

# MARRIAGE IN MOTION

## Transcript: Module 4, Lesson 1

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### LAURA

Hi there. Welcome to Module 4. You've done a lot of good hard work over the last few modules. Now we just want to have a little fun. In this module we're going to be doing some dreaming, some planning, even some scheming. We want you to begin to shaping your path on purpose.

In order to do that, you have to make plans. You have to be proactive. That's what this entire lesson is about. Specifically, we're talking about rituals.

Rituals are so cool. They are an intentional (my favorite buzzword in couples therapy), and fantastic way to increase intimacy in the relationship. I don't want you to be intimidated by the idea that rituals require some grand gesture. Sure some rituals are formal and complex, but many happen automatically in the relationship without much thought. I promise you: You already have dozens of rituals built into your day, even if you don't realize it.

But we want you to realize it. And to be intentional about building rituals. You don't want your relationship to just happen to you. That's how you got here in the first place. So, let's have a little fun with it. Cool?

### ZACH

Cool. Can I tell a quick fun story about a ritual that Rebecca and I have? Our first date was on January 11th, 1996. I wasn't the classy, creative, big spending guy I am now, so I took her to dinner and a movie. Specifically, we went to the Olive Garden (I know, I know) and then saw the movie *The American President* at the theatre. (It's a pretty great movie by the way and remarkably resilient.)

Anyway, the following year, on January 11th, I was ready to propose. So, I asked her to marry me after brunch and then we spent the afternoon calling friends and family. That night, we went back to the Olive Garden. And then we rented the VHS of *The American President* and watched it.

We've recreated that date in some form every single year since then. This year, we were so squeezed for time, I had to get take-out from Olive Garden and we pieced the movie together via YouTube, but for us it was magical nonetheless. And it was intentional.

Whether your rituals are small and simple, or if they're bigger and more expensive, they matter. And they help you create meaning in your relationship.

### LAURA

That's one of my favorite stories about you and Rebecca. Ryan and I don't have anything so dramatic, but we do have a ton of rituals that we rely on daily, weekly, monthly and more.

For you, for today, however, this lesson is about how building routines and rituals into your marriage will define your direction. In this video you'll learn:

1. Why rituals are so important.
2. The difference between formal and informal rituals.
3. Two critical rituals every couple must have.
4. How rituals mark time.
5. How you can really mess it up when it comes to rituals.
6. To become clear about your "next step".

The focus of this lesson is: **We are the rituals we keep.**

### **ZACH**

Ritual is a weird word. In part because we don't really ever use it in the way we intend it here. Ritual brings to mind the idea of a religious sacrifice or an old cultural habit that lost its meaning somewhere along the way.

But Laura is exactly right...rituals are cool, especially when it comes to relationships. Rituals are not just cool, they're important. I have a friend who says, "Confidence is the byproduct of predictability." What he means is that much of our ability to move through life without fear and panic is because we know that's going to happen next.

We can predict that our knees are going to behave in a specific way. And so we walk with confidence. Until we have knee surgery. Once we can no longer predict what our knees are going to do, we lose confidence in our ability to walk.

Rituals create predictability and then confidence as a result. If you know that every day you're going to be able to connect with your partner in a specific, sacred way, your confidence in the relationship will increase.

Rituals also create intimacy. Consider our dinner and a movie ritual. That's ours. That's our thing. No one can take it from us. It's ours and ours alone. Because we've committed to and shared that ritual consistently over 20 years, it's become part of our expression of intimacy. One year, we missed it... Rebecca's dad passed away the week of January 11th and we were apart on that day. I sent her a bunch of text quotes from the movie, but it wasn't the same. We missed it.

Here's a lens for you to think about the rituals you create. They should be consistent enough and intentional enough, that when you miss them, you really miss them. The absence of a predictable thing should raise your antennae enough for you to wonder if you're off track. And the loss of your connection should spur you back toward one another.

### **LAURA**

Rituals are a big deal, but again, we don't want you to be intimidated by trying to create some sort of grand gesture. Your rituals can be just like everything else we've described in this course: small wins that make a huge difference.

There's actually an important difference between formal and informal rituals. You probably have informal rituals that you're not aware of. But again, we want you to be aware. Bill Doherty in his book *The Intentional Family* revealed that when families don't create intention around their rituals, then

their rituals will just happen to them. But when they did connect on purpose, it created...purpose. And confidence and intimacy.

There are two main kinds of rituals: Informal and formal. Informal rituals are things like the way you leave one another in the morning and the way you come back together at the end of the day. Dinner and bedtime are also informal rituals.

For Ryan and I one of our informal rituals goes like this: Our evening meal preparation is a time when we can rely on connecting at the end of a busy day and unwind while we cook together. We both change clothes, put our electronic devices away, pour a glass of red wine and begin preparing our dinner. One person usually takes the lead and the other person acts as the prep chef, chopping and cleaning as we go. We talk about our day, listen to good music and dance about the kitchen in our ritualized evening meal tango.

This is really different than a more formal ritual, like the way Zach and Rebecca celebrate their anniversary. Formal rituals also include birthdays, Thanksgiving, dinner parties, and even Saturday morning. Do you have a ritual for Saturday? Maybe you should.

Rituals are simply formalized routines that we follow to make our time together sacred and special. Think about it for a second. You probably have rituals that you followed growing up. Did your parents do anything special for you around bedtime, like read you a bedtime story and tuck you into bed? Did you have more formal rituals around the Holidays? What did they mean to you? How did they shape you as a person?

## **ZACH**

These are really good, really big questions. But let's give you something to sink your teeth into. Let's start with two really simple, but really critical rituals of connection. Specifically your morning and bedtime routines. Can you imagine starting and ending your day with intention? What if, instead of the polite disinterest that you might have with a roommate, what if you used the morning to really create emotional and intellectual intimacy.

Here's an easy one... every morning make a point to ask, "What's happening for you today that I need to ask about later?" But you can create rituals even earlier in your day. Imagine waking together, so that instead of beginning the day alone, you reinforce your attachment and create some security in the face of whatever may be looming.

What's important is that whatever you do, you do it on purpose. Whether in the morning, or at the end of your day. For example, if you ask your morning question...about the one thing you should ask about at the end of the day...be sure to set time aside at the end of the day to ask about that thing. Similarly, with bedtime.

Kevin and Stephanie were really bad at going to bed together. She worked an early shift. He was a night owl. She would be ready for bed at 9. He would want to stay up and watch ESPN or Game of Thrones or whatever else helped him wind down at the end of the day. Often he would fall asleep on the couch. Stephanie would wake up alone, often confused about where he was. Kevin would sleep poorly because the couch used to belong to his mother. The result is that both were often irritable and tired and certainly not able to connect with one another.

We worked to create a ritual for them to help them go to bed together...even if they didn't go to sleep together. You can't let the night owl/early bird thing to keep you separated. In the case of

Kevin and Stephanie, they agreed to let Kevin “put her to bed”. To go with her to the bedroom and stay with her during the transition. He would sit at the foot of the bed and talk with her, really about anything, until she was settled and comfortable. Then he had the freedom to stay or leave. They also committed to waking up together so Kevin worked on getting off the couch and into bed.

It seems simple, but it’s a foundation of an attached marriage. We start and end our days together. We’re tethered to each other. We’re moving through life together.

## **LAURA**

Moving through life together is a main theme in Dr. Gottman’s work. Rituals are more than just ways to stay connected and create meaning, they’re also about marking time. Dr’ Gottman says, “Rituals give a couple something that they can count on, and look forward to.” Rituals help you understand the passage of time.

We’ve spoken about the importance of daily rituals, but your weekly, and monthly and yearly rituals are just as important. Moving through life is more than just counting time.

Some of the best rituals involve things like vacations, or even when someone gets sick. I recently had a client tell me of a ritual that he’s passing on to his own kids. When he was a boy and would stay home from school sick, his dad would bring him comic books to read to him. As he got older, the comic books became graphic novels, and then actual novels. He said he almost began to look forward to being sick so that he could get something new to read.

He’s now passing on a love of reading to his kids. Helping them mark time and move through life.

Your rituals can also help you manage the highs and lows. How do you celebrate achievements together as a couple? How do you deal with disappointment and failure? Rituals of gratitude and fun and renewal will help shape your entire family story.

## **ZACH**

Finally, I want to talk for just a minute about how you can really mess it up when it comes to rituals. It’s actually pretty simple. It’s to make them, but not honor them. If you and your partner agree to create and pursue rituals as a way to move through life together, then you have to follow through.

This is not to say that you have to blindly commit to doing something. You’ll have some ideas that simply won’t feel good to you both. So throw it out, but on purpose. The worst thing you can do is agree to establish a new pattern and then just let it fade away. If you agree to have a 6 second kiss every morning and then you forget one day and then the next...or you’re sick and never really pick it back up when you’re healthy. That stinks.

Remember, that every single interaction you have with one another is either trust building or trust diminishing. Honoring your rituals is trust building. Letting them fall off is trust diminishing. It’s really tragic to hear a couple say, “well, I was waiting for you....well, I was waiting for you.” That’s how people get stuck.

## **LAURA**

Don’t get stuck. Your next step is to get serious about rituals. But not too serious: Be creative...this is a great place to have fun. Start with mornings and evenings. Can you create a dinner ritual? What about “Saturday”? Or, your anniversary?

**ZACH**

Or the anniversary of your first date?

If you lean into it, creating rituals are a beautiful way to create intimacy. But once you've established your rituals, pay attention to when they start to slip away.

As always, we're rooting for you and we want to hear about how things are going. So leave us a comment and we'll see you in the next video.