



GOSPEL *for* LIFE

Going the Distance with Rusty McKie

Season 2, Episode 8 Transcript

[00:00:00] Intro: Welcome to the Gospel for Life podcast. We help churches make disciples, and now here's your host, Darryl Dash.

[00:00:20] Darryl Dash: Welcome back to the podcast, my name is Darryl Dash, and today I want to talk to you about building a Rule of Life. Now, a lot of you might have never heard of a Rule of Life. I tend to get two reactions when I talk to people about what a Rule of Life even looks like. And the first reaction is this: "What in the world are you talking about?" A Rule of Life is something that's been around for a long time, but it's something that might not be part of the tradition that you belong to. And the other thing I hear is it sounds super complicated. I don't even know where to begin in building a Rule of Life.

Through my new book, *Eight Habits For Growth*, I found as I've been working with people, when we get to the Rule of Life part, people get stuck, they get intimidated when they have a piece of paper in front of them. And begin to think about the patterns and practices that they need to build into their lives.

[00:01:17]: So today I want to explore that a little bit. And I want to think about a Rule of Life as a set of rhythms and relationships that fit your life so that you can love God and others well. It's almost like an owner's manual for you, recognizing that we need to customize the habits of the Christian life for our own unique circumstances and personalities. And somebody that I've appreciated as he writes about rules of life, is Rusty McKie. Rusty McKie is a spiritual director, author, speaker, and founder of Steadfast Ministries. And it's my privilege to talk to him today to try to get his wisdom on what a Rule of Life is and how it can help us. So Rusty, welcome to the podcast.

[00:02:00] Rusty McKie: Darryl, thank you so much for having me on today.

[00:02:04] Darryl Dash: Rusty, I really appreciated your writing on what a Rule of Life can look like. Would you help us out by describing what a Rule of Life actually is?

[00:02:16] Rusty McKie: Yeah, I think there are a lot of ways that you can describe a Rule of Life, actually. But the way that I'm thinking about it most recently is you're putting on paper some rules, not like laws that you have to follow, but much more like a rule. This is what I'm shooting for, this is what I want to measure my life by. And if we could be more specific, it's what I want to measure my weeks and my days by, right? And so it's getting down on a piece of paper, some desires, and some of those may look a little more concrete. I'm going to do x, y or z this many times a week, and some might just be desires of the type of person you want to be, but you're getting those rules down on a piece of paper. And I like to think of a Rule of Life ultimately right now as a self-differentiation tool, if I can use that language. That's a bit of psychological language. But if you were to go back in church history, you know a guy named Saint Ignatius, he would talk about holy detachment, I think that's another way to talk about self-differentiation. And if you were to go back even farther, there's a guy named Jesus who talks about surrender a good bit. In this concept of, "to really gain your life, you have to lose your life, and those who try to keep it will ultimately lose it as well."

[00:03:41]: So for me personally, a Rule of Life helps me decide what are the things in life that I'm going to say yes to so that I can abide more deeply in my relationship with Jesus. And then what are the things in my life that I need to say no to, so that I can abide more deeply in my relationship with Jesus. And I want to abide in my relationship with Jesus so that I can bear fruit in my relationships. So that's how I would begin to talk about a Rule of Life. It's much more like a ruler than a law book, and it really is this self-differentiation tool to help us define who we are in Christ.

[00:04:21] Darryl Dash: So where did this whole idea of a Rule of Life come from? Because it was a long time, I'm in my 50s now, but I think it was like man, it had to be 40 years of my life that I never heard of such a thing. So where did this whole idea of building a Rule of Life come from?

[00:04:39] Rusty McKie: Well, from my knowledge and correct me if I'm wrong here, it comes from around the fourth century. You have the desert fathers and mothers heading out into the desert because they found their lives being ruled and dominated by the predominant culture in Rome. And as these folks wanted to experience deeper life with Jesus and not be just driven mad by their culture, but they wanted to really be compelled by the spirit of God. They began to form

monastic communities and in those communities, they then began to say, these are the Rule of Life for our communities that we're going to commit to, and we're going to live by. So ultimately, the origin story of Rule of Life is that it began as a community affair. Which is interesting in our individualistic culture, a lot of the conversations these days revolve around your Rule of Life or my Rule of Life.

[00:05:40]: And I think it is important to remember the beginnings and just see a Rule of Life as helpful for sure, just on an individual level, and I would recommend anyone toward it. However, a Rule of Life is going to function best if you can have some folks who lock arms with you. They're aware of your rule, you're aware of theirs, and then you're able to help encourage one another in the process of not only writing it out. It's easy to write something out, but then also to have set aside times to remember and reflect and read over it. And to put your actual weeks and days up against the ruler of your Rule of Life to say am I saying yes to those things I should be saying yes to? And am I saying no to those things I need to be saying no to, so that I can abide in Jesus.

[00:06:32] Darryl Dash: If I'm not mistaken, your previous church, the church that you pastored up until recently, you had a common rule together. So could you describe that for us and how that was created?

[00:06:45] Rusty McKie: Yeah, that was really a project that we were working on. And there's a kind of a tipping point in our culture right now, and just seeing the ways that we had done spiritual formation that maybe those ways that had worked for a while. You know, we had community groups, we would do sermon discussion, so there'd be a sermon preached on Sunday, and then we would talk about the sermon. We just noticed in our context that it kind of became this hamster wheel type experience for people. Where they would go on a Sunday and then go to their community group and they talk about these things. But then they never really felt their actual faith was developing or going anywhere. So we just thought, "Hey, what if we went back to an older way and began to focus much more on what it looks like to live the Christian life together?" And so we taught our church about a Rule of Life and talk about how it's a wonderfully flexible tool that we can use. But we also said, "Hey, on a monthly basis, we're going to give you some spiritual disciplines to put in there that we think are countercultural. I think that's another big part of a Rule of Life is that you can make it to really combat the streams of where our culture is trying to take us.

[00:08:17]: Personally, I have a bit of scoliosis. Hopefully nobody can notice, maybe when I'm in my 90s they will. But with that scoliosis, my spine curves in a direction that's not necessarily helpful, and it's not healthy. It doesn't feel good and what I have to do in order to stay healthy and to actually feel good, is I have

to do some counteractive stretches. And so a Rule of Life you're putting in okay, knowing my own personality, our own culture is bent, what are some practices we can put in place so that we can be healthy in Christ? And we can again bear that fruit in a world that desperately needs the good news of Jesus. And they need to not just hear it, they need to see it in people's lives. So as a church we would say, here are practices that we believe are countercultural, and will help you be a healthy follower of Jesus in the 21st century.

[00:09:18] Darryl Dash: So what kinds of things would go in a Rule of Life? Could you give me an example of what one might look like?

[00:09:24] Rusty McKie: Yeah, probably the easiest place to start is with spiritual discipline. You can put spiritual discipline in there. Everyone breaks up their Rule of Life differently. I break mine up into four categories, and I try to get it on one piece of paper. It used to be much more complicated, but I've tried to make it less complicated as time goes on. Which I would say as well, another good point with the Rule of Life, is it really should be a living document. It should change and adjust as your life changes and as your life adjusts. And the things that work in one season for you, are not going to work in another season. And you shouldn't feel shame or guilt about that, you should just be prayerful and follow the spirits leading in that. So I break mine up into four categories; communion with God, rest, community with others, and work. And then under those, I put various spiritual disciplines.

[00:10:24]: So one that is always on my Rule of Life no matter what season, is Sabbath. That always goes under my rest category: one day, 24-hour period of no paid or unpaid work. But a day for really to pray and play, as Eugene Peterson once put it. A day to delight in God and delight in his good gifts. A good resource for folks here if they're trying to think of okay, how can I fill out my Rule of Life? would be a Adelle Calhoun *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*. Phenomenal book that has categories actually, that breaks down disciplines into the various categories of communion with God or community with others. Breaks down disciplines into work and service. And so as you're thinking through how to fill out your rule, it can be really helpful to say here's a book where I want to grow in this and here's a practice. Okay, where can I put that in my rule, so that I can begin to grow?

[00:11:27] Darryl Dash: Man, that's so good, and I love how practical that is. How did you begin to even get interested in what a Rule of Life is, and why you, in particular, should have one? How did you get involved and interested yourself?

[00:11:46] Rusty McKie: That journey for me started on the edge of burnout, a great place to get a Rule of Life. I was in a season of pastoral ministry that was really challenging. And not only was pastoring the church that I planted challenging, but on top of that, we as a family had just a lot of painful losses. A lot of deaths in our family. Death through miscarriages, through long seasons of infertility, through my wife's younger brother suddenly and unexpectedly passing away. So just a lot of grief. I look back on that season and the term that kind of summarizes it, was compounded grief. And there are just so many little losses and big losses stacking on top of one another. And the demands of a young church plant that didn't allow us the time or the space to process them. And in that season, thankfully, my leadership team was gracious and encouraged me towards a sabbatical. So I was able to get a brief sabbatical where we could step away and really process our pain and our losses.

[00:13:04]: And in that season I read Peter Scazzero's *Emotionally Healthy Leader*, and in his book he has the chapter on a Rule of Life. And I just thought wow, I've never heard about this before. And if I remember correctly from his book, he talks about this word for Rule of Life from the Latin comes from a trellis and that really you're building a trellis. That then allows your own abiding in Christ to grow in your life, to grow and to flourish with Jesus. So that was my first introduction to a Rule of Life and started doing one immediately. Again, like I said earlier, my initial Rule of Life was very packed, was very crowded, very achievement oriented, which I contend to be. And over the years as God has matured me, grown me, calmed me down a little bit. My Rule of Life has also shrunk, it's grown down, and it's grown to be much smaller than it once was. So it's a wonderful tool that's very flexible. I would not necessarily recommend you look at someone else's Rule of Life to build out your own. That's not necessarily a good place to start, in my opinion.

[00:14:31]: Darryl Dash: Yeah, that's good advice. I love how it's really changed in your life and how you've, like you say, it's a living document. So probably your Rule of Life is very different from your initial Rule of Life.

[00:14:44] Rusty McKie: Way different Darryl.

[00:14:47] Darryl Dash: And correct me if I'm wrong, I think when people hear of a Rule of Life, at first, as you say, they might think of something like "Oh man, it's an obligation." And I get the sense for you it's not something that weighs you down, but it's something that actually freezes you. So almost like the opposite of what you would expect a rule might feel, like it's going to be restrictive and yet, what I hear you saying is, your Rule of Life leads to greater freedom. So could you talk about that? How does your Rule of Life not just become another

list of ways that I'm failing or not measuring up, but actually a guide to really flourishing in your life and living the abundant life?

[00:15:34] Rusty McKie: Yeah, I think that's a fair observation Darryl. And that's not to say that I haven't had seasons where my rule did feel like an obligation to tackle and just the drudgery of knocking out these tasks. However, I think pretty early on, I just realized if I'm starting to feel that way about my Rule of Life, then I'm doing it wrong. A Rule of Life primarily for me is about relationship. It's about my relationship with Jesus, it's about my relationship with others, and my relationship with Jesus is life-giving. And my relationship with others should be life-giving. And so with that, if my rule becomes a point "Ugh, I don't want to pull it out and look at it because I'm going to feel shame or guilt over not doing it," I'm just at the point now where it's like if I'm feeling that, then it's time to rework my Rule of Life. That's not necessarily a challenging emotion for me to dwell in. It's more of, here's the check the engine light on your car that's saying well it's probably just time to rewrite it. Because something in my season has changed, which is now impacting my soul as I interact with my Rule of Life.

[00:16:56]: And so I definitely try to keep it kind of front forward, facing towards joy and towards life. I think also going back to the idea of a rule as a self-differentiation tool. It really does force you to say, "What do I want? What do I want out of life?" And with that, it really forces you to say "If I really want these things, then what do I need to be saying yes to with my time? What do I need to be saying no to?" Saying no is harder for some than it is for others. It's definitely been a journey for me to learn how to say no. But honestly, a Rule of Life is pretty liberating in that regard. As I plan out my weeks, I'm looking at my Rule of Life first, and it's helping me look and really prioritize what I value, and say no, that doesn't line up with my rule. In fact, saying yes to that is going to be counterproductive towards my abiding in Jesus and my loving of my neighbor. So I'm going to say no.

[00:17:56] Darryl Dash: Rusty, I know that you're in the middle of a fairly significant transition in your life. You've just stepped down as pastor of a church that you planted, and you founded Steadfast Ministries. And I know that any period of transition is full of stress. Even good stress is still stress, right? How have you found your Rule of Life has helped you through this period of transition? Or maybe it hasn't but if it has, how has it helped you?

[00:18:28] Rusty McKie: Yeah, I would certainly agree with everything that you just said. Transitions are really challenging, and I don't know if I or most of us really do transitions well. I think embedded within transition is loss, so I think that's part of why we struggle with transition. Even if it's a good transition, like in our circumstance, we were able to transition from the church I started with really

positive relationships. We were practically sent by our church to this new ministry. I'm still very close with the leaders of the church that I started. So looking at it at a glance, all of that is wonderful and good. And it's still sad because it's a decade of my wife's life that we've invested in this church that we care about deeply still to this day. And so even though we're excited for what God is leading us into with this new ministry, there is a loss.

[00:19:33]: So I say all that I have seen that play out in my Rule of Life specifically with okay, it's another time for adjustment for my rule. And whereas, you know, I can have this propensity to do more and to be really productive. I've actually pared my Rule of Life way down in this season in order to create space. So a lot of the things on my Rule of Life are more geared towards practices that are going to slow me down, and give me space to actually digest this transition. And all of the multitude of emotions that come along with it. So it's been very helpful, but I don't think my Rule of Life would have been helpful if I had given myself the expectation that I need to keep on plugging along in the same way that I did before.

[00:20:32] Darryl Dash: You know, it's interesting, I tried to read my Rule of Life fairly regularly as a living document, and I was transferring it into a new journal the other day and thinking, "This is really good stuff, I really do this." A lot of what I find in my Rule of Life is that I have a propensity to act in a certain way, that's not always healthy. For instance, I tend to overwork and be geared towards achieving and accomplishing as a way of feeling I matter, that my existence matters. A lot of the value of life is actually about leaning the opposite direction as a counterbalance to getting the rest that I need, to getting my identity not from my work but out of just who God says I am. So could you speak to that, how much is our Rule of Life helpful in recognizing our maybe unique temptations? And providing a counterbalance, maybe a different way of living that helps us avoid the traps that we might otherwise fall into?

[00:21:43] Rusty McKie: I think that's really wise and insightful. I mentioned earlier how a Rule of Life can be intentional to put practices in place that help you go against the streams of culture. It can be a counterbalance to the external forces that press in upon us. I think there's wisdom in saying that as you stick with your Rule of Life, you will begin to notice things about yourself. And you will begin to notice the culture of your own soul and the unhealthy streams that can carry you away. And I've certainly seen that in my life as well. Very similar, kind of prone to overwork, and I know before I did a Rule of Life, I had this constant feeling of guilt, especially as a pastor, a constant feeling of guilt of "I'm not doing enough." It would really weigh me down to the point where I would come to my Sabbath, and here's my day of rest, here's my day of delight. And on that day, I

would just be miserable because I would have all this shame and guilt from not doing enough.

[00:22:55]: Then one of the earliest revelations from my Rule of Life was I began to look at it and say, oh actually I'm doing too much and it did just what you're saying. It revealed a tendency in me that ultimately going back to Jesus' call to surrender. To pick up our cross, to follow him, to lose our life so that we might gain our life. I've got to crucify some of these tendencies in myself, so my real life became a revelation of those tendencies. And then it also became a place and a method to help me begin to address what it looks like to crucify those parts of myself again so that we can abide in Jesus. It's all about relationship. It's not just about our progress or our achievements, it's about what are the obstacles to union and communion with Christ. And how can we take those obstacles out of the way experientially?

[00:24:05] Darryl Dash: I talk to people and I've discovered that a lot of people just find it intimidating to begin to write their own Rule of Life. So what are some ways that somebody could get started, especially if they feel like they don't even know where to start, and maybe don't do it right? What advice would you give them on how to build a Rule of Life?

[00:24:23] Rusty McKie: Well, I know this great guy who just came out with a book on "Eight Habits" that I would say pick up. Seriously, I mean there are so many great books out there on a Rule of Life, so I would say find one of those. If that's your book Darryl, which I would recommend to folks or if it's one of Pete Scazzero's books or John Mark Comer. There are so many different authors writing about Rule of Life right now, which is really exciting.

But even with that said, I know a lot of this is based on personality as well, some personalities, even just reading about a Rule of Life sounds awful and like drudgery. And with that, I think just acknowledging your personality first, understanding some of us are more prone towards activity, and that's kind of how we deal with the chaos of the world. Others of us can be on the other extreme, where rather than over function, overwork, to deal with the chaos of life, we just get overwhelmed by the chaos of life. And so I know some folks where it's like you're telling me, I have to write down practices I'm going to do and then check on them and all that. Well no, that's not what we're saying at all.

[00:25:37]: So I would say where to start, just keep it really simple. For the overachievers, the active folks in the room, with your Rule of Life, you probably need to pull the dial back. You probably need to push on the brakes and say "How can I put less on my Rule of Life, but put the essential task on my Rule of Life?" For the folks who are overwhelmed by the idea of it, I would say just

writing one, is a great first step. You don't need to dial back your activity, you actually need to grow in your intentionality and in your engagement in that. And just for those folks simply trying and starting is so significant. So I would say just keep it as simple as you can. And again if it becomes overwhelming, If it becomes a guilt-inducing experience, then that's probably just an indicator not to give it up. But it's an indicator to go back and start deleting some stuff, start scratching some stuff through.

[00:26:49] Darryl Dash: You've written a couple of good articles on a Rule of Life, and I'll link to them in the show notes. I found them really helpful and freeing. You have a way of taking the pressure off as you write about it, so I appreciate that.

[00:27:01] Rusty McKie: Thank you.

[00:27:02] Darryl Dash: Rusty, I want to ask you a couple of personal questions if I can, what are you learning recently in your life?

[00:27:13] Rusty McKie: Well, you mentioned earlier that we're in a bit of a season of transition, and with starting this new ministry: Steadfast Ministries, there's so much joy in that. Because it's rare to be able to find that sweet spot in those moments where God wants us to be right now. So there's such a sweetness, goodness, joy and enjoyment to that. As you mentioned earlier, transitions also involve stress, and there's also the stressful side of just the uncertainty of the future, no longer having the stability of finances that we once did. So what I'm learning right now in the midst of this moment that we find ourselves, is that we can trust God with the uncertainty. And I think I spent so much of my life trying to figure out the future or plan for the future or anticipate everything, so that the future can be secure. I'm just at a point in my life where I'm really tired and exhausted from doing that. And I'm sensing Jesus inviting me to just trust him and to enjoy the adventure.

[00:28:36]: And I was talking with Jesus about this the other day, and kind of the madness of anxiety. That anxiety is trying to figure out an unknown future, so that we feel secure in the future, yet we're making ourselves insecure in the moment because we're ridden with anxiety. I was talking with Jesus about that, and I just got this impression of God's kindness to leave the future uncertain for us. So as terrifying as the future can be, and I just think if I can just know the future, then I won't be terrified, I really believe the reality is, if God showed us our future, we would be even more terrified. So this is what I'm learning, God's goodness and kindness to withhold certain information from us until the appropriate time. That he doesn't reveal what he's calling us to do in the future until we are equipped and we're ready to hear it and to respond to it. So that's

what I'm learning, I'm learning of God's goodness and uncertainty and actually his goodness to keep us in uncertainty, and that we can trust him in that.

[00:29:57]: That's so helpful because I think everybody these days may not be making a job transition, but right now, in our current age, I think all of us are living with a certain amount of instability. So that's a really helpful insight. Well I'm going to sneak in a bonus question, but my second last question is this, what's encouraging you right now?

[00:30:21] Rusty McKie: That's easy, and this is going to sound a bit of an oxymoron. Over the past year or so, I have been deeply encouraged by the Internet. I've been deeply encouraged through social media, and hopefully everyone chuckles because they know what a hot mess a lot of social media has been for folks. And I'm not talking about all the fights and arguing that's not encouraging to me. But within that over this past year and the shutdowns, I have been able to connect with various individuals, you being one of those Darryl, that I would have never connected with otherwise. And as again, we're kind of in this mode of this new ministry, as we're stepping out in faith in this venture, it has been so deeply encouraging to see how many people from afar and locally have come around Rachel, myself, and my family and had supported us. Either with words of encouragement or taking the risk of jumping out and saying, "Hey, will you be my spiritual director?" Or by folks just saying, "Hey, I'd love to help you and this new venture in any way that I can." So we felt the love, the care, the support, and the encouragement of others in this season. And I'm really grateful for that because there is just so much out in the world right now that is discouraging coming from people. So I'm really grateful that God has given us some really concrete examples of there are still good people in the world. Who are not just out there for themselves, but they are loving others and they're loving us.

[00:32:05] Darryl Dash: It's a good idea to create our social media feeds to the point where the people we follow are helping us love God and others more. And then social media becomes actually a life-giving place and not a place where we go to be discouraged and overwhelmed, so I totally agree with you. I want to ask you the question I want to sneak in, tell us about Steadfast Ministries and what you're doing? And also how people can find out more about that ministry, and also you yourself?

[00:32:35] Rusty McKie: Thank you for asking. Steadfast Ministries is really my passion project that the Lord has been working into me over, I could probably say my whole life. But specifically, I look over the past 15 years and I can just see the progression of how the Lord's brought me here. So I'm the founder of Steadfast Ministries, and through that, I offer various services to the broader

church. I offer spiritual direction, which is very similar to counseling for those who don't know. I would say the difference there is that when it comes to counseling most models, someone will come in for an hour session and say, "Here's my struggle." "Here's my problem." And then a counselor will very helpfully say let's understand the past factors that have led you to this point, and let's get some tools in your tool belt to help you in the future.

[00:33:28]: So when it comes to spiritual direction though, you're not so much focused on the past or the present or the future, you're more so focused on the present moment. Rather than you having anxiety, so let's understand where it came from and how to help it in the future. In spiritual direction, we would say let's actually pray together, and let's seek to experience the peace of Christ right now. And so it's much more of a focus on being present to your life, paying attention to your life, being present to Jesus, and really developing within your own soul. Just a more slowed down pace so that we can be attentive to both God's invitations, and also we can then be attentive to our responses to that. So I love spiritual direction, that's a wonderful thing that I get to do with Steadfast Ministries. I also offer sabbatical coaching for folks in ministry, helping them prepare for their sabbatical, caring for them on their sabbatical, and helping them with reentry. And then the final thing I offer is workshops. I do those for whole churches, I do them for church staff, I also do them for various organizations and their staffs. And those workshops really are equipping and giving folks tools to grow emotional and spiritual health.

[00:34:55]: You know, I like to think that when it comes to teams and churches, shared convictions bring us together. And we need to continue to have those shared convictions. That's a good thing. But really, what keeps us together at the end of the day is spiritual and emotional maturity, and so it's a big passion of mine. If you could sum up all of Steadfast Ministries, I want everything I do to help others stay grounded in Christ so that they can go the distance in life and work. So that's what I'm doing now with Steadfast Ministries, and if anyone's interested in that, you can check out my website, it's steadfastmin.com. You can find my services there, and I also have several other free resources to help folks grow in that spiritual and emotional maturity that they can check out as well.

[00:35:54] Darryl Dash: I was just listening to a podcast before our podcast today. I was listening to this guy and he was saying every pastor needs three relationships. And one of them that he mentioned is a spiritual director. So yeah, it really is valuable, I can attest to the value of that relationship. And I don't know if I would be in ministry today if I hadn't been blessed with a spiritual director. So Rusty, it's good to get to know you better, I hope people read your material. I hope that people check out Steadfast Ministries, and I'm just grateful for your voice. You're one of the people on the internet right now that when I see your

name show up in my inbox or on my social media feed, I know that I'm going to find something there that's useful and encouraging. And that helps me not just do more, but to experience the presence of Jesus more in my life and ministry. So I want to thank you for your ministry and for the wisdom that you've shared with us today.

[00:36:48] Rusty McKie: Thank you Darryl, I can say all the same for you. Really appreciate all that you're doing, and thank you again for having me on today.

[00:36:55] Darryl Dash: My absolute privilege, thank you.

[00:36:55] Rusty McKie: Thanks.