

WHYZMEN • PARTICIPANT GUIDE • SESSION 10

The Fellowship Gap & Finding Your Circle

Why men lose friends — and who yours are

Bring this morning: your Harvest Charter open to §3.2 My Rule & My Triad, Part One read once through (whole, not edited), the Board, a pen, and your phone — charged. You will put a date in it before you leave.

Monday, January 25, 2027 • 9:00–10:30 AM • New Community Church

“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: if either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. ... Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.”

Ecclesiastes 4:9–10, 12

This Morning

	Movement	Minutes	What you leave with
1	The Gap	20	Why your friendships thinned, how many people a man can actually hold — and who your five are
2	The Practices	15	Five practices, the ladder, the architecture — the friendship operating system for the second half
3	Your Circle	35	Your standing triad, named in Charter §3.2, with a charter drafted
4	The Commitment & Send-off	15	A first meeting date in your phone, one text sent, your T1 • Your Triad card in your hand

Last Monday you read Part One as one document and said in three lines what it adds up to. You did that alone. This morning we find the men who will carry it with you — because four weeks from today, when you sit in the Clearness Room on Clearness Monday, February 22, it will be these men asking you the questions.

1

The Gap

20 minutes · check-in at the table · the diagnosis · Dunbar's layers

Check-in — one sentence each, around the table

“The last time I made a new real friend was ...”

Receive each answer with a nod. Do not analyze it. Most men in this room will name someone from before they were fifty. That is not a personal failure. It is a pattern — and a pattern has causes.

Then: one moment with last week's practice, “Three Good Things, aloud.” One moment each, no commentary.

The invisible erosion — friendships in the second half do not break; they thin

The Context Collapse

Most male friendships live inside a structure — the team, the office, the unit, the small group. When the context ends, the friendship loses its scaffolding and quietly deflates. Billy Baker calls it the annual-pass problem: good for the season, then it expires.

The Hours Nobody Has

Friendship is made of hours in the same room. Jeffrey Hall's research: about 50 hours together to move from acquaintance to casual friend, about 90 to friend, 200 or more to close friend. The building years spent those hours at work, for free. Retirement stops paying them.

Calorie-Free Connection

Texts, threads, and feeds satisfy the hunger without the nutrition. A man can be in touch with two hundred people and known by none. Digital contact maintains a friendship that exists; it does not make one.

The arithmetic. One dinner a month is two hours. At that pace a close friend takes eight years — if nothing interrupts it. A triad that meets for ninety minutes a month and does one ordinary thing together in between closes the gap in under two. The structure is the whole difference.

This is a design problem, not a character problem. The structures that used to produce friendship disappeared, and nobody handed you new blueprints.

What the research keeps finding

Finding	Source
Chronic loneliness carries a mortality risk comparable to smoking 15 cigarettes a day.	Holt-Lunstad et al.; U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory, 2023
People with strong social relationships have about 50% greater odds of survival — 148 studies, 308,849 participants.	Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010
The quality of a man's relationships at fifty predicted his health at eighty better than his cholesterol did.	Harvard Study of Adult Development, since 1938 — Walderinger & Schulz, The Good Life

How many people can a man actually know? — Robin Dunbar, Oxford

Dunbar spent thirty years on the relationship between primate brain size and social group size. A human being can hold about 150 stable relationships — people you know well enough to join uninvited for a drink. It is a cognitive limit, not a cultural one, and the 150 turns up wherever people organize themselves without an org chart: Neolithic villages, the Roman century, Hutterite colonies that split at 150, the congregation size at which a pastor stops knowing everyone. Inside the 150, relationships sit in nested layers, each about three times the one inside it.

Layer	Who they are	Where your hours go
1.5	The intimate. For most married men, his wife.	—
5	The support clique — the men you would call at 2 a.m. Your triad lives here.	About 40% of your social effort
15	The sympathy group — you would grieve their loss. The cohort may land here.	Another 20% — roughly 60% of your effort goes to these fifteen
50	Good friends — the party, the ball game, the serve day.	Most of the rest
150	Dunbar's number — the most stable relationships a human brain can hold.	
500 / 1,500	Acquaintances, and the faces you can put a name to.	

Four findings that matter this morning

1. **Friendship decays; kinship does not.** Family ties survive years of silence. A friendship not fed with time slips one layer outward in months. That is why the Christmas-card friend was once a five.
2. **Men bond shoulder-to-shoulder.** Women sustain friendship by talking; men sustain it by doing things together in small groups — the club, the team, the crew. This is why your triad charter requires a named activity.
3. **Seven pillars hold a friendship up.** Shared language, place of origin, education, interests, worldview, sense of humor, and moral values. The more pillars two men share, the more durable the bond — and the faster it forms.
4. **The five is a capacity, not a wish list.** You cannot add a man to the five without the time to keep him there. Every triad slot you fill this morning is a slot you are choosing to fund.

The question is not “Do you have friends?” The question is “Who are your five?”

Who occupies my five right now — current reality, not wishful thinking

For you, not for the table. If the ring is thin, write it thin. That is what this morning is for.

Two questions to sit with — at the table if time allows, or on your own this week

These are the questions underneath the check-in. Write one honest line for each.

1. Think of your closest friendship outside your marriage. How did it form? What sustained it? What is its status today?

2. Where have you felt the fellowship gap most acutely — and what story have you told yourself about why?

2

The Practices

15 minutes · five practices · the ladder · the architecture · the couple dimension

You built a 150 over forty years without trying — the office did it for you. The five has to be built on purpose. These five practices are the operating system; the room gets the headlines and this page carries the rest.

	Practice	Source	In one line	The move
1	Anchor yourself	Susan Pinker, The Village Effect	Proximity is the engine of friendship, not intention. The five-minute conversation after the men's breakfast is not small talk — it is brick-laying.	Audit your week. Where do you already show up around the same men? Those are your village anchors. Mine them.
2	Do something together	Billy Baker, We Need to Hang Out	Men connect shoulder-to-shoulder. Activity is the Trojan horse for intimacy. Recurring beats meaningful.	Show up weekly for something ordinary before attempting something deep. Put it on the calendar and protect it.
3	Initiate — don't wait	Marisa Franco, Platonic	The barrier is not opportunity; it is waiting to be invited. The other man is almost always grateful — and almost never the one who initiates.	Assume the friendship. One man, one specific invitation, one date. Not a group text.
4	Climb the vulnerability ladder	Shasta Nelson, Frientimacy	Positivity, then consistency, then vulnerability. Most male friendships stall on rung two — chronic shallowness by mutual agreement.	Go one rung deeper than the conversation is asking for. Vulnerability is not weakness; it is the invitation friendship requires.
5	Build the architecture	Kat Velloso, We Should Get Together	Friendship fails not for lack of care but for lack of architecture. A recurring time and place is the commitment; the friendship grows inside it.	Design the architecture before the feeling fades. When one structure ends — a job, a program, a season — build what comes next.

The practice most foreign to me right now — and why

Not the one you admire. The one you have quietly avoided.

The vulnerability ladder

VULNERABILITY — We share what is real. <i>The rung that turns a good friend into one of the five.</i>
CONSISTENCY — We show up regularly. <i>Where most male friendships stop: pleasant, reliable, and never deeper. Nobody decided to stay shallow; both men just kept not going first.</i>
POSITIVITY — We enjoy each other. <i>Where every friendship starts. Necessary. Not sufficient.</i>

A triad without a built-in progression plateaus at consistency — a pleasant monthly breakfast that never becomes a five. That is why your charter carries twelve opening questions, one a month, climbing from positivity to the core.

What happens when WhyzMen ends on March 22?

For twenty weeks this room has been your architecture — a time, a place, a table, a question. You did not have to design it. When that architecture ends, the friendship needs new architecture or it quietly dies. The architecture is the commitment. The friendship grows inside it. This morning you build the architecture that outlasts the program — and the triad charter is the frame that holds it.

The Recipe — the friendship line of your Rule of Life

For the man it does not happen to by itself: the five practices turned into a calendar — the weekly and monthly rhythms from your Session 4 Rule of Life, now pointed at your five. Copy this page for the refrigerator or your phone.

Rhythm	Practice	What you do
Every week	Anchor · Do something together	One touch per man in your five — a text, a call, ten minutes on the porch. Not a group text. And one shoulder-to-shoulder hour with at least one of them: the walk, the project, the errand you do together.
Every month	Architecture · Initiate	The triad meets — ninety minutes, same place, the month’s question. Plus one invitation to a man in your fifteen: breakfast, a game, a ride to the serve day. You initiate. He is almost always grateful.
Every quarter	Architecture · Anchor	One thing you host — a cookout, a fire, a serve day, a game. Six to twelve men, wives if it fits. Hosting is how a fifteen becomes a fifty and a fifty produces the next five.
Every year	Climb the ladder	Reread your five. Who moved in, who slipped out, who you have been carrying on a Christmas card. Redraw the worksheet. One rung deeper with one man.

Hours are the currency. Weekly keeps a five. The calendar, not the feeling, is what decides.

The fellowship gap is real. But it is closeable — not by waiting for it to happen, but by doing something small, deliberate, and recurring.

The Couple Dimension

You leave this room energized. You go home to a wife who is perfectly content with the social life you already have. Sound familiar? This is not about changing her. It is about designing a friendship life that works for both of you — and one distinction makes the whole conversation possible.

Introversion	Isolation
Wiring — not a choice. Introverts recharge from within and run on depth rather than breadth; large gatherings are draining. It cannot be changed. It can be designed for.	A habit — a groove worn by years of low-friction comfort. Not a fixed trait. A pattern that shifts with the right invitation.

Three practical moves

- 1. **Negotiate the social budget.** Agree a monthly framework once — how many evenings out, how many in, how many with other couples — instead of negotiating every event fresh. She gets predictability and control; you get guaranteed outlets.
- 2. **Design for her comfort.** Smaller gatherings. Home settings. Defined ending times. One couple at a time. Meet her where her version of a good evening lives — calm and depth, not stimulation and noise.
- 3. **Reframe the conversation.** Not “I want to socialize more.” But: “My friendships matter to our marriage — to who I am when I come home to you. Can we figure out how to build more of them together?”

An invitation for the break, at home (optional, not counted): one ten-minute conversation about what you are building and why. Listen first. Card H1 • The Marriage-Safe Conversation, from Session 4, is the tool — open gently, reflect what you hear, and ask “do you want me to just listen, or think through options?” before you offer anything.

One honest thing I know about my wife’s social style that I need to design for

3

Your Circle

35 minutes · four questions · Circle Selection · the tables · the triads · the charter

You have sat in threes since Session 1 — different men every Monday, on purpose, so you would know the whole room. This morning you choose the one that outlasts the program. Most men never choose their closest friends; they inherit them from a context and lose them when the context ends. Choosing on purpose is not unnatural. It is wisdom.

Callback · The Knapsack — you can't carry every friendship

You cannot tend every circle well. You can tend a few with deep presence. Scattered is many circles and thin presence — another group, another list, another reunion, and exhaustion by March. Chosen is your five and your triad — deep presence, high trust, life-giving.

Which relationships go in your Knapsack? We default to adding another group instead of going deep with a few (Klotz: "subtraction neglect"). Leaving others out of the pack is not rejection. It is capacity.

Four selection questions — run every name through them

1 Is he available?

Not just geographically — seasonally. A man in a crisis, a move, or a chaotic family season may be a dear friend and not a triad candidate this year. That is not a verdict on him.

2 Is he willing?

Does he want depth, not just pleasantness? You are not looking for a drinking buddy. You are looking for a man who wants to be known — and to know.

3 Is there real chemistry?

Not similarity. Durable triads are often temperamentally diverse. But there must be something real: curiosity about each other, warmth, ease.

4 Could your wives connect?

Not required. But a triad that can occasionally become three couples at a table has far more surface area to survive on.

Torn between two men? Count Dunbar's pillars — language, place, education, interests, worldview, humor, moral values. More shared pillars, more durable bond. A tie-breaker, not a filter.

Circle Selection Worksheet

Five minutes, silent. Three names from this room — men you have sat with since November who pass the four questions. Two names from beyond this room — a drifted friend, a neighbor, the man from the men’s breakfast: someone who was once a fifteen and could be a five again. Mark each question ✓ or ?, then name the practice that is missing: proximity · activity · initiative · vulnerability · architecture.

IN THIS ROOM

	Name	Available?	Willing?	Chemistry?	Wives?	Practice missing
1						
2						
3						

BEYOND THIS ROOM

	Name	Available?	Willing?	Chemistry?	Wives?	Practice missing
4						
5						

Circle the one man in this room you would text first. You are on somebody else’s list too.

At the table — 10 minutes, three questions

1. **Which names keep surfacing?** From your five — who passes the four questions cleanly? Say his name. Somebody at this table may have written yours.
2. **Is there a man in this room?** Someone you have been getting to know across ten Mondays who you could see meeting with for a year. Name him. This is not a proposal yet; it is a signal.
3. **What would honestly stop you?** Schedule, fear of being turned down, not knowing who to ask, not wanting to need it. Name it so it loses some of its power.

The honest obstacle — mine

Forming the Triads — a cord of three strands

Three.	Four is allowed. Two is not — a pair collapses the first time one man’s life changes. Three has redundancy; at five, men start performing.
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Stand up and go.	If you named each other at the table, find each other now. If you named a man who has not named you — go and ask him. He is almost always grateful.
The unplaced get placed.	At the four-minute mark the facilitator reads the names of any man not yet in a triad and places him. Nobody leaves this room alone.
Write it in §3.2.	Three names in the Harvest Charter, My Rule & My Triad. A charter without names is a nice document.

My triad — Harvest Charter §3.2 My Rule & My Triad

	Name	Phone / email	Best time to reach him
1			
2			
3			
4 (if four)			

A man who wants a triad outside the cohort for the rest of his life is entirely right to build one — and he still joins a cohort triad for the program. The Clearness Room on Clearness Monday, February 22, needs him in one. Both can be true.

The Triad Charter

Drafted in the triad, ten minutes. The charter is not paperwork; it is the frame that holds the architecture. Decide the first three this morning — people, rhythm, activity — and the first meeting date. The other three can be finished at the first meeting; that is partly what the first meeting is for.

1 Our People

Three names, a commitment to each other by name. Copy them from §3.2 above.

Our initiator for the first meeting — the man who sends the reminder and books the table:

Rotating initiator? ☐ Yes, monthly ☐ One man holds it for the year

2 Our Rhythm

The single most important logistical decision. Monthly works. Bi-monthly is the floor. Quarterly is a book club.

How often: ☐ Monthly ☐ Every six weeks ☐ Other: _____

Where (same place, every time): _____

How long: ☐ 90 minutes ☐ Other: _____ Day / time of day: _____

3 Our Activity

The shoulder-to-shoulder thing you do together between meetings. Named now, before the first meeting — a triad that only talks runs out of things to say by month four.

☐ Walk / hike ☐ Serve (NCC Goes) ☐ Build / fix / project ☐ Cook / eat ☐ Study ☐ Other: _____

Our first one, and when: _____

4 Our Progression

The monthly question arc on the next page — use it, adapt it, or write your own. Something has to climb, or you plateau at a pleasant breakfast.

☐ Use the twelve-month arc as printed ☐ Adapt it ☐ Write our own

Month 1 question (write it here so it is ready): “What’s one thing going well in your life right now?”

5 Our Purpose

What the triad is FOR beyond itself. The anchor that keeps you from drifting when the relational tide goes out. Honest beats grand.

☐ Serve together (NCC Goes, two or three days a year) ☐ Pray together ☐ Study together ☐ Invest together (a younger man, a ministry, a neighborhood)

“Our triad exists not just for ourselves, but for _____.”

Stems: our own formation · the men around us · our families · our church · our neighborhood.

6 Our Commitment

How long, and what we do when one man goes quiet.

Initial commitment: ☐ 12 months (suggested) ☐ 6 months ☐ Other: _____

When one of us starts to fade — who calls him, and by when: _____

We will look at this charter again on (date): _____

The Monthly Question Arc — Year One

Nelson’s ladder built into the triad from day one. Not mandatory: adapt it, reorder it, write your own. The arc is the point. Month 1 is easy on purpose — the first meeting is for showing up, not going deep.

Month	Opening question	Rung
M1	What’s one thing going well in your life right now?	Positivity
M2	What’s one thing you’re working hard at that others might not see?	Positivity
M3	What’s one thing you’re wrestling with?	Consistency
M4	What’s a dream or desire you rarely talk about?	Consistency
M5	What’s one fear or uncertainty you’re carrying?	Vulnerability

Month	Opening question	Rung
M6	What's a regret that still has some weight?	Vulnerability
M7	What is God doing in you right now — and what's resisting it?	Deep
M8	Where do you feel most alive? When did you last feel it?	Deep
M9	What does your marriage — or your closest relationship — need from you right now?	Deep
M10	What's the gap between who you are and who you want to be?	Core
M11	What do you want to be remembered for?	Core
M12	What has this triad given you that you couldn't have found alone?	Core

A suggested rhythm for a triad meeting — from month two • 90 minutes

Phase	Minutes	What happens
Arrive and settle	10	Phones away. Informal talk. The transition from the outside world. Optional: one round of “If you really knew me right now...”, a sentence each.
The opening question	45	Fifteen minutes per man on the month's question. No cross-talk until he is finished. Listen before fixing — the Great Listener Card is the rule book.
Open table	20	Anything on the table. No agenda. The frame holds it.
Set the next one	10	Date, place, initiator, next month's question. Then prayer, if that is your practice — brief and consistent.
The activity	as scheduled	Walk, serve, build, cook — shoulder-to-shoulder time, between meetings or attached to them.

Your first meeting runs its own way: ten to settle, twenty minutes a man on the Month 1 question, fifteen to finish the charter and five to set month two. Card T1 • Your Triad carries both: the standing meeting on the front, the first meeting's run on the back. In a triad of four, give each man fifteen minutes at the first meeting and eleven from month two.

4

The Commitment & Send-off

15 minutes · one date · one text · one card · three weeks in the Wilderness Between

Right now, in this room, you are doing something most men never do: choosing your people on purpose. Three things before you leave — and the social permission of doing them together, in the room, is what makes them happen.

1 Put the date in your phone

Your triad's first meeting — in Week 2 of the break, February 2 to 8. Place, time, ninety minutes. Not approximate; not aspirational. In the phone, now, all three of you.

Date: _____ Time: _____ Place: _____

2 Send one text — now

To one man beyond this room from your five. Ninety seconds. Not a group text. Something like: "Hey — I've been thinking about you. Want to grab breakfast in the next couple of weeks?"

Sent to: _____ ☐ Sent in the room ☐ Sending later today

3 Take your card

It is in your pocket: T1 · Your Triad — the one rule and the standing meeting on the front; the twelve monthly questions and the run of the first meeting on the back. Bring it, with the Great Listener Card (E1) from Session 4, to the first meeting. In your envelope: six optional cards (E3–E7 and H2; try one over the break and tell us at Session 11 whether it helped) and the Seven Ways to Coast card — keep it for Session 11. The long version is in the Toolkit in your Reference tab: 5 · Build & Host. One rule — listen before fixing. If you are not sure, ask him: "Do you want help, or just to be heard?"

Why your first meeting matters on February 22

On Clearness Monday, February 22, there is no class: your triad meets in its own room at church, 9:00–10:30, and runs the Clearness Room — Parker Palmer's practice, in which your triad asks you only honest, open questions and never advises. Session 11 on February 15 demonstrates it. It is the hardest thing men do in this program. Your first triad meeting is the rehearsal. A triad that has practised not fixing for one morning can hold a man's mission for half an hour.

The Wilderness Between

Three weeks between the Foundation and the climb — deliberately quiet: one meeting, two pieces of writing, one call a week. Honest minutes are in brackets.

Week	Theme	What you do
1 · Jan 26–Feb 1	Rest	Rest. Answer the facilitator's one text: what are you grateful for from the fall? · Send your one text to the man beyond the room, if you did not send it this morning · Skim the Break Reference once (10) · Shoulder to shoulder: one man, side by side (15) · The practice: one call (15). About 50 minutes.

Week	Theme	What you do
2 • Feb 2-8	First Triad Meeting	Your triad meets once, run from your T1 card on the Month 1 question; finish the charter and set month two (90, plus travel) • If you must, meet earlier, in Week 1 — never later • The practice: one call (15). About 130 minutes.
3 • Feb 9-14	Direction	\$2.0 My Next Chapter: a page, from your Contribution Hypothesis (75) • \$1.4 My Faith Foundation: two or three paragraphs, 300-400 words (60) • The practice: one call (15) • All due Sunday, February 14. About 150 minutes. Strongly suggested, not counted: your Session 8 test action, one try (about 90).

Required: your triad meets once, and \$2.0 and \$1.4 get written. Strongly suggested: run your Session 8 test action. About 330 minutes over three weeks (about 50, 130 and 150), the weekly call counted. Due Sunday, February 14: Charter \$2.0 My Next Chapter and \$1.4 My Faith Foundation, emailed to your facilitator (a photo of the pages is fine). Meet in Week 2, February 2-8; if you must, earlier, never later. Session 11 opens by checking each item off — and then shows you the Clearness Room your triad will run on Clearness Monday, February 22, two Mondays after the break.

Bring to Session 11, Monday, February 15 (Presidents' Day): your Charter, open to \$2.0 and \$1.4 • one sentence on your first triad meeting • one moment from One call a week • what your Session 8 test action found out • the Seven Ways to Coast card from your envelope.

Optional — only if it calls to you, and not counted in the minutes: your ten one-line Domain Why's (Charter Appendices) • reread Part One whole and mark what changed • Three Good Things, with the What I Am Bringing Back page (Break Reference 2.1-2.2) • at home: introduce your triad to your wife, and the ten-minute talk with H1 • the Going Deeper books below.

Monday, February 15 — Session 11 (Presidents' Day)

Mission & The One Thing — the Clearness Room, demonstrated. You have found your circle. In three weeks, your circle helps you find your one thing.

Reading for the Break — before Session 11

REQUIRED FIRST

- **Your card, T1 • Your Triad** — for your first triad meeting.
- **The Break Reference** — skim it once in Week 1.
- **Charter \$2.0 and \$1.4** — the two pages Week 3 writes.

BOOKS • ANY TIME, PICK ONE

- **Robin Dunbar, Friends** — the layers, the seven pillars, and why friendship needs feeding.
- **Kat Vellos, We Should Get Together** — the architecture of adult friendship.
- **David Brooks, How to Know a Person** — Illuminators and Diminishers; the questions that open a man.
- **Robert Waldinger & Marc Schulz, The Good Life** — the Harvard study, and “social fitness.”
- **Allison Pugh, The Last Human Job** — making another person feel seen.
- **Celeste Headlee, We Need to Talk** — how to have conversations that matter.

- **David Bradford & Carole Robin, Connect** — from Stanford’s “Touchy-Feely” course: how to say one true thing past comfortable, and how to tell a friend the truth. For the triad ready to go from good to exceptional.

SHORTER READINGS • WHYZMEN, IN YOUR SESSION 10 FOLDER

- **Building Friendships in Retirement** — why friendship fades when work ends, and how to rebuild it. About 7 minutes.
- **Who Are Your Five?** — Dunbar’s circles of friendship, and why the inner ring is where retired men run short. About 6 minutes.
- **Building New Relationships After Retirement** — the longer read: the loneliness epidemic, the science of friendship, and shared interests that become shared missions. About 20 minutes.
- **Where Do I Start?** — WhyzMen one-page map in your Reference tab. It points each question to the right card, Toolkit section or short read, including the Pugh and Headlee one-pagers.

Practice of the Week • Shoulder to shoulder, then One call a week

How: This week, invite a man to do something side by side — the walk, the project, the errand. Through the break, once a week, call a man you have not heard from. Ask the second question. About fifteen minutes a week.

From the Toolkit: 5 • Build & Host (shoulder to shoulder) • 6 • Take Stock (one call a week)

Rooted in: Dunbar; Session 10 — men bond shoulder to shoulder • The Wilderness Between. “Two are better than one.” Ecclesiastes 4:9

Tried it this week ☐ • Break week 1 ☐ • Week 2 ☐ • Week 3 ☐ • Bring one moment to the room. Session 11 opens with one moment from each man.

*May you go this week knowing who your five are. May you be the man who sends the text. May the cord of three strands hold. **Wise Men Still Seek, Knowing Their Why’s***

WhyzMen • Rewire Retirement • Session 10 Participant Guide r14

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