

Building a Rule of Life

Session 4 Facilitator Guide — The Marriage It Lands In

This session helps a man build a Rule of Life — a chosen set of rhythms that carry him toward the life he actually wants. Not rules that restrict; a *trellis* that supports.

The Big Idea

The phrase is ancient, and the metaphor is hiding in the word. “Rule” translates the Latin *regula* — a trellis, the wooden frame a vine is trained on. St. Benedict wrote his *Rule* in the sixth century as “a little rule for beginners” — not a cage, but a structure that freed the community to grow. A Rule of Life is that for a man’s second half: the trellis his days climb toward the light.

Why Now — answering the loss of Structure

For forty years, structure was *imposed* — the alarm, the commute, the calendar someone else filled. Retirement removes it overnight, and that is one of the Five Losses we named in Session 3: the loss of **Structure**. The two easy errors are to rebuild the old scaffolding (busyness for its own sake) or to drift (the open calendar as quicksand). The Rule of Life is the third way — structure a man *chooses*, aimed at who he is becoming. This is where Session 4 begins to answer that loss.

The Three Moves — how a man builds one

Beneath the slide sits a durable pattern — Dallas Willard’s *Vision, Intention, Means* — reframed for the room as **See it • Choose it • Build it**.

1 • See it (Vision). Help him picture the man he is being invited to become — not the life expected of him. The diagnostic question: where do you feel most alive, and where most defensive? Aliveness points toward the vision; defensiveness names what stands in the way.

2 • Choose it (Intention). A vision admired is not a vision chosen. Willard’s insight: we must actually intend it — decide. The artifact of intention is a present-tense guiding sentence (“I am learning to...” — a confession of direction, not a boast of arrival.

3 • Build it (Means). The practices. Richard Foster’s menu helps here — disciplines of engagement (prayer, study, service, fellowship) and of abstinence (solitude, silence, Sabbath). Choose few, and place them at four cadences.

The Four Cadences

Daily practices ground; weekly practices connect and give away; monthly practices review; seasonal practices prune and recommit. The discipline of the cadences is what keeps a rule *alive* rather than erected once and forgotten. One guideline above all: begin with one practice per cadence. A rule kept small is a rule kept.

Using the Worked Example

The model slide shows one man’s actual rule — Participant Zero’s. Use it as a **model, never a template**. The power is in seeing a real, specific, honest rule — “presence over escape, faithfulness over proving” — not in copying it. Invite each man to write his own “over” statements; the collisions between what he chooses and what he defaults to are exactly the conversation.

Facilitation Cautions

Keep it small. The graveyard of Rules of Life is paved with ambitious ones. One practice per cadence beats ten abandoned by February.

Prune seasonally. The seasonal cadence exists so the trellis stays tended — release what drains, recommit to what deepens. A rule is gardened, not monumentalized.

Grace, not earning. Willard's line to keep in your pocket: "Grace is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to earning." Watch the most driven man in the room — he will try to turn his Rule into a new performance review. Name the irony gently: a rule that says "faithfulness over proving" must not itself become a way of proving.

Pastoral note. For a man whose identity was his schedule, the empty calendar can feel like grief before it feels like freedom. Don't rush him to productivity. The Rule is the slow, kind rebuilding of rhythm — companionship for the Tuesday-morning ache.

Charter Contribution

Each man's draft Rule of Life lands in the Harvest Charter — Appendix F (Weekly Rhythms & Habits) and the Rule of Life section. The Kitchen Table Conversation (homework before Session 5) brings his spouse into the rhythms. As the Psalmist asks: "*Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom*" (Psalm 90:12). That is the whole work of this session — numbering the days on purpose.

In the Facilitator's Kitchen

Sources to draw from, and to ration on participant-facing slides: Benedict's *Rule* (regula = trellis) • Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart* (Vision–Intention–Means) • Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (the menu of practices) • John Mark Comer, *Practicing the Way* (rhythms) • Annie Dillard ("how we spend our days...") • Aristotle, via Durant ("we are what we repeatedly do").

Wise Men Seek, Knowing Their Why's

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