



Creating a
RULE of **LIFE**
in the Footsteps
of St. Benedict

HALEY STEWART & TSH OXENREIDER

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Transcript taken from an interview
between Haley Stewart and Tsh
Oxenreider from the Word on Fire Institute.

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HALEY STEWART. Hello! I'm Haley Stewart. I'm a Fellow of the Word on Fire Institute and an author and podcaster, and I'm joined by Tsh Oxenreider. Tsh, would you introduce yourself and say who you are and what you do?

TSH OXENREIDER. I would love to. Hi, I'm Tsh Oxenreider. I am also an author and podcaster. I'm also a travel guide and a teacher and a recent Catholic convert.

HALEY. Yes, and in this webinar, we wanted to draw from the rule of St. Benedict, which is a recent read of ours in the Word on Fire Institute book club. If you haven't joined the book club yet, we're reading great spiritual classics, we're reading some fiction and novels, Catholic fiction, and just diving into some great conversations. So we'd love to see you there if you haven't joined. If you are already a member, good to see you again. And we're going to dive into St. Benedict's rule, but what we want to take from it is how can we incorporate some of those themes into our life in the twenty-first century. St. Benedict's rule is from the sixth century, and we want to discuss how to make it come alive in our lives as Catholic lay people in modern times. So that's kind of our jumping-off point.

For those who aren't familiar with the rule of St. Benedict, maybe we could go back to the beginning—St. Benedict in the Roman Empire during the fall of the Roman Empire. He is educated in Rome and then decides to become a hermit. And then from there he follows God's call to found this order of monasteries, which we now know as the Benedictine tradition. And so from there he changed Western civilization with all that he did and his faithfulness to God's call, and people like us are still reading the rule today.

But something that you have—in your journey to the Church as a recent Catholic convert—you actually encountered Benedictine spirituality before your conversion. Do you want to share a little bit about that?

TSH. Yeah. It's kind of fun to look back and see how God really used all sorts of things that I never would've expected to actually draw me into the Church as a lifelong Christian. And one of them turned out to be St. Benedict. It was about six years ago. My family and I were traveling around the world. It was this crazy idea—long story—but we were backpacking around the world.

HALEY. And you had three kids?

TSH. Three kids. The oldest was nine. So looking back it's like, how did we do that? But we spent some time

in Thailand. We—my husband and I—kind of have a little bit of a history in Thailand, and so we wanted to reconnect with some friends and hit up some old haunts from our past lives. And one of the things I wanted to do was spend some time with a spiritual director. Now this was, you know, a Protestant director, but after meeting with her for about six weeks, she said, “You know, before you leave Thailand, I want to encourage you to maybe have a day of silence. And there’s this really great monastery in the city—it’s in the city center actually, but it’s just this beautiful oasis once you walk through the walls. And I think you could just benefit from a day of silence.” And I thought, “Sounds great, a day without kids. Why not? I will happily take that.”

And it’s funny, I can look back now and see what God was doing. But I walked through the doors and was like, “Oh, this is *Catholic*. This is a *monastery*. It’s real.” And so, it was a Benedictine monastery, and it was just fascinating to me to see the structure of like, this is a way of life. This is people that commune together, dine together, live life together. They’re in the city center, so they’re not separated, but they kind of also are. And they welcome the community in—I was not the only pilgrim there, there were other people—and it was a day of silence there. And so I didn’t really interact with anybody, but anyway, that day was probably the seed God used to really just wet my appetite for more of this.

So I ended up reading the rule of life of a modern translation and it was fascinating to me. And, I mean, we can get into it, but long story short, a few years later, I ended up writing my own from that. And ever since then, I've been refreshing my own rule of life annually, and it's been a great way to commune with God, connect, and ask really good practical but important questions about what am I meant to do and how do I live my life and why do my daily choices matter. And I think that's what St. Benedict was really good at getting into the meat of with his community that he founded.

HALEY. Yes, wonderful. Well, before we dive into how we could think through creating our own rule of life inspired by St. Benedict, maybe we should talk about what sort of things does he put into his rule? So this is kind of his guidebook for having a monastery, the way of life. So what sort of things is he putting in there?

TSH. Right. Well, that's what I think makes his rule so fascinating, because he really gets into the internal and the external. So a lot of the internal things or the things you might think might be in a monastic rule—things about like why we live with humility, why we defer our own needs to the needs of our brother, how do we live in community with difficult people, this is how we approach God, this is why we rise early and spend time reading together, and this is why we have a day of silence, or whatever it is, all these things. But

what's so funny—and this is actually what I love about it—is that peppered in through all these great deep spiritual practices are things about daily life.

Like, there is a bit about when you're manning the front door—so you're doing the administrative—here's how you check people in and check people out. One of my favorites is on the kitchen jobs; whenever it's your turn to serve food, make sure to have a snack beforehand so that you don't get hungry while you're serving your brothers. And to me, I just loved that, because I thought that is so practical to real life and there's such wisdom there. And it's a good reminder, I think, that God cares about our big and little things, and that those little things are not to just be discounted as unimportant or, you know, "I can just do what I want," or, "If I'm overthinking it doesn't really matter." Those little things do matter.

HALEY. Or kind of it's calling into question the dichotomy we have a lot, of "this is my spiritual life and this is the rest of my life." If we think about it, everything is affected by the spiritual life, you know; every bit of my life is a part of my spiritual life. And so those little things—like one of those practical moments is when St. Benedict is talking about how to take care of the tools of the monastery; make sure they go back where they were and that they're clean for the next person. And when you think about it, it's like, "Oh,

okay, that makes sense, a little rule.” But also it’s feeling grateful for what you have and being a good steward and thinking about other people. I want this to be in the right place because we own all this together. This isn’t mine, this is ours. And so there’s a lot of layers to those little practical nuggets.

TSH. Yeah. I mean, it’s a lot like parenting in a way. If you’ve been around little kids, a lot of those early years are just about the practical. You know, “we don’t hit other people.” You want to get into the “this is because they’re made in the image of God,” and you could get really deep, but not really with a three-year-old. But it’s just good to know how to be a good neighbor. Right? How to love others as we love ourselves. You get into that later once you kind of have that foundation of, “Yeah, it’s good to not hit my neighbor.” Just like a kindergarten classroom, there are rules, because without them, it would be the *Lord of the Flies*, chaos.

And we’re like that too, as adults, I think more than we realize. You know, a lot of these guardrails that we think sometimes are like, “Yeah, you know, I can eat potato chips for lunch. Why not?” And that’s it. We are fickle people and we choose things that aren’t the best for us sometimes, and so we need those rules. A rule of life is there because we need these guardrails, not because we are mature enough to not need them, you know?

HALEY. Yes. And reading the rule in the twenty-first century, I think one thing that stands out to us is there's a lot of rules in here. There's a lot of boundaries here, and part of us goes, "I don't want to be a part of that." But what's also interesting is that there's so much mercy in the rule, particularly talking toward other people. You know, if one of the brothers sins, what do you do? How do you address this? What if one of them abandons the monastery? Do they get to come back? And there's all of this mercy. And if they're ready to try again, you can have them come in and try again. It's very kind of not what you're expecting, because it's like, "Oh, it's a rigid rule," but it's full of mercy. And so it's for the good of the community, but also each individual in the community. We want to take care of them.

TSH. Yeah. You know, I think the reason it kind of pushes up against our sensibilities is because we're modern, most of us in Western civilization—we like our autonomy. We don't like to be told what to do, especially if you considered this was for a community. So this is how to live with each other, but we like to just pick up our ball and go play elsewhere. If, you know, our neighbors are annoying us, or the people we share a house with are annoying us, like, I am just going to go have my personal space. That's not to say there aren't times for that. But the reason it rubs against our sensibilities is because it's in the water here that

almost like true enlightenment or the true pinnacle is to just have total mastery over what you get to do. And you know, Bishop Baron talks all the time about how our life is not about us. And I think St. Benedict really embodies that well, this idea that yes, you are here with great mercy and great freedom, but you're not here for your own just self-fulfillment. That's not the point of life, and what a kind of missed opportunity if we spend our time thinking about, "How can I get the most out of this for me?" And I think the rule helps us, in spite of ourselves really, because that's what we would want to do on our own.

HALEY. And I think that a lot of times we kind of live in this fantasy world where it's even an option to do what we want all the time. And so then anytime you embrace family life or any kind of relationships in community, you realize, "Oh, that is not real." And it's helpful to just know that from the get-go. It's not going to be like that.

TSH. Yeah, to name what's actual, what's real in your life instead of the ideal in your head. You know, those of us that are moms, we can think of this. "If only my kids would give me the space I need to write the next great American novel, then I would be fulfilling my calling on earth here." And what a rule can do is name the real. You know, this is my vocation. My kids are not in the way of that, they are part of that. So what does

that look like? Because that's my reality, how do I live out these things that matter? That's what a good rule does I think. And that's what Benedict did really well, just named the reality of life.

HALEY. So what do you think are some of the themes in the rule that kind of attracted you to St. Benedict's spirituality?

TSH. Well, whenever I first read the rule—this was on our big trip as we call it—one of the things that really struck me about the vows that Benedictine communities take is that one of them is the vow of stability. And that is kind of rare, actually. You don't see that with a lot of monastic communities, but in his you do. And the vow of stability was interesting to me because that was the last thing we had when we were backpacking around the world. We literally did not have a house. And everything we owned we could carry on our backs. And so to me, it was like, *stability*. That is interesting to name that as a need, to name that as a good, and so it really drew me, this idea of, "Why does someone need that vow?" Well, I think it's interesting—we take vows not because these are our favorite things to. Like when we exchange marriage vows, it's because it's hard to do those things, and we are committing to this thing that our just human fleshly nature says no to. And so to me, it was interesting, like, okay, stability must not be the easiest thing for us humans to do.

And I think about what that looks like compared to the sixth century, when you're just saying, "I'm going to stay and live in community." We live in such a mobile world now. If our jobs aren't exactly what we want them to be, if our neighborhoods aren't ideal, if our house is too small, if our parish doesn't have the best music ever, or even if life is just boring. I think boredom is such a modern novelty. This idea of, "If life isn't exciting, then let's go find something new." Taking that vow of stability became a real Ebenezer in my life because I needed that. Most of my life up until then was pretty nomadic. And so I think that was probably the thing that drew me in first, this idea of, "I'm going to commit to stay put, even when life is hard and even when life gets boring." And that's hard for us.

HALEY. That is, I think, most uncharacteristic of our culture. When you read it you think, "Oh, you really got to stay there forever?" And that is something, as you said, our mobile culture doesn't really understand, and we're always kind of looking for the next best thing. What's our next step? What's our next step after that?

TSH. I heard a statistic, I think it said something like the average American moves about every six years, which doesn't sound like much, but it actually adds up to quite a bit, especially if you consider how rare that was just a hundred years ago even, let alone in St. Benedict's time. And that's not to say we can't ever

move. I think God calls us to new places; he did with Abraham, you know? So God definitely moves us and asks us to take risks, but I think sometimes when we just do it out of boredom or out of this need for novelty is when it really can backfire, because we're just doing it for self-gratification more than in service of the greater good, which is what the rule of life helps us do really.

HALEY. And I think part of that is maybe we don't have a strong vision for where we're going or what we're called to do. And so this is kind of the idea that was behind you creating this course for creating your own rule of life. What did you put into yours? How did that shape your vision for your family's trajectory?

TSH. Well when I first did it, it was to create my own. It wasn't like, "I'm going to figure out how to do this and teach everybody because I know so much." It was a legitimate, "I can see how a document can help me because I am a flighty human being, and if I had something that was written down, even something concrete enough and small enough to be in my journal that I could just read maybe even every day, of 'this is what I'm about,' perhaps that could help me." And help me not just like a battle cry—waking up and saying "This is what I'm about!"—but an actual tool that can help me say yes and no to the right things. Because most of life should be a "no" for us, especially in our modern world, when we have so many conveniences,

when we have the internet, when we can hop on a plane and go to Paris if we wanted to. Most of life is a no, and so a good rule of life helps us say no but to the right thing so that we have the freedom to say yes to the one percent we're called to.

And so I wanted to break down what are my yeses. And the way I thought of it was I did some research and I found that there's a think tank called Gallup, and they did a lot of statistical analysis and kind of decided that most of modern life could be put into five domains. That would be: work or vocation, health, family, community, and money. And I ended up adding a sixth one—home—because of that idea of the vow of stability. Even though there's a dovetail, and actually that's what I would say—all these categories are not standalone categories. It's kind of like a Venn diagram.

HALEY. Right, because home would touch family, it would touch community.

TSH. It all touches everything, right? And so I knew that I couldn't think that logically—really life is kind of a blob—but it helped me unpack all the many moving parts of life. And so the way I broke it down then was three steps. And the first step was I asked, “Where do I want to be in these six areas three years from now?” And the reason I chose three years was because ten years felt too long. Anything could be different,

anything could happen, who knows? We could be onto the next plague by then, or it could be that we just live somewhere else or our family situation is different. But one year felt a bit too soon because, you know, there's that quote—something about that we overestimate what we can do in a year but we underestimate what we can do in five years. So to me, three years felt like a good, just enough time to really make some traction without it being unrealistic.

And I wanted to be future-oriented, but not because I wanted to name it and claim it, you know; I didn't want this visualizing, none of that kind of stuff. It was more this idea of, I wanted to work with time. You know, God's put us on earth within time; we're finite creatures, life moves really fast, faster than we sometimes realize. And so to name where I wanted to be three years from now, it was almost like recognizing the path I'm on and looking at the pavers that are being laid in front of me. Too far ahead, I have no idea, but just to be super present felt to me a little bit like I wasn't acknowledging the movement. So step one was asking where I wanted to be three years from now in those key areas.

But then step two is asking why, so kind of channeling my inner toddler and asking why about every single thing I named. And what that did was whittle down a lot of the things that I realized, "Actually, that's not

where I want to go.” Because we have these ideas of where we might want to be—like, “I want to live on a farm,” or, “on a homestead on ten acres.” But then when you start whittling down—why, why, why?—it’s like, “Actually, that’s not with my values; it doesn’t dovetail well with my value of living in community, with my neighbors.” There’s a lot of that. So you eliminate and you really get to the core reason of why this matters. And I mean, we could talk for hours about that.

HALEY. That makes a lot of sense to me, because my family has also done some crazy things. Like we moved to a farm for a year and did an agricultural internship and then decided we don’t want to be farmers. Not because we don’t like farming, but because the whole point of this was to spend more time as a family, and actually, if we started a small farm, we would be incredibly stressed out and it would do the opposite of what we were actually drawn to this for. And so the “why”—saying, “Why is it that I’m drawn to this? What is the call behind this?”—helps you kind of clarify. Well, if family togetherness is the idea, then how can we do that in another place with a less stressful job?

TSH. And so then the third step is exactly that; once you get to your “why,” then you ask “what.” So the first step is how, and then why, and then what. How, why, and what. The “what” gets into, what does life look like this next year? So in light of this value of ours as a

family, what does this look like? And that's when this shapes into a rule of life. So an example from our own families, my own rule of life, is we're committed to our neighborhood parish. Even if the parish isn't ideal—in the sense of like architecturally or stylistically or any of the things that my Western sensibility feels like it has a right to name and have a preference for—our greater value is community, teaching our kids the spiritual lessons of worshiping in your neighborhood, where you're planted. The greater good is being part of our neighborhood parish. So we're declaring, "We go to Mass every Sunday at our local parish." That's in our rule of life. And so that way, whenever we're like, "Oh, we're tired," like no, this is what we've committed to do. This is what God's called us to.

HALEY. And you've already thought through that decision. So when you're thinking, "Oh, today we feel like we really want to go to a place with beautiful music, driving an hour away to get there," and you go, "Actually, we've made this decision, this is what we're committed to."

TSH. Exactly. And it's always like, as soon as we make that right decision for us, we just kind of have that sense of peace, of, "Yes, this is what God has called us to do." We are being us by making this choice. And that's not to say—you know, this can really get into overthinking, because you don't want to have

to start doing that about everything. Like has God called us to tacos for lunch? You don't give into that. But whenever it comes to just those decisions where they're both good things, it's how to choose the greater good that actually feels like it could matter. Maybe not tomorrow, but a year from now, consistently going to Mass at our neighborhood parish has dividends that we will see compared to maybe another decision made. That's not to say that decision is the best for everyone, but that's what works for us as a family. And so when you categorize all the different values, when you start thinking about everything that can fit in—health and money, your home—it really genuinely is helpful.

HALEY. And I think there's something so attractive to me—you know, I have four kids, I'm in the middle of family life—so thinking about reading St. Benedict's rule and thinking about living in a monastery, there's something so attractive to the idea of all these intentional guidelines all set up and you just join the program. And there's something about that that's so attractive, but that isn't the reality that we're living as lay people in the twenty-first century. And so I think intentionally saying, "Okay, how are we going to make these decisions?" How am I, or maybe as a family? If you live with other family members, there's something really helpful about that, because then you're taking some of the wonderful wisdom that St. Benedict has. Thinking about how to live in my community—for

me, that's my family, how to do that well—and you're giving yourself some guidelines to help highlight what's important, what God is calling you to do, which is what St. Benedict did.

He was just following step-by-step what God was calling him to do. He didn't set out to change Western civilization; that happened just because of his obedience and faithfulness. And so kind of remembering, "Okay, God's calling me to be obedient and faithful in what that looks like in my life. How do I do that? What is my next step?" There's so much thinking that goes into that, but it really helps to have a vision.

TSH. It does, yeah. And you know, if we think that what our families are in our homes are domestic churches, that we are called to shepherd this little monastic community of three to four children, that's who we're called to be in community with. And then you expand it to these particular neighbors for at least this season, these school classmates, the whatever kind of groups and places God has called us to. We of course want to do that well, if we think about it. It makes sense that we would be thoughtful about what we're waking up to instead of reacting, you know; it's just being proactive. And so it might sound like classic overthinking, but it actually kind of tempers that to where you're not feeling like you're spinning your wheels whenever you're deciding, you know, should Little Jimmy sign up

for basketball and Sally do ballet and art class? And it's like, "Oh wait, no, we decided as a family that we're doing one thing, so that's a no." But maybe it's a not yet, another season. That's just an example.

HALEY. And through that, you would be saying yes to maybe more family time in the evenings, or you're saying no to say yes to something that as a family you've discerned is what you're called to do right now.

TSH. Yeah, exactly. Like, in our section, under family, we talk about how my husband and I, we wanted to place a high value in spending both together time as a clan and one-on-one time with each of our kids. We can't do that if we're running to a million different places every day of the week. So we've committed to not saying yes to a lot of that, so that we have time for those impromptu ice cream dates with one kid or whatever it is, weekly date nights for us. That was a non-negotiable value. And that's in our rule because we want to make sure that that happens. And if we didn't write it down, I mean, I'm not saying we wouldn't do it, but it would feel a little more reactive. Like, "Oh, it's been a month since we've just gone out to dinner with the two of us, we should maybe do that." Whereas no, we write down that we go on a date once a week, and you know, it doesn't have to be fancy or big or a big thing, but it's just part of who we are. It's in our rule. So yeah, it matters.

HALEY. I love that. So what would you recommend for people who are kind of thinking through these different areas of their life? And maybe one of these areas is my spiritual life, like where do I want to go in my spiritual life? How do I choose what devotions or spiritual habits to kind of take on to get there? Where do you think people should start? Or how do they discern that?

TSH. Well yeah, there's a lot, right, and this is really where it gets tricky because you can overthink too many good things. Like, what's good versus what's best for me now?

HALEY. Or get paralyzed because you're like, "Well, I want to go to daily Mass and pray the Rosary and, you know, every single day I want to do . . ." But then that doesn't fit into your life. And then you feel like, "Well, why should I even try?" Because I can't go to daily Mass and pray the Rosary and do all these things every single day.

TSH. And it all waters down when you try to do too much, right? So what I have found that's helpful in this area is the domain I focus on is health. So when I say health, I mean both physical and soul health, so this is where my spiritual life comes in. And so I spend time in prayer asking, where do I want to be three years from now? A lot of times that looks kind of like, who am I

being influenced by? You know, who do I look at and think, “What a great person, role model as a mom or as a Christian or whatever it is.” And what are some of the things I can learn from them? And what does that look like in a small way?

You know, if we’re reverse-engineering this thing, where we go from three years to one year, what does it even look like one month and then all the way to today? What could this be? And so for me, it looks like having a few kind of tools in my toolkit, and I’m not necessarily—this is for me though—committing to always praying the Rosary at 8:30 a.m., because that’s not my reality, right? But that is going to be one of the tools in my toolkit. And so I will do things like keep my rosary in my nightstand. I will have this devotion of Thomas Merton in my nightstand. I have these tools at easy reach, and I commit to doing something. And so, a lot of times it helps to think of what you’re not necessarily saying no to but more like “not yet.”

Like, there’s so many great books out there. I’m going to just keep an ongoing list, but that’s a “not yet” list and maybe I’ll get to it, maybe I won’t. But right now this is what fits me in my season. And also to remember that life is cyclical and seasonal. We all know this—we have four seasons—but we forget this sometimes, that, okay, in the summer I will have more leisurely time to read, so that’s where I’m going to get into this classic

I have never read before but really want to. But in the midst of a busy school year, I am not going to have time but for the small little devotion and that's okay. So just giving ourselves a lot of grace to keep in mind that a rule is not going to be a recipe for perfection. I don't follow it perfectly. I'm a human being. I will mess up and I will stray from it, but it just helps me get a little bit back on track. "Oh yeah. It matters to me that I spend time in prayer every morning in some way, even if it's five minutes."

HALEY. Yeah. I think that that concept of thinking about the seasons of our life is so helpful, because I think there have been times in my life where I've tried to do things that were meant for me in a different season. And then you just feel frustrated or you feel like you're failing. Because I remember, I had three kids right in a row and then a little bit of a break and then another baby. And whenever I would hear about, "Okay, you really need to first thing in the morning start in a quiet place of prayer," for me it was sometime between 4 a.m. and 5 a.m., someone's going to wake me up, and the day is rolling already. I'm not going to be able to hide and have this quiet time of prayer, or else someone's crying. This is not going to work. But now I am in this season where I can get up before the kids and I can pray before they wake up, or maybe they'll get up while I'm praying and they can kind of leave me alone while I finish up my prayer time. And if I just told

myself, “that’ll happen. But just pick something you can do right now and don’t stress out about it,” that would’ve been really helpful.

TSH. It is. And that’s when it’s so helpful to name your vocation too, just to acknowledge the reality. My oldest is almost seventeen now. My life is drastically different than it was even ten years ago, when my youngest was a toddler and I just did not have the luxury that I do now to spend my morning how I want. Perhaps not every day still, but I get that now. But had I been told, “that will come, right now you can get in five minutes.” You can pray a memorized prayer; keep that in your notebook.

HALEY. Pray the Rosary while you’re rocking a baby, or just whatever it takes, whatever you can do now.

TSH. Whatever you need. And it’s okay. There’s so much grace to all of this. That’s what I think St. Benedict got right. You know, so much grace and mercy to us as humans. He’s not calling us to strive for perfection that’s unattainable. He’s recognizing that this side of heaven is always going to be an ongoing quest for being who God made us to be and that our rule can point us in that direction and keep us on the path of being the best me that I was created to be, you know, and not your path or not someone else’s path because that’s not meant for me. And if I try to go over there, I’m just

going to be frustrated. But acknowledging “this is the step I’m on, those are the three steps in front of me, I just need to step there and that’s good.”

HALEY. Which I think is very Benedictine in the sense of St. Benedict’s emphasis on humility. That is the virtue that he emphasizes the most, I think, in the rule. And so if we take on the sense of, “Okay, I’m not perfect, I’m going to mess up,” then we’re not paralyzed by this need for perfection, because we’re like, “Oh yeah, I am a sinful human being, I’m going to mess up, and then I’m going to start again. I’m going to start again and then I’ll start again.” And so that humility, cultivating that, becomes such a gift of grace in actually ever getting anywhere.

TSH. Yeah. I think our rules of life can be a primary tool God uses on our twelve steps of humility that St. Benedict prescribes. That’s where it’s lived out in the flesh, right? My striving for humility looks like when I’m stirring the soup at the stove, you know, when I’m choosing to strap on my running shoes when everything in me screams “stay in bed and sleep in.” These are all daily steps I can take to whatever God has called me to do, to die to myself. Right? I mean, because that’s what humility is about, remembering that our life is not about us. A rule of life is our recipe book for doing that in a way that makes sense to us.

HALEY. I really like that. That is a really good way to say it. So, before we wrap up, as evangelizers, what wisdom do you think we can take from the rule of St. Benedict and his mission to carry out into our work in the world as evangelizers?

TSH. Well, you know, if we all try to be the same person, then we're ignoring the creativity God has given us as members of one Church. God's not called me to be you or Bishop Barron or St. Benedict. He's called me in this particular time period to my particular neighborhood, with my personality and preferences and background. And there's a reason for that. And so I think St. Benedict's idea of thinking about the particulars of life means those little things have purpose. I think especially of those of us who feel like I live a really ordinary life, like, "All these Doctors of the Church are amazing and inspiring, but who am I? I'm just going to be little me in the carpool line or going to the grocery store every week." Recognizing that those are tools God can use to reach the whole world who he loves more than we can fathom, it's almost laughable that we can even be used in our daily life, but he chooses to use us. That's insane, you know, that's amazing. He didn't have to. And so we get to participate in the evangelization of the world, largely through these daily acts.

A few of us might give great sermons or some kind of viral YouTube video or whatever, but most of us, it's

not going to look like that. It's going to look like how we choose to interact with our kids or our neighbor or the person we share a pew with. And those are the people we're meant to evangelize. I think it's easy to forget that in our hyperconnected world, where it's so easy to reach large masses of people, but that's not really how the human soul is made to connect. We're made to connect with people across tables. And so if my rule tells me that's my priority—my priority is getting to know my neighbors or the other moms at my kid's school—then I'm going to say yes to that and no to something else that might seem big and flashy and important but perhaps is not what's meant for me. And I will have missed the opportunity to reach my neighbor with whatever God wants me to say to them or with how to be Christ to them if I'm striving for the wrong things.

HALEY. That's wonderful. That's a great way to think about it. Well, Tsh, where can people find your “create your rule” course if they want more inspiration for how to craft that for themselves or their family?

TSH. Everything is just at tshoxenreider.com. That's the easiest way to put it. It's a very simple, straightforward, self-paced guide that just leads people through the process that worked for me. It's very malleable, you do it how it works best for you, but I review it twice a year around my birthday and around the start of a new

year—just refresh what it is that matters to me. And God’s really used that. So yeah, that’s where people can go.

HALEY. Wonderful, wonderful. And for folks who haven’t yet joined in on the Word on Fire Institute book club, you can just go into the website and click on Groups, and it’s one of the groups. It’s called Club 451. A little play on “Word on Fire”—that is the temperature at which books catch flame. So we have been reading some great spiritual classics, fun novels, all kinds of different stuff. We really mix it up and have different genres so that there is something for everyone, and we have great discussions. The group members are so insightful and we just have a lot of fun discussing, both in the threads and then on live Zooms, the different books that we’re reading.

So we’d love to have you. If you’re already in the book club, I will see you around there.