

The Common Rule

www.thecommonrule.org



Habits of Light for a World of Darkness

THE COMMON RULE ADVENT EDITION is a set of four daily habits designed to help you lean into the rich meaning of Advent - that Jesus has come to renew all things. The Advent Edition also contains a daily [Prayer & Reading Plan](#) below and [online](#). Rooted in the idea that our most ordinary of habits are forming our souls in the most extraordinary of ways, The Common Rule invites you to a new set of habits for Advent. Practicing the Advent Edition will help us celebrate that the King has come & wait for him to come again.

Table of Contents & Instructions

www.thecommonrule.org

FAQs	3
Advent Habits Summary	4
Advent Scripture Before Phone Readings	5
Christmas Morning Liturgy	14
“All Things New” New Year’s Habit Devotional	19
The Common Rule Habit Planner	22
Access Online	www.thecommonrule.org

How to try The Common Rule for Advent:

1 **ADMIT CHRISTMAS IS CRAZY**

Our rituals are bizarre, we need new ones.

3 **READ ABOUT THE HABITS**

Read this PDF to learn about the four daily habits. There is even more information on each habit on www.thecommonrule.org. So go there and subscribe to the mailing list as well.

2 **INVITE SOME FRIENDS**

Communal habits are formational habits.

4 **CELEBRATE & WAIT**

Starting on November 27, practice the four habits with your community for a new kind of Advent.

FAQs

www.thecommonrule.org

WHAT ARE THE HABITS? The Common Rule habits for Advent are summarized in visual form on the following page. You can also read about them and follow along on the website at www.thecommonrule.org/advent-edition.

WHY ADVENT? Advent is the season where the church celebrates the King who has come, and waits for the King who is coming again. The holiday season is filled with rituals that seem to sparkle on the outside, but underneath aren't celebrating anything but consumerism. Further, they are often filled with such busyness that we end up spending the season cultivating perpetual rush rather than patient longing. We need a new set of rituals for Advent, and that is exactly what The Common Rule - Advent Edition! has in mind.

WHEN IS ADVENT? Advent starts on Sunday, November 27, 2022 and lasts until Christmas day. The scripture readings in this resource, however, walk you all the way through the New Year.

WHY HABITS? Habits - even our most mundane ones - are matters of worship, and thus powerfully formational. This is even more true during the holidays. Many of our rituals and customs are rooted in the worship of consumerism and greed while thinly cloaked in Christian words. The Common Rule - Advent Edition! is one way to resist how these customs form us, and embrace the way the incarnation of Christ the King forms us.

ISN'T THIS LEGALISTIC? No! Legalism is the misguided idea that doing the right things will earn us God's love. We reject it. The incarnation is the astounding truth that though we were lost God came to us anyway. Practicing a new set of habits is not going to earn you His love - you already have it! It is a response to that love. It is an expression of thanks, hope, and a desire to practice the love that the incarnation has announced.

Advent Starts

NOVEMBER

27

Sunday

THE 4 DAILY HABITS

www.thecommonrule.org

#1 KNEELING PRAYER 3X A DAY:

By stopping three times a day to kneel and pray, we are trying to punctuate our day with prayer so that our Christmas season is framed by something besides holiday busyness. These short prayers will instead help frame your day in longing for the light of Advent - Jesus the Messiah, who has come and will come again to make all things new! In the **Prayer & Reading Plan** on page 5 (and also on the website) you will find three short, one sentence prayers, for morning, midday and evening. The act of kneeling has a way of grabbing the attention of the body, which is one way of grabbing the attention of the mind. Try it. It will be more significant than may you think.

#3 SCRIPTURE BEFORE PHONE:

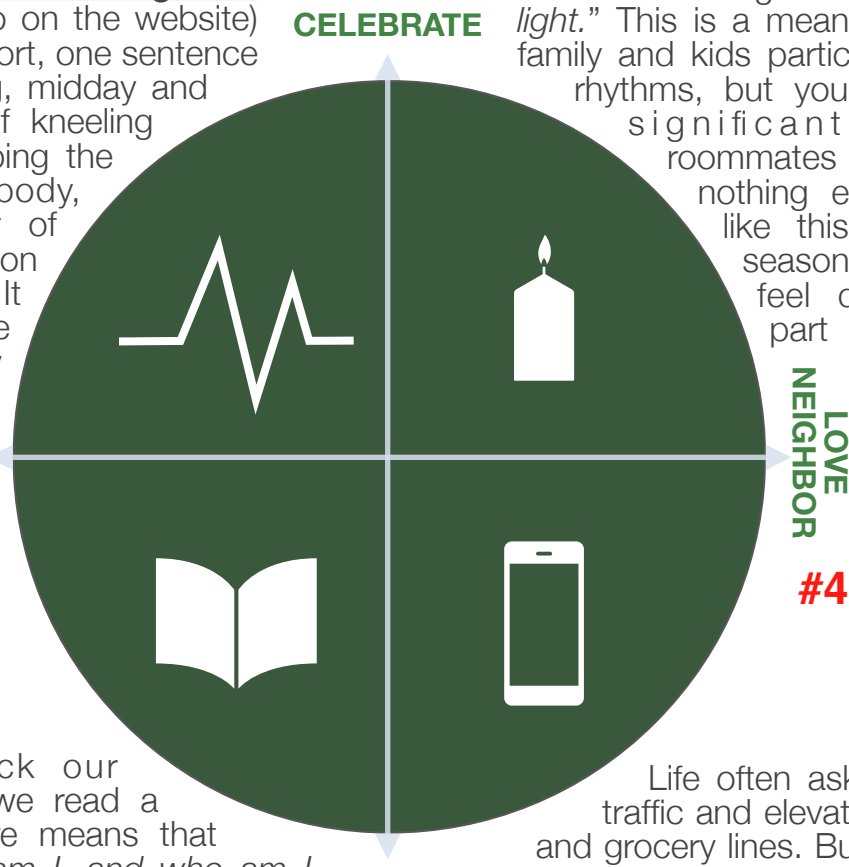
Refusing to check our phones until after we read a passage of scripture means that we ask first "Who am I, and who am I becoming?", not, "What do I need to do today?" The Advent Edition provides a short scripture to read each morning - before you use your phone. The goal is to be formed first in the love of God instead of the demands of the day. I suggest printing out the **Prayer & Reading Plan** on page 5 and keeping it beside your bed or on your coffee table. (However, if you're in a pinch, the readings are online too, so yes, you can read them from your phone - irony acknowledged. Better to start somewhere than do nothing at all!)

#2 LIGHT A CANDLE:

This is a tactile way to be reminded of the promise of Advent - that Christ is light, and the light has come and the light will come again. There are many ways to practice this habit, but my favorite is the way our family does it before dinner. Each night before eating, we start the meal by lighting a candle and together saying: "Christ is light." This is a meaningful way to get family and kids participating in Advent rhythms, but you'll find it just as significant eating with roommates or eating alone. If nothing else, small habits like this help set apart seasons, and make time feel different - that's part of the point of Advent.

#4 NO PHONE WHILE WAITING:

Life often asks us to wait. In traffic and elevators, at stoplights and grocery lines. But we don't know how to wait. We don't like to wait. So we fill the time with useless, distracted glances at our phones. Through the season of Advent, do not touch your phone while waiting. Learn to wait. Look around you, look at all the people with their stories and their lives just as real, as beautiful, and as painful as yours. See them. Be present. Talk to them. Learn to wait, learn to long, learn to remember that all of creation waits for the King to return.



SCRIPTURE BEFORE PHONE

DAILY ADVENT READINGS & PRAYERS

All prayers and readings also available on www.thecommonrule.org

DAILY KNEELING PRAYERS

MORNING: *Father, I pray that I would enter this day as your Son entered the world, full of love and hope. Amen.*

NOON: *Jesus, I pray that I would be present in my work as you were present in this world, full of humility and service. Amen.*

BEDTIME: *Holy Spirit, I pray that I would be at peace in my rest knowing that you came to bring peace to the world, and will one day bring rest to all things. Amen.*

SCRIPTURE BEFORE PHONE READINGS

First Week of Advent | Nov. 27 - Dec. 3

Sunday **John 1:1-9**
 Monday **Matthew 4:12-17**
 Tuesday **Isaiah 60:1-3**
 Wednesday **John 3:16-21**
 Thursday **Ephesians 5:6-14**
 Friday **Isaiah 60:19-22**
 Saturday **"Oh Realm of Light"**

Second Week of Advent | Dec. 4- 10

Sunday **Psalms 119:105-106**
 Monday **Mark 1:1-3**
 Tuesday **Luke 15:6, 9 & 32**
 Wednesday **Isaiah 40:1-5**
 Thursday **Isaiah 55:1-8**
 Friday **Luke 3:1-6**
 Saturday **"Joy to the World"**

Third Week of Advent | Dec. 11 - 17

Sunday **Eph. 2:13 & Lev. 26:13**
 Monday **Luke 4:16-21**
 Tuesday **Romans 15:4-13**

Wednesday **Zephaniah 3:14-17**
 Thursday **Psalms 27:1-4**
 Friday **Isaiah 11:1-10**
 Saturday **"O Holy Night"**

Fourth Week of Advent | Dec. 18 - 24

Sunday **Luke 2:25-33**
 Monday **Mark 13:33-37**
 Tuesday **Psalms 130:5-8**
 Wednesday **Luke 24:32**
 Thursday **Luke 2:8-15**
 Friday **"O Come O Come Emmanuel"**
 Saturday **Matthew 1:18-23**

New Year's Readings | Dec. 25 - Dec. 31

Sunday **Revelation 21:1-5**
 Monday **Proverbs 29:18**
 Tuesday **"All Things New"**
 Wednesday **Romans 12:1-2**
 Thursday **Psalms 115:2-8**
 Friday **1 Sam. 7:12 & "Come Thou Fount"**
 Saturday **Revelation 22:20**

Week 1 | November 27 - December 3

LIGHT & DARK

In the shadow of darkness, a light has dawned.

Sunday | John 1:1-9 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light. The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world.

There is light. There is dark. There is life. There is death. And it is in the light that we find our life. There is truth and the freedom it brings. And there are lies and the bondage of conspiracy. We do not live in a neutral world. Yet often we live as if the stakes are not high. As if good and evil do not war within us, and around us. Pray, and ask God whether you are aware of the light and the dark. Examine yourself, and ask whether you are wise at knowing the difference.

Monday | Matthew 4:12-17 Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: *“The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles - the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.”* From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

It is us, and it is our neighbors, who are the people dwelling in darkness. The beginning of Advent is to admit that we live in the valley of the shadow of death. That things are not well. We may be numb to it, we may be blind to it, but we must wake up to it. To wake up means to realize that reality is a dim shadow of what it could be and what it ought to be. Yet in this shadow of death, a light has dawned. Pray and ask God to help you feel (not just see, but feel) that you live in a time and a place that is not OK, and that this time and place needs many things, but more than anything else, it needs the presence of Jesus.

Tuesday | Isaiah 60:1-3 Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.

Light has the quality of attraction. Light a candle at your table or desk today, see if it does not make the space more welcoming. Fires and lights are places of warmth and conversation. They are the places where light happens. This is what the glory of God is: a light so warm and bright that we all want to come to it. This is the light we are waiting for. Pray this morning that you and your community would be like the light of Jesus, the kind of warm presence that draws the outsider in.

Wednesday | John 3:16-21 For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

Light is comforting, but it also exposes. This is radical, because most of the world around us now echoes our own distorted voice. Most of the world is an electronic mirror, reflecting back the thing you need the least - a

whitewashed version of yourself. But God's light is different. It reveals the truth, even when the truth is unpleasant. It is in the light of Jesus that we finally see what is actually in us, who we really are and what we really do. But do we want to see? Do we want that darkness exposed? Confess this morning what needs to be exposed in your life. Then tell that to a trusted friend and ask them to pray with and for you.

Thursday | Ephesians 5:6-14 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for it is because of these things that the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not associate with them, for once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is a shame even to speak of the things that they do in secret; but when anything is exposed by the light it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it is said, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light."

The way of secret lives and inner darkness is death. But that is why Christ came, to shine the light that we might rise again from this darkness. Yesterday you confessed something, today is the day to turn and leave it. Today is the day to see that to walk as a child of light is to walk out of that former darkness and into the light. Pray that God would lead you out of that thing today, and then begin to take the first step. Turn off that screen, shut down that website, throw away that thing you need to, delete that account, write something down, leave that place of darkness. And know that whenever you walk to the light, you are walking towards Christ - He is with you, and that is always the better place to be.

Friday | Isaiah 60:19-22 The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night; but the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself; for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended. Your people shall all be righteous; they shall possess the land for ever, the shoot of my planting, the work of my hands, that I might be glorified. The least one shall become a clan, and the smallest one a mighty nation; I am the LORD; in its time I will hasten it.

It will not always be like it is now. This constant wrestling with yourself and the world, the ever-present tangle with darkness. There is a day coming where all that will be put to rest. You may have never named it, but this is the day you have spent your whole life longing for. Everyone has. This day of eternal morning, where the presence of God is with us and we are with each other, this is what the whole world longs for. This is the center of Advent - the hope of Jesus' renewal. Advent reminds us that the world has a future. Because of Jesus, that day is actually coming. Pray that you would long for nothing short of that, because nothing short of that is worth your longing.

Saturday | Oh Realm of Light

Oh realm of light! whose morning star to Bethlehem's manger led the way. Not yet upon our longing eyes shines the full splendor of thy day. Yet still across the centuries fall, both strong and sweet, our Lord's command. And still with steadfast faith we cry, "Behold, the kingdom is at hand!"

Oh realm of Heav'n! whose dawn began with love's divine, incarnate breath, our hearts were slow to understand the lessons of that life and death. Yet though with stammering tongues we tell redemption's story, strange and sweet. The world's Redeemer, lifted up shall draw the nations to His feet.

Oh realm of peace! whose music clear swept through Judea's starlit skies, still the harsh sounds of human strife break on thy heavenly harmonies. Yet shall thy song of triumph ring in full accord, from land to land, and men with angels learn to sing, "Behold, the kingdom is at hand!"

Week 2 | December 4 - 10

LOST & FOUND

We have a home. We have a way home.

Sunday | Psalms 119:105-106 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to keep your righteous rules. I am severely afflicted; give me life, O Lord, according to your word! Accept my freewill offerings of praise, O Lord, and teach me your rules. I hold my life in my hand continually, but I do not forget your law. The wicked have laid a snare for me, but I do not stray from your precepts. Your testimonies are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart. I incline my heart to perform your statutes forever, to the end.

It is hard to know where to go, it is hard to know what to do. This confusion is one of the hallmarks of being human. We do not always know the way. We spend so much of our life confused, we have no idea who to believe. This can be so painful - until you realize that that is normal for the world, and that's why we look to God instead. The word of God is a light to our feet - it shows us the way so that we can walk straight - so that we can go somewhere worth going. This Psalm is in part about scripture, yes. Indeed there is so much wisdom in scripture for showing us the way in life. But it is ultimately about Christ, the Word made flesh. He is the Word to end all words. He is the path. He is the one that turns us from being lost, to being found. Pray that you would not walk alone in your confusion, but that by studying the word of God and relying on the Word made Flesh you would find the way, the truth and the life.

Monday | Mark 1:1-3 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'"

To live in the world is to live in the wilderness, in exile. But there is a way home, and there is Someone to lead us home. Have you ever considered the remarkable fact that Someone has gone before you? That even when you cannot quite see it yet, Someone has prepared the way for you. Even in your wilderness and your confusion, there is a God who goes before you, who protects you, who guides you. Even in the strange places, you are not alone. Because Jesus (whose name is Emmanuel - God with us) walks before us, creating a path. Pray a prayer of thankfulness, that even when you think you are lost, God is with you, making a way.

Tuesday | Luke 15:6, 9 & 32 He calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' / 'She calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' / 'It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'

Yesterday you considered that God is with you, and that he goes before you and makes a way for you. But there is more than that too. He does not just walk before you, he has actually come out to find you! Over and over, Jesus tells stories that describe him as the crazed lover, the one that defies all logic and reason to go out and find something that he loves. Did you know that it is you? It is you that he goes out to find. Pray and ask God to open your eyes to the remarkable reality that he loves you, individually and specifically. He loves you enough to leave everything, come and find you, and take you home.

Wednesday | Isaiah 40:1-5 Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

Think of a child lost in a crowd, and then think of the comfort that follows when she is found by her parent. Think of the overwhelming peace that settles in when you know that you were lost, but now you are found. This is the comfort that God is bringing the world. The comfort of suddenly being found. We are lost in our selfishness, lost in our depression, lost in our scrolling, lost in our injustice, lost in our wars, lost in our politics, lost in our lies, lost in our wilderness of a world. We have gotten ourselves lost and it is nobody's fault but ours. And yet - God will find us. And God will bring comfort. He will hold us like the Father that he is, and tell us that the night is gone, and that morning has come. That the war is over. That all has been forgiven, and that all will be made well. Spend a moment of silence, and try your best to envision yourself found and in his arms. Try to imagine that the war is over.

Thursday | Isaiah 55:1-8 “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know, and a nation that did not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, and of the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.” “Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.

We spend our lives searching after so many things. Spending money where we think it will buy us happiness, spinning our time away trying to feel like we are worth something. “Why do you do it?” God gently says to his people. “Here I am. I am everything you are looking for, and more. Come find me.” It is somewhat incredible that the mysterious God who created everything from nothing reveals himself. He can actually be found. Today, think of how you can look for him. Look for him in the ordinary moments and places of your day. Walk around in the wonder that God can be found.

Friday | Luke 3:1-6 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiber'i-us Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Iturae'a and Trachoni'tis, and Lysa'ni-as tetrarch of Abile'ne, in the high-priesthood of Annas and Ca'iaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechari'ah in the wilderness; and he went into all the region about the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

Every valley. Every mountain. All flesh. We have spent time this week considering that God came looking for you, and loves you, and can be found by you. But now consider the vastness of God's advent. He came so that every valley may be filled and every mountain brought low. He came so that all flesh shall see the salvation of God. Consider God's vast love for all things and ask yourself - How can you be a part of that? How can you be a part of God's renewal of all things? Pray and ask how you can be a part of shining his light into a dark world, how can you be a part of bringing his joy to all the world.

Saturday | Joy to the World

Joy to the world! The Lord is come; Let earth receive her King; let every heart prepare him room, and heaven and nature sing, and heaven and nature sing, and heaven, and heaven, and nature sing. / Joy to the earth! the Savior reigns; Let men their songs employ; While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains repeat the sounding joy. / No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground; he comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found. / He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove the glories of his righteousness, and wonders of his love.

Week 3 | December 11 - 17
FREEDOM & SLAVERY

“He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives.”

Sunday | Ephesians 2:13 & Leviticus 26:13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. / I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt so you would no longer be their slaves. I broke the yoke of slavery from your neck so you can walk with your heads held high.

We were far off, and we were slaves. But by coming near, God has set us free. Consider that running away from the presence of God always lands us in slavery to some other master - a master who does not love us. But when we are near to God, he is the light burden, and the easy yoke. Under his gentle hand we are finally free to be who we were made to be. Put another way - in his presence, we finally become fully human. Fully alive. We finally walk with our heads held high. Pray that you would see that apart from him you are always enslaved, but in the nearness of God you are finally free.

Monday | Luke 4:16-21 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Yesterday we considered how the nearness of God sets us free, but today, consider that he has come not just for you but to set the whole world free. When he teaches in the temple, Jesus talks about proclaiming liberty to captives and giving sight to the blind. Jesus loves the vulnerable and the oppressed and he has come to set them free from all the forms of sin and death. Pray today that you would turn your head to the vulnerable, just as God has turned his head to you. We were the vulnerable and the oppressed until God's nearness set us free, so think today on how you can serve those in need as God served you when you were in need.

Tuesday | Romans 15:4-13 As it is written, "Therefore I will praise thee among the Gentiles, and sing to thy name"; and again it is said, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people"; and again, "Praise the Lord, all Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him"; and further Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse shall come, he who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles hope." May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

God is coming to be our king, our ruler. If you may balk at this suggestion of his authority, think about how we actually long so deeply for a good ruler. Think about how much time and ink is spent rightfully lamenting those people in power who act selfishly and unjustly. Think of how we physically and mentally suffer under their unjust acts. But Jesus will be a better king, the one for whom we have always longed. He is the king who sets captives free to be human and flourish. Pray today that you would long for no other kingdom but the kingdom of God, and that you would put your hope in no other king but Jesus the king.

Wednesday | Zephaniah 3:14-17 Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The LORD has taken away the judgments against you, he has cast out your enemies. The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall fear evil no more. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Do not fear, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak. The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing."

The king we are waiting for is a king unlike any we have ever known. He is strong, he is tender, he is just, he is forgiving. Here God is a warrior, a judge, a protector and a lover. He fights for us, he pronounces us innocent, he comforts us, and he sings over us. This is the only king who deserves your service. Pray that he would reign in your life.

Thursday | Psalms 27:1-4 The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When evildoers assail me, uttering slanders against me, my adversaries and foes, they shall stumble and fall. Though a host encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident. One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple.

In an age of darkness, it is helpful to admit that there really is a battle raging. Evil exists, and suffering is real. Whether physically or mentally, whether from human enemies or spiritual enemies, to live in the world is to be assailed and assaulted. We trip and we fall not just because we are fallen and sinful people (though we are), it is also because evil wants to ruin us and take us captive. Unless we understand this, we will not see how marvelous it is that we have a strong God who has come to fight our battles. Here the Psalmist acknowledges the fight of life, but takes refuge in God his protector. Even more, he sees that the end of the battle will not just be victory - but beauty. He will be with His God - and so will we. Pray that today you would acknowledge the battle, see God as your protector, and trust that the end will be beautiful.

Friday | Isaiah 11:1-10 There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the girdle of his waist, and faithfulness the girdle of his loins. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall feed; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The sucking child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. In that day the root of Jesse shall stand as an ensign to the peoples; him shall the nations seek, and his dwellings shall be glorious.

This week we have considered that apart from God we are enslaved, but he has come to set us free. Further, we have seen that he has come to set the whole world free and deliver us from evil and suffering. We have seen that this is not just an image of victory, but of beauty and comfort. Here, in this passage, is a vision of the end we are hoping for: a king who ushers in an eternal peace, where wolves lay with lambs and lions with calves. This is a vision of what is to come, and it will be glorious.

Saturday | O Holy Night

O holy night, the stars are brightly shining, It is the night of the dear Savior's birth. Long lay the world in sin and error pining, 'till he appeared and the soul felt its worth. A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices, for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn. Fall on your knees, Oh hear the angel voices! O night divine! O night when Christ was born. O night, O holy night, O night divine.

Led by the light of Faith serenely beaming; with glowing hearts by his cradle we stand. So, led by light of a star sweetly gleaming, here come the wise men from Orient land. The King of Kings lay thus in lowly manger, in all our trials born to be our friend. He knows our need, to our weakness no stranger! Behold your King! Before Him lowly bend! Behold your King! Your King! Before him bend!

Truly He taught us to love one another; his law is love and His gospel is peace. Chains shall he break, for the slave is our brother, and in his name all oppression shall cease. Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we; Let all within us praise his Holy name! Christ is the Lord, then ever! ever praise we! His pow'r and glory, evermore proclaim! His pow'r and glory, evermore proclaim!

Week 4 | December 18-24

HE IS COMING.

On longing for the King to come.

Sunday | December 19 Luke 2:25-33 Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And inspired by the Spirit he came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel." And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him.

For Simeon, that advent of the Messiah is the very culmination of his life. This is all he has hoped for. He can now leave life in peace. Like Simeon, in Advent we celebrate that God has come near to a people who were far. Like Simeon, in Advent, we practice yearning for this salvation to come. Meditate on what it would be like to yearn for this. Confess what you actually spend your life yearning for.

Monday | Mark 13:33-37 Take heed, watch; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Watch therefore - for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning - lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Watch."

It is an odd life we spend as Christians, living in constant and vigilant expectation for something to happen. But when you think about it, aren't we all living life this way? Hoping that some moment will come that will change everything else? The difference for Christians, then, is that we stake our lives on it and say it out loud. We live in faith that such a fantastic story is actually true. We hang everything on the idea that Jesus really did come, and really is coming again. Think of a child this week, waiting for Christmas morning. They can't think about anything else. Everything is hanging on it. Now consider that that is the right Christian posture towards life - we're waiting for the King to come back. Everything is hanging on it.

Tuesday | Psalm:130 5-8 I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning. O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption. And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

To wait for the Lord means that there is a hope that cannot be satisfied in this moment. To wait for the Lord means that there is a longing that cannot be helped in this world. If you feel like something is missing - it's because it is. This is why we must guard our hopes. We must make sure not to fill that God-shaped hole in our hearts with politics, sex, money, success, social media attention, or anything else. Remember that your restlessness has meaning. It teaches you about the King that is coming. Guard that as a holy discontentment. And don't let something lesser trick you into temporary relief. You were meant to stay up the night watching for the King.

Wednesday | Luke 24:32 They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?"

Life can often feel empty. We sense we should feel more, experience more meaning, desire the right things more fiercely, and have full hearts when hearts ought to be full. But life's not like that. Our desires and thoughts mix and match. We feel sad when we ought to feel happy and numb when we ought to feel sad. Holidays like Christmas often highlight this confusion. Yet it's worth noting that our desires can be like a compass. They are not true north, but they do point to something. They point to a longing to be fulfilled. As if we were made for full hearts, and we just can't figure out how to get there. How settling is it, then, to read that when King Jesus is near that hearts are set on fire? How fitting, it seems, that when he walks with the

disciples on the road to Emmaus their hearts burn within them. Our longings are not so far off. The advent of the King means that we won't always live with mixed up desires, but that one day our hearts will burn with the hope they were made for.

Thursday | Luke 2:8-15 And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!" When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us."

This morning, try to imagine the shepherds. You've heard this story so much that the extraordinary has become normal. But think again. These were normal shepherds, doing their normal job, on a normal night, when suddenly something happens that changes everything, and changes it forever. This is the core truth of the incarnation. Jesus - who is the King we have been waiting for, who is the Way we have been looking for, who is the presence of God made manifest - changes everything! He comes into our ordinary and makes it extraordinary. Nothing will be the same again, because Emmanuel is coming.

Friday | O Come, O Come, Emmanuel Now that you have spent weeks reading and pondering what it means that God is coming, read this old song with new eyes and ears. Pray that you would feel the longing it communicates:

O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appears. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel. / O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free thine own from Satan's tyranny. From depths of hell Thy people save, and give them victory o'er the grave. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel. / O come, Thou Dayspring, from on high, and cheer us by Thy drawing nigh. Disperse the gloomy clouds of night and death's dark shadows put to flight. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel. / O come, Thou Key of David, come and open wide our heavenly home. Make safe the way that leads on high and close the path to misery. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel. / O come, Adonai, Lord of might, who to Thy tribes, on Sinai's height. In ancient times didst give the law in cloud and majesty and awe. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel.

Saturday | Matthew 1:18-23 Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit; and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel" (which means, God with us).

The story of the Bible is a story of presence. We began in the garden with God, then sin drove us out of God's presence. But the Old Testament is a story of God tracking down his people, and showing them his presence in tents and tabernacles, in pillars of smoke and columns of flame. He wants to be with us again. And that story culminates in today - Christmas, because today we celebrate that the presence of God has found us again, in the form of a baby boy. This is Emmanuel - God with us. In the body of a small baby, the presence of the infinite God who set the stars in motion is here with us. This is a fantasy tale unlike any other. This is a story you couldn't make up if you tried - and it's true. God is near, God is here - and nothing will ever be the same.

The Common Rule

Habits of Light for a World of Darkness

A CHRISTMAS MORNING LITURGY



Instructions: This Christmas Morning Liturgy is a way to lean into the celebration of the incarnation on Christmas day. Work it in after Christmas breakfast, before you exchange gifts, or even after Christmas dinner if that is best. It takes about 10-15 minutes.



You will need: Print copies of this liturgy for everyone, or go to thecommonrule.org/advent-xmas-morning-liturgy to read on a phone.



For Reading: You will need a Leader & one Reader. All scripture readings are printed here.



Small Children: This is written to involve small children, who have one repeated line: on your signal (perhaps the raising of your hand) they will act surprised & yell "Wow!!!" Make sure to practice one or twice beforehand. Older children might prefer to simply read along with the adults.



Supplies: In the case of small children, chocolate milk & marshmallows may be involved, if desired. This will help with excitement and attention span. Have milk poured in appropriate cups & plenty of marshmallows ready in advance.



For Songs: If the group is comfortable with signing the song verses, do so! If that will not be comfortable, just have everyone read them together.

A CHRISTMAS MORNING LITURGY

Leader: Merry Christmas!

People: Merry Christmas!

Leader: It was a real morning, with real people, with real bodies, like the ones sitting in this room, when a baby was born. This is how it happened:

Reader: *In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. Joseph also went up from Galilee to Bethlehem to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*

[Leader signals children.]

Children: Wow!

Leader: I know! It was remarkable! This is why we sing:

All Sing (or Read): *Away in a manger no crib for a bed.
The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.
The stars in the sky looked down where he lay.
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.*

Leader to Children: Do you think baby Jesus had milk in the barn? (*Entertain answers.*) Do you think he had chocolate milk? (*Entertain answers.*) Do you all want some chocolate milk while you hear more of the story? (*As chaos dies down, hand out chocolate milk.*) Now, everyone keep listening for the rest of the story:

Reader: *And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.*

[Leader signals children.]

Children: Wow!

Leader: I know. Can you believe it? A baby and a star. Fire and song. This is when the world was forever changed. It's this baby, who will save us from our sins. Can you believe it?

People: We believe it!

Leader: This is why we sing:

All Sing (or Read): *Angels we have heard on high
Sweetly singing o'er the plains
And the mountains in reply
Echoing their joyous strains*

Gloria, in excelsis Deo

Gloria, in excelsis Deo

Leader to Children: Do you think the shepherds had sheep? (*Entertain answers.*) Are sheep white and fluffy? (*Entertain answers.*) What else is white and fluffy? (*Provide hints until marshmallows are guessed, hand out said marshmallows.*) Now, eat some marshmallows while we hear more.

Leader to All: Because there is much more! This baby grew up. Just like these children here. He became a boy who became a man who became a teacher. When he spoke - people were amazed! Listen to the kinds of things he said. He said that, because of him, we could finally be reconciled to God:

Reader: *Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*

Leader: He said that, because of him, the vulnerable would finally be protected:

Reader: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*

Leader: He said that, because of him, we can all finally rest:

Reader: *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

Leader: Are you tired?

People: We are.

Leader: Then rest in Jesus. This is why we sing:

All Sing (or Read): *Come, thou long expected Jesus, born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in thee.
Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.*

(Second round of marshmallows optional here.)

Leader: Hear now the good news of this baby that was born: He was not just born, but he lived. And he did not just live, but he died. And he did not just die but he rose again. And he did not just rise again, but he will come again. To set all things right.

People: Let it be so!

Leader: Now, because of him, all that we've done and all that we've failed to do; all the good things and all the bad things, now they all fade away in the bright shadow of the love of Jesus the resurrected Son of God.

[Leader signals children.]

Children: Wow!

Leader: And when he comes again all people will beat their spears into plowshares. Melt their guns into spoons for food. Chains will break. War will be no more.

People: We are waiting for a day when the sun will rise on a new world. With no tears, no dying, and no pain.

Leader: It is Jesus who will bring this world. Can you believe it?

People: We believe it!

[Leader signals children.]

Children: Wow!

Leader: This is why we sing:

All Sing (or Read): *Joy to the world, the Lord is come
Let earth receive her King
Let every heart prepare Him room
And Heaven and nature sing
And Heaven and nature sing
And Heaven, and Heaven, and nature sing*

Leader: How we long for you to come again. For you we will celebrate. For you we will wait.

All in Loud Voices: *King of kings. Mighty God. Counselor. Emmanuel. Come again soon. Today, for you, we will celebrate. Tomorrow, for you, we will wait. Amen!* www.thecommonrule.org

The Common Rule



subscribe at www.thecommonrule.org

Merry Christmas!

There are more readings for Christmas morning in the [Christmas Morning Liturgy](#), on the next page or online at www.thecommonrule.org/advent-xmas-morning-liturgy.

(For continued Scripture Before Phone readings up through January 1st, see the “All Things New” New Year’s Devotional which continues after the Christmas Morning Liturgy .)

In light of the Advent of Jesus Christ the Son of God, and in hope for his second advent, we will spend the remaining days of December meditating on how he is making all things new. Specifically, we will use this as a time to think about how we can be made new. This part of the devotional will lead you through passages on change, and also lead you through “The Common Rule Habit Planner,” which is a resource for rethinking your ordinary habits and rhythms. This way, by New Year’s Day, instead of having a few unattainable resolutions that you’ll forget by January 5th, you’ll have a renewed vision of who God is making you, and you’ll also have some new habits and rhythms to put in place on January 1. The habit planner can be found at www.thecommonrule.org, and is also attached to the end of this PDF devotional.

ALL THINGS NEW

Because he has come, everything can change.

Sunday | Revelation 21:1-5 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."

Jesus has come, and he will come again. In the meantime, he is working to make all things new. This means something incredible - change is possible. It is real. We often lead our lives in a cycle of vague inevitability, like things have to be the way they are. The advent of Jesus Christ the Son of God means that way of thinking is totally wrong. You are not alone, you are not stuck, and you can change. The last five days of this devotional will focus on renewal in order to help you get ready for the new year. The purpose is not to create a list of resolutions, the purpose is to see clearly that Jesus making all things new has implications for you in all areas of your life. Begin this morning by (1) Reading the "Think Through Your Roles" section in the Habit Planner, and then (2) Listing five areas of your life that you want to see God work in. (For example, think of the roles that you play: parent, worker, spouse, son, friend, disciple, creator, guitarist, etc.) After you write them down, spend some time praying that God would bring newness to each place. Use this template to write them down.

Monday | Proverbs 29:18 Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he. (KJV)

Seeing a vision of newness is central to change. In part, this is why throughout this devotional we have continually looked at so many visions and prophecies of what the world to come will be like. In order to keep hope alive, we must have a vision of the possible future. Like this Proverb reminds us, some part of us dies when we can not envision a beautiful future. This is why any good leader will motivate people by reminding them (sometimes ad nauseam) of the vision behind what they are doing.

We need this in our personal life as well. We need a clear and compelling vision of what we can become.

Yesterday, you wrote down five roles you have in your life. This morning, read the "Set a Vision" section in the Habit Planner, and then write a vision for two or three of those roles. This vision should be one sentence, and should be an aspirational image of who you want to be in that role. For example, if the role you picked was disciple, you might write: "Become the kind of person who walks faithfully with God every day." Or if your role was husband, you might write: "Fall more in love with my wife each day, and serve her accordingly." If your role was accountant, perhaps you would write: "Bring order and excellence to every project I am given." You get the idea. You will have time tomorrow to finish writing the visions, so do two to three now, and pray over each vision.

Tuesday | All Things New

Come, Lord, and tarry not; Bring the long looked for day;
O why these years of waiting here, These ages of decay?
Come, for Thy saints still wait; Daily ascends their sigh;
The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come"; Does Thou not hear the cry?

**O come and make all things new! Come and make all things new!
Build up this ruined earth. Come and make all things new**

Come, for creation groans, impatient of Thy stay,
Worn out with these long years of ill, these ages of delay.
Come, for love waxes cold, Its steps are faint and slow;
Faith now is lost in unbelief, Hope's lamp burns dim and low.

**Come and make all things new; Build up this ruined earth; Restore our faded Paradise,
Creation's second birth.**

Come, and begin Thy reign of everlasting peace;
Come, take the kingdom to Thyself, Great King of Righteousness.
Come, for love waxes cold, its steps are faint and slow;
Faith now is lost in unbelief, hope's lamp burns dim and low.

**Come and make all things new; Build up this ruined earth;
Restore our faded Paradise, creation's second birth.**

Come, and begin Thy reign of everlasting peace;
Come, take the kingdom to Thyself, Great King of Righteousness.

These words were written by Horatius Bonar and adapted recently to song by Red Mountain Music - they are worth a read and a listen. There is a deep longing, even an impatience, that the Lord would come in his second advent and make all things new. Read through (or listen online) to this song once or twice, and mediate and pray on one or two of the lines that move you. Now, continuing from yesterday, think about being made new in the roles you listed, and continue to write a vision for the remaining roles. Consider reviewing and revising the visions you wrote yesterday. Your goal is to - like this song - articulate a yearning for how you want to be made new in that role of your life. Tomorrow, we will begin to ask more practically what would need to happen to make this vision a reality. But for this morning, keep dreaming, and write it down.

Wednesday | Romans 12:1-2 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (NIV)

This is a beautiful and stunning passage on change. First, because it anchors change in the motive of the gospel. We are not working towards newness so that we can prove something. That would be about us. We are working towards newness because of what God has done. In light of his mercies, in light of his love, in light of what he did for us - so we now go and do. Second, this passage highlights one of the most important realities of formation - conforming to patterns. This is the image of being made in the mold of something. Imagine a cookie cutter. This is important, because much of our life unfolds in habits, patterns, and molds of acting. We usually have very little idea of how much of our life is one big way of conforming to patterns. For example, we may say, "I want to lose 10 pounds." And we may be very motivated by this goal to exercise. But if we fail to understand that what is really going on is we are in a (potentially unconscious) pattern of unhealthy eating, we'll fail to see that it is the concrete patterns of our diet, not our aspirational hopes of exercise that actually form our body. Our spiritual lives are not so different. We may say in our vision, "I want to be a better husband who serves my wife," but if we do not see that our small patterns (of not coming home on time, of leaving small chores undone) are the real ways we fail to serve our wife, then we miss the real formation that is happening. In light of this idea of patterns of formation, read the "List Habits for Each Role" section of the Habit Planner and begin to think about what habits and rhythms you need in your life to move you towards the vision you articulated. On the chart you will use, these might be daily or weekly rhythms, or they might be annual traditions. Do not feel the need to fill up every box, just write a few key habits or patterns for each role. You do not need to finish them all, we will continue and finish this process tomorrow.

Thursday | Psalm 115:2-8 Why should the nations say, “Where is their God?” Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them.

This Psalm is a boast in the power of the living God, however, it also contains a warning to worshippers of false gods - those who worship them become like them. All of life is worship. Even in our small places in life, we are always worshipping something. So when we think about who we are becoming and how we want to change, we must not just consider the big moments, but the ordinary patterns and rituals of our lives - for these are also places of worship. Often, unfortunately, they are places of false worship. Perhaps you engage in a small pattern of jealousy each morning when, for example, you wake and mindlessly scroll images of other peoples’ lives on social media. You would never say it out loud, but in your heart, you are comparing. This is a small ritual of worship, and it is forming you. This morning, think about small patterns like this in your day and ask yourself: If I want to become the kind of person I expressed in my vision, what kinds of small daily and weekly actions need to be happening? Keep in mind what you might have to stop doing in order to make room for what you want to start doing. Finish your chart by writing these daily and weekly patterns down.

Friday | 1 Samuel 7:12 / Come Thou Fount Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen and called its name Ebenezer for he said, “Till now the LORD has helped us.” / “Here I raise my Ebenezer, here by Thy great help I’ve come.”

You may have probably heard the song “Come Thou Fount” before, but you may have never thought about what this line means. The Ebenezer means “stone of help,” and it comes from the story where Samuel leaves a stone marker, or a milestone, to remember what the Lord has done. There is a goodness in marking time and creating milestones that remind us that the Lord’s grace has been with us all along. This morning, in order to finish your chart, write down a few milestones you hope to hit as you live out these new habits and rhythms in light of your vision. This can be akin to a New Year’s Resolution - but think of it as a milestone that these habits should eventually lead you to. Instead of goals that you will simply check off, these are hopeful Ebenezers, things you will eventually name as markers to the Lord’s faithfulness.

Saturday | Revelation 22:20 “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

Congratulations! You now have something much better than a few New Year’s resolutions - you have a vision for a renewed life and some habits and rhythms that will form you in that newness. First, spend some time praying this morning that God would bless your efforts. Second, make sure you share this chart you’ve filled out with someone. Ask them to check in with you and ask you how it is going. Maybe even ask them to follow along with you. And remember, the Lord has come, and he is coming again. So may you live this year in light of his coming, and all the newness that will bring. Maranatha!

The Common Rule



subscribe at www.thecommonrule.org

The Common Rule

— habits of purpose for an age of distraction —

www.thecommonrule.org

THE COMMON RULE HABIT PLANNER

A tool for turning big vision into daily habits.

“Change is the great dream of the human heart,” wrote John O’Donahue. It has such a truth to it. Much of our daydreaming is imagining who we could be, how things might be otherwise, or how we could quit doing the things we know that we need to quit doing. The excitement of a new planner, a new year, or a new job is always the excitement that maybe you could be someone new this time.

This is resonant with our fundamental problem and our fundamental hope. The fundamental problem is that we are broken, sin-bent people, and we can’t help it. So we really do need to change, but we can’t change ourselves. But our fundamental hope is bigger than the problem, Christ is our life now - and that’s a new life. *We are* being made new.

These are the two truths that our life is spent between: We need to be made new. *We are* being made new.

For this reason, I believe the practical disciplines of turning vision into habits is an urgent matter for Christians. Re-imagining your life in light of Christ, and then turning those imaginations into realities is the heart of sanctification and bearing out the good deeds that are planned for us.

The chart in this PDF is a tool to help you do that. It tries to get you to think through who you are, who you want to be, and then how you might get there. I hope it helps you. It has helped me and some of those close to me.

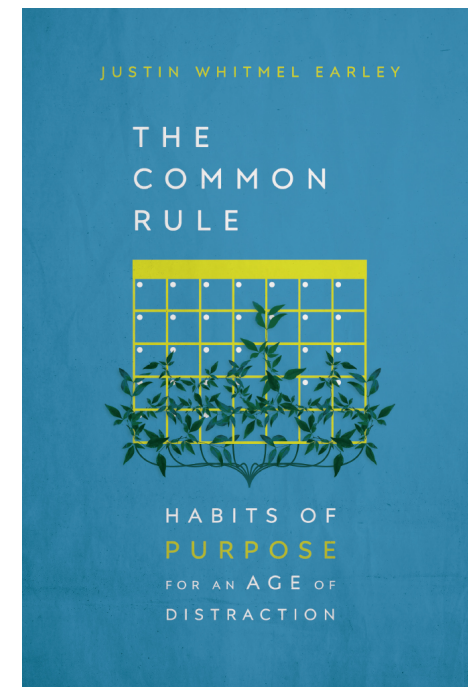
As always, *don’t do it alone*. Do it with someone else. If you’re interested in more, check out www.thecommonrule.org for a set of daily and weekly communal habits designed for formation in the love of God and neighbor.

Best,



Justin Whitmel Earley

THE COMMON RULE is a set of daily and weekly habits designed for formation in the love of God and neighbor. While this PDF is a template for general habit planning, you can explore the specific daily and weekly habits of The Common Rule on the website, and get the book for a more in depth look.



www.thecommonrule.org

Buy book on Amazon

The Common Rule

— habits of purpose for an age of distraction —

www.thecommonrule.org

How to use The Common Rule Habit Planner:

On the next page is a chart for thinking through who you are, and who you (through your habits) are becoming. Simple instructions for going through it are below.

1 THINK THROUGH YOUR ROLES

We are not just our careers, our bodies, or our family relationships. Our whole life is a web of different roles that we play, and it's hard to change one without impacting others. List out the roles you exist in, and ideally set them in order of priority from top to bottom.

2 SET A VISION FOR EACH ROLE

In each of our roles, we have a dream or a vision. Some north star of who we long to become, or who we want to emulate. Try to articulate this in a broad sort of vision statement. This should be big, beautiful, and compelling. It may be impossible to achieve, but that's OK. That's the point.

3 LIST HABITS FOR EACH ROLE

Here is where vision meets reality. Our habits form us more than we form them. Starting listing out what kinds of rhythms or habits should be true of your daily or weekly life if you wanted to become that kind of person stated in your vision. This is far more important than goal setting. These should be almost mundane, achievable realities, that would - over time - be the guardrails guiding you towards your goal. Some should be "do not's" and some should be "do's." You don't need a habit for each timeframe. The goal isn't to fill everything out, but to flesh out the key habits that will form you.

4 REVIEW AND REVISE

Ideally, you should be doing this in community. If so, set a time each month to review with someone. My wife and I do this every few months, for example, and my friends and I talk about it semi-annually. Make edits and adjust. Check in on benchmark goals to see if after some time you are coming any closer, or if you think actually that they should be scrapped. Print it out and put it in your journal. Email it to yourself. Revise it, over and over and over.

The Common Rule

forming habits of purpose for an age of distraction

WHO AM I?		WHO AM I BECOMING?					
Roles	Vision	Habits					Milestones
		Annual	Quarterly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily	
1. _____							
2. _____							
3. _____							
4. _____							
5. _____							

The Common Rule

forming habits of love for a world of chaos

Here's a sample chart I did years ago as an example. I deleted the benchmark goals from my chart because I want to emphasize the focus on habits

WHO AM I?		WHO AM I BECOMING?					
Roles	Vision	Habits					Milestones
		Annual	Quarterly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily	
Disciple	<i>To love God</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise this chart • One day of silence and reflection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fast twice • Memorize one verse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have two extended quiet times a week • Sabbath 	Morning / Noon / Night Kneeling Prayer	
Husband	<i>To be best friends with Lauren</i>	One getaway just us	Saturday of deep house cleaning reset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One fun date night • One conversation date night 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only 1 weeknight per Sun-Thurs of social activity out of house • Evening of downtime with Lauren 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pray with Lauren before bed • Keep phone off from 6-8PM 	
Father	<i>My sons know they are loved</i>	Write a letter to each child	Parenting review with Lauren	One blank weekend in town with no prior commitments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every Saturday morning with just the boys and give Lauren break • One family night of prayer and bible reading 	Stop work at 6PM even if I have to work after bedtime	
Friend, Brother & Son	<i>Friends like family, family like friends</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One Cast Weekend • One family vacation 	One weekend at Smith Mountain Lake with immediate family	At least two intentional one on one conversations with a friend	Sunday family dinner		
Worker	<i>Build excellent institutions</i>	Tithe 5% of hours to pro bono / volunteer	Clean office & reconsider health of space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two networking lunches 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 minutes of prayer/meditation midday • One time of checking news at 3:30PM, no others 	
Creator & Catalyst	<i>To help myself & others see</i>			Spend extended 90 minutes engaged in hobby	Journal at least one page	Record daily activities in iCal	
Steward	<i>To multiply talents</i>		Quit one thing		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limit alcohol to no more than 2X per week • Two active/exercise times per week • Review budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drink 2 liters of water per day • Eat light lunch • Vitamins 	