

A Template for a Spiritual Growth Plan or Personal Rule of Life

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This is a template to use for setting specific goals for spiritual growth in seven major dimensions of life. These guidelines suggest general categories of action to help orient us to important areas in which we can set specific goals in each dimension of life.

There are two major types of suggested categories. Guidelines that begin with “learn” identify some core knowledge or skill that we need to acquire. Guidelines that begin with “commit” identify specific categories of practices or habits to cultivate in the way we live.

This template can assist us in our growth plan in two ways. First, it can provide categories to help us think through the knowledge and skills we already have as well as the practices and habits that are already patterns in our life in these different areas of life. Second, it can provide categories to help us identify specific areas in which we need to grow and set goals for change.

Lest we feel overwhelmed by the length and breadth of this list, remember that developing a spiritual growth plan is a work that takes time. We can only pursue change in a small number of ways at a time, so our current plans and goals for change in a particular season may only contain a few items. What is most important is not how much of this template we can fill out at a particular moment in time but rather the direction in which we are moving and the progress we are making toward growth in these areas. May the Lord give us joy in his presence, guide us with his wisdom, and empower us with his strength to pursue faithfulness to God and transformation into the image of Christ by his grace.

1. Worship

Public worship

- Learn the elements and structure of public worship.
- Commit to attend public worship every week and participate with whole-hearted focus.

Private/personal worship

- Learn to pray from the Bible and other written prayers.
- Learn to pray the four major kinds of prayer.
- Commit to a daily time set aside for prayer “face-to-face” with God using a daily prayer guide or plan
- Commit to ways of practicing an ongoing conversation “side-by-side” with God throughout the day.

2. Mind

Knowing the Bible

- Learn how the Bible presents a single unified story of God's kingdom organized around a series of covenants.
- Learn how to study the Bible using good questions and tools for interpretation.

Knowing Christian beliefs

- Learn basic Christian theological doctrines of God, creation, humanity, sin, salvation, the church, and the mission of God.

Knowing reasons to believe

- Learn reasons supporting the truth of basic Christian beliefs.
- Learn how to dialogue with others about reasons for faith.

3. Heart

Christian character

- Learn the character of God revealed ultimately in Christ and the fruit of the Spirit.
- Commit to regular self-examination to discern sins to confess and repent and virtues to cultivate with the help of biblical meditation, other Bible-based prayers and tools (e.g., journaling), and dialogue about one's life with trusted friends.
- Commit to some plan(s) to avoid or counter-act sinful habits/vices and actions that put Christ-like virtues into action.

Family influences

- Learn how my family of origin shaped my beliefs, values, sense of self, patterns of engaging in relationships, managing my emotions, and dealing with conflict by reflect on my family history.

Responding to troubling emotions

- Learn what makes you feel troubling emotions (e.g., grief; depression; anger; fear/anxiety).
- Learn how you typically respond to troubling emotions.
- Commit to some habits of anticipating and responding to troubling emotions in ways that are healthy and Christ-like.

4. Body

Physical health

- Learn about the union of body and soul and the importance of bodily health and habits in spiritual growth.
- Commit to some habits of eating that cultivate physical health.
- Commit to some habits of exercise that cultivate physical health.
- Commit to some habits of sleep that cultivate physical health.

Sexuality

- Learn the biblical perspective on human sexuality.
- Commit to some habits of avoiding sexual temptations and sins.
- Commit to some habits of cultivating healthy sexual intimacy within marriage (if applicable).

5. Relationships

- Learn biblical principles and practical skills for engaging in healthy, loving relationships in friendship, family, marriage (if applicable), and parenting (if applicable).
- Commit to some habits of cultivating healthy, loving relationships. Craft goals that are specific to relationships with particular people. Consider especially relationships in which you are experiencing tension, conflict, or estrangement; think of specific practical ways that you could demonstrate love to them.
- Commit to some habits of biblical peacemaking to resolve conflicts in relationships.
- Commit to some habits of befriending people outside the church and your sphere of Christian relationships with the hope of sharing Christ with those who need to know him.

6. Work and Service

- Learn biblical principles about work and justice.
- Commit to some habits of being a good worker, growing in your knowledge and skills as a faithful steward of God's gifts.
- Commit to some goals for seeking to use one's vocational training, skills, and relationships (and, if possible, those of your organization or institution) to serve people or communities in need who lack access to these resources.

7. Wealth

- Learn biblical principles about wealth, money, and possessions.
- Commit to some habits of spending and saving that faithfully manage your money to provide for your needs and enable you to share with others in need.
- Commit to habits of giving generously to the church, using the principle of the tithe as a foundational goal.
- Commit to habits of giving generously to other organizations that support the mission of God and the flourishing of our communities.