THE MARANATHA RULE OF LIFE

The Rule

A trellis, not a verdict. Four daily anchors for a whole life

Oldboy meets his elder self.

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BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Tools for the Journey.

This little Rule grew out of my book *The Way of Lent*. If you walked that road with me, you already know the terrain. Lent taught us to travel light and pay attention. This is the same road, made daily.

the satchel

It is a wholistic approach. Not a plan for your prayer life with your body and your money left standing out in the cold. Mind, body, and soul travel together, or they do not travel at all.

Jesus packed his disciples the way he packs us. “Take nothing for the journey except a staff. No bread, no bag, no money in their belts” (Mark 6:8). Oldboy respectfully keeps the bag. But the principle stands. Pack only what you need. Leave the rest behind. The journey is lighter than you think.

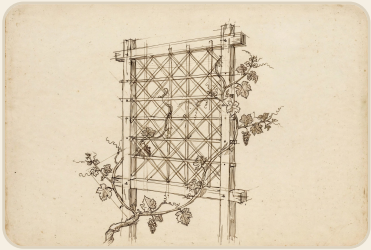
PACK THIS

A Bible. A journal or binder for the Day Log. A pen you like. Walking shoes. A phone-free corner to begin the day.

BEGIN HERE

A trellis, not a verdict.

> *"The kingdom is within you, and it is outside you."*
> GOSPEL OF THOMAS 3



the trellis

The word "rule" makes most of us reach for an excuse. A ruler across the knuckles, a diet, one more system for measuring how far behind we are.

The old monks meant something gentler. A rule is a trellis, the wooden frame that holds a vine open to the sun. The vine does the growing. The trellis keeps it from collapsing into a heap.

In therapy we call it a frame, the steady structure that holds the work so the person can do the growing. It never does the healing. It only keeps the space safe enough for healing to happen.

Jung would have recognized the kinship. The ancient Christians were mapping the inner life long before Freud gave it a name. A frame holds you. The trellis, the frame, the Rule. Different centuries, same wisdom.

On a full day the anchors hold a great deal. On a hard day each one may be small, and the day still belongs to the Rule.

The anchors are not a scorecard for your worth. They are four marks in the binder and four questions at night. Four ways of staying awake to the life God has given you, mind, body, and soul. The ancients called us layered creatures, and the Rule takes the layers seriously. Start with one anchor, and add the next when it feels like yours. Ninety days of the Rule will teach you more than ninety books about it.

THE FOUR ANCHORS

WATCH: attention and surrender. WORD: Scripture and writing. BODY: movement, rest, care. ORDER: household and kept promises.

ANCHOR ONE

WATCH

> *“What I say to you, I say to all. Keep awake.”*
>
> MARK 13:37

Oldboy sits in stillness.

Jesus said it to sleepy disciples in an olive grove at midnight, and it has been the church’s bedtime story ever since. Keep awake. The Coast Guard taught me the posture. Remain awake, attend to what is present, be ready to respond. The mystics taught me the rest. I sat under them, the everyday mentors and guides who showed me where to find the Lord. Most of what we call prayer is simply learning to notice.

Psychiatry began as the healing of the soul. The word says so. Somewhere along the way, much of the field traded listening for managing behavior. We stopped listening to ourselves, and our instincts became a threat to reason instead of being integrated with it. The Watch is where you start listening again.

The psalmist worked the night shift. “My soul waits for the Lord, more than watchmen for the morning” (Psalm 130:6). Waiting is the job. The morning comes on its own schedule.

Attention is the rarest thing you own, and the one thing the world is always trying to buy off you. Thomas put it like a homeowner. “Blessed is the one who knows where the thieves will break in, and gets up to secure the house before they come” (Gospel of Thomas 103). The Watch is where you take it back, nine minutes at a time.

The shape is simple. Sit down. Set a timer for seven to nine minutes. Breathe in for four counts and out for six to eight. When a thought comes, notice it the way you would notice weather, and return to the breath. Close by naming one thing you are grateful for. That is the whole practice. Everything else is commentary.

THE MINIMUM

Stand the Watch for 7 to 9 minutes.

FULL EXPRESSION

The full nine-minute practice, a dream note, and a brief pause at midday to return to the Watch.

THE QUESTION AT NIGHT

“Where was I awake, and where was I automatic?”

JOURNAL

Name one moment you were truly present today, and one moment you were stolen. No judgment. Just notice.

ANCHOR TWO

WORD

> *“Were not our hearts burning inside us as he talked with us on the road and opened the scriptures to us?”*
>
> LUKE 24:32

The book reads him back.

Two disciples walked seven miles with the risen Christ and mistook him for a stranger, until the Scriptures started burning. That is the whole of this anchor. Let the text do to you what it did to them.

Every reader knows the moment the book starts reading you back. Bastian found it in an attic with *The Neverending Story*. The disciples found it on the road to Emmaus.

There is a difference between reading Scripture and letting Scripture read you. One of them is safer. Only one of them works. Read the passage slowly, then write one honest sentence in the Day Log. Not one impressive sentence. The page can smell the difference.

Jeremiah ate the book before he preached it. “I found your words and I ate them, and they became the joy of my heart” (Jeremiah 15:16). Chew first. Speak later.

Thomas said it even shorter. “Whoever drinks from my mouth will become like me” (Gospel of Thomas 108). Drink deeply enough, and you start to resemble what you read.

The way in is simple. Read the passage twice. Notice the word or image that shimmers, the one that will not leave you alone. Write one honest sentence about it in the Day Log. You have just let Scripture read you.

Read slowly. Slower than feels natural. Remember your parents at the dinner table. Slow down or you will choke. Do not stuff the words down. Each one is rich and filled with nourishment for the soul. Let them feed you.

THE MINIMUM

Read a short passage of Scripture and write one honest sentence. If you are wondering where to begin, begin here. Psalm 23. Mark 4:35-41, the night Jesus slept through the storm. Or Gospel of Thomas 108, “Whoever drinks from my mouth will become like me.” Any of the three will read you back.

FULL EXPRESSION

Scripture, companion reading, the Day Log (a few honest lines about the day), and thirty minutes of study or leisure reading.

THE QUESTION AT NIGHT

“What word or image addressed me?”

JOURNAL

Copy the word or image that addressed you at the top of the page. Write what it might be saying to your real life this week.

ANCHOR THREE

BODY

> *"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit dwelling in you, whom you have received from God? You do not belong to yourselves."*
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 6:19

Oldboy walks at morning.

Paul told the Corinthians their bodies were temples, which must have come as news to people treating theirs like a tavern. The body is where calm begins. It is also where stress keeps its filing cabinet.

You cannot think your way out of a body that has not been moved, rested, or fed. Ten minutes counts. The body cannot tell the difference between a pilgrimage and a walk around the block. It only knows you showed up.

David looked at his own body and saw a wonder, not a project. "I thank you that I am wonderfully made. My soul knows it well" (Psalm 139:14). The body is not a problem to be solved. It is a gift to be inhabited.

Thomas marveled at the same mystery. “If the flesh came into being because of the spirit, it is a wonder. If the spirit came into being because of the body, it is a wonder of wonders” (Gospel of Thomas 29). Either way, the body is a wonder. Treat it like one.

Start where you are. Ten minutes of walking counts. Stretching on the bedroom floor counts. Rest counts too. The Rule is not training for an event. It is tending the only body you will ever get.

THE MINIMUM

Move your body for ten minutes. Walk, stretch, or pick one simple movement for the day and do it. Ten pushups. A walk around the block. Leg lifts on the bedroom floor. Choose in the morning. Do it before the day gets away from you.

FULL EXPRESSION

Strength work, a walk outside, sleep, food, and the medical care appropriate to the day.

THE QUESTION AT NIGHT

“Did I inhabit my body or merely use it?”

JOURNAL

Describe how your body felt today in three honest sentences. No fixing. Just notice.

ANCHOR FOUR

ORDER

> *“Go to the ant, you idler. Study her ways and learn wisdom.”*
>
> PROVERBS 6:6

Oldboy keeps order.

The Bible’s productivity guru is an insect. No seminar, no app, no morning routine industrial complex. Just an ant.

Outer order steadies the inner life. And Christ meets you in the menial. “Split a piece of wood, and I am there. Lift the stone, and you will find me there” (Gospel of Thomas 77). The bed you make is a small altar. The promise you keep is a sacrament with the dishes still in it.

Doing the chores, serving your partner and your family, being like Christ in the small hours. This is how the ego learns it is just the car, not the driver, and certainly not the destination. The soul is the one making the journey. That is why Jesus asked, “What good is it to gain the whole world and forfeit your soul?” (Mark 8:36).

Paul told the Colossians to do the dishes as if Jesus were coming to dinner. “Whatever you do, do it with all your heart, as for the Lord” (Colossians 3:23). The small hours count double.

Your house is bigger than your house. Every space you are responsible for counts as your house. The office. The car. The desk at church. The inbox. The room where you sit with people in pain. Tending those spaces is tending the people who will enter them. That is what makes it holy instead of merely tidy.

And here is the quiet miracle. Get your house in order and you will literally be clean. Not just tidy. Clean. The outer order washes the inside too.

Finances and savings belong here too. Money is a room in the house. A budget is a bed made. Savings are a pantry stocked against winter. “Precious treasure and oil are in the house of the wise” (Proverbs 21:20). When you are strong in this area, you can bless others rather than be a burden to them. That is the point of the strength. Not to need no one. To be able to give.

THE MINIMUM

Make the bed or clear one surface, and keep one promise to family or vocation.

FULL EXPRESSION

Morning and evening resets, the day’s house zone, the calendar, the shutdown, family presence, Sabbath, and faithful work.

THE QUESTION AT NIGHT

“What did I tend, repair, release, or protect?”

JOURNAL

What did you leave untended today? What would “enough” look like tomorrow?

THE RULE BENEATH THE RULE

Six quiet laws.

The anchors hold the practices. These six laws hold the anchors, so the Rule never becomes another performance system for the ego. The prophet said it shorter. “Do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). The laws below are that verse with its sleeves rolled up.

- **Never miss twice.** A missed practice is information, not a moral identity. The Rule has no detention hall.
- **Reduce before abandoning.** A taste of the Rule beats a bucketful of guilt. Use the minimum version during pressure, illness, travel, or family need.
- **Track anchors, not every nested practice.** Four marks in the binder are enough. You are keeping a rule, not running a census.
- **Do not borrow from sleep** to prove commitment. God invented rest before you invented ambition.
- **Do not use the Rule to police the family.** You practice it. Others may join freely. Nothing kills a spiritual practice faster than turning it into a household policy.
- **Review weekly with curiosity.** Ask what gave life, what became performative, and what needs to change.

THE SHAPE OF A DAY

Morning, midday, evening.

Here is one shape of the day. It is a suggestion, not a subpoena. The times are a trellis. Keep the anchors, and let the clock bend to the season. “Everything has its season. Every matter under heaven has its time” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). Even rest. Especially rest.

MORNING

Rise and make the bed, water, phone outside the practice *(ORDER)*. Stand the Watch *(WATCH)*. Dream note, Scripture and companion text, Day Log *(WORD)*. Strength movement and a walk or mobility work *(BODY)*. Ten-minute morning reset *(ORDER)*.

MIDDAY

Deep work first, then meetings, errands, and administration. Lunch, then a brief pause to return to the Watch *(WATCH)*.

EVENING

Write tomorrow’s three priorities and end the workday *(ORDER)*. Evening reset and the day’s house zone, one area of the home, *(ORDER)*. Family evening *(ORDER)*. Thirty minutes of reading when energy permits *(WORD)*. A brief Examen, a prayerful review of the day, *(WATCH)*. Lights out. Sleep belongs to the Rule *(BODY)*.

SUNDAY AND SABBATH

Rest is an anchor too.

> *“The Sabbath was made for humankind, not humankind for the Sabbath.”*
>
> MARK 2:27

Jesus said the Sabbath was made for humankind, not humankind for the Sabbath, which remains the single best argument against turning rest into another project.

Sunday is a worship day, not a catch-up day. Keep the Watch, gather with the congregation, and rest with family. The evening review lasts no more than twenty minutes.

The weekly Sabbath is deliberately unproductive. An unhurried Watch and reading, a walk, family time, a book read for pleasure rather than for use, and one slow act of household care if it feels like prayer rather than duty.

THE MINIMUM VIABLE RULE

On a crisis day, seven minutes of Standing the Watch, one short Gospel passage, ten minutes of gentle movement or walking, and one act of order that protects family or vocation. Mark the four anchors and begin again tomorrow.

A FINAL WORD

Live it first.

> *“Yes, I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!*
>
> REVELATION 22:20

Do not teach what you have not practiced. The sequence matters. Live the Rule for ninety days. Then, if you want, invite someone into it. The world has enough unpracticed teachers.

Let the Rule serve your life, not swallow it. Family, friendship, work, rest. No practice is worth eroding the people you love or the sleep you need.

God hid himself somewhere no one would ever look. Right under our noses.

AFTER AN OLD HINDU LEGEND

. . .

Maranatha. Come, Lord.
Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Rev. Shawn Garan

The scripture renderings in this book are my own, in the cadence of the New Jerusalem Bible. This guide is free to copy and share.