or habits we need to put in place so that we're not owned by our money, but that we use it as a resource to bless others and serve God's purposes. Now, for some of us, this may feel completely overwhelming and I get it. Many of us are exhausted and we're just trying to get through the week. But let me just be honest right now, going with the flow of normal life on the Eastside is overwhelming. I love how Justin Earley in his book, "The Common Rule" says it. He says, "Let me tell you what's overwhelming: a default normal unexamined American life. That is completely overwhelming. It's so much to take on. And we all do it simply by not doing anything else instead." You see being intentional about a Rule of Life and actually thinking about who I am to become, what's Jesus' vision for me, and what habits or practices I'll commit to towards that end. It may feel hard, but it will be freeing. It's not about doing more. It's not about adding more to your already busy life. It's about looking

intentionally at your life and asking, "What do I need to stop doing so that I can do what really matters?" This is life giving. This is freeing. Jesus says that he came to give life abundantly and following him and aligning our lives with his vision for our lives is what gives life.

Let me wrap this up with just a few quick encouragements for where you can go from here. Just, I want to make this really, really practical. First thing, you need to own your Rule of Life. I already said, you already have a Rule of Life. You already have a rhythm for life that's forming you in some way, but today we have the opportunity to own our Rule of Life, to stop and think about who we're becoming and who we want to become and what practices and habits we'll put in place to help form us into that person through the work of the Spirit. Jesus is inviting you to stop being swept up into the current of the world and to actually build your life on him where true life is found. So today I want to encourage you, download the Rule of Life worksheet, it's going to be on our app and on our website. Work through the Rule of Life guide that we're going to provide with your community or on your own. But please begin to own your Rule of Life. You already have one, but don't just go with the flow. It's not going to make you more like Jesus. Second encouragement I want give you is to start where you are. Start where you are. Start small and build. Establishing new rhythms takes time. And so it's probably not wise for you to go from the day and say, "Okay, I need to now commit every morning to one hour of prayer." I mean, that would be amazing, but it might feel defeating. These kinds of rhythms and habits take time to build, so start small. Maybe it's just to say, "I'm going to take five minutes in the morning before I do anything else, before I pick up my phone, before I start checking the news, and I'm just going to sit in quiet for five minutes and talk to God." So what's one rhythm that you need to add to your life today? Start where you are.

The third thing I want to encourage you to is not just think about what you're adding, but also think about what you're removing. Some of us, probably all of us, need to actually think intentionally about removing rhythms from our life or habits. We need to reevaluate rhythms that either intentionally or unintentionally we've developed over the years, that are eroding us in significant ways. And these aren't just bad things. Obviously things that are against God's will we need to remove, but there's plenty of good things we're doing that we need to stop doing. That we need to change our rhythm because it's eroding us. It's not making us more and more like Jesus. Could be your relationship with your phone. Could be how you spend your evenings and how much entertainment you engage in. Could be work patterns. But what is one rhythm you need to reevaluate and even remove from your life?

And the fourth thing I want to encourage you with is to not look past your current situation. I know many of us feel overwhelmed by school and work. Many of us feel overwhelmed by young kids. Many of us feel overwhelmed by the demands of our career. Many of us feel overwhelmed maybe by the new reality of this thing called retirement. And it's amazing how we can feel overwhelmed in all of these places in life and think if we could just get past this season of life, then we could actually really spiritually grow, and don't look past the current place that God has you, because God has you in that place and he's actually gonna use that place to form you and shape you. Ruth Haley Barton says that, "One of the great temptations of the spiritual life is to believe that if I were in another season of life, I could be more spiritual. The truth is this spiritual formation takes place as we embrace the challenges and opportunities associated with each season of our life." So don't look past this current season and think "If I could just get past young kids or get past teenagers or get to retirement or get, figure out my career, then I can actually spiritually grow." Instead, look at the current place that God has you and ask, "How is God forming me in this unique spot in life, how is he working in me to make me more like Jesus?"

Last Church, let me just encourage you with this. And this is where we have hope because you can, I know even now, start to think that it's up to you, but it's not. Jesus began a good work in you and he will be faithful to complete it. Jesus doesn't start something that he's not going to finish. And he is, he is so committed to you. He came and he gave his life for you. He went to the death for you. He is committed to forming you. He is committed to keeping you. He will not let you go. I love the prayer that Jesus prays right before his death, as he knows he's about to leave, and his disciples are going to be left confused, and hurting and vulnerable to the erosive and evil world around them. Jesus prays to his father in John 17, he says, "Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one." Jesus will keep us. Jesus the solid rock will keep us and no wave can erode us. Amen. Let me pray for us.

Jesus, we don't want to be swept along anymore. We're tired. We're anxious. We're overwhelmed. This world has had an incredible impact on us. It has eroded us in significant ways and we don't want to be swept along anymore. We want to experience life as it was meant to be lived. We want abundant life. We want you. We want to become more like you. So Jesus help us. Through your Spirit, help us. Help us to think, to think honestly about our lives. Help us to think honestly about who we're becoming and what rhythms of life are forming us. And then help us to actually begin to own those things and use them. Use them to make us more and more into the people that you've created us to be, more like yourself, more human. Jesus, we ask for your help. And we thank you that you are committed to us, that you will keep us and you will never let us go. In your name. Amen.

Church family, I want to invite you to respond this morning just in a few different ways. First one is I really do want to invite you to give this morning. You know, for a lot of us, one area of our life that we've been shaped more like the world and we've followed the current of the world rather than the way of Jesus is with our finances and how we steward our resources. And as we begin to think about what does it look like to be formed into the image of Jesus and how we think about our money and our resources, one tangible practice that I want to ask all of us to commit to, is to be giving joyfully and regularly and sacrificially, to free our hearts from the slavery that we often experience to money. To be joyful and how we give, because God has given so much to us.

So respond first in that way. If you give right now or just remind yourself, if you already give online on a regular basis, remind yourself of why you do that and how that practice forms you. The second thing I want to invite you to do is to take communion together. I'm going to give you a few reflection questions that I want you to think about, but then I would just encourage you at home wherever you are to take communion. And we have a communion guide that if you need help knowing what that looks like, but here's the deal guys, Jesus is committed to you. And this is what, this is what communion reminds us of. That Jesus came and he gave his life for you. His body and his blood broken and poured out for you so that you could be made whole.

So that one day you could become the person that he created you to be. And the only reason that we have hope of being formed into his image of becoming like Jesus at all, is because of what he did for us on the cross. So celebrate that today by taking communion, either on your own or with those that you are with. And after you do that, I would love for you to then spend some time this morning reflecting on what we just talked about. Now I have a few questions and I'll read these slowly just so you can hear me. Write these down. One is in your current rhythm of life, are you becoming more like Jesus or less like him? Are you becoming more full of love and joy and

peace or more anxious, afraid, and sad? You have a rhythm of life. Remember we all have some kind of Rule of Life, a rhythm of life, whether intentional or not. Is your current rule or rhythm making you more like Jesus or less like him? The second question is, what's one current rhythm of life that you need to reevaluate? What's something that you need to reevaluate that maybe is eroding you and deforming you in significant ways? And the third one is what is one rhythm that you need to add to your Rule of Life? What's one thing you need to engage in, one practice, one habit that you would like to engage in, so that Jesus might form you more and more to become like him?

As we do this. I just want to encourage you after this time of reflection, to not let today go by without downloading, looking at the guide, the worksheet, that we've put here on the website and on the app. These are resources for you to begin taking ownership of the rule that you live by, the rhythm that you engage in, and who you're becoming. So please today, just start that process. You can do it on your own. You can sit with a friend or a spouse and begin to process through that together. We've made it intentionally a very simple and just a clear process to begin to help you think through who you're becoming and how you live to become that person. All right, Church, I'm so thankful for you. I want to end and just send you out with this benediction. To him who is able to keep you from stumbling, to present you before his glorious presence, without fault, and with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, be glory and majesty, power and authority through Jesus Christ, Our Lord, before all ages now and forevermore. Amen.