

The Common Rule

habits of love for an age of chaos

www.thecommonrule.org

How to try The Common Rule for Lent:

1 GET SOME FRIENDS

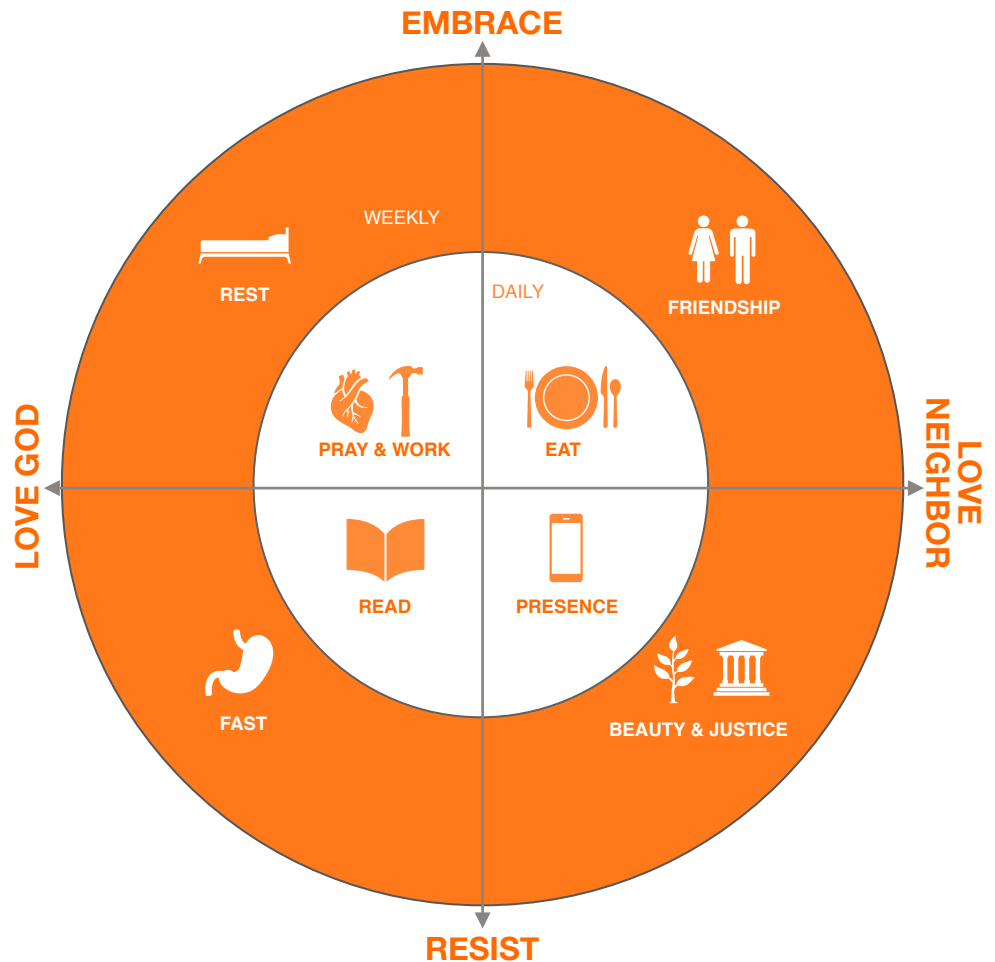
Communal habits are formational habits. The Common Rule is not meant to be practiced alone, but in a community. Maybe this is a small group, a family, a congregation or some friends.

2 READ UP ON THE HABITS

You can read about the 4 daily & 4 weekly habits on the following pages. There is much more on the website. The Common Rule habits are all meant to be small shifts in your daily & weekly routine, largely aimed at the unceasing busyness of work & technology.

3 GET COMFORTABLE WITH FAILURE

The Common Rule is not meant to be something you perform, it is something you practice. These habits are directional, they are supposed to turn you towards the love of God & neighbor in meaningful daily ways. Realizing how hard that is is part of, not an interruption to, that formation.



WHAT IS LENT? Lent is the season on the church calendar that comes just before Easter. It is 40 days long (if you don't count the Sundays, which are seen as "little easters.") While there are many ways that Lent is described & observed, it is typically in preparation for Easter with a focus on restraint & meditating on the suffering of Jesus.

WHAT IS THE COMMON RULE? A modern set of daily & weekly habits designed to help ordinary people live missional lives of love for God & neighbor. You can read more about the four daily & the four weekly habits on the website & the following pages. The Common Rule is intended to be an experiment in formational habits for any season, but Lent is a particularly fitting time to try the habits in a communal context.

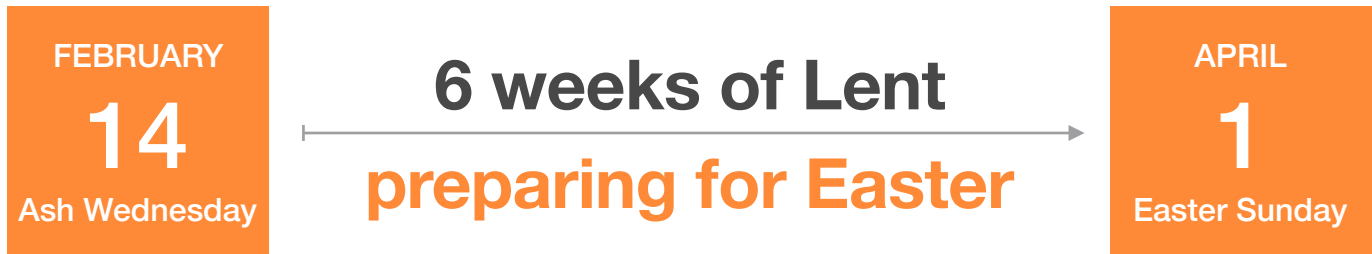
WHY PRACTICE THE COMMON RULE FOR LENT? Because if we are going to live lives shaped by Easter, we need to think about our habits. The vast majority of our lives are governed by habit. We are not formed simply by our deepest beliefs & greatest aspirations, but also the most ordinary of habits that guide our everyday lives. We usually don't think about these habits - & *that's why they matter so much*. Practicing The Common Rule for Lent combines the traditional ethos of Lenten restraint with communal formation & preparation for Easter. Much more difficult & much more meaningful than than giving up chocolate.

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RULE OF LIFE: noun. An ancient monastic practice of setting out intentional habits & rhythms to guide a community's spiritual formation in love.



5 BASICS OF THE COMMON RULE

1) THE 4 DAILY HABITS On the inner circle of The Common Rule are the 4 daily habits. They are kneeling prayer, one meal with others, one hour of phone off, & scripture before phone. Each is intended to be a “microhabit” or “keystone habit.” The idea is simple, tiny habits that have big consequences. Easy to check off, but they rework your whole day.

2) THE 4 WEEKLY HABITS On the outer circle of The Common Rule are the 4 weekly habits. They are a day of sabbath, an hour of intentional conversation, a 4 hour limit to streamed video, & one day of fasting from something. These habits are intended to frame the week in rhythms of intentionality - rest, friendship, restraint & curation. Like The Common Rule generally, these move between resistance & embrace

3) HABIT → VIRTUE Each of the specific habits of The Common Rule is aimed at a classic virtue or discipline. Kneeling prayer intertwines with vocation & work. Conversation with friendship. Limits on steamed media (which forces curation) point at beauty & justice. Fasting practices forms of abstinence, & sabbath aims at rest. As such the habits of the rule orient the direction of a day, then a week, then a life towards rhythms of love & meaning instead of busyness & chaos.

4) EMBRACE & RESIST The upper half of The Common Rule focuses on patterns of embrace, the lower half focuses on patterns of resistance. Habits of embrace & resistance try to acknowledge that the world we live in is not neutral. It is a formational world that is hammering us into certain kinds of people every moment of every day. We thus need counter-formational habits to resist the grooves of busyness, consumerism, vanity & injustice that we will otherwise move in should we choose to do nothing. Some of these are positive movements towards the good. Some of these are resistance of evil. We resist letting our work, our technologies, our networks, & our culture's narratives become the center of gravity in our lives.

4) GOD & NEIGHBOR The left side of The Common Rule pushes towards the love of God, the right side towards the love of neighbor. In this way the rule tries to orient our days & weeks around the great commandment - to love God & neighbor. That said, the habits bend back towards each other. Sabbath rest before God makes us better workers for our neighbors, curating screen time so that we are attentive to our neighbor is an act of love for God too. The habits are synergistic, not separate.

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DAILY HABITS

PRAY & WORK

Kneeling prayer at waking, at work, & at bed

Ora et labora, or “work & pray” is the motto of the Benedictine monks. Regular, carefully placed prayer is one of the keystone habits of spiritual formation. Interspersing work with prayer is the reminder that *Laborare est Orare* - To work **is** to pray.

READ

Scripture before phone

Refusing to check our phones until after we read a passage of scripture means that we refuse the question “What do I need to do today?” & ask a different one: “Who am I, & who am I becoming?” In the word of God we will find that we are a child of God, we are becoming more & more like our Father, & that this day will be more defined by **who God is** than **what we do**.

REST

Sabbath for 24 hours

The weekly practice of sabbath reminds us that God sustains the world & we don't, in order to make a counter-cultural embrace of our limitations, & in order to create a different sense of time where we can meet God in a distinct way, we stop our usual work for a day of rest.

FAST

Fast from something for 24 hours each week

Fasting from something not only reminds us that we need Jesus like we need food, it also sets us into a physical & mental state of unique longing where our prayers become more earnest, more desperate, more desirous, & thus *more true*. To fast is to be in solidarity with those who suffer. Pick something (all food or just meat or something else) & refrain for one day a week.

EAT

One meal with others every day

A constant succession of meals alone or on-the-go not only overlooks the beauty of what it means to be people who eat, but we also miss generous moments with those we love. One meal a day eaten together emphasizes that we need the lives of others to live, & it gives us those moments to begin doing so.

PRESENCE

Daily hour with phone off

This habit is one that actively resists the nagging worry that someone, somewhere might look up & see that someone here in the room actually needs our attention, even our gaze. We cannot love well without presence, & our presence is one of the greatest gifts we give to those we love, or are trying to learn to love.

FRIENDSHIP

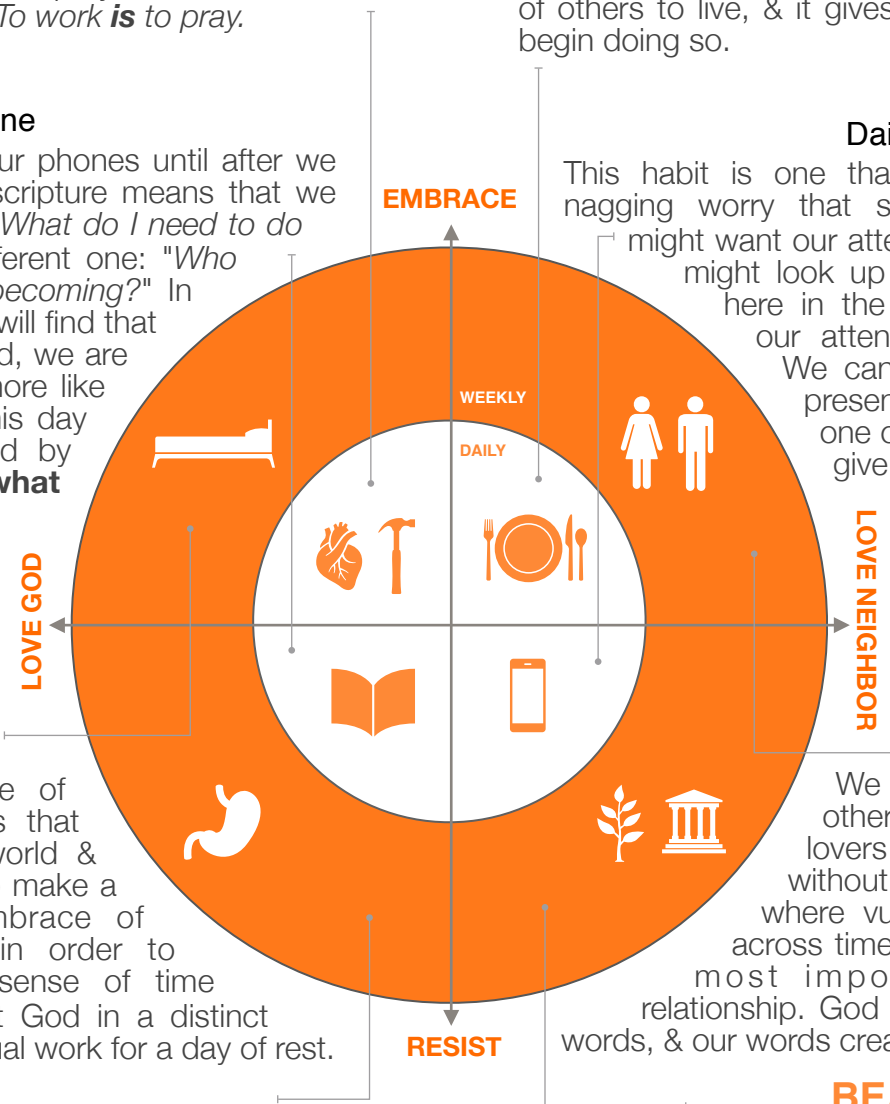
Hour of conversation with a friend

We were made for each other, & we cannot become lovers of God & neighbor without intimate relationships where vulnerability is sustained across time. Words are one of the most important mediums of relationship. God created the world with words, & our words create life in each other.

BEAUTY & JUSTICE

Curate weekly screen entertainment to 4 hours

Stories matter. So much that we must handle them with reverence. Mediums matter too, as much as messages. Resisting submission to the constant stream of addictive media means that we must curate what we do watch & then turn our eyes to other forms of art, & our hearts to the vulnerable that are so easily ignored in a world distracted by white noise of unending media.



WEEKLY HABITS

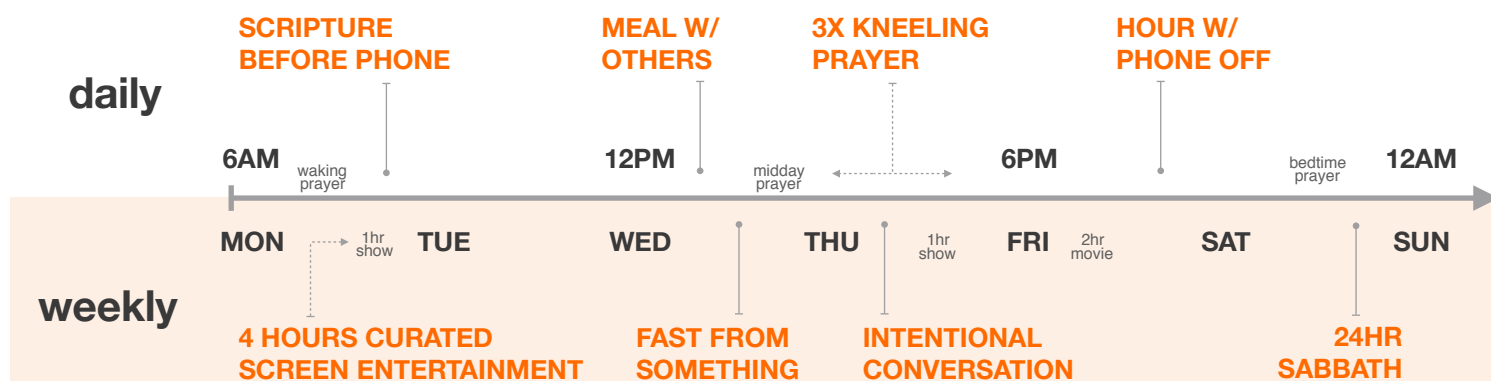
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TO LIVE IN THE WORLD IS TO BE FORMED. If we are not attentive to our formation, then someone else will do it for us. The Common Rule rhythms of embrace & resistance are rooted in the belief that the place we live in is always forming us, & we need counter-formational habits of grace to resist the grooves of busyness, consumerism, vanity & injustice *that we will otherwise be formed in should we choose to do nothing.* Some encourage embrace of the good, some require the resistance of evil, all of them are ways of grace. **Below is an example of how The Common Rule might unfold over a day & a week, though you may arrange yours differently.**

EXAMPLE DAILY RHYTHM



EXAMPLE WEEKLY RHYTHM

RULES before **LOVE**
equals **LEGALISM**
LOVE before **RULES**
equals **GOSPEL**
FORMATION

WE LABOR NOT TO EARN LOVE, BUT BECAUSE WE ARE LOVED. The starting place of The Common Rule is not to earn love, but to acknowledge that love has come to us, & we want to be formed in that love so that we can love God & neighbor better. While at first glance it could seem complicated, **look again** - *these habits are meant to actually free us from the unseen habits that are enslaving us.* We find our freedom within the constraints of love. Even more, we find it as we are constrained together. In a common way of approaching the world we find accountability, vulnerability & community in those who go along with us.

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