

Dearly Beloved,

My main rule in life is “If anyone dies on a cross and then comes back from the dead 3 days later, listen to everything that guy says.” It helps keep my priorities straight. Sometimes I add a second rule to that like, “Don’t eat at the chili cookoff before preaching at the midweek service”, but that rule doesn’t apply to most of you.

Today I’m going to give you more life rules, and then we’ll focus on one in particular.

1) Go to church every Sunday. You need the Word of God and Christ’s body and blood more than you know, and you need to be a part of the community of believers.

2) Spend time in God’s Word and prayer every single day.

3) Show up (on time) and do your job. This applies to everything - church, family, friends, and career. Woody Allen said 80% of success is showing up. Caring has little to do with where your head or heart is; I can tell someone cares by where their butt is. If you show up, you care. Immanuel means “God with us.” God cared, so He showed up in a big way. And He did the job, i.e., dying on the job.

4) Eat right and get exercise every day. God created the human body, and He wants us to take care of it.

I want to focus more on rule number 2, especially as we go through the season of Lent. You’ve probably heard a bunch of times, “Have a devotional plan” but maybe you don’t know how to do that. Don’t be embarrassed by that - the disciples had to ask Jesus how to pray (Lk 11:1).

There are many ways to go about this, so don’t think I’m saying you have to do it my way. The most important thing is consistency in God’s Word. Here’s what I suggest -

1) Get a Bible reading plan. There’s so many out there. Google “Bible reading plan” and find one, and pick one that’s manageable for you. If you read 4 chapters a day, you’ll get through the Bible in a year with some days to spare. But a yearly cycle doesn’t have to be the goal - maybe it’s a 2 year thing. You should challenge yourself at some point to read through the entire Bible.

If you’ve never read the Bible, I’d start with Matthew. I have theological reasons for doing so, and if you ask me some time I’ll show you my hand.

2) Pray the Psalms. When I read the Bible, I read the Psalms differently. They’re not a part of my regular plan - I pray 4 different Psalms every day throughout the day, and my plan is a cycle of

all 150 Psalms throughout the entire year. You don't have to do it this way, but I suggest praying at least one Psalm a day.

Why? Because the Psalms teach us how to pray. (So does the Lord's Prayer, of course). I'm not a very good prayer on my own, but the Psalms teach and form my own prayers. And here's a practical tip for praying the Psalms - pray them out loud. Don't simply read them in your head. Reading out loud gives you the benefit of hearing it and it makes your pray at a better pace.

3) Pray with your own words. Again, the Psalms will teach us and form our words. It's good to pray for others, for health, and for everything. But also thank and praise God in your prayers. Confess your sinfulness before God, as well! The acronym ACTS for prayer helps - Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplications (requests).

Devotions like *Portals of Prayer* are helpful tools. Use what works for you, but you have to do something. The devil works hard on Christians, and he loves idle hands. So fold those hands in prayer this Lenten season, and then continue to do so for the rest of your life.

In Christ,

Pastor