

Rules of St. Ignatius

A contemporary translation for becoming aware of the different movements that are experienced within the soul and how to discern between what is lifegiving and what creates suffering.

-Ignatian Wisdom and Quotes by Sacred Art of Living

First Rule: Of Freedom and Unfreedom For persons who are trapped in a cycle of addiction there are momentary attractions that create the appearance of pleasure but in reality, hold them prisoner to their addictions. At the same time there always is present a spirit of freedom which is available through deeper knowing and leads to encouragement and peace.

Ignatian Wisdom: The foundation of the *Exercises* is about gaining spiritual freedom.
“God comes to us disguised as our life; everything belongs, there are no dead ends.” Moses Maimonides, 12c Spanish Mystic

Second Rule: Of Contrary Voices In persons who are going through intense periods of darkness one can expect contrary voices which may even appear reasonable at the time but always sadden and discourage. At the same time a spirit of encouragement is always available offering courage and strength, consolations, inspirations and even tears that ease the obstacles and point to our well-being

Ignatian Wisdom: The soul possesses the innate power to discern between different spirits.
“One day with hindsight, the years of struggle will strike you as the most beautiful.” Freud quoting Plato’s Republic

Third Rule: Of Spiritual Consolation I call it consolation when some interior movement in the soul occurs, through which the soul becomes inflamed with love for its Creator. When connected to this Source no created thing is more important than Divine Love.* Finally, I call consolation every increase of hope, faith and charity, and all interior joy which calls the soul to the quiet and peace drawn from the Source of Love.

Ignatian Wisdom: The primary principle of the *Exercises* is in the phrase: *Id quod volo* (that which I desire the most).
“Discovering the Divine Will is no further than the deepest desires of your own heart.
The profound peace and spiritual consolation that follow are the sign you are on the right path.” Pope Francis

*The original text adds language about dedication to the love of Christ. Today the Spiritual Exercises have become a source of guidance both for Christians and spiritual seekers from other faith traditions.

Fourth Rule: Of Spiritual Desolation I call desolation all that is contrary to the third rule, such as darkness of soul and profound disturbance that moves to unquiet, agitation and temptation. Desolation can be recognized by its lack of confidence, hopelessness and absence of love. In such a state one finds oneself lazy, tepid, sad, and separated from the Source of Love. Because, as consolation is contrary to desolation, in the same way the thoughts which come from consolation are contrary to the thoughts which come from desolation.

Ignatian Wisdom: Spiritual desolation is easily recognized by its effects.
“In times of desolation, I barely wanted to pray and even wondered why I should pray.” Mother Theresa’s Diary

Fifth Rule: About Making Changes In the time of desolation never to make a change; but be firm and constant in the resolutions and determination in which one was the day preceding such desolation, or during the last time of consolation. Because, as in consolation, it is a holy spirit within us who guides and counsels, so in desolation untrustworthy energy may counsel us against what is lifegiving...*

Ignatian Wisdom: Rule Five is the 'crown jewel' of the *Exercises*
"Remain resolute about not changing your decisions in times of desolation but redouble every effort and remain committed to what was once discerned in the light." Ignatius, Letter to his Friends

*Ignatius warns that, following a profound consolation with the *Exercises*, one should expect inevitable voices of self-doubt to appear. A wise spiritual companion is needed to remind us of the truth that was encountered in the Light lest we revert to fear and desolation.

Sixth Rule: Antidotes to Desolation Although in desolation we ought not to change our first resolutions, it is very helpful to intensely fortify ourselves against the same desolation. Practices that encourage more time in quiet meditation, service to others and returning to deep Examen are especially suitable disciplines in times of desolation.

Ignatian Wisdom: Reliable guidance is needed when overwhelmed by challenging life circumstances.
"Before you are life and death, blessing and curse, always choose life." Deuteronomy 30, 19
"Come to me all you who are weary and find life burdensome... you will find rest for your souls." Matthew 11, 28-30

Seventh Rule: Trusting in Times of Desolation Let the one in desolation be reminded that the soul has natural, innate powers to resist the different agitations and temptations of 'the enemy of human nature.'* Though Divine Grace may not be clearly perceived, the greater Love is never absent from the soul.

Ignatian Wisdom: There are times when an angel of darkness appears as an angel of light.
"Consolation is typically associated as 'good' and desolation is taken to mean 'bad.'
Clear discernment of spirits is essential lest good appear as evil and vice versa..." Carl Jung

*Ignatius' term for evil was 'the enemy of human nature.' Other commentators use the term, the 'predator' of human nature.

Eighth Rule: Patience during Desolation Let the one who is in desolation strive to be patient which feels contrary to the vexations of the moment. Recall that in the past consolations appeared after desolations and that a time of consolation will soon return. Let the wisdom of the sixth Rule be a reminder of how to not lose hope.

Ignatian Wisdom: Re-visit the Spiritual Geography of your life during times of discouragement.
"In the end, all shall be well and if all is not yet well, it is not yet the end." Julian of Norwich

Ninth Rule: Three Causes of Desolation There are three principal reasons why we may find ourselves desolate:

The first is, because we may have grown tepid or negligent in our spiritual exercises; and as a result, spiritual consolation withdraws from us.

The second, is a result of losing perspective about the most important values in life.

The third, is a result of pride whereby we begin to believe that consolations are of our own creation rather than from the Source of Love and Grace. In such times we need to be reminded that we have put our energy into building an earthy nest which is not ours to keep. Authentic consolation awaits those whose energy is focused on the greater lasting things.

Ignatian Wisdom: Blaming others or becoming a victim keeps us trapped in desolation.

“During dark nights of the soul engage in activities that align with your values and bring a sense of meaning to your life. Helping others can be as beneficial to your spiritual and emotional well-being as receiving support.” Karl Rahner, SJ

Tenth Rule: Impermanence Let someone who is now in consolation think how he may again be in the desolation that follows-- but take strength for the grace available in both states.

Ignatian Wisdom: Holy Indifference allows the soul to stay in balance during swings of consolation and desolation.

“Ignatian Indifference is similar to WuWei (not-doing) of the Tao, where we let go of our agenda to rest in Higher Wisdom.”

Eleventh Rule: Humility and Grace Let one who is consoled remain humble as the grace of such times is truly a gift to be savored. On the contrary, let one who is in desolation be reminded that the soul possesses grace sufficient to resist despair and the dark night, taking strength in the Source of Divine Love.

Wisdom Teaching: Trust that the wisdom of creation is within you and that love is stronger than death.

“Whatever painful growth and change may lie ahead, it is leading to life and not destruction.” Margaret Silf

Twelfth Rule:* **The Enemy of Human Nature** It is the way of the enemy to weaken and lose heart and take flight when a person who is exercising in spiritual things opposes with a bold front that which is diametrically opposed to our true spiritual nature. And on the contrary, if the person who is exercising himself commences to have fear and lose heart, there is no beast so wild on the face of the earth as the enemy of human nature in pursuing a fearful soul out of *his* damnable intention to do great malice.

Ignatian Wisdom: A paradox of human nature is that our hearts are divided between good and evil impulses.

“There is danger in facing evil but it is more dangerous if not faced at all...” Gerald May

“The dragon is not evil itself but refusal to believe in the dragon is the doom of earth people.” Black Elk

*The original text uses some misogynistic language in describing the relationships between men and women.

Modern commentators translate the twelfth rule with more apt metaphors for our times.

Thirteenth Rule: Secrets to Defeat Deceit The enemy of human nature does not want our dark doubts and secrets to be revealed. For when depraved intentions are brought to light, the temptation towards self-loathing and self-doubt cannot succeed. So a soul that wishes to remain at peace, will do well to reveal its secrets and temptations to a spiritual companion who knows how to discern between consolation and desolation and between temporary desolation and a dark night of the soul.

Ignatian Wisdom: It is dangerous to trust your own discernment during times of desolation.

“...at such times a trusted spiritual companion is needed not as an advice giver but as a sounding board to help the individual remember their deepest desires which are easily lost during times of desolation.” John English, SJ

Fourteenth Rule: Our Best Defense A spiritual enemy behaves as a chief bent on conquering and robbing what he desires. For just as a captain or chief attacks on the weakest side of the opposition, so the enemy of human nature looks in turn at all our virtues and innate strengths and where we are found weakest and most in need of everlasting Love, attacks and aims at creating chaos and doubt.

Ignatian Wisdom: God honors and affirms our human experience as the only path to whole-ness.

“Rather than denying our human condition, ‘Ignatian humanism’ (*cura personalis*) engages with all of life including our emotions and woundedness as a defense against false voices of spiritual perfectionism.” Jack Kennedy

Fifteenth Rule:* Faith and Freedom It is dangerous to think of faith and salvation in terms that negate the soul’s innate freedom to choose. These exercises offer the grace and wisdom to fully accept that all of who we are is innately sacred—even the parts we would rather deny. Either all of creation belongs or none of it does. Grace knows that nothings lies outside the reach of Love.

Ignatian Wisdom: The art of choosing the MAGIS between two goods

While a seeker is sometimes faced with what appears to be a good or bad choice, most often the gift of discernment is needed between two ‘goods’ – discerning which may be the MAGIS (that which would lead to the Greater Love).

*Some commentators cite several additional ‘rules.’ This fifteenth rule is a good summary of the entire list.

A.M.D.G.

(literally, “For the greater honor of God”)

The motto of the Jesuits, attributed to their founder St. Ignatius of Loyola, articulates a call to embrace a way of being in life where we live more consciously in all the particulars of ordinary life. The result is that our everyday choices make a difference for our own wellbeing, the good of the world which is in service to Divine Love. In such a spirituality no human action is outside the realm of divine influence.

In Latin, the M in this motto = *Majorem* (the greater); from this word, its noun, MAGIS is used in Ignatian Spirituality to indicate whatever choices we make that contribute to greater freedom and love.