



**(First 5 Chapters only.)**

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***“A rule in the spiritual life is to create a space where God’s jealous love can reach us, heal us, transform us, and guide us to freedom ....”***

**Henri J. M. Nouwen**

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**Community of the Good Shepherd Edition**

**This edition authorized for the Community of the Good Shepherd by Br Daniel-Joseph Schroeder of the Community of the Gospel 2023**

## **INTRODUCTION**

We live in a “doing” society today that moves fast, owns many things, and fails to encourage people to connect deeply with each other – all of which tends to erode our spiritual foundation and the sense of who we really are as a people. We sometimes seem lost, but are too busy to realize it, or even care about it. We fill the voids within our souls with things and activities which provide us the alibis we need to avoid a face-to-face encounter with our own hearts. The busy life has become our habit, our excuse to escape the encounter we need to really live.

The idea for this Common Rule grew out of the realization that, over time, too many of us have become human doings, and have forgotten that we are actually supposed to be human beings first. But not only that, we need to remember that we are part of an Interbeing ecosystem. At some level everything is connected to everything else through a diverse network of relationships. So, from within our monastic community, we pause for a while and re-examine what it means to be a human being at the most basic levels. What are the roots that tie us to life and living? What can provide the basis for knowing ourselves and understanding how we fit into this world, without succumbing to its illusion?

What gives us the strength and bearing to be who we are truly made to be, thereby fulfilling the deep-seated desire in each of us to reach our full potential as part of this interbeing world?

The pieces of this puzzle are scattered over the pages of time, written in many places throughout the world. They appear again and again, however, like a perennial flower in the gardens of both the East and West. They are the voices of prophets, sages, and mystics, beckoning us to join in the cosmic dance of love; an invitation that never ends, like love itself. “Come! Follow me!” Where else can we go for the truth but to the truth-givers?

The pages of this document emerge as an invitation – a call to first understand who we are as human beings, and then to extend that knowledge out into the world in our own unique ways, serving as models of what life could be. The offering is a life of seeing deeply, living deeply, and loving deeply –

a life that values relationships more than things and ensures the dignity and respect of nature and all persons, helping each other discover the wonders of life.

Take the words of this Rule and discover what they mean for you. Be in the world but know where your roots grow best – in the loving Presence of your Creator as found in many places, including the far corners of your heart.

Br Daniel-Joseph Schroeder, Founder Community of the Gospel (Companion Community)  
September 2021

## CHAPTER 1 - GOD AND US

1. God is love, and God loves us unconditionally. (1 John 4:8, 16) (Romans 8:38-39)

God's relationship with us began long before we were born:

"Before I formed you in your mother's womb, I knew you." (Jeremiah 1:5)

2. God breathed into us the Divine image which included a strong desire to be in unity with each other and with creation as an interbeing community. (Genesis 1:26, 27; 2:7)

From this we have a strong desire to find God. (Psalm 63:1-8)

3. But we sometimes look for God in the wrong places.

We seek the wrong connections and false relationships with things or ideas.

We may believe that God is in some far-off place, a throne in the skies, way beyond our reach.

4. But we are mistaken, because God is closer, much closer.

Truly, God abides in us, and we abide in God. (1 John 4:16)

God has made us into a temple where God is intimate with our soul.

We belong to God. (1 Corinth. 3:16-17)

5. God is not to be feared, as there is no fear in love. (1 John 4:18)

God's love endures forever, and nothing can come between us and God's love for us – nothing. (Rom. 8:38-39)

It has always been this way, and will always be.

6. To prove this love, and to teach us how to love one another,

God sent us the Son, Jesus.

Not to condemn the world, (John 3:16) but to save it by bringing God's kingdom to earth.

How could God not visit what is loved?

7. To know Jesus is to know God. To know ourselves (John 14:7-11) we need to imitate Jesus.

Follow his word, live his way, forgive, share, embrace, smile, pray, and love.

Even a small act of love for another person, or for a creature, or for nature, reveals to us what God is like.

8. Some days the distance between us and God may seem a very long way.

But this is our perception, not God's.

Each new moment brings an invitation to renew our relationship with God.

Watch for signs – in the dawning sun, in a cloud, in a breeze, in a quiet day, in the face of the next person we meet in our life.

We glorify God by becoming who we were made to be.

Not what others think we should be – but who God made us to be deep inside.

9. Faith in God doesn't mean that we believe God exists.

Faith in God means that we trust that God loves us.

Believing in God comes from the head.  
This doesn't really change us much.  
Having faith in God comes from the heart.  
This can lead to big changes in our lives.

10. Trust in and live God's love,  
For there is no other way.  
"I am the Way, and the Truth,  
And the Life," says Our Lord Jesus.  
"Trust that I will be with you,  
Even to the ends of the earth."

11. We seek to love the Lord God with all our heart, (Matthew 22:36-40) and with all our mind, and with all our soul; and to love our neighbour as ourselves.  
For doing something for the least of any is doing it for God.  
Walk with gratitude, hope, and joy, for these are the fruits of the Spirit.

## **CHAPTER 2 - JESUS AND US**

1. God so loved the world (John 3:16) that He sent His only begotten Son to us so that we could learn how to live with each other and with all of creation.  
He was sent to teach us, to heal us, and to show us love.  
He was God's free gift to us – not to be earned, but to be accepted.

2. The interbeing of all creation is shown in the unity of God and Christ.  
"I and my Father are one... (John 10:30, 38)  
If you had known me, you would also have known God."  
And "He who has seen me (John 14:7-10) has seen the Father."  
This unity extends to us, too.  
"You will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you."  
We are all interconnected. (John 17:21-23)  
We are united as a close family.

3. Jesus did not come to change God's mind about humans – God's love and mercy were everlasting before time, and will be on into eternity.  
But Jesus did come to us to change our minds about God.  
Jesus came to show us what God is like.  
God desires healing and reconciliation; not punishment and retribution.  
God is love everlasting.  
God desires a deep, personal relationship with each and every person regardless of who they are or what they may have done.

4. Jesus did not come to judge the world, but to save us from ourselves. (John 3:17)  
He taught about equality and equity; he taught about humility and mercy; he taught about seeing deeply into the heart; he taught about forgiveness and understanding.  
Jesus said, "I give you peace; not as the world gives, but as God gives." (John 14:27)

“Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me.”

“Love one another as I have loved you.”

(John 15:12,17)

5. Jesus said, “Follow me.”

If we decide to follow Jesus, then we are joining with the down-trodden, and with the outcasts, and with the poor, and with the lonely, and with sinners...

So, how do we do this in our own lives?

6. We respond by seeking our true self and nurturing it in community.

We respond by imitating Christ in our own unique way, the way in which we were made by the hand of God.

We respond by beginning at the place where we are now, and moving forward just one moment at a time.

7. Even if we have chosen to follow Jesus, even if we “got Jesus” on a specific date, we do not become flawless angels.

We continue to make mistakes, we continue to battle temptations, we continue to fall short of God’s Glory.

But God still loves us anyway.

8. Live to the fullest with the assurance

that Jesus walks with us, embraced in the faith that life will be fruitful through his love and guidance.

9. We walk with Jesus on the journey from our head to our heart, knowing that each step rests in enduring love, grace and mercy.

Because we can’t do it alone, even with all our spiritual discipline, and all our sacrifices and self-denial.

10. We study the Gospels.

We try to see things as Jesus saw them – united, interconnected, interdependent.

We try to say things that Jesus said –

“You are loved.” “Peace be unto you.”

We try to understand the way Jesus did – in compassion, patience, and wisdom.

Life is love, and is the fullest when it is expressed in our own way, as it’s needed in the present moment.

For Jesus taught us to pray, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” (Matt. 6:10)

### **CHAPTER 3 - THE HOLY SPIRIT AND US**

1. God loves us so much (1 John 4:13) that we were given the Holy Advocate to teach us, and guide us, (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13) to comfort us, and to sustain us in life.

The Spirit abides in each and every person. (Luke 1:40-41)

2. Paul wrote, “The Holy Spirit is the power that brings the soul to life. (Eph. 3:16-17)

This Spirit is the energy that drives every one of us.

This Spirit is the breath of life that lets us be who we were meant to be.”

The Holy Spirit is the outpouring of God’s love over all time and in every place.

3. A farmer plants a seed (Mark 4:26-29) where it can grow, but the farmer can’t make it grow. It grows by the power of the Spirit.

The farmer has faith that it will grow even though the farmer may never see the harvest. (Romans 8)

4. We offer an act of love, like planting a seed, but we can’t make it grow.

We place this offering into the hands of God and have faith that it will produce what God wants it to produce by the power of the Holy Spirit.

5. We are to love our neighbours as ourselves, without expectation of a result, without expectation of a return, without any expectation of gain at all.

It is God’s place, not ours, to take this act of love and grow it through the Holy Spirit.

Do the love, then let God grow it.

6. Our other task is to listen, listen, listen to the guidance and wisdom of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 10:16-20) in the stillness of the night, in the stillness of our prayers. (Ps. 51:6)

To be filled with the Holy Spirit is to be filled with the love of Christ.

*“The Holy Spirit graciously breathes into us the gifts that lead to eternal life.” - Julian of Norwich*

## **CHAPTER 4 - COMMUNITY**

### **Interbeing**

1. We are all part of a community; a web of relationships (Eph. 4:4-6, 11-16) that have some common bond which creates a sense of identity and unity: families, work groups, churches, neighbourhoods, towns, and the Community of the Good Shepherd.

2. These are the places where we try to bring God’s kingdom to earth in service to others; to unite all peoples under the love and wisdom of Our Lord.

### **RELATIONSHIPS**

3. The lifeblood of any Community is the love of God that flows through the veins of relationships. God is love itself; (1 John 4)

The deeper and more honest the relationship, the more evident will be the love of God.

4. We receive each person in our Community with thankfulness and openness knowing that they, too, are temples of God, fellow travellers on the journey.

What can we do to help each other along the way? (1 Corinth. 3:16)

5. The flow of God’s love depends on how ready we are to listen, receive, share, and be vulnerable in the image of Christ.

It depends on how willing we are to put the good of the kingdom above self-interests; to let our false-self egos die, and to grow in spirit, that others may live.

6. Learn the stories of others; take an interest in their well-being with respect, dignity, and equity.



Love as we would be loved.

If one member suffers, (1 Corinth. 12:26) all suffer together with that member;

If one member is honoured, all rejoice together with that member.

7. We are all broken in some way, in need of the love, healing and support of Christ.

We affirm each other's potential as beloved children of God, growing and learning from the gifts of each present moment.

8. There are people in the community who suffer under a sense of guilt and hurt; they need reassurance of God's Grace and unconditional love.

They can return to God's family; to a place they actually never left.

None of God's children will be lost in the final gathering – none.

#### DIVERSITY

9. We become fuller and more complete as we tap into different relationships built on God's love.

Strength in diversity builds strength in community.

As Paul writes, "There is a variety of gifts, services, and activities among us, but we all have (1 Corinth. 12) the same Spirit, Lord and God for the common good.

10. Just as the body has many members, it is still one body; (John 10:16) so it is with the body of Christ of which we are all a part.

One member of the body is no less important than another; what good is it if we are all alike?"

11. Because we all have one Creator, we are all brothers and sisters even though we are all unique.

No better, no worse – just unique.

God loves each of the children very deeply, and very personally.

So, too, must we love.

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12. This is the whole reason we exist as a Community – to know, love, and serve God in our own unique way, based on the specific talents, skills, and interests that we have been given; and to help each other to do this, too.

#### LEADERSHIP

13. Jesus is the only perfect leader; the head of the Church. The Church is all of God's people; Not just buildings.

The Church has many groups which have leaders, but all must follow Christ.

He has placed them there to care and nurture the members of each group.

14. While the leaders need authority, they should not be authoritarians.

While they must be heard, they must also listen.

While they must be loved, they must also be loving.

While we are accountable to them; they are accountable to God, and to us, for their leadership.

15. Together we seek the building up of all our members, of kindred souls, to make the community whole by growing in the love of the Lord.

*Pray for the leaders, and for those who follow, let us be leaders in our own way, the way we were made to be.*

***“If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.”***  
**- Mother Teresa**

## **CHAPTER 5 - BEING HUMAN**

### **More Interbeing**

1. The creation story tells us that God formed people from the earth, and breathed into their nostrils the breath of life; and they became living beings.

People are created in God’s image, according to God’s likeness.

And God called this “good.”

So, we, too, should call it good and begin our understanding of people as a blessing, and not a curse.

Our inherent identity stems from the very life of God.

2. The core of our identity, our actual being and soul, is sometimes referred to as the True Self. (Romans 7:20)

It knows who we really are.

It is connected to all the other True Selves in the world, and to God.

Because of this, we are all interrelated and interdependent.

3. We sometimes forget this and get lost.

We forget that we came with a built-in connection to our Creator, a love-line from God’s heart to ours.

We somehow get separated from God, at least in our minds, but not in God’s mind.

Then we try to find our identity in many of the wrong things instead of in God.

Paul tells us that one of our main challenges in life is to reconnect to our original identity “hidden with Christ in God.” (Colossians 8:3)

Perhaps this is one way of defining salvation.

4. A false self can emerge from within, a “little self” that tries to confuse us with illusions, and tempts us with power, or prejudice, or fear, or busy-ness.

It feeds on guilt and shame, on anxiety and arrogance.

We must be aware when this happens and pause to check on reality.

We must seek the inner true self with prayer, meditation and contemplation, and finding God in the patterns of life that we see around us.

5. To dissolve the false self should not be a violent act.

We simply work to become aware of it

and all the waste and harm it can cause us.

Soon, the scales over our eyes fall away and we begin to see clearly, deeply.

We die to the old self, (Acts 9:17-19) that our new self may live.

We empty ourselves of the old, to make room for the new.

6. The fruits of the Spirit shine through, and we gradually begin to know who we are – our interests, our skills, our likes, and how we are interconnected to those around us.  
We gradually become who we were made to be, not anything we want to be, but who we are supposed to be.  
That’s all we are, and that’s more than enough.

7. We are a blend of calm and chaos, darkness and light, pain and pleasure;  
But God loves us as we are anyway.  
We experience the Gospel of Grace when we accept that we are accepted, and loved.

8. In our True Self we begin to see ourselves  
and others more deeply. (John 7:24)  
We see beyond false selves and (1 Sam. 16:7) into the depths of the human heart.  
We see possibilities and bridges, where before we saw only limits and walls.  
We no longer think in “either/or” terms, but rather we think in “and/also” terms.

9. Instead of division, we see unity.  
Instead of separation, we see connection.  
Instead of competition, we see collaboration.  
Instead of scarcity, we see abundance.  
Instead of privilege, we see fairness.  
Instead of blame, we see forgiveness.  
Instead of punishment, we see restoration.  
Instead of hurting, we see healing.  
Instead of falsehood, we see truth.  
Instead of death, we see life.

***“My Grace is enough for you: My power is at its best in your weakness.” (2 Corinth. 12:9)***