

You don't need to be a religious sister to have a rule of life

Amid the chaos around and within me, there was a moment of clarity, and the clarity was this: [Our life is chaotic](#). Staring at the cardboard boxes yet to be filled with our belongings, the ever-growing stack of medical bills and the wreckage from a 10-month-old's morning playtime, I began to attribute the mayhem to so many external forces and factors.

There was our family's decision to become missionaries, the cross-country move, over a month of travel, two hospital stays and a baby who was on the cusp of walking, talking and taking over the world. I felt a strong temptation to surrender and let the chaos completely take over our lives. After all, everything seemed to be out of my control. Ah, [the lies of the devil](#). Thankfully, the truth struck me: We aren't created for chaos. We are made to live ordered lives, oriented always toward God. And it is in order and proper orientation, that we become just who he created us to be.



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Armed with this knowledge, my husband and I flirted with the idea of establishing a rule of life. The structured lives of religious men and women, such as the Franciscans and Benedictines, seemed absolutely heavenly. We longed for the

clanging of bells spurring one on to the next task of the day, the discipline of rigid waking and sleeping times, and the ample portions of time allocated for prayer, the sacraments and intimacy with God.

Of course, the lifestyle of the Benedictines would not quite align with the responsibilities of a mother and father. The spirit and the overarching aim of a rule of life, however, very much applies to a mother and father – and to just about [any layperson seeking heaven](#).

For several months, we prayed about the rule and spoke about it here and there. In my prayer journal, I began writing little snippets of various features that I wanted to include in my own mother's rule – a greater emphasis on contemplative prayer, more frequent reception of the sacraments and deeper fostering of growth in our marriage.

As this list lengthened, I began to pray about the real root of it all. What, I asked myself, are my true aspirations? Why this rule? The peace that I knew would come with more discipline and a tidier schedule was, of course, very enticing. But the desire was deeper than that. Quite simply, it was a [longing for sainthood](#). It was a longing for golden days centered on love. It was a longing for a heart so free that it can fall ever more in love with Christ.

Beneath that grand, overarching aim of loving Love himself fall many other intentions. These, I have arranged into four categories based on my state in life: my relationship toward God, myself, my husband and my child. Some of these desires include recognizing our Father's presence in the little moments of motherhood, cultivating the talents God has given me, actively and selflessly loving my husband and nurturing my daughter's relationship with Christ.

After gathering all of these pursuits into a neat list, I set about discerning how each would be practically implemented in

my life. To better recognize the Lord's presence, for instance, I needed to allow for [more prayer throughout my day](#) – even while folding laundry, washing dishes and nursing a baby.

To cultivate my passion for writing, I needed to carve out time in my week to sit in silence at my desk and put pen to paper. To actively love my husband meant penciling in weekly date nights in and monthly nights out. And nurturing my daughter's relationship with Christ meant (for now, at least) bringing her to daily Mass, reading books about the Faith to her and immersing her in the beauty of the Catholic faith.

As these desires took flesh, I began to pencil them into a daily, weekly and monthly schedule. A rule is all about routine – disciplining our fallible selves into a rightly ordered and joy-filled existence. With the formation of a schedule, this good discipline is born.

Thus, I ordered the days. Contemplative prayer would happen [first thing in the morning](#) if my wild child allowed it (and, if not, it would happen during her morning nap). Exercise would happen directly before lunch. Storytime would happen before the afternoon nap. A family Rosary would happen after dinner. A trip to the library would happen every Monday. Date night in, every Tuesday. Deep cleaning, every Wednesday. Meal planning, every Thursday. Confession, every Friday. So on and so forth.

I am still very much in the infancy of my rule. Adjusting to my family's big move, I am, little by little, stepping into the rule while also allowing myself much grace. The hours and days get juggled around – nap time at 3 o'clock instead of 2 o'clock because babies can be unpredictable; confession on Saturday, instead of Friday; a rain check on a date night. Perfection is far off, but I know that perseverance will enable me to continue moving in that desired direction.

And, despite being in the very beginning stages of this new way of life, I am already witnessing great fruits. Interior peace blooms daily. My awareness of God's presence increases. I am better able to exist in the present moment, for I know that I am where I am supposed to be, [doing what I am supposed to be doing](#). There is, in a word, freedom. I feel freer to pursue heaven, for I am not so tied down by a tangle of to-dos. I know that if I remain obedient to this rule and continue to allow God to lead me through it, these fruits will grow all the more.

A simple verse from Sirach spoke to me during my time of rule discernment and formation: "The sun rising in the Lord's heavens – the beauty of a good wife in her well-ordered home" (26:16). God offers us order and consistency. The sun rises every morning and sets every evening. The seasons come and go, changing rhythmically and predictably. His covenant with us is everlasting. He himself is unchanging and always present. We should offer the Lord the same order with our own lives so as to allow him to work in a way that is clear and visible to us. Order allows us to become more like our Creator, to grow closer to him and to better understand his perfect ways. It is, as Sirach says, beautiful.

What began as a quest for less chaos has become a quest for sanctification. A rule enables us to [utter our own fiat](#) to God for, unshackled from the race of life, we are free to kneel before him and say, "Do with me as you will." My hope and prayer is that my rule will give God the space he needs to truly complete his work in my life. Truly, at the end of the day, I simply want to have been an instrument in the hands of the Lord – finely tuned so that he can play a beautiful song.

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