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Grace & peace.

"You make known to me the path of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence,
with eternal pleasures at your right hand."

PSALM 16:11

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INTRODUCTION

“If seeds in the black earth can turn into such beautiful roses, what might not the heart of man become in its long journey toward the stars?”

G.K. CHESTERTON

On any journey, it's important to know where we are going and how we are going to get there. When we begin to follow Jesus, we don't receive a road map laying out the rest of our lives, but we do know our destination: we are traveling to the eternal city of God where we will enjoy him forever. Like any journey, you will not be the same person you were when you left. You change along the way.

As we move towards Jesus we are "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet 1:3-4), and we are "being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory" (2 Cor 3:18) until we "obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess 2:14). Sharing in Christ's nature and becoming like him is part of the journey. Our destination is Christlikeness. But what is Christlikeness? And how do we get there?

Christlikeness is reflecting the character of Jesus in your own life. John the Baptist declared of Jesus, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (Jn 3:30); this exemplifies the heart of the pilgrim seeking Christlikeness. As you walk with Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the way you think, act, desire, and imagine life will align more and more with Christ.

However, we will not become Christlike by accident. It takes intentionality. Our Anglican heritage celebrates intentionality. In the Book of Common Prayer (BCP) we are instructed that "Every Christian man or woman should from time to time frame for themselves a Rule of Life in accordance with the precepts of the Gospel and the faith and order of the Church."

A Rule of Life helps you deliberately envision your pursuit of Christlikeness in the context of a church community. The BCP suggests that your personal rule of life should consider a few topics, such as "The regularity of your attendance at public worship and especially at the Holy Communion; the practice of private prayer, Bible-reading, and self-discipline; bringing the teaching and example of Christ into your everyday life; the boldness of your spoken witness to your faith in Christ; your personal service to the Church and the community; and the offering of money according to your means for the support of the work of the Church." These suggestions are by no means exhaustive, but they are thorough, and an excellent place to start.

At St. Peter's, we aim to continue this tradition of intentionality. However, we call it our Rhythm of Life. A rule can become inflexible, whereas a rhythm has movement.

The moment you write down a list of activities and disciplines that you think will help you grow in Christlikeness, what happens? You suddenly have rules to keep. You may begin to measure your self-worth by how well or how poorly you've succeeded at keeping them. While this is not the intention behind this ancient tradition, there are two risks of treating it this way: you could develop pride based on how spiritual you've become, or you may fall into shame because of how you have failed to meet your ideals. Both of these responses miss the mark.

When we place our faith in Jesus, we become children of God. The adoption papers are signed; our new life has begun. God loves us with irrevocable and unending love. We are his beloved; nothing we do or fail to do can increase or decrease his love for us. This is the brilliance of grace; God gives it freely. St. Paul assures us that, "God who began a good work in you will bring it to completion" (Phil 1:6). God doesn't leave things half done. The Father himself will make sure you arrive at his eternal city. God will fully form you into the image of his Son, through the power of his Spirit at work in you.

Why then would we have a Rhythm of Life? Because God invites us to participate in his work. St. Paul calls the church throughout the ages to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil 2:12-13). We cannot become like Christ without God reshaping our desires and granting us the ability to carry them through. However, God also wants us to become like Christ as we participate in his work. As Dallas

Willard put it, "The path of spiritual growth in the riches of Christ is not a passive one. Grace is not opposed to effort. It is opposed to earning. Effort is action. Earning is attitude."

We use the language of Rhythm over Rule because life moves along with seasons of rigidity, flexibility, spontaneity, and discipline. What works for six months may not work for the next six months. Life is dynamic, not static. As the BCP suggests, we should revise our plans for spiritual formation "from time to time." The word rhythm reminds us to assess our goals in light of our phase of life and to wrestle with what is best for us at our particular moment in time. It reminds us that there are seasons for everything under the sun.

The book you hold in your hands is meant to help you go deeper in your faith by designing your own Rhythm of Life. To be explicit: this is not a project towards self-fulfillment or personal growth; it is an exercise to clarify and deepen your call to follow Christ. Part One is composed of four chapters. These chapters are designed to help you prayerfully reflect upon how God has made you. In the first chapter, you'll consider your primary identity and its influence upon your roles in life. In the second, you'll discern your spiritual gifts, talents, and examine how your personality shapes your use of them. In the third chapter, you'll articulate your values. In the last chapter of Part One, you'll craft a personal purpose statement. The entirety of Part One works as a blueprint for Part Two.

In the second half of this book you will work through the four Rhythms of Life: up, in, out, and with (we'll explain these later).

You will consider how your daily, weekly, monthly, seasonal, and annual practices relate to each of these rhythms. This entire process will help you envision how God has uniquely made you and equipped you to grow in Christlikeness. You will have a clearer picture of how the many facets of your life can work together towards the aim of becoming like Jesus. The Rhythm of Life itself will not assure your transformation. It will help form a clearer path to discipleship and encourage you to depend upon the work of the Spirit in your life to empower your growth (2 Thess 2:13). Much of the work you'll do in this book is designed to make explicit what has been implicit, to reveal what was hidden, and to bring light to areas that have been unclear. Jesus is the master of doing this. Throughout the gospels he speaks what is on people's minds, he reveals what is on their hearts, and he invites them to follow him on a better journey.

We have two encouragements as you begin. First, pace yourself. Do not try to do it all at once, and do not expect your whole life to change overnight. This is a journey and not a sprint. It requires endurance, steadfastness, and takes time. Second, prayerfully craft your Rhythm of Life with other people. On this journey, you do not only need to know your destination and route: you also need to know your traveling companions. We can't become fully like Jesus in isolated bubbles. We're children in the midst of a new family. The Spirit dwells in the divine "y'all." As St. Paul writes, "Do you not know that you (plural) are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you (plural)?" (1 Cor 3:16). St. Paul did not envision anyone pursuing Jesus

alone. We are meant to journey together. This is why a healthy Rhythm of Life will contain personal and collective practices. In fact, traditionally the communal practices carried greater weight than the personal ones. An additional benefit of crafting our Rhythm of Life in the context of community is the process of sharing it with others. They can ask us the questions we may not think of asking ourselves, and we may discover disciplines and practices we may have otherwise overlooked.

Let's intentionally journey toward Jesus together, one step at a time.