

“A Passionate Rule of Life”
Psalm 42 and Philippians 3:12-4:1
Pastor James York
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Scripture Readings

Psalm 42 (The Message)

A white-tailed deer drinks from the creek; I want to drink God, deep draughts of God. I'm thirsty for God-alive. I wonder, "Will I ever make it—arrive and drink in God's presence?" I'm on a diet of tears—tears for breakfast, tears for supper. All day long people knock at my door, Pesterer, "Where is this God of yours?" These are the things I go over and over, emptying out the pockets of my life. I was always at the head of the worshiping crowd, right out in front, Leading them all, eager to arrive and worship, Shouting praises, singing thanksgiving—celebrating, all of us, God's feast! Why are you down in the dumps, dear soul? Why are you crying the blues? Fix my eyes on God—soon I'll be praising again. God puts a smile on my face. God's my God. When my soul is in the dumps, I rehearse everything I know of God, From Jordan depths to Hermon heights, including Mount Mizar. Chaos calls to chaos, to the tune of whitewater rapids. Your breaking surf, your thundering breakers crash and crush me. Then God promises to love me all day, sing songs all through the night! My life is God's prayer. Sometimes I ask God, my rock-solid God, "Why did you let me down? Why am I walking around in tears, harassed by enemies?" They're out for the kill, these tormentors with their obscenities, Taunting day after day, "Where is this God of yours?" Why are you down in the dumps, dear soul? Why are you crying the blues? Fix my eyes on God—soon I'll be praising again. God puts a smile on my face. God's my God.

Philippians 3:12-4:1

Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. Only let us hold fast to what we have attained. Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord.

“A Passionate Rule of Life”

What is your passion? Eric Liddell was a man who nurtured his passion as he strived to dedicate his life and talent to God. Eric discerned God's call for his life to be a missionary to China. Eric realized that every aspect of his life can bring glory to God and can draw others to Jesus. Eric said, "We are all missionaries. Wherever we go we either bring people nearer to Christ or we repel

them from Christ." All of us have a call. How you fulfill your call determines if you are a positive or negative missionary.

In his twenties Eric was an extremely busy man. Numerous people had expectations of him. The mission board wanted him to go directly to the mission field in China. Jenny his wife, wanted him to serve in China with her. His professors wanted him to get another degree. The church wanted him to preach and teach in England. The Olympic committee wanted him to train and run in the Olympics. Eric wanted to nurture his relationship with God so everything he did would bring glory to God. Therefore Eric developed and lived a rule of life.

Weekly worship, daily prayer, generous giving, daily scripture reading, loving his wife and family were all a part of his rule of life. Being bold in love, serving and using every aspect of his life to be Jesus hands and feet, a missionary, was a part of his rule of life. Running was Eric's passion and it was essential to his rule of life. There were many who condemn him for nurturing his passion. They argued that it took time away from his call. However Eric realized that by nurturing his passion, by dedicating his passion to God, his soul was renewed. God connected with Eric, energized him, molded him, filled him with joy peace and love through his passion of running.

I invite you to develop your rule of life. Steps for writing your personal rule of life are in the bulletin. Start by identifying your passion. Eric said, "I believe God made me for a purpose, to be a missionary in China, but God also made me fast. And when I run I feel God's pleasure." What do you do that enables you to sense God smiling and delighting in you? How do you celebrate the attributes of yourself that please God?

I shared this quote at confirmation class. One of our wise mentors pointed out that Eric's statement would be even better if the "but" was replaced with "and" Following your passion in moderation does not contradict, compete or detract from your calling rather it opens you up to God's delight in you and fuels the rest of your life.

Personally I believe God made me for a purpose to be a loving husband, father and son, to be a pastor and God also made me a backpacker and when I backpack I feel God's pleasure. Backpacking is my passion. When I backpack my mind gets uncluttered and I see God more clearly in the beauty of creation; Somehow I hear God, scripture reveals new meaning, questions get answered, new questions arise, priorities emerge; Somehow I feel God, burdens are lifted, and joy fills my heart; Somehow God renews my soul and gives me the energy to fulfill my calling through my passion of backpacking.

In this silence identify your passion. God made you *what* and when you *what* you feel God's pleasure.

Minute of Silence

Start your rule of life by identifying how you will nurture your passion.

Your passion needs to be balanced out with your call and love for God and others. Pursuing one's passion in excess will result in your passion becoming an idol. Anytime one's passion becomes more important than God then one's passion has become a sinful idol.

There came a point where Eric was greatly tempted to make his passion an idol. After years of training for the Olympics his best event was scheduled for a Sunday. Eric believed Sunday was a day to rest and worship. His rule of life identified every Sunday as a day to connect with God through worship and rest alone. He refused to compete on a Sunday. His coaches, even the prime minister and numerous people from his country were outraged, demanding that Eric compete. They provided Eric with all sorts of justifications and rationalizations yet Eric would not change his mind. Eric was determined to keep his passion as a portal to God, to keep his passion pure as a way to feel God's pleasure. He resisted the temptation to make his passion an idol using it solely for his own glory or his country's glory. Eric was determined to glorify God with his passion. Eric had a rule of life that clearly identified his priorities. A teammate switched events with Eric so he could

run not his best event but run on a day other than Sunday. Eric won Olympic Gold. After the race Eric said, "You came to see a race today. To see someone win. It happened to be me. But I want you to do more than just watch a race. I want you to take part in it. I want to compare faith to running in a race. It's hard. It requires concentration of will, energy of soul. You experience elation when the winner breaks the tape - especially if you've got a bet on it. But how long does that last? You go home. Maybe you're dinner's burnt. Maybe you haven't got a job. So who am I to say, "Believe, have faith," in the face of life's realities? I would like to give you something more permanent, but I can only point the way. I have no formula for winning the race. Everyone runs in her own way, or his own way. And where does the power come from, to see the race to its end? From within. Jesus said, "Behold, the Kingdom of God is within you. If with all your heart, you truly seek me, you shall ever surely find me." If you commit yourself to the love of Christ, then that is how you run a straight race."

Our soul renewal, the transformation of our hearts and minds is a gift God gives us. A rule of life, or as Eric would put it "running a straight race" or as the psalmist would put it, "thirsting for God" or as the Apostle Paul puts it, "pressing on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus" is an intentional way of placing ourselves in the hands of God so God can mold our souls and recreate us in the image of Jesus. Your rule of life should enable you to grow in your faith, grow your friendship with God, grow in grace and grow your desire to love. Your rule of life should help you harness God's power in your life enabling you to live abundantly.

The Apostle Paul urges us to learn, grow, teach and mature. Paul presents faith not as something static, not a possession, not all or nothing rather faith is a striving toward, a transformation to a new self, a quest to have the mind of Jesus, a journey into more and more pliability yielding to God to shape our thoughts, attitude, values, behavior and actions. Faith is a spiral as we follow our rule for life, God renews our soul, resulting in a deeper awareness of God's presence, revealing more of our call, increasing our desire to lovingly serve, inspiring us to follow a revised rule of life. God's gift of faith is a lifelong journey of soul renewal. The Apostle Paul puts it this way **2 Corinthians 5:17** "**So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see everything has become new!**" Fresh as the sunrise every day God renews your soul, everyday is an Easter, a resurrection. A rule of life is an intentional way of living with deliberate effort, purposeful action and clear priorities to make every day, every renewal of your soul more glorious. C. S. Lewis said that faith is to begin over again. We have to begin every day, understanding that each morning is a new day. Asking ourselves: God what are you going to teach me today? Where are you going to take me today that I have never been before? How are you going to show yourself? How are you going to use me and how am I going to grow in my faith. A passionate rule of life guides you into God's unforced rhythms of grace.

The Apostle Paul illustrates following a rule of life with a metaphor. As we mature in Christ, God cultivates in us the fruit of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. The psalmist said when we delight in God we are nourished like a tree planted by a stream of water empowered to bear fruit. Living your personal rule of life fulfills your prayer for God's will to be done for God's Kingdom to come.

Jesus renewed the disciples through the ordinary in their daily life, water, bread, light. Jesus renewed their souls with truths from ordinary experiences the growth of a mustard seed, celebrating a wedding, eating dinner together. A rule of life celebrates how you have perceived God in the past and positions you to see God in your daily life.

Develop your rule of life by reflecting on your life, by being aware of what you do and why. Ponder how you can open all aspects of your life to God. When, where and how have you felt God's love, joy and peace? Make a list of all the ways you experience God, ways you are filled with joy, peace, love, grace? I challenge you to add to your list everyday for a month.

Be careful not to focus on the negative parts of your life this is not a self help exercise or a new year's resolution where you are going to "fix" some aspect of your life. Most new year's resolutions are quickly dropped because they remind us that we are not good enough. Rather a rule of life springs from the positive aspects of your life and invites you to grow avenues where God is already blessing you. A rule of life is not focused on self improvement rather on opening ourselves to God's renewing abundant life. A rule of life is a response to God's love that then inspires us to love God, love others and to achieve God's calling.

Schedule a time to be with God. Smile God loves you. Review your list. Anytime you love or are loved or your heart grew or you see God through some aspect of your life then that is God renewing your soul, transforming you into Christ likeness. Select some of these and write them into your rule of life.

Decide: how and when you will pray and worship; How you will handle your gifts, abilities, resources and money in a way that draws you closer to God; How you will approach work in a way that will help Christ to be formed in you; How will you share your God sightings in community; And how you can fill your daily tasks with a sense of the presence of God?

The apostle Paul says **Colossians 3:17** "**Whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus.**" To do something in Jesus name means to do it in a way consistent with Jesus character—to do it the way Jesus himself would do it. Every moment is an opportunity to live in Jesus name. All the everyday stuff can be filled with God's presence if you do it in Jesus name. Think about what it would mean to do activities such as waking up, greeting others, eating, driving, work, shopping, watching TV, using electronics, doing chores, reading and going to sleep in Jesus name. Write a few of these into your rule of life.

You should have some daily, weekly, monthly and yearly activities that you will intentionally do to nourish your relationship with God. Be careful not to make your rule of life to big, something that you are unable to keep. Rather discern what currently opens your soul to God. Be intentional in continuing that and then add one to three more.

Review your list checking for spiritual practices sometimes called spiritual disciplines. You should have at least one practice in your rule of life. Practices are patterns of living that create openings for the grace, peace, love, joy, healing and power of God to enter you. Starting next Sunday we will look at a practice each Sunday exploring worship, service, generosity, fasting, simplicity, confess, meditate, celebrate and submit. You are invited to practice each practice for a week, then on holy week add the practice that helped you connect with God the most to your rule of life. Then on Easter you will have a passionate rule of life that will open you to God's resurrection power everyday for the rest of your life. Amen

Soul Renewal

Spiritual practices for your extreme makeover

Writing Your Rule of Life

Identify your passion. Complete this statement:

God made me _____

and when I _____, I feel God's pleasure. How will you enjoy and nurture this?

Jesus renewed the disciples through the ordinary in their daily life, water, bread, light. Jesus renewed their souls with truths from ordinary experiences the growth of a mustard seed, celebrating a wedding, eating dinner together.

A rule of life celebrates how you have perceived God in the past and positions you to see God in your daily life.

- ◆ Reflect on your life and be aware of what you do and why.
- ◆ Ponder how you can open all aspects of your life to God.
- ◆ When, where and how have you felt God's love, joy and peace?
- ◆ Make a list of all the ways you experience God, ways you are filled with joy, peace, love, grace? (Add to your list for the rest of the month) (Consider sports, friends, hobbies, extra curricular activities, reading, family etc. for any of them can be God filled. Use the following categories to help organize your thoughts: Seeking God, School/Work, Study of God, Worship/church, Care of your body, Relational/Reaching out, Free time, Play, Rest.)

Schedule a time to be with God. Smile — God loves you. Review your list. Anytime you love or are loved or your heart grew or you see God through some aspect of your life then that is God renewing your soul, transforming you into Christ's likeness. Select some of these and write them into your rule of life.

Decide:

- ◆ How and when you will pray and worship.
- ◆ How you will handle your gifts, abilities, resources and money in a way that draws you closer to God.
- ◆ How you will approach work in a way that will help Christ to be formed in you.
- ◆ How will you share your God sightings in community.
- ◆ How you can fill your daily tasks with a sense of the presence of God.

Every moment is an opportunity to live in Jesus' name. All the everyday stuff can be filled with God's presence if you do it in Jesus' name. Think about what it would mean to do activities such as waking up, greeting others, eating, driving, work, shopping, watching TV, using electronics, doing chores, reading and going to sleep in Jesus' name. Write a few of these into your rule of life.

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Spiritual Practices

Worship

Service

Generosity

Fasting

Simplicity

Confess

Meditate

Celebrate

Submit

Prayer

Study

Solitude

Guidance

Ten tips for keeping your "Rule of Life"

1. Discern your rule of life by listening to your heart's desires.
2. Make sure your rule includes joy, play and fun.
3. Take baby steps.
4. Challenge yourself to grow.
5. Figure out how much structure you need, lots or just a little.
6. Alter, refine and add to your rule of life.
7. Share your rule of life with a friend.
8. Find a way to keep yourself accountable.
9. Read your rule of life regularly.
10. Sometimes it will be difficult to keep your rule of life but persevere and alter your rule of life when necessary.