

Seeking God, a Rule of Life and Ways of Knowing

Spiritual Director (SD): Thank you for coming. Please sit down.

Seeker (S): I didn't really want to come see you, but I thought one time wouldn't hurt and maybe you could point me in the right direction.

SD: What are your concerns and questions, my friend?

S: I don't want to be coming to a person for spiritual guidance, I want to be getting my direction directly from God. I want to hear God in my own life. Why should I make it even more difficult by inserting another person?

SD: The role of a spiritual director is not to tell you what God is saying to you. Rather it's to provide you the best tools to be able to discern what God is saying to you about your life. For that matter, if you are agnostic, what your life is telling you about your life. So you are right I cannot discern for you how God is leading you in your life, but what I can do is help you understand how you know what you know and how to be most open to knowing from God. Because we are all unique this varies individual by individual. As a spiritual director my job is simply to enhance the opportunity for someone like you to be able to hear God's leading in your life.

S: Fair enough. But I don't want to sign on to be coming to see you on some regular basis, I just want to know how I might best know.

SD: Spiritual direction is grounded in trust. As your ability to trust in your ongoing interaction with your spiritual direction grows, your ability to access and trust how you experience God leading you will also grow. In the abstract just reading a book about spiritual direction or me giving you ideas on how to discern God's leading is like drinking water without a glass, you might get a splash or two, but you won't be able to drink deeply.

S: Don't you think that is for me to decide?

SD: Of course, and lots of time an overview is helpful and I am glad to give you that. Just don't confuse the map of the moon with the moon.

S: (smiles) Right about that.

SD: Okay, here goes, but this is more a lecture on discerning God's will than a spiritual direction session.

S: I understand.

SD: Let me start with describing the phrase: A Rule of Life. This term is most associated with a man named Benedict who came to Rome to study as a young person around the year 500 A.D. He was so appalled by the immortality of life in Rome that he left Rome and later founded a monastery where other young men, encouraged by his example,

followed. Benedict was concerned about the needs of those living together in community and about the same desire you have expressed to me today -- how each could learn to understand God's will in their lives. To that end Benedict devised a Rule of Life for his fellow monks to follow to help ensure harmony in their community and openness to hearing God. Many spiritual seekers in the next 1500 years have followed a Benedictine Rule of Life. In modern times Spiritual Directors help their directees fashion a Rule of Life for themselves that most fits their personalities and where they are on their spiritual journeys.

A Rule of Life defines patterns we put in our lives to help us listen to God and to listen to our own life -- to create conditions under which we are most able to discern how God and the gifts of our own life are leading us to be free, open and loving in the world. We start with certain important spiritual premises about certain capacities we have as human being. When these capacities are combined they help us to be able to discern God's leadings and support in our lives.

Spiritual Capacities¹

1. Awareness. To be able to discern God's will we need to be non-attached to our own. So first and foremost we need awareness. What is the energy/perspective from which I am seeing choices in the world. Is it my ego false self's attachment to power and control, esteem and affection or security and survival or does it come from a deeper place we call True Self, our Inner Light or the Divine Indwelling Spirit.
2. Know How I Know. We need to know how we know. As we become aware of the capacity to see clearly without attachment or aversion, we become more able to see how we are perceiving reality -- we see how we perceive the choices before us; we discern our means of knowing. Of course, our ego/false self is all about trying to know. It is how it maintains our sense of ego identity. So our task is to discern the ways our ego/false self prefers to know and to distinguish them from the means of knowing most in tune with the True Self, the Divine Indwelling Spirit.
3. Faith. How are we faithful to the inner knowing that comes from the True Self, the Divine Indwelling spirit? We ask, "How is the Divine Indwelling Spirit Leading Me?" and then we need to be in a mode of knowing that is most open to connection with the True Self. Then we wait for an answer. We try not to allow the ego's aversions or attachments to cloud decision-making and let our soul's intentions be compromised. We wait patiently so God can have time to form the answer in our hearts. We will all go through periods of uncertainty and unknowing when we must rest in our faith until an answer comes from the Divine Indwelling Spirit.
4. Love. God is Love. The ego/false self never operates out of love. It derives its energy from its needs for power and control, esteem and affection and security and survival. So to reduce the chance that we are listening to our ego/false self, our discernment must always ask how does my leading grow love in me and others; how does what I might decide serve love?

¹ Richard Rohr was the original source for defining many of these spiritual capacities and ways of knowing.

5. Change and Curiosity. Our ego/false self is afraid of change. Change threatens its self image, its need for security and survival. We open to God's leading when we lean into change. Our True Self does not fear change. It is one of the constants of the universe. Life, all of us, are constantly changing and evolving. The best antidote to fear of change is curiosity. We stay open to change in our life with the same gentle loving gaze with which we watch children and grandchildren growing and changing. Some say God is change. Be curious about how a God of change is unfolding your life.
6. Focus and Commitment. There is much to do in this world and only a few of us come into life knowing early on what we are called to do. For most of us, our focus evolves and changes over different seasons of our life. Be aware of these shifts; they may be a part of your transformation. Spiritual growth is about our evolving a larger and larger perspective, a deeper and deeper way of knowing -- which makes us more and more less self referenced. We become less focused on our selves and our needs and more focused on others and the world. A focused commitment opens us to the kind of inner transformations that come through service to the world.
7. Presence/Beingness. In this digital world it is hard to stay present and grounded. Yet, it is only in the moment of pausing to truly taste that food tastes best. And so it is with everything. Only in presence do we experience the presence of the Divine. Most importantly, presence is what brings healing and expands our hearts as well as the hearts of those we are present to.
8. Gratitude. Awareness of gratitude for everything from our next breath to the majesty of a brilliant sunset keeps us grounded in both humility and the aesthetic pleasure of beauty and goodness. Gratitude attunes us to the splendor of creation and the interconnectedness of everything. In gratitude I remain humble, open and grounded.
9. Non-harm. Not using plastic and lowering my carbon footprint, buying food from community farmers, simply being aware of the impact of my actions on others are all ways to practice non-harm. Non-harm is a way to live peacefully on the planet in a way that allows all God's creatures to thrive.
10. Community. Create community wherever you go. The two primary impulses behind all religions are a search for meaning and a search for community. As the pandemic has taught us, we are deeply social creatures. In community we begin to know who we truly are. Every community we participate in brings meaning to our lives and the lives of others. In community we learn to be open and accepting, a good listener and team member. Seek out and support communities important to you.

Here are a Sampling of Practices that might be included in a Rule of Life

- Daily Centering Prayer to support awareness, devotion, presence, inner knowing and openness to change
- Welcoming Prayer to support love by allowing false self blocks to be dissolved
- Wesleyan Contemplative Order participation to build community of seekers in loving support of each others' journeys
- Prayers of gratitude to support appreciation of wonder and dependency on others
- Lectio Divinia to support non-dual knowing
- Sabbath to support beingness, presence and love
- Daily Examen to support focus and commitment

- Physical Exercise and walking to support body knowing and appreciation of natural world
- Recycle and plant based diet to support non-harm

How our Spiritual Capacities Interact with How we Know what we Know

Much has been written about each of these capacities and their importance in spiritual transformation. They are all important, but here we will explore one of particular importance. To achieve our purpose of building a Rule of Life in order to best discern how God is leading us, we start with recognizing that a Rule of Life and access to our ways of knowing are inexorably linked. We must know how we know in order to design a Rule of Life that supports building a greater capacity to know how God is leading us and what our own life is saying to us. The reason this is so important is that we don't all have the same gifts or strengths in ways of knowing. Depending on how our own ego/false self evolved, we each developed different patterns of knowing. We need to recognize the ways of knowing most entangled in our ego/false self and those ways of knowing most connected to our True Self.

Ways of Knowing

Intellect: The lens that we most associate with knowing is intellectual knowing. It's the result of formal education and it has to do with science, reason, logic, and what we call intelligence. Most of us are trained to think that it is the only way of knowing or the superior way of knowing. Yet that isn't necessarily true. Seeing intellectual intelligence as the best or only way of knowing is actually a great limitation.

Strengthening Practices: Book study, studying the lives of deeply spiritual people we admire. e.g. Thomas Merton, John of the Cross, Hildegard of Bingen, John Wesley, Henri Nouwen, C.S. Lewis

Will: The second way of knowing is volitional knowing. It comes from making choices, commitments, and decisions, then sticking with them, and experiencing them at different stages. Anyone who has made and then kept vows understands this. This knowing comes from the very process of struggling with choices and then making them. This knowing is a kind of cumulative knowing that emerges over time.

Strengthening Practices: Daily Examen, Having a Rule of Life, Being in Spiritual Direction, Being in Year Long Programs of Spiritual Growth like School of the Spirit, Being a WCO member

Emotion: Our emotions are especially powerful teachers. Love, ecstasy, hatred, jealousy, fear, despair, anguish: each have their lessons. Afflictive emotions like anger and rage are great teachers, if we listen to them. They have the power to reveal our deepest self to ourselves and to others, yet we tend to consider them negatively and our ego/false self tries its best to avoid our experiencing them. People will live and die much more because of their emotional knowing than they ever will for intellectual, rational knowing. To deeply experience our emotions is often to live in a new reality afterward, with a new ability to connect to ourselves and God. The emotional power of love is what

has powered so much of the work to connect people across differences and to be of service in the world.

Strengthening Practices: Centering Prayer, Welcoming Prayer, Sabbath, Devotional Rituals, Making/Listening to Music, Silence and Solitude Retreats, Plant Based Diet Practices, Caring for animals

Senses: Bodily or sensory knowing comes through the senses, through touching, moving, smelling, seeing, hearing, breathing, tasting. Until we develop access to it, this way of knowing often remains at an unconscious level. Becoming aware of our senses in a centered way allows us to awaken, to listen, to connect. In addition to bringing awareness to our sensory knowing, the body itself is a center of intelligence. We often hear people say, “I knew it in my gut.” An expression that is shorthand for body knowing. Our body intelligence allows us to know reality more deeply, on our body’s terms instead of our brain’s terms. It is no surprise that Jesus touched most of the people he healed. Something very different is communicated and known through physical touch, in contrast with what is communicated through mere words. Bodily knowing is essential for us as creatures to feel the essential compassion needed to steward the natural world and to connect with each other.

Strengthening Practices: Walking Meditation, Labyrinth Walking, Tai Chi, Yoga, Gardening, Silence and Solitude Retreats, Plant Based Diet Practices, Foot Washing, Blessing Ceremonies, Healing Services, Chanting, Taze

Images: Imaginal knowing is a way that unconscious knowing can move into consciousness. It happens through fantasy, through dreams, through symbols, through nonlinear stories, through pictures, and experienced events. It happens through poetry, where well-chosen words create an image that, in turn, creates a new awareness—that was already there but unconscious. We knew it, but we didn’t know we did. We must be open to imaginal knowing because the work of transformation will not simply be done logically, rationally, or cerebrally. Our intellectual knowing alone is simply not adequate to the greatness and the depth of the task.

Strengthening Practices: Soul Collage; Icon writing, Dream Diaries, Ignatian imaginative prayer and exercises, visio divina

Aesthetic: Aesthetic knowing is a profound way of knowing. The experience of beauty can lead to true changes of consciousness. People’s lives have been changed in response to a novel, a play, a piece of music, or a movie. The experience of beauty can soften the ego/false self so God can get in through the right metaphor at the right time. We can experience profound grief and sadness through artistic expression which can open us to the healing of our own grief and sadness. Artistic expression can illuminate profound suffering in the world in a way in which we can experience insight into how Christ experienced the suffering of the world. We can see our own goodness, our own beauty and our own stories reflected in the beauty of the world and artistic expressions.

Strengthening Practices: Prayer Time in places we find aesthetically holy and healing -- in nature, certain church sanctuaries; having a beautiful cross or icon on our personal altar; practices of reading beautiful poetry like John O'Donohue or beautiful Scripture like the Psalms as translated by Nan Merrill; experiencing great literature

Negative Capability: This term was first used by John Keats to describe the pursuit of truth beyond reason and is now more generally defined as a way of knowing from an other's perspective. The experience of negative capability comes when we open ourselves to others not like us and deeply listen to them. Any process of deep subjective understanding, of seeing the world through the eyes of another allows us to access truth and wisdom in a way that can be transformative.

Strengthening Practices: Trust Circles, interfaith dialogue, service (which includes many ways of knowing)

Epiphany: This is a way of knowing religion often emphasizes -- epiphanic knowing. An epiphany is a parting of the veil, a life-changing manifestation of meaning, the eureka of awareness of self and something much larger than self. There are no formulas which ensure its unfolding. It is always a gift, unearned, unexpected, and larger than our present life. It is an experience of radical grace which we cannot manufacture or orchestrate. We can only ask for and be open to this experience. Then we wait expectantly, keep out of our own way and thank God afterward.

Strengthening Practices: Centering Prayer, Silent Retreats

Ways of Knowing Summary

How we know what we know dictates how we design our Rule of Life. Often those ways of knowing most under-used are the clearest ways to discern God's leading, because the least used ways often have the least ego/false self baggage. Often our Rule of Life needs to simply be about having more balanced ways of knowing so we are drawing from a larger source to discern God's will for us.

Richard Rohr says, "I have to imagine that Jesus' consciousness was developed by all ways of knowing. Scholar Christopher Pramuk describes how Jesus engaged his listeners and followers in ways far beyond their minds. He writes -- When Jesus of Nazareth prefaced his enigmatic sayings with the words, "let those with eyes to see, see, let those with ears to hear, hear," scholars tell us he was speaking as a teacher of Jewish wisdom, appealing not just to the head but to the whole person of his listener: heart, body, mind, senses, imagination. Like a lure darting and flashing before a fish, Jesus's words dance and play before the imagination, breaking open our habitual assumptions about "the way things are." . . . To be "born again" is to break free of the stultifying womb of conventional wisdom. . . ."

Knowing from God is what we call wisdom. Wisdom is clearly more than mere intelligence, knowledge of facts, or information. Wisdom is more synthesis than analysis, more paradoxical than linear, more a dance than a march. In order to grow in

wisdom, we need to move beyond cerebral, rational knowing. As wisdom teacher Cynthia Bourgeault puts it: “Wisdom is not knowing more, but knowing with more of you, knowing deeper.”

The Enneagram and Ways of Knowing

The Enneagram perspective of ways of knowing focuses on three primary ways of knowing: mental, emotional and bodily. Enneagram wisdom suggests that among these three we all have a preferred way of knowing which we default to. This default way of knowing is the way of knowing most tied to our false self; since that is what has acted unconsciously and automatically most of our life for us to make sense of our perceptions. The second way of knowing supports the default. The third way is repressed and because it is less used it is often the way that is most free of false self energy and therefore more likely to allow us to know from our True Self, from the Indwelling Spirit within. Our Rule of Life needs to encourage the integration of our ways of knowing. As Cynthia Bourgeault discusses below that integration is key to our spiritual transformation.

Here is how the Enneagram stacks these ways of knowing.

| Dominant | Support | Repressed |
|-------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Take Action | Feeling supports action | Mental clarity - Buddha mind |
| 2. Have Feeling | Take Action | Mental Clarity - Buddha mind |
| 3. Mental Idea | Take Action | Feeling Values - heart knowing |
| Take Action | Have thought to support | Feeling Values - heart knowing |
| 4. Get Feeling | Think about feeling | Action - body knowing |
| 5. Get thought | Have feeling about it | Action - body knowing |
| 6 Take Action | Have feeling to support | Mental clarity -- Buddha mind |
| Have a Feeling | Take Action | Mental clarity -- Buddha mind |
| 7. Get thought | Take Action | Feeling Values -- heart knowing |
| 8. Take Action | Have thought to support | Feeling Values -- heart knowing |
| 9. Have a Feeling | Think about it | Action -- body knowing |
| Have a thought | Have a feeling about it | Action -- body knowing |

Accessing the Repressed Center

To develop the repressed way of knowing, the way of knowing most connected to True Self :

1,2 and 6s need a centering prayer practice to develop capacity for mental emptiness and clarity, known as Buddha mind, to experience wisdom from their minds

3, 7 and 8s need to develop devotional practices to allow their feeling values and heart to be more open to experience wisdom from their hearts

4, 5 and 9s need to develop their bodily engagement through practices like yoga and Tai chi in order to experience wisdom from their body

How Three-Centered Awareness—heart, mind, and body—allows us to be fully present to ourselves, our lives, and God

by Cynthia Bourgeault

When a person is poised in all three centers, balanced and alertly there, a shift happens in consciousness. Rather than being trapped in our usual mind, with its well-formed rut tracks of issues and agendas and ways of thinking, we seem to come from a deeper, steadier, and quieter place. We are present, in the words of Wisdom tradition, fully occupying the now in which we find ourselves. Presence is the straight and narrow gate through which one passes to Wisdom.

This state of presence is extraordinarily important to know and taste in oneself. For sacred tradition is emphatic in its insistence that real Wisdom can be given and received only in a state of presence, with all three centers of our being engaged and awake. Anything less is known in the tradition as “sleep.” It is like the disciple Peter suddenly sinking beneath the surface of the waters [Matthew 14:30].

Everybody has all three centers (head, heart, moving) in them. Most people are born into the world favoring one center or another. We learn to make one our dominant center for our own orientation to the world. And in the Western culture, I would say that’s overwhelmingly, shockingly, the intellectual center. In traditional schools, that’s the capacity we train, with maybe a little bit of space left for the kinesthetic moving center through sports programs, and virtually nothing for the emotional center. Any budget cutback and what leaves? Arts and music, the primary channels through which the emotional center is still trained. So in the West we’re formed as heavily lopsided intellectual-center-oriented beings. That’s how most of us get our start.

In pop culture, we say, “Well, find your center, acknowledge it, and live in it.” But the inner tradition work calls us to develop our under-utilized centers. If we over-use the intellectual center, then our work lies in bringing the emotional and moving centers fully online and integrating them.

The “work” is to discover our starting position and reach out to incorporate the other two so that they are fully—and in a balanced way—part of our perceptual center. Whatever center you may find yourself to be, don’t detain yourself on it, because it immediately sets out your job of discovering where the other two are hiding inside yourself and bringing them forward. It’s only when you have balanced the three centers—kinesthetic moving center, emotional center, and intellectual center—and

integrated them that you become conscious. We've got to have all three. We may think of prayer as thoughts or feelings expressed in words. But this is only one expression. Prayer is the opening of mind and heart—our whole being—to God, the Ultimate Mystery, beyond thoughts, words, and emotions. Thomas Keating has said that through grace we open our awareness to God whom we know by faith is within us, closer than breathing, closer than thinking, closer than choosing—closer than consciousness itself.

Those who can keep all three spaces open at the same time will know The Presence that connects everything to everything. Surely this is what Jesus is talking about in his several parables that warn us to stay awake! (See Mark 13:34-37; Matthew 24:40-44 and 25:1-13) Being awake is a prerequisite for true prayer. This way of knowing has little to do with belonging to any particular denomination or religion; it is found at the headwaters of all the world's major religions. Each has its own piece of Wisdom, its own techniques and teachings that urge us to bring our whole selves to the job of growing and “wising” up.

Devising a Rule of Life to Unlock Love

Because God is love and living in and through love is both the process and destination of our spiritual journey, in devising our Rule of Life it is helpful to be aware of how our false self in our type structure can block love. This helps us discern the practices for our Rule that open us more to love.

How we block giving and receiving love by type:

Mental

5 — giving: by not embodying our feeling, which we may be out of touch with because we are afraid we will be overwhelmed by them

receiving: by analyzing to figure out a way not to be overwhelmed

6 — giving: by judging and evaluating that takes one out of presence

receiving: by not having embodied presence, not being patient in the moment

7 — giving: by over analyzing the other to see if they are safe enough to trust

receiving — by mental preoccupation which prevents taking love in deeply for fear of losing freedom to identify with ego self

Heart

2 — giving: by giving to create ego image of helpfulness which blocks authenticity of giving

receiving: by being out of touch with heart needs and protecting from vulnerability

3 — giving: by allowing ego self image of competence to only give competently not authentically

receiving: by performing to protect heart which creates ego image of competence which blocks vulnerability to receiving love

4 — giving: by being self absorbed in such a way that cannot genuinely see the other

receiving: by escaping into feelings to feel uniqueness which creates ego image that blocks receiving love; by comparing in mind of what seems sufficient one doesn't receive

Body

8 — giving — by being in the ego's need to control such that cannot give from authentic innocence

receiving — by pushing against love to sustain ego sense of self

9 — giving — by not embodying our passion

receiving — by withdrawing to avoid being fully present

1 — giving — by holding back out of fear of not loving right

receiving — by judging how the other is extending love which blocks receiving it.

SD: Well, this lecture on a Rule of Live and Ways of Knowing ended up being longer than I ever imagined. Thank you for hanging in there. One final thought -- the spiritual path with all its meanderings is best traveled slowly and consistently. Let your life and the beingness of the world speak to you, and if you need help don't hesitate to find a spiritual director.

S: Thank you for all the teaching. I am overwhelmed. And I am happy I pushed forward with what is so important in my life.