

# PLAY, DATE, SLOW DOWN

Chapters 3 & 4 • Based on *The First Few Years of Marriage* by Jim Burns and Doug Fields

## THE TRANSFORMATIVE ARC OF THIS SESSION

From a **marriage running on a breathless, joyless pace** → to a **marriage that protects play, presence, and pace**

### Anchor Scriptures

*"A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones."*

Proverbs 17:22 (NIV)

*"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens ... a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance."*

Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4 (NIV)

*"Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, 'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.'"*

Mark 6:31 (NIV)

### How to Use This Guide

This study guide is designed for small groups 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, and questions for group conversation.

**For best results:** Read Chapters 3 and 4 of the book, then watch Session 3 together. Open your Bibles. Then work through this guide using the group discussion questions. Close with the prayer and invite couples to choose one practice to try this week.

Each session contains five parts. Each section is clearly marked to help guide the small group leader.

 **Opening Comments for Facilitator/Leader**

 **Video**

 **Group Discussion Questions**

 **Practical Activity Assignment**

 **Closing Prayer**

## Opening Comments for Facilitator/Leader (10-15 Minutes)

Welcome the group back. In Session 2 you helped couples name the drift. Session 3 hands them three of the most practical course corrections in the entire book: play, dating, and slowing down. They sound simple — which is exactly why busy couples abandon all three without noticing.

Set the tone tonight by being a little lighter yourself. Jim and Doug argue that laughter is medicine and that connection — not conversation — is what unlocks honest communication. This is a session to enjoy, not endure. The goal is to send couples home with a date on the calendar and a plan to slow down.

Before we dive in, take a moment to settle in. Let's invite God into this time.

### Prayer

Let's start with one honest sentence about where each couple is in their marriage today.

To begin:

- When did you and your spouse laugh hardest together recently? If you can't remember, what does that tell you?

### Scripture Foundation

Before we talk about what to do, we start with what is true. These three passages anchor everything in Session 3. Read each one slowly — out loud and together if you can.

*"A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones."*  
Proverbs 17:22 (NIV)

Solomon names what Jim and Doug call a truism for marriage: laughter heals. A cheerful heart is not a luxury you earn after the work is done. It is the medicine that makes the work survivable.

*"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens ... a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance."*  
Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4 (NIV)


A marriage needs rhythm. There is a time to work — but if there is never a time to laugh or dance, the season has gone unbalanced. Play is not stolen from the schedule. It is scheduled.

*"Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, 'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.'"*  
Mark 6:31 (NIV)

Even Jesus prescribed deceleration. When the pace got breathless, he didn't push harder — he pulled away. Slowing down is not laziness. It is how the most important relationships get protected.

### Reflect Questions

- Which of these three verses speaks most directly to where your marriage is today? Why that one?
- Proverbs 17:22 calls a cheerful heart "good medicine." Where does your marriage most need that medicine right now — and what has been crowding it out?

 **Video (15-20 Minutes)**

**Play Session 3 Video**

In Session 3, the teaching turns to the loss of fun and the breathless pace of busyness — two quiet enemies of a joyful marriage. The small group couples talk honestly about the “fun drift,” the excuses that keep them from dating, and the technoference that leaves them “knee to knee but not eye to eye.”

 **Group Discussion Questions (30 Minutes)**

These questions are designed for small groups. Take your time. Listen more than you speak. Keep it light where you can — this is a session about joy.

1. Jim and Doug say connection leads to communication, not the reverse — fun builds the bond that makes honest words possible. When has play opened a door in your marriage that talking couldn't?
2. The 1% Rule asks for one hour and forty minutes a week — one date. Go around the circle: what's the real excuse that's been getting in your way, and what's the honest response to it?
3. Jim and Doug warn against the child-centric marriage — where the kids' needs always outrank the marriage and “later” never comes. Where is the line between loving kids well and quietly demoting the marriage?
4. Busyness is described as a heart issue, not a time issue. Which warning light rings most true for you: constant clutter, addiction to speed, relationship fatigue, superficial relationships, or spiritual emptiness?
5. The “no muscle” is the ability to say no to good things to protect the best thing. What's one “yes” in your life that's really stealing time from your marriage?
6. At the end of life, the authors say, your most valuable possession will be your museum of memories. What's one memory you want to build together this year?

 **Practical Activity Assignment (5 Minutes)**

THIS WEEK: A PRACTICE TO TRY

**Book the Date. Build the Bookends. Jail the Phones.**

Play, dating, and slowing down don't happen by accident — they happen on a calendar. This week, do three things:

- 1. Book one date.** Before you leave group tonight, put a date on the calendar — one hour and forty minutes, your 1% of the week. Decide who arranges childcare if you need it. One rule: no logistics talk allowed on the date.
- 2. Build your beverage bookends.** Pick two small daily windows — coffee in the morning, something warm in the evening — for fifteen minutes of phones-away, face-to-face connection. Tell the kids (or the roommates, or the dog) not to interrupt.
- 3. Jail the phones.** Choose one media-jail rule and start it this week: no phones at meals, no phones after 8 p.m., or no phones in the bedroom. Put a basket by the door if it helps. Notice what comes back when the noise goes away.

 **Closing Prayer**

**Prayer Suggestion**

*God of rest and laughter, You made us to delight in each other — and the busyness has a way of stealing that delight from every marriage in this room. Forgive us for the time scraps and the screens. Teach these couples to play again, to protect a slower rhythm, to guard the small windows where they actually see each other. Make ours cheerful hearts that heal. Give us the courage to say no to good things so we can say yes to the best things. We trust You with these marriages. Amen.*