

RECOGNIZING THE DRIFT

Chapters 1 & 2 • Based on *The First Few Years of Marriage* by Jim Burns and Doug Fields

THE TRANSFORMATIVE ARC OF THIS SESSION

From a **marriage drifting unaware on autopilot** → to a **marriage making intentional course corrections daily**

Anchor Scriptures

"We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away."
Hebrews 2:1 (NIV)

"Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things."
Philippians 4:8 (NIV)

"Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows."
Galatians 6:7 (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 Chapters 1 and 2 of the book, then watch Session 2 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

In Session 1, Jim and Doug introduced the central image of the book: marriage is a sea voyage that drifts off course without intentional course corrections. In Session 2, Kelly and Leah Fellows pick up where the authors left off — they introduce you to a small group of couples, and together you start naming what the drift actually looks like in real marriages.

The honest truth is that most marriages don't end in a single dramatic crisis. They drift. The walks you stopped taking. The questions you stopped asking. The gratitude you stopped saying out loud. Drift is rarely loud — which is exactly what makes it dangerous. The writer of Hebrews warns us to pay the most careful attention so that we do not drift away. This session is an invitation to that kind of attention.

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:

- Name one thing you and your spouse did regularly in your first year of marriage (or first year of dating) that you don't do anymore. How does it feel to name it out loud?

Scripture Foundation

Before we talk about what to do, we start with what is true. These three passages anchor everything in Session 2. Read each one slowly — out loud and together if you can.

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Reflect

- Which of these three verses speaks most directly to where your marriage is today? Why that one?
- Hebrews 2:1 says the cure for drift is careful attention. Where in your marriage have you stopped paying careful attention — not because you stopped caring, but because life got loud

The Drift

Jim and Doug describe the drift this way: it has no racial, religious, or socioeconomic bias. It affects any couple that is not actively navigating. It is fueled not by malice but by an undercurrent of busyness, distraction, and apathy — and it sneaks up. The good news? NASA learned long ago that space flights are on course only about three percent of the time. The other ninety-seven percent is course corrections. The two stories below are about couples who finally noticed the drift — and made one small correction.

A STORY TO REFLECT ON **The Mendoza Inventory**

Scripture: Hebrews 2:1

Two-and-a-half years in, David and Sara Mendoza were at dinner with old friends when Maya leaned across the table and asked, "Wait — do you guys still do that Friday-night thing where you cook together with no music or anything?" Sara laughed. "Oh my gosh, no. We haven't done that in..." She looked at David. He shrugged. "A year?" Maya raised her eyebrows. "Huh. I loved hearing about that."

They didn't say much about it on the drive home. But back in the kitchen, Sara opened the junk drawer, pulled out a Post-it pad, and wrote at the top: things we used to do. David poured two glasses of water and sat down. The list grew slowly. Cook together on Friday nights. Read books out loud before bed. Take walks after dinner. Pray together in the morning. Send each other photos during the day for no reason. Have a real Sabbath on Sundays.

Twelve things. They had been married thirty months. They were doing roughly two of the twelve. Nothing dramatic had happened. No fight. No betrayal. They had just... stopped. One at a time. Without noticing.

They didn't try to fix everything. That felt like a recipe for fixing nothing. They circled one item on the list — walks after dinner — and committed to that one thing for a month. Just walks. Twenty minutes. Phones in the basket by the door. The first walk was quiet. The fourth walk was funny. By week three, Sara said, "I feel like I have you back." David said, "I didn't know I was gone."

That's the danger of drift. You don't feel it happening. You only feel it once someone names it.

BIG IDEA

The drift is rarely loud. It's the slow subtraction of small things you stopped noticing you weren't doing anymore. The first course correction is just noticing.

Reflect on the Story

- David and Sara needed a friend's offhand comment to see the drift. Who in your life would notice a drift in your marriage before you would? When was the last time you let them speak into it?
- Their list had twelve items — and they only restarted one. Why does picking one beat trying to fix everything? What would be your one?
- "I didn't know I was gone." What's something in your marriage you might be quietly absent from — emotionally, spiritually, or relationally — without realizing it?

A STORY TO REFLECT ON

The Index Card

Scripture: Philippians 4:8

Eight months into their marriage, James started noticing something uncomfortable about his own thoughts. Driving home from work, he'd catch himself rehearsing a small list — the way Marisol left dishes in the sink, the way she scrolled her phone while he talked, the way she said "I'm fine" when she clearly wasn't. The list wasn't huge. But it was getting longer. And the more he rehearsed it, the more he saw her through it.

One Sunday at church, the pastor read Philippians 4:8 — whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is lovely, think about such things. James felt the words like a tap on the shoulder. He had been thinking about Marisol's faults for so long that he wasn't even sure he could name what he loved about her anymore. Not in detail. Not without trying.

He bought a pack of index cards on the way home. He didn't tell her. He just made a deal with himself: one card a day, slipped into his wallet, with one specific thing he was grateful for about her — no repeats. He almost gave up on day four. The honest truth was that he had to sit in the car for ten minutes before he could think of something fresh. But he wrote one anyway. The way she laughed when their nephew said something ridiculous.

By week three, something had shifted that he didn't expect. He wasn't struggling to find things anymore. He was noticing them. The way she hummed when she made coffee. The way she texted his mom on her own. The way she always remembered to ask about his Tuesday meetings. He hadn't changed Marisol. She didn't even know about the cards. He had changed what he was looking for. And the marriage felt different because he was different.

BIG IDEA

Gratitude is not a mood. It is a discipline of attention. You don't feel grateful and then look for things — you look for things, and the feelings follow.

Reflect on the Story

- James was rehearsing a list of complaints without even knowing it. What's the list you've been quietly rehearsing about your spouse? What would change if you stopped rehearsing it?
- Jim and Doug write that gratitude can raise a couple's happiness by as much as twenty-five percent. James didn't change Marisol — he changed what he was looking for. Where could you start looking for what is true, noble, and lovely about your spouse this week?
- Philippians 4:8 is a discipline of attention. What's your version of the index card — a daily practice that would force your eyes back to what's good about your marriage?

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 one-degree principle — being one degree off course doesn't feel like anything on day one, but over fifty years you miss the destination entirely. Where might you already be one degree off in your marriage?
2. The Happiness Pie says fifty percent of happiness is genetic, ten percent is circumstance, and forty percent is up to you. How does it change things to realize forty percent of your marital happiness is actually in your hands?
3. Jim and Doug call it the "If Only" game — the running fantasy that life would be better if only your spouse would change. What's your most-played "If Only"? Can you name it without weaponizing it?
4. A central principle in this session: you are 100 percent responsible for your own responses and 0 percent responsible for your spouse's. What's one place where you've been carrying responsibility for your spouse's response that isn't actually yours to carry?
5. Galatians 6:7 says we reap what we sow. What seeds are you planting in your marriage this week — in your words, your habits, your attention — that you'd be glad to harvest in year fifty? What seeds would you rather pull up before they take root?
6. Jim and Doug describe the "servant lover" — someone who looks for ordinary, daily ways to serve their spouse without demanding a reason or payback. What's one small act of service you could begin this week as a discipline, not as a feeling?

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: "One thing we used to do that I miss is..."
- Finish this sentence: "The 'If Only' I rehearse most often about my spouse is..."
- Write down three specific, recent things you are grateful for about your spouse. Be specific. No greatest hits.
- What is one small course correction — something doable in the next week — that you could make in your own behavior, not your spouse's?

A Prayer

God, You see what we don't. You see the small drifts we stopped noticing — the prayers we stopped praying together, the walks we stopped taking, the gratitude we stopped saying out loud. Forgive us for the autopilot. Forgive us for the long lists of what we wish were different about each other. Teach us to pay careful attention again — to what You've given us, and to the one You've given us. Help us think about what is true and lovely about each other this week. Help us sow the small seeds today that we want to harvest in fifty years. We trust You with our marriage. Amen.