

EIGHT SESSIONS - WORKED ALONE

The Christian Marriage Workbook for Men

Because the man is usually the one who will not sit in the room.

Most marriage material is written to be worked by two people who have already agreed to work on it. This is written for the man who has not got that far - who knows something needs to change, is not ready to be in a room with a counsellor and his wife, and has been putting it off for months while the gap widens. Eight sessions. One man, one pen, one hour a week.

- Eight sessions, each on one passage and one decision
- Every session ends with a WHEN, an ACTION and an EVIDENCE line - not a reflection
- A written failure condition per decision, so one bad week does not end it
- A HOW SHE CAN TELL WITHOUT ASKING line on every session
- An eight-week tracking page and a closing review

This is not counselling and does not replace it.

Break the cycle. Build the system. Be the man.

bethemansystem.com

For personal and small-group use.

How to work this

One session a week, same hour, for eight weeks. Put it in the calendar now, before you read session one. A workbook without a slot is a book, and books get finished at a rate of about eleven percent.

Four rules

- Read the passage first, out of your own Bible, before you read my paragraphs. The text is the source. I am commentary, and commentary that replaces the source is how men end up with a faith made entirely of other men's conclusions.
- Write in it. An answer you thought is not an answer. The physical act of writing it is what makes you notice that it does not hold up.
- Every session ends with one decision that has a time attached. Not a resolution, not a value, not a word for the year. A time.
- Do not show her the book. Show her the change. If she sees the workbook before she sees thirty days of evidence, you have asked her to be impressed by the intention, which is the exact thing she has already been asked to do before.

What this is honest about

I am working these decisions in my own house, not reporting back from the far side of them. Session 4 is the one I fail most often, and I failed it twice this quarter. You are not being handed a finished man's conclusions. You are being handed a system that is currently running, with its failures written in.

And a workbook has a ceiling. If there is abuse, addiction, or an affair in your house, this is the wrong size of tool and you already know it. Get a person involved this week - a counsellor, a pastor, a doctor. Nothing in here is a substitute for that, and using it as one is just a more organised way of avoiding the call.

SESSION 1

The man moves first

THE TEXT

Genesis 3:8-12, then Ephesians 5:25

Open it and read it before you write anything below.

THE GROUND

The first thing recorded of a man after everything went wrong is that he hid, and then when he was found he explained. He gave a true account that was also a way of not being the one responsible: the woman, the fruit, the sequence of events. Every word of it accurate. None of it moving toward the problem.

That instinct did not stay in the garden. The modern version is not blame, it is waiting. Waiting to see whether she brings it up. Waiting until the temperature drops. Waiting for a better moment, which is a moment that does not arrive, because the thing that would make it better is the conversation you are waiting to have.

Ephesians 5:25 does not say love her as much as she loves you. It sets the measure at a man who moved first while it was still entirely one-sided. That is the standard, and it is deliberately not reciprocal - which means the argument "I will when she does" is not a hard case, it is the case the verse was written against.

WORK IT

Write the last thing you waited on. What were you actually waiting for?

What did the waiting cost - in days, and in what she concluded from your silence?

What would moving first have looked like, specifically, on that day?

THE DECISION THIS SESSION INSTALLS

WHEN

ACTION

EVIDENCE

FAILS AT

HOW SHE CAN TELL WITHOUT ASKING

The conversation starts before she has to decide whether it is worth the fight. She stops rehearsing how to bring things up.

SESSION 2

What leading actually costs

THE TEXT

Ephesians 5:25-28*Open it and read it before you write anything below.*

THE GROUND

Headship is the most quoted and least priced idea in Christian marriage. The passage does not describe a man with the final vote. It describes a man who spends himself first, on a wife who has not yet been made easy to love, and who keeps spending whether or not the spending is noticed.

Notice what is not in the text: no mention of her submission as the trigger. The cost is not contingent. A man who leads on condition of being followed is not leading, he is negotiating, and she can tell the difference in about a week.

So the practical question is not whether you are the head. It is what it has cost you this month, in a form she could point to. Leadership with no invoice is an opinion about seating arrangements.

WORK IT

What did leading cost you this month? Name the specific thing, and the date.

Where are you leading on condition - waiting for her response before you spend?

What is one cost you could carry this week that she has been carrying instead?

THE DECISION THIS SESSION INSTALLS

WHEN

ACTION

EVIDENCE

FAILS AT

HOW SHE CAN TELL WITHOUT ASKING

Something moves off her list and stays off. She notices the absence of a worry before she notices the effort.

SESSION 3

The number she does not have

THE TEXT

Luke 14:28-30, then 1 Timothy 5:8

Open it and read it before you write anything below.

THE GROUND

A man is told to sit down and count the cost before he builds, so he is not the one standing in front of a half-finished tower being laughed at. The point is not caution. It is that the numbers get looked at before the thing is started, and looked at honestly enough to be discouraging.

In most houses there is a number the wife does not have. Sometimes it is the balance. Sometimes it is the actual hour you will be home, as opposed to the hour you say. Sometimes it is what a decision already cost. It is rarely hidden on purpose. It is withheld because saying it starts a conversation, and not saying it postpones one.

But a withheld number does not stay withheld. It gets discovered - in a statement, an app, a phone call from someone else. And a number she learns from a third party costs about ten times what the same number would have cost coming from you, because now she is not just handling the number, she is recalculating what else she has not been told.

WORK IT

Name a number she does not currently have. Money, schedule, or whereabouts.

Why have you not said it? Write the real reason, not the tidy one.

What is the date and the sentence? Write the sentence you will actually say.

THE DECISION THIS SESSION INSTALLS

WHEN

ACTION

EVIDENCE

FAILS AT

HOW SHE CAN TELL WITHOUT ASKING

She stops checking. Not because she decided to trust you, but because checking stopped producing anything she did not already know.

SESSION 4

The ninety seconds

THE TEXT

James 1:19-20, then Proverbs 29:11

Open it and read it before you write anything below.

THE GROUND

Quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger. It is quoted as a temperament and it is written as an order of operations. Hearing comes first, speaking second, and the anger is not forbidden - it is put last and slowed down. That is a sequence, and a sequence can be practised.

Almost nothing that wrecks an evening is the anger itself. It is the ninety seconds between the trigger and the sentence, and what gets said in there cannot be unsaid by any amount of being sorry afterwards. Proverbs is blunt about it: the fool empties out everything he has, and calls it honesty.

So the work is not becoming a calmer man. That is a goal, and it has no time attached. The work is having something specific to do in those ninety seconds that you have decided on in advance, while you were not angry - because you will not invent one while you are.

WORK IT

What is your trigger? Not the topic - the physical signal you feel first.

What is the interrupt? A room you leave, a sentence you say, a number of minutes.

What is the sentence you come back with? Write it now, while you are calm.

THE DECISION THIS SESSION INSTALLS

WHEN

ACTION

EVIDENCE

FAILS AT

HOW SHE CAN TELL WITHOUT ASKING

The evening survives the disagreement. She stops managing the temperature of the room before she raises something.

SESSION 5

Coming back after you broke it

THE TEXT

Psalm 51:1-4, then Matthew 5:23-24

Open it and read it before you write anything below.

THE GROUND

David's confession has no explanation in it. There is no paragraph about pressure, no context about how it happened, no mention of anyone else's part. That absence is the whole thing. An explanation attached to an apology converts it into a defence, and she will hear the defence and discard the apology.

Matthew 5 puts the repair before the worship. If you are at the altar and remember your brother has something against you, you leave the gift and go. Not after the service. Not when you have prayed about it. The instruction interrupts the religious act, which means a man who is spiritually busy and relationally overdue has the order exactly backwards.

Repair is not a feeling and it is not a speech. It is: name it, name the cost to her, say what changes and when, and then stop talking. The last part is where most men lose it - the apology runs long, becomes about how bad he feels, and she ends up comforting him about the thing he did.

WORK IT

What is currently unrepaired? Write it in one sentence, no context.

What did it cost her? Not what you intended - what it cost.

What changes, and when? Then: what is the failure condition on that change?

THE DECISION THIS SESSION INSTALLS

WHEN

ACTION

EVIDENCE

FAILS AT

HOW SHE CAN TELL WITHOUT ASKING

She hears the bad news from you first, and the apology is shorter than the change that follows it.

SESSION 6

Provision she can see

THE TEXT

1 Timothy 5:8, then Proverbs 27:23*Open it and read it before you write anything below.*

THE GROUND

Providing gets read as earning, and earning is the easiest part to point at and the least likely to be the thing missing. Proverbs 27:23 says know the state of your flocks - know the actual condition of what is in your care. Not the revenue. The state of it.

In a house, the state of things is mostly held by whoever tracks it: when the car is due, when the form is in, which child is struggling this month, what the balance actually is. That tracking is invisible work, it is exhausting, and in most Christian homes the man has quietly outsourced all of it while believing he is providing because money arrives.

So the move here is not to earn more or to help more. It is to take one domain and own it completely, including the remembering. Helping means she still holds the tracking, and the tracking was the weight.

WORK IT

Which domain will you own end to end? Name it, and name what owning it includes.

Who currently holds the remembering for it? Be honest about this one.

What is its recurring schedule? A date or a trigger, not "regularly."

THE DECISION THIS SESSION INSTALLS

WHEN

ACTION

EVIDENCE

FAILS AT

HOW SHE CAN TELL WITHOUT ASKING

She stops reminding you. Two reminders in a month means you took the task and left her the tracking, which is not the thing you meant to take.

SESSION 7

Listening is a discipline, not a personality

THE TEXT Proverbs 18:13, then James 1:19 again

Open it and read it before you write anything below.

THE GROUND

Answering a matter before you hear it is called folly and shame. Not a communication style. Not being a fixer. Folly - which in Proverbs is a moral category, not a temperament.

Most men do not interrupt because they do not care. They interrupt because they have already located the problem and want to move to the solution, and the sitting-in-it part feels like waste. It is not waste. It is the part where she finds out whether the thing she is carrying is hers alone.

Listening is trainable because it is behavioural. Do not speak until she has stopped. Say the thing back before you respond to it. Ask what she wants from you before you supply something else. None of that requires you to become a different kind of man. It requires three rules and a week of being bad at them.

WORK IT

Where do you jump to solving? Name the specific kind of conversation.

What is the rule you will run instead? One rule, stated as behaviour.

What is the WHEN - which conversation, this week, does this rule apply to?

THE DECISION THIS SESSION INSTALLS

WHEN

ACTION

EVIDENCE

FAILS AT

HOW SHE CAN TELL WITHOUT ASKING

She finishes sentences. She brings you the hard thing before it is fully solved, which is the actual privilege here.

SESSION 8

Who holds you

THE TEXT

Proverbs 27:17, then Galatians 6:1-2*Open it and read it before you write anything below.*

THE GROUND

Iron sharpens iron. It is quoted at men's breakfasts and it describes something sharper than fellowship - two hard things making contact hard enough to remove material. That is not encouragement. It costs something and it changes shape.

Galatians 6 is more specific: a man caught in something gets restored by men who are spiritual, gently, and each of them watching himself while doing it. So the structure assumed here is a named man with permission, not a group you attend and not a friend who agrees with you.

The reason this session is last is that the previous seven decisions all decay without it. Every one of them fails quietly and privately, and a man is the worst possible judge of his own quiet decay. Your wife should not be the enforcement mechanism - a woman who is both the person you are accountable to and the person affected cannot be a wife while she is doing that job.

WORK IT

Name the man. If you cannot name one, that is the finding - write it plainly.**What does he get access to? Which of these decisions, and which numbers?****When do you meet? A recurring slot, booked ahead, not arranged when things are bad.**

THE DECISION THIS SESSION INSTALLS

WHEN

ACTION

EVIDENCE

FAILS AT

HOW SHE CAN TELL WITHOUT ASKING

She stops being the only one who notices. That is a weight coming off her that she never asked you to pick up in the first place.

Eight weeks

One row a week. The decision column is the one you installed in that session. Adherence is how many days out of seven it actually ran - and it goes in on the day, not from memory on Sunday night.

WEEK	THE DECISION I INSTALLED	RAN	MISSED	THE ONE THING I STILL GET WRONG
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				

AT THE END OF EIGHT WEEKS

Add the Ran column. Divide by fifty-six. Below 70%, do not add resolve - cut the scope of the two weakest decisions until they hold, and run another eight weeks. Above 70%, keep every decision exactly as it is and do nothing new for a month. The temptation to expand a system that is finally working is how most men lose it.

The closing review

Do this alone, at the eight-week mark, before you tell anyone anything.

TOTAL DAYS THE DECISIONS RAN, OUT OF 56 _____

ADHERENCE PERCENTAGE _____

The three questions

Which decision held most reliably, and why did that one hold?

Which one broke, and did it break because it was wrong or because it was too big?

What would she say changed, if you asked her - and are you willing to ask?

The last one

At some point in the next fortnight, ask her one question: "Over the last two months, is there anything that got easier?" Then do not defend, do not explain, and do not present the workbook. Write down exactly what she says, including if the answer is no.

If the answer is no, that is not a failed eight weeks. It is the first honest measurement you have had in a while, and it is worth more than a good feeling about your own effort. Cut the scope, keep the schedule, run it again.

Break the cycle. Build the system. Be the man.

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