

I don't know about you but my own experience of life is overwhelmingly **busy** and completely **distracted** - there is always stuff to do, electronic communication to follow and people to see!

So begin by taking off your watch, turning off your mobile phone and leaving it on the table as a sign of your willingness to be intentional about not being distracted in this space.

Prayer is a good idea - of course! And also something to be practiced.

Take one of these sheets which are designed to help you begin to reflect on your own rhythm of life and prayer and/or to think how you might develop one. This space can be one where you begin that process but it is most likely just a beginning. Take it away with you and work on it and perhaps find someone else or a small group in Grace to talk about it together over a meal...

## Base Rhythm

The trick seems to be finding a base rhythm, which is sustainable and appropriate to your personality, life situation and community. Then once that is established, mixing it up (lent is a good time to experiment) with other disciplines that don't come as naturally but add depth and allow us to move beyond our weaknesses and lazy inclinations. Establishing a base rhythm requires a good dose of self-awareness, like New Years resolutions the best intentions fail, but realistic goals are reached. You are highly unlikely to change your habits quickly, but over time it is totally possible to develop new practices, leave less desirable ones behind and find yourself with a life giving rhythm of life within 3–5 years.

Which of these describes you best?

- I am generally unorganised and respond to what is most urgent or what interests me most.
- I am highly organised and function best in a routine. I have set times for most things including God. I get irritated when my week does not go as planned.
- When it comes to spiritual practices or disciplines I am good at giving things a go, but find it hard to stick at something for more than a few months.
- Trying to do anything on my own is pointless, I need people around to engage, process and develop. Journaling, prayer etc come quite easily but sometimes I find myself going round in circles rather than getting over issues.

## Practices

Fill in the 4 boxes below, below there is a list of disciplines, it's not exhaustive, more just to help bring things to mind. And these don't have to be activities you do alone!

Disciplines and practices I have tried and found difficult	Disciplines and practices I engage with sporadically
Disciplines and practices I persevere with	Disciplines and practices I couldn't live without

Examples of disciplines and spiritual practices

Celebration | Studying scripture | Contemplation | Rest | Exercise | Learning | Solitude | Prayer | Giving | Fasting | Stewardship | Worship | Meditation | Confession | Abstinence | Thankfulness | Chastity | Intercession | Ecological responsibility | Service

Which of the things could you say form a rhythm to your life?

Which would you like to do more of?

# Moving from practices to rhythm

## Work and Rest

The rhythm of all our lives involves work and rest. There are lots of ways that you could reflect on rhythm and develop it. For example in setting a rhythm in our busy and distracted world rest might be a place to start...

List what you do as recreation to 'recreate yourself', include how often you do it?

How does my community rest?

You could do the same in other areas and begin to work towards a rhythm. Here's one worked example that goes for a weekly, monthly, quarterly pattern and then maps out the year...

## A Worked Example

Weekly practices

One day of rest plus a night off on my own | One evening with my partner | Personal bible study, contemplation and prayer

Monthly practices

Community prayer and worship and meal | Read a book | A morning for silence and meditation - often a walk | Have a meal with friends who are not connected to church/ministry/job | Meeting with a small group for prayer and support

Practices done every three months or so

Silent retreat weekend at monastery | See extended family | Mentoring/spending time with people who know stuff

## Yearly rhythm

August: The year starts in August, work is minimal with much more time than usual spent in prayer, looking back over the previous year, letting that die, learning from what's happened and beginning to make plans for the year ahead. I also use this time for resting, spending time with friends and opportunities for inspiration eg going to Greenbelt.

September: Always busy, but exciting as new things are bubbling up as we gather together to share vision and make plans. Usually there isn't much time to reflect, so plans, ideas, and vision boundaries need to be at least clear in my head by the end of August, or I go off on tangents.

October: Things are really getting going now, life is still busy although things have slowed down a bit. I need to choose a routine of spending alone time with God now or I'll be playing catch up after Christmas. Unfortunately it means early mornings, I need friends to remind me about my intentions, a loud alarm and a husband to kick me out of bed.

November: This month depends on my ability to be extra disciplined in sticking with early mornings that are becoming increasingly dull. Roping friends in for early morning prayer meetings, or finding inspiration in something new carries me over. Friends is the best option, as this means I actually persevere in praying for people or issues that are coming up and it's usually more fruitful than the other option which is more about distraction.

December: Advent gives renewed interest in inviting God into my days, the whole light and dark imagery always engages my spirituality. It's also an opportunity to kick start regular alone time with God if October and November intentions failed. December is one of the months where my practice includes family and revolves more around meal times – advent calendars, daily verses, and eating dinner in candlelight etc.

January: Detox! Not just to get over increased doses of food, and alcohol, but also people, parties (including annoyance at friends for overdoing it and being sick or saying inappropriate things...), family rows and general rowdiness. In this month I like discipline and routine... prayer, fasting, self-righteousness no problem at all.

February: The depressing month, just go with whatever works! Don't forget to see people, go dancing and watch movies that inspire and make you cry.

March: Lent - best practiced as community. Works best when whatever fasting we're doing is done together. My usuals are avoiding caffeine and TV. Should also balance this with taking on a new discipline, eg last year was reading blogs.

April: Suddenly things seem alive. Church goes better, other people are also enjoying church and the teams started in the autumn are more functional. Time to celebrate all things alive!! Personal time with God best spent outside. Also a good month for days of solitude and reflection.

May: The temptation is to think it's summer already, give up discipline and replace with picnics. When I resist this and focus on the things I had aimed at during the year they are surprise, surprise much more likely to happen. A bit like November – it's time to decide to stick with it.

June: Finishing well – June is best focussed on other people. Lots of intentional meals and coffees. What has happened this year that can be built on? Is anyone moving on? How can we end well?

July: Winding down for the summer, more celebration, parties, BBQ's and beer.

# Rhythm of Life

So over to you...

You might like to think about it for yourself and your community?

Use this to space to jot down some initial thoughts and then take it away and rework it in your own time.

I have developed one and find it helpful to touch base with it once a month (or two) to see how I am doing and to set some plans for the month ahead. Remember this is designed to help you and be life giving not make you feel guilty so if it turns to that throw it away!

## Me

## Community

Weekly

Monthly

Quarterly

Yearly