

# Common Rule of Life | RVA 2017

an experiment in communal rhythms and habits in Richmond

**WHAT?** A rule of life refers to a set of regular habits and rhythms geared towards spiritual formation. A communal rule is one adapted specifically to our time and place, and joins us together as we seek to become people who orient their lives towards the love of God and neighbor.

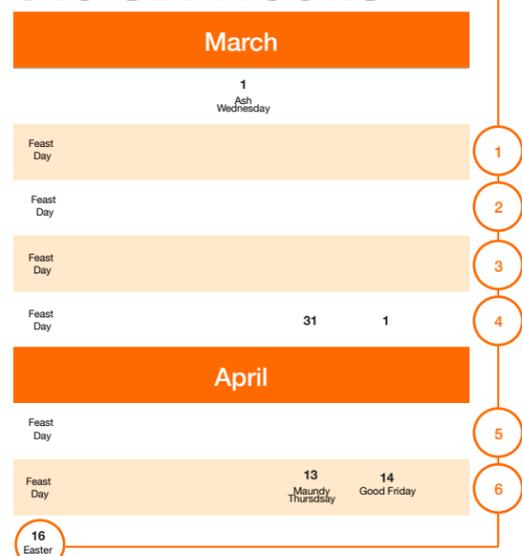
**WHY?** The vast majority of our lives are governed by habit. We are not formed simply by our deepest beliefs and greatest aspirations, but also the most ordinary of habits that guide our everyday lives. We cannot love in the abstract but only in the concrete. We must be radically attentive to our habits in order to become the lovers we want to be. This is not to earn love, but because we are loved and we want to love.

**HOW?** For the six weeks of Lent we will live according to The Common Rule which is divided into daily and weekly habits of embrace and resistance which aim us towards the love of God and neighbor. The Common Rule shown to the right is simple, but individuals or groups are encouraged to add up to four additional habits and practices based on their current situation. More info on pg. 2 & 3.

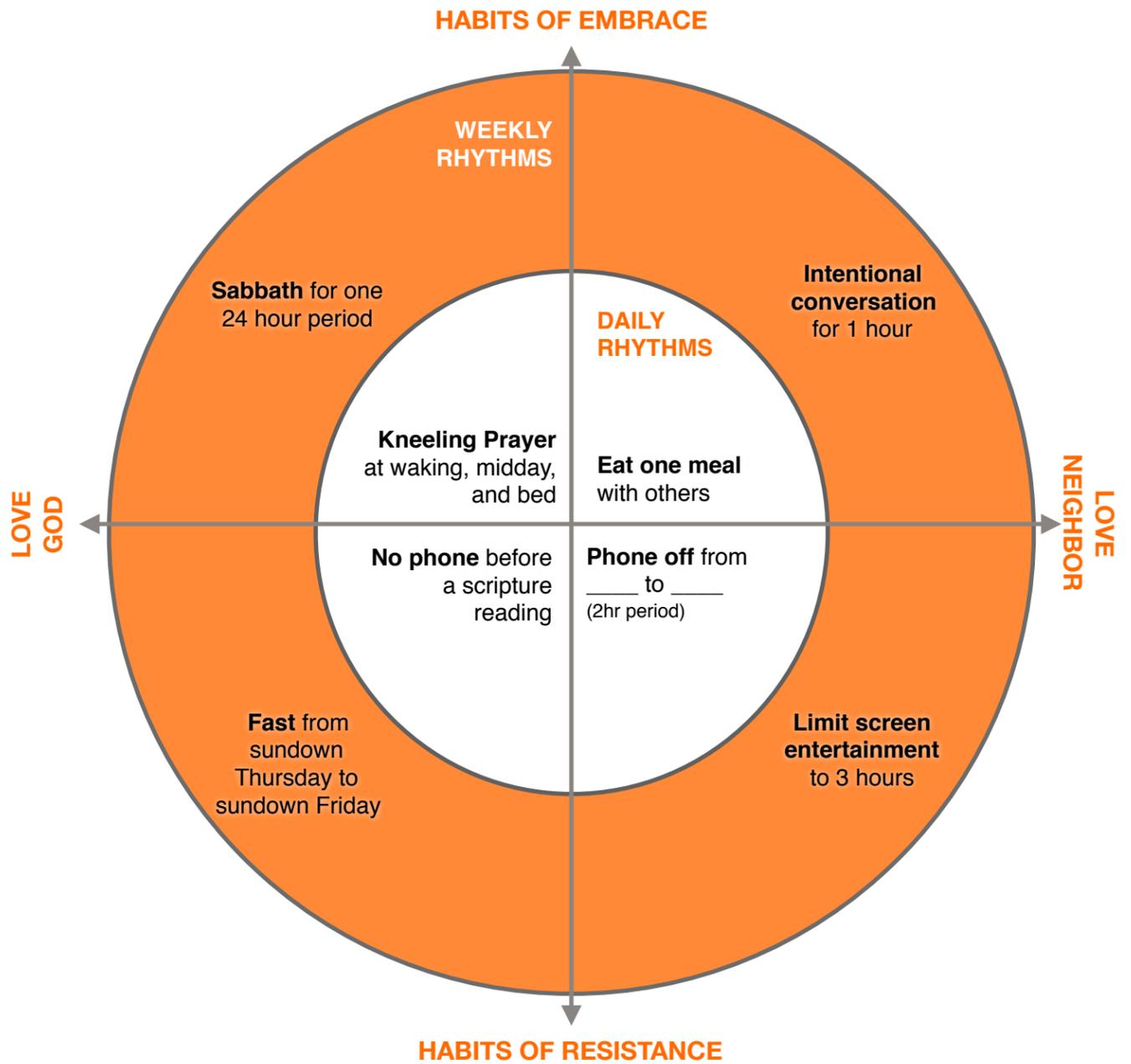
## COMMUNAL?

Common habits are one of the fundamental building blocks of both culture and friendships. A communal set of intentional practices reminds us that we have a common purpose and that we long to be shaped by that purpose. The Common Rule shapes the way we understand ourselves as exiles here in RVA, because, in resistance, it emphasizes our strange identity as something other than the world, while in embrace, it calls us to manifest that strangeness in the most ordinary habits of love.

## the six weeks



## The Common Rule



## Habits of Resistance & Embrace

To live in the world is to be formed, and if we are not attentive to our formation, then someone else will do it for us. Habits of embrace and resistance are oriented around the at once sobering and energizing acknowledgement that the place and time we find ourselves in is not a neutral one, but a formational one that is hammering us into certain kinds of people every moment of every day. We thus need counter-formational habits to resist the grooves of busyness, consumerism, vanity and injustice *that we will otherwise move in should we choose to do nothing*. Some of these are positive movements towards the good. Some of these are resistance. We resist letting our work, our technologies, our networks, and our culture's narratives become the center of gravity in our lives. The below quadrants show what kinds of ordinary things we practice to recover the extraordinary movement towards God and neighbor.

	LOVE GOD	LOVE NEIGHBOR
EMBRACE	Prayer Scripture Study Rest Worship Presence of Mind	Vulnerable Conversation Communal Feasting Service & Acts of Justice Practicing Empathy Learning about / Praying for Vulnerable Neighbors
RESISTANCE	Fasting Starving Addictions Resisting Habits of Distraction & Absence Avoiding Busyness	Avoiding Isolation Resisting Complaining & Gossip Resisting Technology that Dilutes Real Relationships Resisting Fear of Neighbor

# The Common Rule

## AN IN-DEPTH LOOK

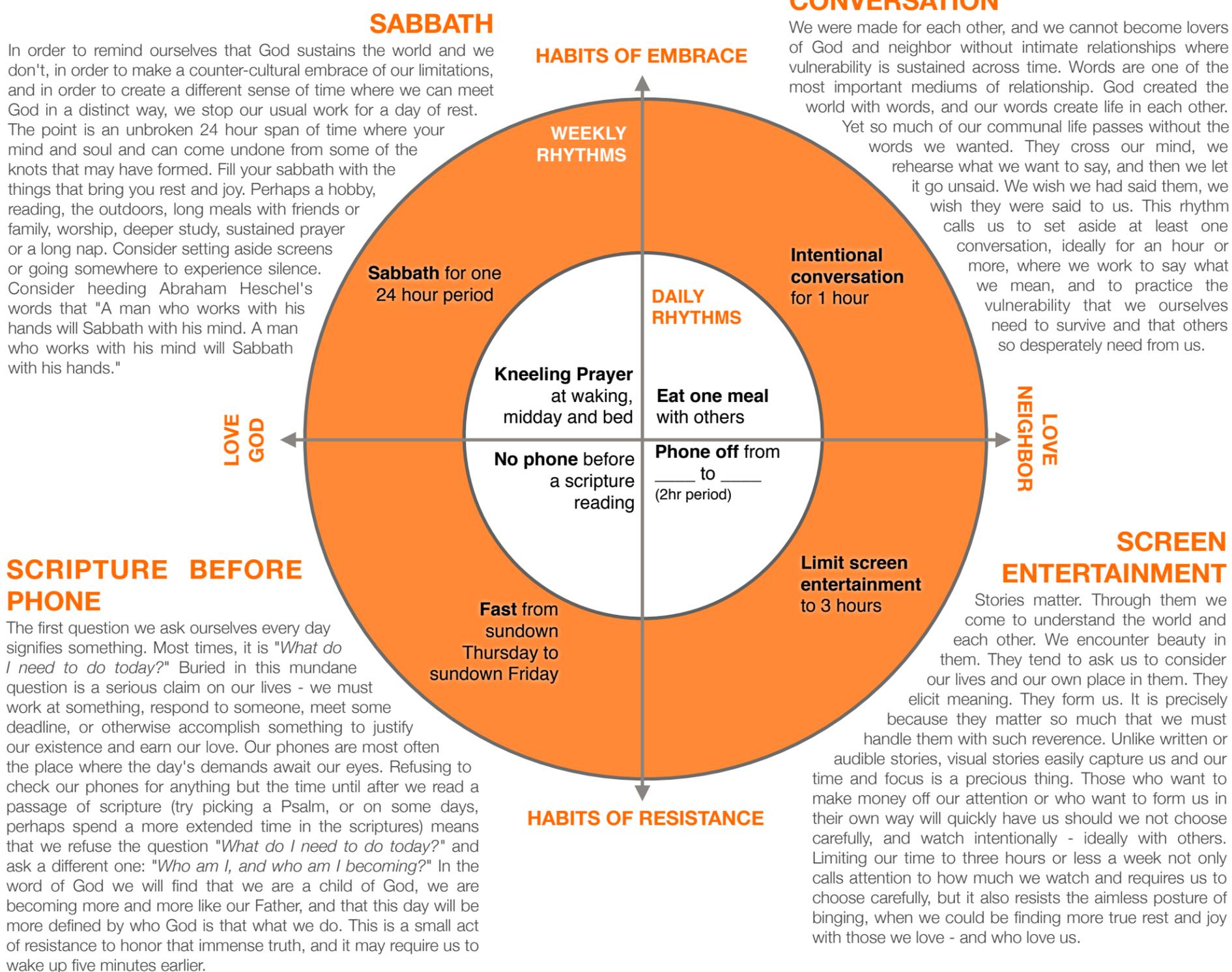
**WE LABOR NOT TO EARN LOVE, BUT BECAUSE WE ARE LOVED.** The starting place of The Common Rule is not to earn love, but to acknowledge that love has come to us, and we want to be formed in that love so that we can love God and neighbor better. While at first glance it could seem labor intensive, most habits are meant to *actually free us from something else* that is monopolizing our labor in the wrong direction. We thus find our freedom within the constraints of love. Moreover, we find it as we are constrained together. In a common way of approaching the world we find accountability, vulnerability and community in those who go along with us. While The Common Rule is practiced together, each person/group is encouraged to find the flexibility that acknowledges it is a tool, not an end. See more on flexibility, personalization and any concerns of legalism on the notes on page 3.

### DAILY KNEELING PRAYER

Regular, carefully placed prayer is one of the keystone habits of spiritual formation. It is an incremental adjustment with monumental reward. Short, habitual, focused prayers at the right times can call us back to that which we desire most, whether we know how to name it or not - to be at peace in the presence of God. Immediately on waking in the morning, and before we check our phones and begin to imagine what demands the day has for us - we kneel and pray. At the turn of a workday, where the morning energy has worn off and we start to realize all the things we will not get done today, we kneel and pray. At the end of the day, before the moment when we lay down and the replay reels with their anxieties and regrets start to rush in on us, we kneel and pray. Our bodies matter, and kneeling is a way to call attention to the small radical act of asking God for peace, presence and love - and so much of it that we might turn and offer it to the world.

### ONE MEAL PER DAY WITH OTHERS

Culture, memories, lives and families are forged over food. The table is a place where we are reminded that we need the life of others in order to sustain our own life, it is the reminder that life has died so that we can live. Thus the table is the place of sacrifice where life is renewed, and renewed communally so. A constant succession of meals alone or on-the-go not only overlooks the beauty of what it means to be people who eat, but we also miss generous moments with those we love. One meal a day eaten together emphasizes that we need the lives of others to live, and it gives us those moments to begin doing so.



# The Common Rule

## ADDITIONAL NOTES

**A NOTE ON LEGALISM** Legalism is the misguided idea that abiding by rules earn us love. We reject it. It is poison because it is the law turned inward, to serve us. Knowing that the love of God is freely given to us, we are free from earning love and free to give love. Thus we simply make the proper use of order and rules: in the constraints of love we find our long-sought freedom. Freedom to do what? To love God and love neighbor. Using The Common Rule to feel good about yourself is not the right starting point. But it doesn't disqualify you either. In fact, many of these constraints (for example, the scripture before phone) are geared to resist the natural view that "we work to earn love" and reframe it to a world made of love - "we work because we are loved". In the end, we must resist legalism and good habits go a long way in that fight.

**A NOTE ON FAILURE & FLEXIBILITY** Avoiding legalism will mean embracing partiality and messiness. You will mess up, forget, intentionally break rules and more. The point is not get a perfect score. The point is that *in articulating a rule we are describing the life we long to live, and when we fail the rule prescribes for us the road home*. So do not be deterred if you mess up, join the process late, duck out early, or need to adjust something because of a major life event, crisis or opportunity. However, if you find yourself needing to tweak everything and constantly adjust, take note of that. We should distrust our desire to individualize all things. We strongly encourage you to follow The Common Rule as best you can. In doing so, you constrain your usual desire to adjust the world to you and this time adjust yourself instead, at least for this six week experiment.

**A NOTE ON LENT** There is no direct connection between The Common Rule and the season of Lent. But because Lent is a time where the church historically focuses on the suffering of Jesus and often follows patterns of fasting and restraint, The Common Rule provides a guided form for that. As such, additional habits of embrace are restraint are encouraged, and some ideas to get you thinking are listed below. Remember that if you are looking at a habit of restraint, Lent is not for giving up sin, that is to be done every day. We are restraining things that we tend to abuse, not that are abusive in and of themselves. Note also the concept of the "**feast day**" exists. A feast day, typically the Sabbath, is a break from what you are otherwise fasting from. If you choose to fast from something through the whole of Lent, consider breaking that fast weekly on a feast day. Finally, **do not choose more than four additional items**. We are limited people with limited capacity, and this is not an experiment in perfection. Simply take stock of your life and your community's life, and choose some habits that will guide you in love. Or choose none and just live by The Common Rule. If you add some, write the ones you choose into your individualized rule template on page 4.

# Personalized Rule

## OPTIONAL IDEAS FOR PERSONALIZATION

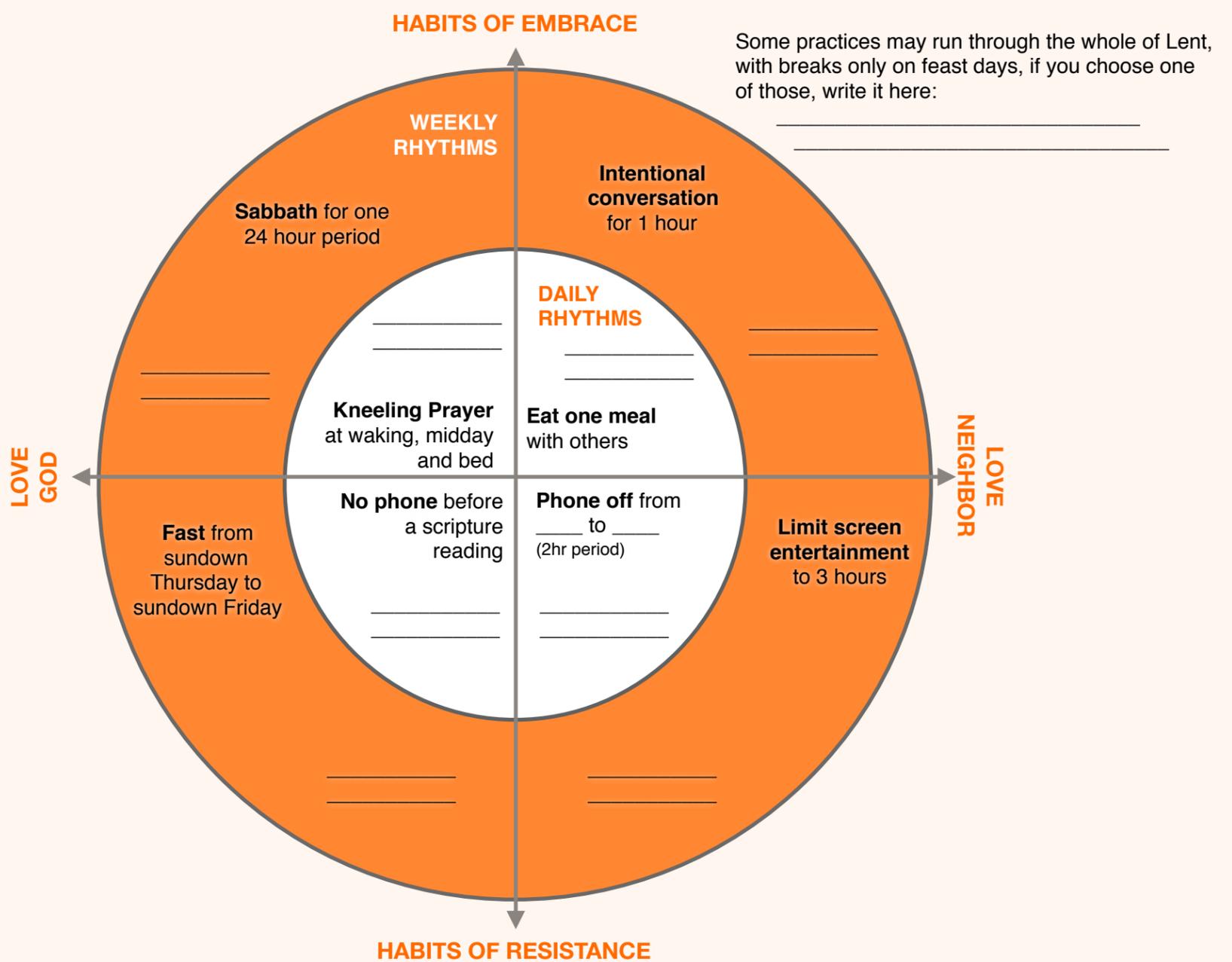
WORK	CONSUMERISM	TECHNOLOGY
Stop work completely each day at ___PM	Do not buy anything except food through Lent	No screens one day a week
Daily 10min meditation on whom your work serves	Wait 24 hours between clicking add to cart & buy	No social media except on feast days
Daily meditative walk through workplace	Give any money saved by fasting away	No news except on feast days
PRESENCE OF GOD	FOOD	COMMUNITY
Daily lectionary	No restaurants except on feast day	Sunday evening meal with the same friends
One 3 day fast during Lent	No factory farmed meats through Lent	Meet weekly w/ same friend at same time & place
Monthly day of silence	No alcohol except on feast days	Take weekly walk through neighborhood
VANITY	JUSTICE	TEMPTATIONS
No new clothes through lent	Prayer for the disenfranchised before each meal	Weekly accountability meeting with friend
Give away half of wardrobe over Lent	Read weekly article on oppressed peoples	Engage a counselor during Lent
Cover bathroom mirror with scripture through Lent	Weekly walk in a poor neighborhood	Write & memorize a daily prayer addressing issue
BODY	TIME	PARENTING
Same bed & wake time through Lent	Keep daily diary of time during Lent	Daily hour of undistracted play with kids
Exercise twice a week	No screens, only pages through Lent	Nightly prayer over sleeping children
Only 1 caffeinated drink per day	Do not use the word "busy" through Lent	No phone around kids

Request to join the email list by emailing  
justin.earley@gmail.com

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## PERSONALIZED RULE TEMPLATE



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