

RHYTHMS

for Life

N A M E :

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We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. To review Lifeway's doctrinal guideline, please visit lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline.

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Contents

Introduction	4	Week 1	Finding Life in Daily Rhythms	9
What to Expect	6	Week 2	Bible Study	27
How to Use	7	Week 3	Prayer	45
Supplemental Resources	153	Week 4	Sabbath Rest	63
Leader Guide	175	Week 5	Worship	81
Endnotes	186	Week 6	Community	99
		Week 7	Serving	117
		Week 8	Generosity	135

Welcome

The idea of *spiritual disciplines* is ancient, though the phrase itself is fairly modern. Early Christians borrowed the Greek word **askesis**, meaning “training” or “exercise” (1 Timothy 4:7-8), to describe practices like prayer, fasting, and Scripture reading as ways of training for godliness.¹

Then, in the monastic tradition that came about in the fourth century, these practices were organized into “rules of life” or “holy exercises,” as in the sayings of the Desert Fathers² and the Rule of St. Benedict.³

During the Reformation, John Wesley and others emphasized the same habits but spoke of them as the “means of grace”—the ways God works to shape and sustain faith.⁴

The actual phrase “spiritual disciplines” became common in the twentieth century, but they are as old as the church. What people call them and how they are practiced changes in ways determined by time, human culture, and thought. Some today may even resist the twentieth century language of spiritual disciplines, believing it ties to legalistic religious expectations they may have experienced in their own upbringing. But whatever language we use to describe these disciplines or methods we use to practice them, these rhythms offer believers in Christ abundant life in the day-to-day.

As you choose to engage with God, seeking Him through Bible study, prayer, Sabbath rest, worship, community, serving, and generosity, He will draw you closer to Himself. This is the very reason we wrote this resource. We’re praying God does a work in our time and culture, drawing believers into ongoing rhythms that have given life to disciples of Jesus Christ since He walked the earth. We hope you’ll be one recipient of that special work.

Standing with you in the promise that godliness holds in this life and the life to come (1 Timothy 4:8),

The Lifeway Publishing Team

Introductory Group Discussion

Use the following questions for group discussion, making introductions and setting the tone for the first week of personal study. See pages 177-186 for the full leader guide for group meetings that follow each week of personal study.

PRELUDE. Invite group members to introduce themselves and share a reason they joined *Rhythms for Life*.

PRAY. Thank God for His Word. Ask Him to draw each member closer to Himself as you seek Him in this study.

PREVIEW. Read page 4. Invite members to circle and discuss any terms that stand out to them as personal motivators for completing this study.

Note the terms used across the ages—*askesis* (training, exercise), *rules of life*, *holy exercises*, *means of grace*, and *spiritual disciplines*.

Which of the terms, if any, most draws you into this study? Why?

What does the title *Rhythms for Life* imply about this study's aim?

Read 1 Timothy 4:7-10.

What is something you've trained your body to do (e.g., run a marathon, lose weight, work through physical therapy)? Did you establish any sort of rhythm, or was your "training" more hit or miss?

How does that approach impact training in any pursuit?

What are some "pointless and silly myths" (v. 7) that serve to prevent spiritual growth in today's culture?

Based on 1 Timothy 4:7-10, what should we gain by establishing daily rhythms of spiritual disciplines?

Take time to look through pages 6-25 together as a group to understand how to use this study and what you should do individually throughout the coming week. Make plans to gather next week for discussion of Week 1.

What to Expect from This Resource

WHAT'S AHEAD?

This study provides a guided process for individuals and small groups to learn and experience biblical practices for growing in Christ. Eight sessions of personal study help examine the spiritual disciplines of Bible study, prayer, Sabbath rest, worship, community, serving, and generosity. The personal study content will help you build daily rhythms that will increase your understanding of what it means to engage in relationship with Christ and other Christians. The prayer for this study is that you will experience the real world applications of practicing ongoing spiritual disciplines in daily life—faith that deepens, love that grows, and obedience that comes readily.

Each day, you will read Scripture passages related to that week's topic. You'll also find questions that will help you respond to the truth of God's Word. The daily study will include ways to practice the rhythms being taught. Each day's personal study will also end with a prayer focus and a review of the weekly memory verse, which is also on the opening page of each week (see page 9 for an example). We strongly encourage you to hide God's Word in your heart by memorizing Scripture. Each week, post your memory verse somewhere you'll see it often, read it daily, and repeat it aloud throughout the week until you have it memorized. (It often helps to break it into shorter sections and memorize pieces each day.)

Because discipleship happens best in community, we hope you'll consider doing this study with others at your church in a group setting—or ask a friend or two to go through it with you. Going through this study with other believers will give you the opportunity to discuss what you're learning, dig deeper into the text, pray together, and develop friendships that lead you closer to God.

This book is just the beginning of your journey of practicing ongoing daily spiritual rhythms. We pray these pages will give you a longing to grow in your relationship with God and dig deeper into His Word.

How to Use This Resource



First, you'll need a Bible. If you don't have one, check out lifeway.com/Bibles for options. The version used throughout this study is the Christian Standard Bible.



Each day includes a Bible verse, a main idea ("The Heart of It"), questions to help you reflect and respond, a guide to help you pray, and prompts to help you develop spiritual rhythms. Take your time as you ponder the truths of God's Word, and intentionally respond to God as you go.



At the end of each week, you will find journaling pages. Use this space to reflect on the truths you are learning, how God is changing your heart, and what you will do with what you have learned.



You can work through this book individually or with a mature Christian. If you work through it on your own, write down any questions you want to ask a mature believer.



Set aside the time you need. Don't feel rushed to get your study done quickly. Meditate on the truths of God's Word at your own pace.

RHYTHMS *for Life*

THE BIG IDEA

Spiritual practices help us engage with God in daily rhythms—and find life.

Week 1

Finding Life in Daily Rhythms

THIS WEEK'S MEMORY VERSE

²¹For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

PHILIPPIANS 1:21



Day 1 • The Call for Us All

¹³ Therefore, with your minds ready for action, be sober-minded and set your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹⁴ As obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires of your former ignorance. ¹⁵ But as the one who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct; ¹⁶ for it is written, Be holy, because I am holy.

1 PETER 1:13-16

Relationships take work! The strongest relationships are the ones we nurture. We know this from our own experience. Establishing spiritual rhythms nurtures and strengthens our relationship with God and helps us grow in Christ.

As in all relationships, there are things we can do that draw us closer to God and things we do (or don't do) that can push us away from Him. Think about it this way: What if you only had a set number of days to grow as close to God as possible? What steps would you take to make the most of that time? Are you currently doing those things?

Don't misunderstand—we are not talking about earning God's grace, His love, or our way into heaven. God's grace is given freely (Ephesians 2:8-9). We don't need to do anything to earn it. We actually *can't* do anything to earn it. Jesus already did that work on the cross. He reconciled our broken relationship with God through His death and resurrection.

God has already pursued you. He's forgiven you and brought reconciliation to your relationship with Him, and He wants to engage with you to take that relationship as deep as you'll let Him—He wants to make you holy.

He's calling you to holiness and fully intends to transform you toward that outcome. But you have to decide that you want to engage with Him in daily rhythms and allow Him to develop that relationship.

Will you let Him? Will you engage with Him in the practices He uses to bring about holiness in your life? You have that choice before you each day. Get ready, set your hope on the grace of Jesus, and let Him draw you into deeper relationship with Him.

Restate God's call in 1 Peter 1:13-16 in your own words.

Is there anything in 1 Peter 1:13-16 that seems impossible to you? Explain.

ESTABLISHING RHYTHMS

Good news! You've already begun to establish a rhythm for life by engaging with God in this study.

Use the prompts below to write a prayer of response to His call to holiness:

- Look over the contents of this study on page 3. What rhythms for life in Christ have you already begun to establish? Thank God for revealing Himself to you in those practices.
- Acknowledge any obstacles that prevent you from living out God's call on your life in 1 Peter 1:13-16.
- Invite God to keep drawing you toward His holiness as you seek Him and establish spiritual rhythms in your life.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

If I'm saved by grace, not works, then what's the point of spiritual disciplines?

THE HEART OF IT

Because God has given us a living hope and redeemed us through Christ, we respond by intentionally orienting our lives toward Him.

REMEMBER

Memorize Philippians 1:21 to acknowledge your need to engage with God in spiritual rhythms for life:

For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.



Day 2 • The Work of God

²³ Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely. And may your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ He who calls you is faithful; he will do it.

1 THESSALONIANS 5:23-24

When was the last time you held an infant? Babies are entirely dependent upon their caretakers to grow and thrive. That's true for a period of time both in and out of the womb. You don't engage with a nine-month-old because you think you might be able to depend on him—you engage with him so that he might be fed by you. He's not going to pay for dinner or feed you soup when you're sick—you provide all the food and formula needed to nourish him. An infant can't offer you anything at all.

Spiritually, God relates to us in a similar way. God is not depending on you to accomplish your own spiritual growth. He hasn't engaged in relationship with you hoping you might tend to His needs—in fact, He doesn't have any needs at all (Acts 17:24-25). No, God has engaged with you because you have needs.

You can't sanctify yourself. You can't bring about your own holiness. You can't keep yourself blameless. You can't produce life on your own, even when you establish and commit to ongoing spiritual rhythms. And that should actually bring you a lot of hope.

God knows you can't sanctify yourself, and through Scripture, He assures us all attempts are in vain. Paul wrote it this way in his letter to Titus: “[God] saved us—not by works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy—through the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5). And here in his letter to the Thessalonian Christians, notice who is the subject of Paul's prayer and who is the object.

Who is it who sanctifies completely? God. Who does He sanctify completely? You. Who keeps you sound and blameless? God does. Who is faithful to carry out His call in your life? God is. Who will do the work of bringing you life in the ongoing practice of spiritual rhythms? Jesus will.

Your spiritual transformation is not up to you. Only Jesus Christ can make any meaningful difference in your life, transforming you through His mercy and the work of His Holy Spirit.

How does the image of an infant's complete dependence help you understand your own spiritual dependence on God?

What does this passage teach you that God will do as He engages you in spiritual rhythms for life?

ESTABLISHING RHYTHMS

Isn't it wonderful to know as you step into this study on spiritual disciplines that it is God, not you, who will accomplish your sanctification?

Complete the journaling exercise on the following page.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

I want to do what's right, but my sinful desires get me off track. So how can spiritual growth or change in my life ever really happen?

THE HEART OF IT

Spiritual transformation is a process by which God works to draw us closer to Him.

REMEMBER

Memorize Philippians 1:21.

For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Take ten minutes to write down moments in your past when you clearly saw God working in your life—not because of your effort, but because of His mercy.

REFLECT

How do these reminders strengthen your trust that He will also sanctify you in the present?

PRAY

He who calls you is faithful; He will do it.

1 THESSALONIANS 5:24

Personalize this verse as a prayer to God.



Day 3 • The Decision of Pursuit

So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

² *Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.*

³ *For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.*

COLOSSIANS 3:1-3

Prior to this study, have you ever sought Christ with intentional focus for an extended period of time? If you have, then you know that when your mind is set on Jesus, you view the world differently. If you haven't done it before, you'll experience that in the days and weeks to come.

When you set your heart on the things above, your whole being is focused more on Jesus and His work than the things going on around you—and that changes everything.

The phrase *set your minds* (v. 2) means “to think, ponder, consider.” This is a command to make a daily choice to focus on your life with Christ. Paul isn't encouraging you to adopt a “Pollyanna” type of mentality where everything is happy and carefree. When your life is hidden with Christ in God, bad things still happen. You still grieve. You still experience the effects of sin. However, your perspective changes.

When you “set your mind on things above, not on earthly things,” you'll rest in the eternal security you have in Christ, knowing God will never give up on you. You'll know you are forgiven and God is working to mature you with a new focus. You'll know the things of this earth will fade away, but eternal realities will continue for limitless billions of years. You'll know those years will continue to be meaningful and even celebrated throughout eternity.

Do you know these truths personally? Set your mind on things above. The reality that decision contains for you is limitless.

What does it mean that *your life is hidden with Christ in God* (v. 3)?

What are some ways you make time to connect with God in the day-to-day?

ESTABLISHING RHYTHMS

It's one thing to know you should set your mind on things above instead of earthly things and another thing altogether to experience that as reality.

Use the prompts below to pray in response to God's call for you to seek things above.

- Begin by confessing to God the areas where you are seeking ultimate satisfaction from temporary or worldly concerns.
- Pray through Colossians 3:1-3, turning each verse into a personal prayer. For example: "Lord, since I have been raised with Christ, help me seek the things above and not fixate on earthly things."
- Ask God to shape your perspective so that grief, joy, and daily routines are all reframed in light of your eternal life with Him.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

If transformation is a work of God, what is my role in the process?

THE HEART OF IT

Engaging with God in daily rhythms is a daily choice to pursue the things above.

REMEMBER

Memorize Philippians 1:21.

For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.



Day 4 • The Help of Community

¹⁵ But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into him who is the head—Christ. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building itself up in love by the proper working of each individual part.

EPHESIANS 4:15-16

We need people. They will disappoint us at times. They will get it wrong at times. They will sin. Yet we need them, and that's by God's design.

In fact, Paul's words in Ephesians 4:15-16 indicate that you can't grow in Christ unless you have people around you who can equip and encourage you in the growth process. God made the church to be the body of Christ and the means by which a person can be devoted to Christ. Relationships are for your sanctification.

Consider the original recipients of this letter—a diverse church seeking unity through faith in Jesus Christ. They needed healthy spiritual rhythms to pursue the Lord together. Paul explained that each individual believer in Christ is a part of a single body guided by Christ. As the head of the body, Jesus directs and sustains every other part. Jesus guides and holds the church together. We are built up into maturity as we establish and engage in consistent rhythms of learning and serving together.

Yet Paul still urged the church to grow—in every way—into *him who is the head by speaking the truth in love* (v. 15). To speak the truth, we must know about Christ, and to speak in love, we must know Christ personally. We must be familiar with both what is true of our salvation and the love of Christ.

You need people, and people need you. That means engaging in ongoing conversations where grace and truth intersect. God uses these rhythms to build us up together as one in the community of faith.

According to Ephesians 4:15-16, and in your own words, why do you need people? Why do people need you?

As God makes Himself known to you through this study, how might He want to use you to help build up His church?

ESTABLISHING RHYTHMS

Since you're participating in this study on spiritual disciplines, you likely value God's Word. Do you also value the community of faith?

Use the prompts below as a guide for treasuring the truth of Ephesians 4:15-16 in your heart.

- Slowly read Ephesians 4:15-16 four times.
- Each time, emphasize a different phrase:
 1. "Speaking the truth in love"
 2. "Let us grow in every way into him who is the head—Christ."
 3. "... fitted and knit together [...] for building [the church] up in love"
 4. "... the proper working of each individual part."
- Spend five minutes in silence, inviting God to show you what each phrase should mean for you today.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

People always let me down.
Can I grow in faith without connection to the church?

THE HEART OF IT

*The call to holiness
is a call to the
community of
faith—and for it.*

REMEMBER

Memorize Philippians 1:21.

*For me, to live is Christ
and to die is gain.*



Day 5 • The Reality of Rhythms

⁴“Remain in me, and I in you. Just as a branch is unable to produce fruit by itself unless it remains on the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. ⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me.”

JOHN 15:4-5

Have you ever felt like you were just “spinning your wheels”? Sometimes, we exhaust a lot of energy on something that doesn’t end up amounting to much. Like a car stuck in the mud, it doesn’t matter how hard you try; you are not going anywhere or accomplishing anything.

The routine practice of spiritual disciplines can feel a lot like that. God’s heart is for you to experience so much more in these daily intentional moments. He intends for your spiritual life to have a lasting effect on your everyday life.

Remaining in Christ may not change your to-do list from day to day, but it will change your focus as you walk through that list. In other words, if you’re establishing rhythms of reading your Bible, praying, resting, worshiping, engaging in a community of faith, serving, and being generous, that’s great! But know that there is a difference between legalistic religious activity and engaging in spiritual rhythms for abundant life in Christ.

The goal of spiritual rhythms isn’t the routine—it’s staying connected to Jesus, so His life flows through you. Don’t chase after the list of religious practices; chase after Jesus. When you do that, the outcome isn’t achievement, it’s adoration. You don’t end up feeling like there’s still so much to do; you end up being joyful about all He has done in and for you. Instead of impressing other Christians with your knowledge, you end up blessing them with your hope. Instead of spinning your wheels on temporary pursuits, you make meaningful, eternal investments.

God has designed you for more than just getting by; He has created you to bear much fruit—both in your own life and in the lives of other people. And that can only happen when you remain in Him.

Based on this passage, how can you know if you're yielding to the Spirit and not just going through the motions?

What would it look like to remain in Christ daily this week? What are some areas of your life where you forget to remain in Him?

ESTABLISHING RHYTHMS

The act of remaining desperately connected to Jesus drives the rest of our spiritual rhythms. This is our spiritual aim. Fruitful Bible study, prayer, rest, worship, community, service, and giving result from keeping your thoughts and actions focused on Christ.

- Choose one small act of service today—encourage a friend, help a coworker, or give generously.
- Before doing it, pray: “Lord, I can do nothing without You. Bear fruit through me now, not for my achievement, but for Your glory.”
- Then, reflect: Was this an act of striving or a fruitful effect of abiding in Christ?

WHAT'S THE POINT?

A set routine of daily “rhythms” seems sort of legalistic and rigid. How do I know I’m yielding to the Spirit and not just going through the motions?

THE HEART OF IT

The goal of spiritual rhythms isn't the routine itself—it's staying connected to Jesus so His life flows through us.

REMEMBER

Memorize Philippians 1:21.

For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

The Pharisee & the Branch

Jesus spoke plainly to express the differences between religious practices and spiritual rhythms for life.

The Pharisees were the largest and most influential religious-political party during New Testament times.⁵ The term *Pharisee* means “separated ones.”⁶ And that they were. The reality, which Jesus made plain in Matthew 23, was that in separating themselves by self-made definitions of holiness, the Pharisees separated themselves from Jesus and eternal life in Him. The aim of a person truly seeking after God is to remain connected to Jesus, who alone has the power to make anyone holy.

⁴ “Remain in me, and I in you. Just as a branch is unable to produce fruit by itself unless it remains on the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me.”

JOHN 15:4-5

Jesus on Pharisaical Routine	Jesus on Spiritual Rhythms
Motive is to be seen by others (Matthew 23:5-7)	Motive is to abide in Christ (John 15:4)
Performative (Matthew 23:5)	Genuine (John 15:9; Romans 12:9)
Burdensome (Matthew 23:4)	Light (Matthew 11:28-30)
Gives no needed help (Matthew 23:4)	Gives needed help (1 Thessalonians 2:8; Matthew 28:19-20)
Wants to be honored by others (Matthew 23:6-7)	Wants to be honored by Christ (John 5:44)
Rooted in pride and public standing (Matthew 23:7,12)	Rooted in humility and dependence (John 15:1-3)
Produces hypocrisy (Matthew 23:3-4; 27-28)	Produces fruit (John 15:5; Galatians 5:22-23)
Leads to judgment and death (Matthew 23:13,15)	Leads to transformation and eternal life (John 3:3,16)

Week 1 Reflections

Your study in Week 1 centered around this big idea: Spiritual practices help us engage with God in daily rhythms—and find life. Take some time now to reflect on what you’ve learned about that reality. Use the following questions to help.

What did you learn about God this week?

What truths or promises from God’s Word stood out to you?

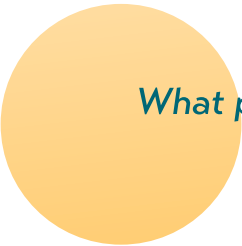
Is it possible for a person to practice spiritual disciplines and not grow in relationship with God? Based on this week’s study, why might that happen?

What are some specific ways you want to obey or apply what you have learned from God's Word this week?

How has this week's study helped you understand what Paul meant when he wrote, "to live is Christ"?

Try to write this week's memory verse without looking at it.

Philippians 1:21



What prayer requests do you have?