

SESSION 4 · PARTICIPANT GUIDE

The Marriage Retirement Lands In

Two Callings, One Covenant

“Love does not consist in gazing at each other, but in looking outward together in the same direction.”

— Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *Wind, Sand and Stars*

NAVIGATING TRANSITION · BUILDING BROTHERHOOD · IGNITING JUBILEE

Name: _____

Date: _____

THIS MORNING'S ARC

Three Movements, One Question Each

1 • 20 MIN

Review & Discussion

Your three markers.
What the couples
conversation surfaced at
home.

2 • 40 MIN

The Three at the Table

What retirement
removes. His calling, her
calling, the covenant.
Polarities, not battles.

3 • 30 MIN

A Rule of Life

Why now, not someday.
A trellis, not a cage. One
conversation to take
home.

She is not in the room this morning. Speak as if she were.

No One Holds an Empty Chair

Some of us are widowers. Some are divorced, or never married. Some have a wife who wants no part of this. This session is still yours.

Every tool this morning has a path for you: *honor and continue a vision built with someone now gone* — or complete the Marriage Shared Vision worksheet with an adult child or a close friend. Where the take-home steps say “her,” read the person your covenant reaches. For widowers, the last step becomes honoring the “we” you built.

If this morning touches grief: that is the material working, not you failing. Tell your table, or tell the facilitator afterward. No one carries this room alone.

MOVEMENT 1 · REVIEW & DISCUSSION

The Couples Conversation, Out Loud

You closed Session 3 with one main assignment: sit down with your wife, ask, and listen. This morning you speak from that conversation — share only what you feel comfortable sharing. Your misalignments are not this morning's problem; they are this morning's raw material, and they return on the Polarities page.

1 Any surprises? What did she say that you would not have predicted?

2 Where did you find yourselves agreed?

3 Where were you misaligned — and what tension sits underneath it?

Check-In · On the Table · The Reading · This Week's Practice

Open your Charter to §1.1 — your Three Markers, Peak, Valley, Turning Point, three sentences each — done or not yet? They were due this morning; nobody collects them. If you are not done, finish this week. Then, one short line each: the Couples Conversation — one sentence on what you heard from her; the reading — one sentence that landed from The Two Halves of Life Reader's Companion; Practice of the Week — one moment with "Let them finish," no commentary.

MOVEMENT 2 · THE THREE AT THE TABLE

The Scaffolding Comes Down

For thirty years, career and child-rearing built a scaffold around your marriage. Separate roles. Separate schedules. Separate pursuits, held in place by the demands of the week. The scaffold did real work — and it quietly masked the places where the two of you were never the same.

Remove it, and what was always there becomes visible: differing visions of how to spend the days ahead. This is not a marriage in trouble. It is two people discovering they were never identical.

The differences were always there

Adventure	vs. the safe and familiar
Time as a couple	vs. time around kids & grandkids
Spend & splurge	vs. save — vs. give
A mission to pursue	vs. enjoyment earned
Act now	vs. wait — and whether to downsize

Breakout · At your tables

Which of the five differences is most alive in your marriage right now — and how do you know?

Three Sit at the Marriage Table

“One flesh” has never meant two people blurred into one. If it did, the differences on the previous page would be defects. The model is the Trinity: distinct persons, undivided union. So three parties have a seat at your table — and the third is real.

1

His calling

A man may carry a sense of God’s particular call on his life — valid even when it isn’t yet shared.

2

Her calling

She has her own life, gifts, and longings — not an appendix to his, and not a vote to be won.

3

The covenant

The marriage itself is a third entity with its own vision and claims. Not the overlap of two agendas — a party at the table.

The covenant is not the Venn intersection of what each of you wants. Only two whole people can be one flesh.

If a separate sense of calling sounds almost disloyal to you, hold the frame: your calling is never handed to you *instead of* her — it is carried *with* her, inside the covenant. The deeper material on personal calling in marriage lives in the Reader’s Companion, and it always travels with the covenant vision around it.

A word to stand on

Genesis 2:24

“...and they become one flesh.” Union — of two whole people.

Ephesians 5:21

“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”
Mutuality before hierarchy.

Ecclesiastes 4:9–12

“Two are better than one... a cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” The third strand — this morning’s whole argument.

Polarities to Manage — Not Battles to Win

Most retirement-vision differences aren't problems with a solution. They're tensions a couple keeps rebalancing for life — what Barry Johnson calls polarities. Framed this way, no one has to be wrong. Difference is the norm, not the alarm.

Adventure	⇌ Security
Together	⇌ Family-centered
Spend / give	⇌ Save
Mission	⇌ Enjoyment

The work isn't to win the pole you prefer. It's to keep the tension in healthy balance — together.

Breakout · In pairs

Which pole do you lean toward? Which does she? (Your misalignment from Movement 1 probably lives on one of these lines.)

A both/and to take home

Turn a reframe into a tool. Try the sentence on one polarity:

"We will honor _____ by _____ and
_____ by _____."

Why Answer This Now?

Atul Gawande, in *Being Mortal*, observes that medicine has chased survival and safety — and lost sight of what makes life worth living. Drawing on Laura Carstensen's research, he notes a shift: when we sense time is finite, our priorities turn from achievement and accumulation toward presence, relationship, and meaning.

The healthy, mobile, adventuring years are a window — and it is open now, not indefinitely.

The conversation to have together

“If our time were shorter than we hope — what would make these years worth living, and what would we most want to do together?”

Ask it gently. Ask it now.

Concepts from Atul Gawande, Being Mortal, and the work of Laura Carstensen. Paraphrased; not direct quotation.

MOVEMENT 3 · A RULE OF LIFE

Not a Cage. A Trellis.

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.

WHAT IT IS NOT

A rigid daily schedule
A self-improvement project
Something you achieve once and finish
One more thing on your plate

WHAT IT IS

A personal framework for intentional living
A way to align your time, energy, and values
Something you practice, not complete
Choosing what matters most — on purpose

Like a trellis for a vine — a Rule of Life doesn’t restrict growth, it gives it something to climb.

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; that is the loss of Structure we named in Session 3. The two easy errors: rebuild the old scaffolding (busyness for its own sake), or drift (the open calendar as quicksand). The Rule of Life is the third way — structure a man *chooses*, aimed at who he is becoming.

The WhyzMen Core Orientation

Four guiding postures for the second half. They are “over” statements — a direction chosen over a default. The collisions between what you choose and what you default to are exactly the conversation.

Withdrawal → Presence	Show up fully — to family, friends, and your own life.
Proving → Contribution	Your value is no longer in your title. It’s in your impact.
Isolation → Relationship	The research is clear: connection is health.
Control → Wisdom	Let go of what you can’t change; invest in what you can.

“Abide in me, and I in you.” — John 15:4 (ESV)

How to Build Your Rule

Beneath the three steps sits Dallas Willard’s Vision–Intention–Means, reframed for the room:

1

SEE IT

Name the man you’re becoming. Picture the life you actually want — then notice where you already feel most alive, and where most defensive. Aliveness points toward the vision; defensiveness names what stands in the way.

2

CHOOSE IT

Turn the picture into a decision. A wish drifts; a decision holds. A vision admired is not a vision chosen — write it as a present-tense sentence: “I am learning to...”

3

BUILD IT

Pick small rhythms that move you there. Start with one per rhythm — the trellis, not the whole garden.

Your guiding sentence — first draft

A confession of direction, not a boast of arrival: ***“I am learning to...”***

“How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives.” — Annie Dillard

The Four Rhythms

The rhythms that hold a life upright — the rungs of the trellis. Daily practices ground; weekly practices connect and give away; monthly practices review; seasonal practices prune and recommit. One guideline above all: **begin with one practice per rhythm.** A rule kept small is a rule kept.

DAILY	Move your body. Five minutes of stillness. One honest question you keep asking.
WEEKLY	Give some wisdom away. Share one relationship without fixing it. Do one thing that brings joy.
MONTHLY	Review where you felt most alive — and most defensive. Take a Sabbath from producing.
SEASONAL	Release one draining obligation. Recommit to what deepens love, wisdom, and presence.

Small and sustainable beats heroic and abandoned.

Scratch space — one practice per rhythm

Rough it in here this morning; it lands properly in the Charter — §3.2 My Rule & My Triad (the fuller version is optional, Appendix L · My Rule of Life) — and the Kitchen Table Conversation brings your wife into the rhythms.

Daily

Weekly

Monthly

Seasonal

A Worked Example

One man’s actual rule — a model to learn from, never a template to copy. The power is in seeing a real, specific, honest rule; yours will not look like this, and it shouldn’t.

CORE ORIENTATION

“I choose presence over withdrawal, relationship over isolation, contribution over proving, and wisdom over control.”

A FEW RHYTHMS

Daily — five minutes of stillness; one honest question

Weekly — create something that gives wisdom away

Monthly — a Sabbath from proving

Seasonal — release one draining obligation

GUIDING SENTENCE *“I am learning to stay present instead of withdrawing, connected instead of isolated, contributing instead of proving, and wise instead of controlling.”*

Watch for the irony: a rule that says “contribution over proving” must not itself become a way of proving. Grace is not opposed to effort; it is opposed to earning. (Dallas Willard)

Callback · The Rule Clears the Way

A Rule of Life is not the destination. It makes room to be present.

Be still, and know. “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). The daily five minutes of stillness is where the Rule starts. Meaning lives in this morning, this conversation, this wife.

Every practice gets two things. A cue: when and where it happens (“after morning coffee, in the red chair”). A two-minute version: what you do on the day you don’t feel like it.

The trellis holds the vine up. It does not make the fruit. Presence does.

WHAT YOU TAKE HOME

From This Room to the Kitchen Table

1 • Name the third	Tell your wife you've come to see your marriage as its own entity — not just two schedules. Let her hear it.
2 • Bring one polarity	Choose a single tension — adventure, downsizing, giving — and bring it as a question to explore, not a position to defend.
3 • Listen to understand	Label the feeling, ask a real question, and resist fixing. Make her feel known first.
4 • Begin the “we”	Name one practice for your marriage, together — a “we,” not a “me.” That is this week's one line. (Widowers: one practice that honors the “we” you built.)

The program doesn't pull you away from her. Done right, it sends you toward her with better tools.

In your hands this morning

E1 • The Great Listener Card — for any conversation that matters; Listening vs Fixing is on its back. **H1 • The Marriage-Safe Conversation** — take it with you to the Kitchen Table Conversation this week.

The Communication & Relationships Toolkit — already in your Reference tab since Session 2. These two cards are the short versions of §1 Listen and §4 At Home. Nothing in it is assigned; it is there when life asks for it.

Keep the cards in the front pocket of your notebook — or by the coffee maker, where you will use them.

Closing Discussion

- 1 What might be the biggest gap between me and my wife in how we spend our time together in this half of life? What does our *apart* time add to the relationship?**

- 2 What one experiment might we run together this season?**

BEFORE SESSION 5 · YOUR MAIN WORK THESE TWO WEEKS

The Kitchen Table Conversation

A 20-minute conversation with your spouse about rhythms for the next season. Twenty minutes, three questions, one thing brought back to Session 5. The listening posture from this morning applies: label the feeling, ask a real question, resist fixing.

01 What daily rhythms do we want to protect?

Morning quiet? Meals together? Evening walk? What structure do we want to build into this new freedom?

02 What is one thing each of us may need to release?

A role, an identity, a habit, an expectation. What no longer fits this next season of life?

03 What new rhythm do you hope we build together?

A practice, a place, a ritual. What would make this season feel intentional rather than accidental?

“Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?” — Amos 3:3

Bring one thing you heard from this conversation to share at Session 5.

HOMEWORK · ONE WEEK

Two Things Finished Beats Seven Started

Do · Required

- 1 Hold the Kitchen Table Conversation** on the previous page, with card H1 in hand; bring one thing you heard to Session 5. It is the designed centerpiece of this week. About 30 minutes.
- 2 One practice for your marriage — one line.** From this morning's Rule of Life and the Kitchen Table Conversation, name one practice the two of you will keep, in one sentence. (Widowers: one practice that honors the “we” you built.) About 10 minutes.
- 3 Practice of the Week · Her day first** — From the Toolkit: 4 · At Home. Tried it this week ☐ · Bring one moment to the room. About 5 minutes.

Optional · Going Deeper — only if it calls to you, not counted

- **Marriage Shared Vision worksheet** — written as a “we,” not a “me”; the result can go in Charter Appendix C (Marriage & Family). Alternate path: honor a vision built with someone now gone, or complete it with an adult child or close friend.
- **A fuller Rule of Life for your marriage** — one practice per rhythm, from the scratch space in this guide (Charter Appendix L).
- **Readings** — listed below. The McAdams appendix and the Allender reference now sit in Session 5's library.

Handed out this morning E1 · The Great Listener Card (Listening vs Fixing on the back) · H1 · The Marriage-Safe Conversation (take H1 to the Kitchen Table Conversation).

Bring to Session 5 One thing you heard at the kitchen table · your one line · one moment with Her day first · your Charter.

About 45 minutes this week — Session 5 is Monday, December 7. Nothing optional is counted.

Readings for This Week

Required None this week — the Kitchen Table Conversation is the reading.

Optional / Going Deeper — only if it calls to you, not counted The Life Story Interview II — Dan McAdams · Rule of Life, Atomic Habits & From Knowing to Doing — the WhyzMen Going Deeper Reading Guide. If the markers have you thinking, the Life Story Interview is where the method behind them lives. No one is behind for leaving any of these.

Practice of the Week · Her day first

How: Ask about her day before you tell yours, and stay with her answer.

Rooted in: Gottman: turning toward

From the Toolkit: 4 · At Home

Tried it this week ☐ · Bring one moment to the room.

No wife at the table? A daughter, a sister, a close friend.

Recommended

Text the men on your left and right one sentence: how you walked out this morning. Brotherhood is built between sessions, not during them.

Coming at Session 5 · Me, the Co-Author & Protagonist of My Story

Story drafting begins, and your Three Markers become raw material. Bring one thing you heard at the kitchen table, your one line, and one moment with Her day first.

Use This Space During the Session

[illegible]

The days are numbered — and they are yours together. Go spend them on purpose.

Wise Men Still Seek, Knowing Their Why's