

WHYZMEN • REFERENCE • AFTER THE 13 WEEKS

The Presence Practice

A 13-week skill path: seeing people, being seen, building what lasts

“Jesus looked at him and loved him.”

— Mark 10:21

How to use this reading

This is a **WhyzMen reference** for the year after the program. Session 10 handed you the Listening Kit and three Go Deeper readings (Pugh, Headlee, and *Meaningful Conversations*). The Presence Practice turns those ideas into a thirteen-week path, one skill a week, each building on the last.

Walk it with your triad if you can: one week per meeting, bringing your log. Each week has a **daily practice**, a **weekly challenge**, and a few lines for your notes. Don't rush. A week that doesn't land is worth repeating.

ABOUT THE SOURCES

Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* • **David Brooks**, *How to Know a Person* • **Eric Barker**, *Plays Well with Others* • **Chris Voss**, *Never Split the Difference* • **Michael Bungay Stanier**, *The Coaching Habit* • **Daniel Siegel**, *Brainstorm*.

Most men think listening is something you either do or don't. It is a set of skills, and like any skills they are learned in order. You can't mirror well until you can receive. You can't receive until you can quiet yourself. And you can't quiet yourself until you know what is going on inside you.

So the sequence matters: self-awareness first, then listening, then precision, then integration, then application, then a practice that lasts. This isn't a program you finish. It's a practice you begin. The measure of success is how differently the people in your life feel seen by you.

The Six Phases

THE PATH AT A GLANCE

- **Foundation (Weeks 1-2).** Awareness before action.
- **Core Skills (Weeks 3-4).** The architecture of listening.
- **Deepening (Weeks 5-7).** Emotional precision.
- **Integration (Weeks 8-9).** Presence in practice.
- **Application (Weeks 10-11).** The shared struggle.
- **Mastery (Weeks 12-13).** Sustaining presence.

Phase 1 • Foundation

Awareness before action

1

Week 1: The Inner Calibration

Goleman • Self-awareness

Theme. You cannot see others clearly until you see yourself clearly. Goleman puts self-awareness at the foundation of emotional intelligence; everything else is built on it.

Daily practice: The 60-second check-in. Before every significant conversation, pause for sixty seconds and ask three questions silently. What am I feeling right now? What do I want from this conversation? What does this person likely need from me? Write your answers down. The writing is where the self-awareness develops.

Weekly challenge: The blind-spot conversation. Ask your wife or a close friend: “When I’m in a conversation, what do you notice about me that I probably don’t notice about myself?” Listen without defending. Write down what they say. This is the hardest practice in the path, and the most valuable.

Why this week. This week is uncomfortable by design. Most capable men default to reading others. Reading yourself comes first.

Week 1 log: what worked, what surprised me, where I struggled

2

Week 2: Surveillance vs. Exploration

Brooks • How to Know a Person

Theme. The moment you think you already know someone, you have stopped seeing them. Brooks calls the alternative being an Illuminator: treating every person, even the most familiar, as a mystery still worth knowing.

Daily practice: The not-knowing question. Before each significant conversation, name one thing about the other person you genuinely do not know and cannot predict. During the conversation, explore that gap with real curiosity. Afterward, write what you learned. Did it surprise you?

Weekly challenge: The assumption audit. Pick someone you know very well: your wife, a grown child, a grandchild. List five things you “know” about how they feel or what they need right now. Then have a conversation in which you assume you are wrong about at least two of them. Ask instead of assuming. Record what happens.

Why this week. Week 1 built awareness. Week 2 turns it outward, with humility instead of certainty. Notice how people respond to you.

Week 2 log: what worked, what surprised me, where I struggled

Phase 2 • Core Skills

The listening architecture

3

Week 3: Contemplative Receiving

Contemplative practice

Theme. Real listening isn't waiting for your turn. It is receiving without preparing a reply.

"Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry."

— James 1:19

Daily practice: The two-minute silence. Once a day, sit in silence for two minutes with one intention: receive without responding. No planning what you will say, no sorting, no fixing. Then carry the same posture into your next conversation. It will feel uncomfortable. That discomfort is your default being interrupted. Stay with it.

Weekly challenge: The full listen. In one conversation this week, commit to not speaking for the first two full minutes after the other person begins. No advice, no questions, no stories of your own. Mirror at most. It will feel excruciating. Do it anyway, and write what happened.

Why this week. This is the practice that changes everything downstream. Without receiving, mirroring and labeling become performance. With it, they become presence.

Week 3 log: what worked, what surprised me, where I struggled

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Week 4: The Mirror

Voss • Mirroring

Theme. Repeating a man's own words back to him is one of the most powerful things you can say. Voss, a former FBI hostage negotiator, found that a simple mirror makes people feel understood and invites them to go deeper.

Daily practice: Mirror first. In every significant conversation this week, make your first response a mirror: repeat the last few words, or the most charged ones, with a slight upward inflection. Then stop and wait. Don't add, explain, or advise. Keep an honest count of how often you mirror first and how often you jump to a response.

Weekly challenge: The mirror chain. In one conversation, mirror at least three times in a row before you offer a single thought of your own, each one following where he takes you. Write the exchange afterward. Notice where you felt the pull to break the chain.

Why this week. Mirroring feels awkward at first because you are overriding decades of habit. By the end of the week it starts to feel natural.

Week 4 log: what worked, what surprised me, where I struggled

Phase 3 • Deepening

Emotional precision

5

Week 5: The Generative Questions

Bungay Stanier • The Coaching Habit

Theme. The best help is often not solving his problem but asking the question that helps him solve it. Bungay Stanier's seven questions are a structural brake on advice-giving.

Daily practice: "And what else?". Ask it at least three times in every significant conversation. After he shares something, resist the urge to advise or tell your own story. Ask, "And what else?" and wait. Ask again until he says there is nothing else. Log how often you managed it and what came out that surprised you.

Weekly challenge: The seven-question conversation. Have one conversation using only Bungay Stanier's seven questions, no statements or advice: (1) What's on your mind? (2) And what else? (3) What's the real challenge here for you? (4) What do you want? (5) How can I help? (6) If you're saying yes to this, what are you saying no to? (7) What was most useful for you? Afterward, write what he discovered that your advice would have prevented.

Why this week. After a career of leading with expertise, staying curious instead of helpful will feel unnatural. That discomfort is the signal you are doing it right.

Week 5 log: what worked, what surprised me, where I struggled

6

Week 6: Naming What's There

Voss · *Labeling* · Goleman

Theme. Naming an emotion doesn't create it; it calms it. Matthew Lieberman's UCLA brain-imaging research (2007) found that putting feelings into words quiets the amygdala, the brain's alarm center.

Daily practice: Label before logic. Each time you sense an emotion in someone, label it before you respond to the content: "It sounds like..." or "It seems like..." Then pause. Don't move to problem-solving until you get some confirmation: a nod, a "yeah," a "that's right." Log your labels. Were they accurate?

Weekly challenge: The "that's right" conversation. Have one conversation with your wife, or the person closest to you, where your only goal is for her to say, "That's right." Not to solve anything. Mirror (Week 4), ask (Week 5), and label until she feels seen. This tests whether you are practicing from care or from technique.

Why this week. Labeling brings together awareness, receiving, mirroring, and questions. The "that's right" moment is unmistakable when it happens.

Week 6 log: what worked, what surprised me, where I struggled

7

Week 7: The Architecture of No

Voss · No-oriented questions

Theme. Voss teaches that “no” isn’t rejection; it’s safety. A man who can say no feels in control, and a man who feels in control can cooperate.

Daily practice: Reframe one request a day. Each day, take one request or disagreement and turn it into a question that invites a no: “Would it be a bad idea to...?” “Would you be against...?” “Is now a bad time to...?” Write the original and the reframe side by side. Notice how the other person responds differently.

Weekly challenge: The grandchild lab. Have one low-stakes negotiation with a grandchild (or a young person you know) using only no-oriented questions. Make no direct requests. Do they feel more in control? Do they cooperate more naturally? Write your observations.

Why this week. No-oriented questions can feel manipulative to a man who values directness. They aren’t. They give the other person safety, and safety is respect.

Week 7 log: what worked, what surprised me, where I struggled

Phase 4 • Integration

Presence in practice

8

Week 8: Warmth Before Competence

Barker • First-impressions research

Theme. People forgive a lot when they feel cared for, and they rarely warm to competence without care. Princeton's Susan Fiske finds that warmth is judged first and weighted most, and Willis and Todorov (2006) showed we read trustworthiness from a face in about a tenth of a second.

Daily practice: Warmth first. Every time you enter a conversation or a room this week, make your first move a warmth signal, not a competence signal: a real question, a moment of attention, an acknowledgment of the other person. No insights, no expertise. Notice where your default wants to lead with competence, and override it.

Weekly challenge: The warmth-only gathering. Attend one gathering (church, a party, a club) and spend the whole time leading with warmth only. No pattern-reading, no advice. Just presence, questions, and interest. Afterward write: how did people respond, and where did you struggle most?

Why this week. This challenges a professional identity built on expertise. It is not abandoning competence; it is sequencing it. Warmth earns the right to be heard.

Week 8 log: what worked, what surprised me, where I struggled

9

Week 9: Narrative Companionship

Brooks • Voss • Bungay Stanier

Theme. The most powerful thing you can do for a man is often to help him see his own story more clearly.

“He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how.” — Nietzsche, quoted by Viktor Frankl

Daily practice: Reflect the story back. Once a day, try to put the other person’s story into words, not your interpretation but the story he seems to be living: “It sounds like what you’re really navigating right now is...” or “The story I’m hearing underneath all this is...” Listen for whether he confirms, corrects, or goes deeper.

Weekly challenge: The illumination catch. Your only job this week is to catch one moment when someone says something that surprises you or reframes what you thought you knew. When it happens, stop: “Wait, say more about that.” Then mirror and label. Write the moment down. What would have happened if you had sailed past it?

Why this week. Weeks 1–8 built separate skills. This week they work together. If it feels shaky, revisit an earlier week before moving on.

Week 9 log: what worked, what surprised me, where I struggled

Phase 5 • Application

The shared struggle

10

Week 10: The Teen Brain

Siegel • Brainstorm

Theme. Teenagers are not difficult by character; their brains are under construction. Siegel names the adolescent drives, emotional spark, social engagement, novelty seeking, and creative exploration, as necessary, not defects. Understanding this changes how a grandfather shows up.

Daily practice: The reframe. Each time you meet teen pushback, in person or in memory, ask: “What is this young person’s developing brain actually trying to do right now?” Write your reframes. See biology before you judge behavior.

Weekly challenge: The respectful-disagreement rehearsal. Role-play with your wife or a trusted friend. One plays a teen pushing back; the other uses mirror, label, a no-oriented question, and silence. Then switch. Write what it felt like from both sides.

Why this week. This week carries your practice into the relationships with the most at stake: the young people in your family and church.

Week 10 log: what worked, what surprised me, where I struggled

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Week 11: Designing for Struggle

Barker • Shared struggle

Theme. Shared good times create pleasant memories. Shared struggle creates bonds. Research on “pain as social glue” (Bastian and colleagues, 2014) found that people who went through discomfort together felt closer and cooperated more.

“The typical expression of opening Friendship would be something like, ‘What? You too? I thought I was the only one.’” — C. S. Lewis, The Four Loves

Daily practice: The experience audit. Look at the regular gatherings in your life: your triad, your small group, your volunteer crew, your family traditions. For each, ask: does this create shared struggle or shared attendance? Where it is only attendance, redesign it to include real effort, a problem to solve, or a challenge. Write the before and after.

Weekly challenge: The vulnerability staircase. In one group or one-on-one, share something mildly uncomfortable: not your deepest wound, but something real. Watch for a response in kind. If it comes, go one step deeper. Log the staircase: what you shared, whether it was returned, and how deep it went.

Why this week. You are moving from personal practice to shaping the groups you belong to. Leaders who have walked the path lead it best.

Week 11 log: what worked, what surprised me, where I struggled

Phase 6 • Mastery

Sustaining presence

12

Week 12: The Integration Test

The full stack

Theme. Presence isn't a skill you master once. It is a practice you return to every day.

"Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning." — Lamentations 3:22-23

Daily practice: The full protocol. Bring the whole stack into one significant conversation a day: check your state (1), enter not knowing (2), receive before responding (3), mirror first (4), ask (5), label (6), use a no-oriented question if it fits (7), lead with warmth (8), reflect the story (9). Write the flow afterward. Where it broke down is your growth edge.

Weekly challenge: The deep conversation. Have one extended conversation, thirty minutes at least, with your wife or the person closest to you, with no agenda but presence. Nothing to solve. Mirror, label, reflect her story. Afterward write: what did I learn that I didn't know? What did it feel like to be present without an agenda?

Why this week. This is the integration exam. If the skills still feel separate, that tells you which earlier weeks to revisit.

Week 12 log: what worked, what surprised me, where I struggled

13

Week 13: The Sustainability System

Long-game design

Theme. The goal isn't to finish this path. It is to build a practice that sustains itself.

"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit." — Will Durant, summarizing Aristotle

Daily practice: Design your ongoing practice. Choose which daily practices from Weeks 1–12 you will keep and which challenges will recur. Decide who will hold you accountable. Write no more than three commitments, specific and tied to your actual days. Use the questions on the last page.

Weekly challenge: Teach it. Teach one technique (mirroring, labeling, or no-oriented questions) to one person this week: a friend, a grown child, a grandchild. Teach it simply, then let them practice it on you. Teaching is the deepest form of learning.

Why this week. You finish with a practice, not a certificate. The only metric is how differently the people around you feel seen.

Week 13 log: what worked, what surprised me, where I struggled

The Test

ONE QUESTION AT THE END OF THE THIRTEEN WEEKS

Who in my life feels more seen by me than they did three months ago?

Not “Do I understand the frameworks?” Not “Did I finish?” **Who feels seen?**

If you can name them, the practice is working. If you can’t, go back to Week 3.

“Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”

— **Philippians 4:9**

Design Your Ongoing Practice

No more than three commitments. Bring them to your triad.

1. Which daily practice from Weeks 1–12 changed the most? That is the one to keep.

2. Which weekly challenge will I make recurring: monthly, or quarterly?

3. Who will hold me accountable? A practice without accountability fades.

4. Who am I ready to teach this to?

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