



BEFORE YOU BEGIN • ORIENTATION

How This Program Works

The Wisdom Behind the Structure

For participants: why we do what we do, and how it all fits together

“Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”

— Psalm 90:12 (NIV)

PART ONE

The Foundation — Where This Comes From

The Research

This program is built on **backward design**, a method widely used in curriculum design — from classrooms to seminars to leadership programs. The principle is simple: start with the end in mind.

Instead of filling 15 sessions with interesting content and hoping something sticks, we start with one artifact: **your Harvest Charter**. Everything else — every session, every exercise, every homework assignment — is designed to help you complete it authentically.

This approach comes from Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe’s *Understanding by Design* (1998), one of the most widely used course-design frameworks in education. Its logic is simple: decide what a learner should be able to do at the end, decide what evidence would show it, and only then plan the lessons. Content serves the outcome — not the other way around.

The Theology

Scripture tells the same story in different language: **work backward from the end**.

Jesus teaches us to “seek first the kingdom of God” (Matthew 6:33) — start with what matters most, then organize everything else around it. The Psalmist prays, “Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Psalm 90:12) — know where you’re going so you can live with intention. In Proverbs, “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (29:18, KJV) — clarity about your future shapes your present.

Your Harvest Charter is that vision. It’s your numbered days made concrete. Everything in this program exists to help you write it.

The Convergence

Here's what's remarkable: the secular research (Wiggins) and Scripture (Jesus, the Psalmist, Solomon) are saying the same thing. **Start with clarity about what matters. Let that clarity reorganize how you actually live.**

This program holds both together. We use best-practice learning design AND biblical truth. They're not competing — they're reinforcing.

PART TWO

The Architecture — How It's All Connected

The Three Phases

The program has three distinct phases. Understanding this structure helps you see why we do what we do, when we do it.

PHASE 1 · SESSIONS 1-9 · FALL

Excavation

Who am I, really?

In the first half of your life, you had external answers to this question. Your title told you who you were. Your role told you who you were. Your productivity told you who you were.

Retirement strips those answers away. This phase is about excavation — digging beneath those external definitions to find what's actually true about you.

WHAT HAPPENS

- **You tell your story (Sessions 5-6)** — not your resume, but the narrative you've constructed. What were the turning points? What did they mean? Northwestern psychologist Dan McAdams' research shows that identity is fundamentally narrative. You are not the events of your life; you are the meaning you make of those events. In this phase, you excavate that meaning.
- **You clarify your faith (Session 9)** — what's actually true about God, not what you were taught to believe? What anchors you when everything else changes?
- **You name your values (Session 7)** — what would you refuse to compromise, even for significant gain? Social psychologist Shalom Schwartz's research shows that core values stay remarkably stable through adulthood — what shifts with age is their order of priority. Your values don't disappear when your job does.
- **You recognize your strengths (Session 8)** — not what you were praised for at work, but what comes naturally to you? Psychologist Donald Clifton, who created StrengthsFinder (now CliftonStrengths), built his work on the premise that talents are enduring patterns, not job skills. They work in marriage, in community, in mentoring, just as they worked in your career.
- You harvest your life lessons (over the Winter Break — optional, and worth it) — what have you actually learned? By domain: work, marriage, parenting, money, faith. You're transforming 40+ years of experience into wisdom that can be shared.

WHAT YOU PRODUCE

- Your **Story** (who I am)
- Your **Faith Foundation** (what I believe and how I experience God)
- Your **Core Values** (what matters most)
- Your **Strengths & Gifts** (what I bring)
- Your Life Lessons (what I've learned), optional, in Appendix A

All of these become **Part One of your Harvest Charter: Foundation — Who Am I?**

Why this phase comes first: You can't write a vision for a future self you don't know. You can't make authentic commitments from a false sense of identity. This phase answers the question: If you strip away the titles and roles, who's actually there? Once you know that, you can build from solid ground.

PHASE 2 · SESSION 10 · WINTER BREAK · SESSIONS 11-12**Reframing**

What does purpose look like now?

After Excavation, you understand who you are. But you haven't yet reframed what it means to be significant in the second half.

The danger is this: men often try to reconstruct their first-half identity in a new context. You were a leader in your career, so you become a Professional Board Member. You were a provider, so you over-invest in adult children. You were the expert, so you become a consultant to everyone around you. The form changes; the underlying need to be needed stays the same.

This phase interrupts that pattern. It helps you see that significance in the second half is fundamentally different — not because you're less valuable, but because the structure of your life has changed.

WHAT HAPPENS

- **You discover that your relationships can deepen (Session 10, building on Session 4)** — not broader networks, but intimate community. Your marriage can shift from parallel lives to genuine partnership. Your friendships can move from surface to real. You belong to a triad (three men) who know you and hold you accountable.
- **You realize your contribution can shift (Sessions 11-12)** — from being the one in charge to being the one who develops others. From achievement to significance. From building your own legacy to multiplying the legacy of others.
- **You recognize your purpose doesn't depend on productivity (the Winter Break)** — health, rest, joy, learning, spiritual practice — these aren't luxuries or rewards for productive people. They're the actual substance of a meaningful life.

WHAT YOU PRODUCE

- **My Next Chapter** (§2.0) and your **Personal Mission** (§2.1: what I exist to do)
- **A Tuesday in 2031** (§2.2), one day that touches the ten Life Domains:

THE TEN LIFE DOMAINS

1 Faith & Spiritual Life	6 Service & Contribution
2 Marriage & Family	7 Growth & Learning
3 Friendships & Community	8 Recreation, Adventure & Joy
4 Health & Wellbeing	9 Finances & Stewardship
5 Identity & Purpose	10 Practical Readiness

All of these become **Part Two of your Harvest Charter: Vision — Where Am I Going?**

Why this phase comes second: You can't reframe what you don't understand. By the time you reach this phase, you know who you are. Now you need permission and language to be significant differently.

PHASE 3 • SESSIONS 13-15 • SPRING

Integration

How do I actually live this?

Excavation has answered "Who am I?" Reframing has answered "Where am I going?" Now comes the hard part: integration. How do you move from clarity to action? From vision to rhythm? From intention to habit?

WHAT HAPPENS

- **You choose three priority domains and a first step in each (Session 13)** — not vague aspirations, but concrete actions. Not "be healthier" but "walk three times a week." Not "deepen my marriage" but "weekly date night with my wife." Not "contribute" but "mentor one person in my area of expertise." Psychologists Edwin Locke and Gary Latham, across more than four decades of research, found that specific goals consistently outperform vague "do your best" intentions.
- **You design your weekly rhythm (Session 13)** — how does your week actually structure? When do you pray? When do you move your body? When do you connect with your marriage, your triads, your community? This rhythm is your practice — the daily embodiment of your charter.
- **You name your accountability structure (Session 13)** — who holds you to this? Your triad meets monthly, with a weekly touch between. You share your goals. You report on progress. This is not judgment; it's witness. As Proverbs says, "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another" (27:17).
- **You complete your legacy (Session 14)** — you write letters to those you love. You articulate your ethical will — not your financial will, but your values will. What do you want your grandchildren to know about what matters? What wisdom do you want to pass on?

WHAT YOU PRODUCE

- **My First Steps** (§3.1): three priority domains, a first step in each, one experiment
- **My Rule & My Triad** (§3.2): your weekly rhythm and the men who walk with you

- **One letter or a one-page testament**, with your Legacy sentence (§4.1)
- Optional, on the shelf: **Stories for Grandchildren** (Appendix I)
- Optional: more **Letters to Those You Love** (Appendix J)
- Optional: your **Ethical Will — Spiritual Legacy** (Appendix K)

All of these become **Parts Three and Four of your Harvest Charter: Action — How Will I Get There? Legacy — What Do I Leave Behind?**

Why this phase comes last: You can't build on a foundation you don't have. You can't integrate a vision you haven't clarified. By the time you reach this phase, you have foundation + direction. Now you translate that into the daily structure and relationships that will actually carry you.

How It All Fits: The Logic of Sequence

Notice the sequence:

- 1 **Tell your story** (not “build your story” — you're excavating, not constructing)
- 2 **Clarify your faith** (the anchor beneath everything)
- 3 **Name your values, strengths, lessons** (what's true about you)
- 4 **Reframe your purpose** (how significance works differently now)
- 5 **Build your vision** (where each domain is going)
- 6 **Design your action** (how you'll live it weekly)
- 7 **Write your legacy** (what endures)

Each step is built on the previous one. You can't do it in a different order. If you try to write your mission before you know who you are, you'll reconstruct your first-half identity. If you try to design your weekly rhythm before you know your purpose, you'll fill the time without filling it with meaning.

This is why we don't offer a shortened version. The sequence matters. The pacing matters. The phases build on each other.

PART THREE

How Homework Works — It's Not Busywork

Every homework assignment in this program serves one function: **it moves you closer to completing your Charter authentically.**

Here's how to think about homework:

Excavation Homework (Fall)

YOUR JOB Prepare material for your Charter's Foundation section

- **Story mapping** — You're not writing an essay. You're identifying the three moments that define your narrative. These become the opening of your Charter's "My Story" section.
- **Values card sort** — You're not doing a personality test. You're discerning what's actually true about you. These become the two Core Values in My Compass (§1.2).
- **Strengths and Virtues-spotting** — You're not getting feedback; you're recognizing capacities that transcend context. These become your "Strengths & Gifts" section (§1.3).
- **Life lessons by domain** — You're not journaling aimlessly; you're distilling 40+ years into wisdom. These become your optional "Life Lessons I've Learned" page (Appendix A).

Result: By the end of the Wilderness Between (February 14), with My Faith Foundation (§1.4) written, you have a complete, coherent Part One of your Charter. You know who you are.

Reframing Homework (Session 10 + Winter Break + Sessions 11–12)

YOUR JOB Prepare material for your Charter's Direction section

- **Reading** — One short reading a week, about 15 minutes. Books such as Halftime (Buford) or Rohr's Falling Upward wait in the Going Deeper library for when you feel a need or want to go deeper. You're not being assigned busywork. You're absorbing the research and stories of men who've already made this transition. Their wisdom becomes the backdrop for your own vision.
- **Direction** — In the Wilderness Between you write My Next Chapter (§2.0), one page: "Here's where I want to go." Not detailed; just direction. Then your mission (§2.1, held in the Clearness Room by your triad on Clearness Monday, February 22) and A Tuesday in 2031 (§2.2). A paragraph for each of the ten domains is optional (Appendix C).
- **Accountability triad formation** — You're choosing the two men who will know you and hold you accountable. They become "My Rule & My Triad" (§3.2).

Result: By Session 13 (March 8), you have a complete Part Two of your Charter. You know where you're going.

Integration Homework (Sessions 13–15, March)

YOUR JOB Translate vision into action and finish your Charter

- **Field experiments** — You test small things. Try the two-week contact rule with someone. Attempt a new health habit. Have the conversation with your wife. Mentor for one session. You're not making permanent commitments; you're gathering data about what actually works for you. These experiments become material for your goals.

- **First steps** — For each of your three priority domains, you write one specific first step. “My vision is meaningful friendships. My goal is monthly dinner with Tom, Mike, and Carlos.” Specific. Measurable. Tied to your vision.
- **Rhythm design** — You write your weekly rhythm. When do you pray? When do you move? When do you connect with your wife, your triads, your community? This becomes your practice — the lived embodiment of your charter.
- **Legacy writing** — You write one letter or a one-page testament, with your Legacy sentence (§4.1). More letters and an ethical will are optional. You articulate what you’re passing on.

Result: By Commissioning on March 22, you have a complete, coherent Charter. All four parts are done.

PART FOUR

From Charter to Life — What Actually Changes

The Charter is not a document to file and forget. It’s a working document — your constitution for the second half of your life.

Here’s how it works in practice:

WHEN...	ASK YOUR CHARTER
When you’re making a decision about time...	“Does this align with my charter?” If your vision says “deep friendships” and you’re being asked to join a committee where you’ll know 30 people superficially, you know what to do.
When you’re feeling lost...	“What does my charter say?” If you’re in the 3 PM slump and wondering what you’re for, you read your mission statement. You remember. You get up and do what it says you do.
When you’re in conflict with your wife...	“What does our marriage vision say?” You read what your Tuesday in 2031 says about the two of you. You remember what you committed to. You have a conversation grounded in that shared vision.
When you’re tempted to slip into busyness...	“What’s my weekly rhythm?” You look at it. You notice you’re not doing what you said matters. You course-correct.
When someone asks you for wisdom...	“What are my life lessons?” You read what you distilled. You recognize that you have something real to offer.
When you’re wondering what to leave behind...	“What’s my ethical will?” You remember. You make sure you’re living in a way that’s consistent with what you want to pass on.

WHEN...	ASK YOUR CHARTER
When you're discouraged...	<i>"What's my accountability structure?"</i> You reach out to your triad. They remind you of who you are and what you're for.

The Charter isn't the end of the program. It's the beginning of the rest of your life.

PART FIVE

Why We Believe This Works — The Integration of Wisdom

What the Research Says

THE PRINCIPLE	THE RESEARCHERS	WHAT THEY FOUND
Backward design	<i>Wiggins & McTighe</i>	Start from the end result, then plan backward to reach it
Narrative identity	<i>McAdams</i>	Identity is fundamentally the story you construct, not the roles you play
Values stability	<i>Schwartz</i>	Core values stay remarkably stable through adulthood; their priority shifts with age
Strengths transfer	<i>Clifton</i>	Talents are enduring patterns that go with you from one setting to the next
Adult learning	<i>Knowles</i>	Adults learn best when they're solving problems they actually care about
Goal setting	<i>Locke & Latham</i>	Specific goals consistently outperform vague aspirations
Relationships and health	<i>Harvard Study of Adult Development — Waldinger & Schulz</i>	Close relationships are the strongest predictor of a long, healthy, happy life

What Scripture Says

- **Start with the end in mind:** "Teach us to number our days" (Psalm 90:12); "Seek first the kingdom" (Matthew 6:33); "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18, KJV)
- **Your story matters:** Jesus repeatedly invites people into new identities — "Come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people" (Matthew 4:19); "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (John 1:42)
- **Your gifts are for others:** "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others" (1 Peter 4:10)

- **You are called to something:** “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10)
- **Community holds you:** “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another” (Proverbs 27:17); “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2)
- **You have something to pass on:** “Entrust [these things] to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Timothy 2:2)

Notice: The research and Scripture are saying the same thing. This is not one or the other. It’s both together.

PUTTING IT TO WORK

How to Use This Understanding

As you move through the program, remember:

- 1 **Every session has a function** — It’s not random content. It exists to help you complete one specific part of your Charter.
- 2 **Every homework assignment builds on the previous one** — You’re not doing separate tasks; you’re constructing something coherent across 15 sessions.
- 3 **The sequence matters** — You can’t do this out of order and get the same result. Foundation comes before vision. Vision comes before action.
- 4 **You’re not just learning; you’re becoming** — This isn’t content delivery. It’s formation. You’re being shaped by the work you’re doing, the people you’re with, and the clarity you’re gaining.
- 5 **The Charter is not the destination; it’s the beginning** — Once you have it, the real work begins. The program ends; your life with your Charter continues.
- 6 **You’re not alone in this** — Your triads, your cohort, your facilitator — these are not supports. These are essential. Alone, you might drift. Together, you actually change.

ONE FINAL THING

Why This Matters

You’ve spent the first half of your life building something. A career. A family. A reputation. A life.

That building was necessary. It was good. It was not something discarded or yearned for or to be stuck in.

But the second half is not about building more of the same.

The second half is about something different: **clarity about what actually matters, depth in the relationships you choose, and the freedom to let go of what you built so you can focus on what will endure.**

Your Charter is your map for that journey.

This program exists to help you draw it, as honestly and deeply as you can.

Welcome.



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