

WHY MARRIAGE MATTERS

Introduction • Based on *The First Few Years of Marriage* by Jim Burns and Doug Fields

THE TRANSFORMATIVE ARC OF THIS SESSION

From a **marriage left to drift on autopilot** → to a **marriage built with intentional course corrections**

Anchor Scriptures

"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."

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 (NIV)

"So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

Mark 10:8-9 (NIV)

"Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."

Proverbs 4:23 (NIV)

How to Use This Guide

This study guide is designed for couples walking through the First Few Years of Marriage book and video series together. Each session includes Scripture for reflection, real-life stories that illustrate the principles, questions for couples discussion, and personal reflection for journaling. Work through it at your own pace. There are no wrong answers here — only honest ones.

For best results: Read the Introduction of the book, then watch Session 1 together. Open your Bibles. Then work through this guide at your own pace, saving the discussion questions for conversation with your spouse. Close with the prayer together.

Introduction

If you're newly married, recently engaged, or in the first few years of building a life together, you already know: marriage is not what the movies told you. The wedding ended. The thank-you notes got mailed. And now you're here — sharing a sink and a calendar and a checking account with a person whose breakfast preferences you're still learning.

Jim and Doug call these the foundational years. The decisions, habits, and values you build now will shape the next fifty. That's not a threat — it's an invitation. The same small choices that lead to drift can lead to a marriage that goes the distance. The work isn't huge. But it has to be intentional.

Before you dive in, take a moment to settle in. Invite God into this time. Start with one honest sentence to each other about where your marriage is today.

To begin:

- On a scale of 1 to 5, how connected do you feel to each other right now? How intentional do you feel about your marriage? (It's okay for the numbers to be different.)

Scripture Foundation

Before we talk about what to do, we start with what is true. These three passages anchor everything in Session 1. Read each one slowly—out loud and together if you can.

“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.”

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“Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.”

Proverbs 4:23 (NIV)

Reflect

- Which of these three verses speaks most directly to where you are in your marriage right now? Why that one?
- Jim and Doug say marriage takes intentional course corrections — it doesn't happen by doing what comes naturally. Where in your marriage have you been relying on what comes naturally?

The Drift

Jim and Doug use the image of a sea voyage. You set off with a destination in mind — a thriving marriage, a love that lasts — and then the currents start working on you. Not storms. Just currents. Busyness. Distraction. Phones. Schedules. The slow, almost-invisible pull of life. The two stories below are about couples who noticed the drift — and made one small course correction.

A STORY TO REFLECT ON

The Garcias and the Compass

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

Two years in, Marcus and Jenna Garcia realized they were sleeping in the same bed but living parallel lives. Marcus left for work before sunrise. Jenna worked a hospital shift that ended at 11 p.m. They texted logistics. They split the dog. On weekends, they each scrolled their own phones on opposite ends of the couch and called it spending time together.

It wasn't a crisis. There was no big fight. That was almost the scary part. They liked each other. They had just stopped being together.

One Tuesday, Jenna was reading in the kitchen and looked up. “When did we stop having coffee in the morning?” she asked. Marcus thought about it. He honestly couldn't remember. Sometime after the new job, probably. Sometime after the dog. He shrugged.

They made a deal that night: fifteen minutes of coffee together every morning before either of them touched a phone. That was it. The whole intervention. The first morning, they ran out of things to say after four minutes and sat there in awkward silence. By week three, they were laughing again. By month two, Marcus said, “I feel like I have a wife again.” Jenna said, “I feel like I have a husband.”

Nothing about their schedules changed. They just started showing up for fifteen minutes. That was the course correction. That was the difference.

BIG IDEA

Two are only better than one when they're actually together. The drift is rarely a betrayal — it's usually just absence. And the cure is usually smaller than you think.

Reflect on the Story

- Marcus and Jenna's drift wasn't a crisis — it was an absence. Where do you see a small absence in your own marriage that hasn't felt urgent enough to address?
- Their course correction was fifteen minutes of coffee. What's your fifteen minutes? What's a small, specific habit you could put on the calendar this week?
- Two are better than one only when they're actually together. Where in your week are you and your spouse physically near each other but not really together?

A STORY TO REFLECT ON

What Renee Remembered

Scripture: Mark 10:8-9

Seven months in, Renee was in her car. Not driving — just sitting in the driveway, keys in the ignition, an overnight bag in the passenger seat. The fight had been ugly. Stupid, really. Something about money and his mother and the way he'd looked at her at dinner. She had said things she meant and things she didn't, and Mike had said worse, and now her chest was hot and she just wanted to leave.

She didn't know where she was going. Her sister's, maybe. A hotel. Anywhere that wasn't inside that house.

She sat there for a long time. The dashboard glowed. The garage door was open. She watched her breath fog the windshield and thought about the wedding — not the dress or the cake, but the actual words. The promise she had said out loud. For better, for worse. Until death. She had said it. She had meant it. And now — seven months in — here she was, ready to be the one who left first.

She didn't go inside because she'd figured everything out. She didn't even forgive him yet. She went inside because she had said something out loud that mattered more than how she felt at 11 p.m. on a Tuesday. She put the bag back. She took off her shoes. She went and sat on the edge of their bed. Mike was already in there, face in his hands. Neither of them said anything for a while. Then she put her hand on his back. It wasn't a resolution. It was an anchor.

BIG IDEA

A covenant isn't a feeling. It's an anchor that holds when the feelings drift. What God has joined together isn't held together by how it goes on the good days — it's held together by what you promised on the day

Reflect on the Story

- Renee went back inside not because she'd figured anything out, but because of a promise she'd said out loud. What did you promise on your wedding day? Can you still remember the actual words?
- Gary Chapman writes that marriage "cannot be simulated" — it is a covenant, not a trial run. What changes when you treat your marriage as a covenant God joined rather than a partnership you're managing?
- When the feelings drift, the covenant is what holds. What's one thing you could do this week to make your covenant more visible to each other — a written vow on the fridge, a yearly date to reread it, something else?

Couples Discussion Questions

These questions are designed for couples to honestly discuss. Take your time. Listen more than you speak. Be sensitive and compassionate to what your spouse is feeling.

1. Jim and Doug describe the drift — the silent current that pulls marriages off course through busyness and distraction, not through any big betrayal. Where have you already noticed the drift in your own marriage, even subtly?
2. What drew you to each other when you first started dating? What about that do you most want to protect five, ten, fifty years from now?
3. Gary Chapman says marriage cannot be simulated — it is a covenant relationship, made privately and publicly. How is treating marriage as a covenant different from treating it as a partnership or a contract? Where does that difference show up in your daily life?
4. Jim and Doug write that the first few years are foundational years — what you build now shapes the next fifty. What's one habit you'd love to be sharing together at year fifty? What would it take to start building it now?
5. What's one thing on your calendar right now that's quietly squeezing out your marriage? What would it look like to push back on it together this week?
6. Read your wedding vows out loud to each other tonight (or whatever you can remember of them). What one line still feels most alive? Most challenging? Why?

Personal Reflection

Set aside fifteen quiet minutes this week. Find a pen and a place where you won't be interrupted. Sit with these questions and write whatever comes — unfiltered, unpolished.

- Finish this sentence: "The thing I love most about our marriage right now is..."
- Finish this sentence: "The drift I'm most worried about is..."
- If your spouse could hear one thing from you this week — and hear it without defensiveness — what would you want them to know?
- Where are you doing what comes naturally instead of what your marriage actually needs? What's one small course correction you could make this week?

A Prayer

God, You designed marriage. You joined us together, and You meant it. We come to You at the start of this journey — not because we have it all figured out, but because we don't. Help us notice the small currents now. Help us build the small habits that will hold us through the storms we haven't seen yet. Make us a couple that laughs, fights well, and keeps the promise we made on our wedding day. We trust You with our marriage. Amen.