

TWO ORIGINALS

Chapters 7 & 8 • Based on *The First Few Years of Marriage* by Jim Burns and Doug Fields

THE TRANSFORMATIVE ARC OF THIS SESSION

From a **marriage fighting each other and drifting apart** → to a **marriage that fights the fear together and pursues real intimacy**

Anchor Scriptures

"In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold."
Ephesians 4:26-27 (NIV)

"Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."
Colossians 3:13 (NIV)

"I belong to my beloved, and my beloved is mine."
Song of Songs 6:3 (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 7 and 8 of the book, then watch Session 5 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

This is the honest session — the one about the two things every marriage has to navigate and almost no one talks about openly: conflict and intimacy. Jim and Doug don't pretend a good marriage is one without fights. Research is clear that happy couples have just as many conflicts as unhappy ones; the difference is they've learned to resolve them well. As the authors put it, conflict is inevitable, but misery is optional.

Their key insight will reframe how you fight: most arguments are not really about money, chores, or schedules. They're about relational fears — the fear of being rejected, of failing, of being unwanted or unseen. And their insight about intimacy is just as freeing: a good sexual relationship is usually the outcome of a good emotional one. Closeness drifts when wounds go unforgiven and connection goes untended. This session is about clearing what blocks the way back to each other.

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:

- Think of a recent fight that was "about" something small. Looking back, what might it have actually been about?

Scripture Foundation

Before we talk about what to do, we start with what is true. These three passages anchor everything in Session 5. 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?
- Ephesians 4:26 says not to let the sun go down on your anger. What unresolved thing are you currently “going to bed” on — and what would it take to deal with it?

Into the Messy Middle

Jim and Doug walk into the two hardest rooms in a marriage. On conflict: when a spouse pushes your “hot button,” it awakens an old relational fear, and you tend to either explode (attack) or implode (withdraw) — which pushes your spouse’s button, starting the “Fear Chase.” The way out is to stop fighting each other and fight the fear, and to choose forgiveness, the only option that heals. On intimacy: the sexual relationship is an emotional thermometer — it reflects the health of everything else, and emotional connection comes first. The two stories below walk both paths.

A STORY TO REFLECT ON

The Crazy Chicken

Scripture: Ephesians 4:26-27

It started over a chicken order. Standing in line at a fast-food place after a long day, Tomas asked Elena what she wanted, she said “I don’t care, you pick,” and then — when he picked — she made a small face. That was it. That was the whole spark. By the time they got to the car, they were in a full, cold, jaw-clenched fight about absolutely nothing, both of them stunned at how fast it had gone from chicken to silence.

They didn’t talk on the drive home. Elena stared out the window doing the thing she always did — going quiet, building a wall, imploding. Tomas did his thing too — getting clipped and sarcastic, the low boil of someone about to explode. Neither could have told you what they were actually angry about.

Later that night, instead of going to bed mad, they tried something their group had talked about: don’t fight about the chicken. Find the fear under the chicken. Tomas went first, and it surprised him to hear himself say it: “When you made that face, I felt like... like I can’t get anything right with you. Like I’m always failing some test I didn’t know I was taking.” Elena’s eyes filled. “I wasn’t testing you. I went quiet because when you got sharp, I felt like you didn’t even want to be there with me. Like I’m a chore.”

There it was. His fear: I'm not good enough. Her fear: I'm not wanted. The chicken never stood a chance — it was just the thing that pushed two very old buttons. Once they could see the buttons, they weren't enemies anymore. They were two scared people who loved each other, fighting the same fear from opposite sides.

They made a rule that night, half-laughing, half-serious: when a fight flares up over something dumb, one of them says "this is a chicken," and it's the signal to stop and ask what fear just got triggered. They still fight. But they fight the fear now, not each other — and they don't let the sun go down on it.

BIG IDEA

Most fights aren't about the thing you're fighting about. Under the surface is a relational fear — rejection, failure, disconnection. When you stop fighting each other and start fighting the fear together, the chicken loses its power.

Reflect on the Story

- Tomas's fear was "I'm not good enough"; Elena's was "I'm not wanted." What's the relational fear that tends to get triggered in you — rejection, failure, disconnection, being controlled, being unseen?
- When your fear gets triggered, do you tend to explode (attack) or implode (withdraw)? What does your spouse do? Can you see how the two responses feed each other?
- What's your version of "this is a chicken" — a phrase or signal you could agree on to stop a spiraling fight and ask what fear just got pushed?

A STORY TO REFLECT ON

The Long Way Back

Scripture: Colossians 3:13

Nine months earlier, Priya had said something in an argument that landed like a slap — a comment about Daniel's job, his ambition, his worth. She apologized the next day. He said "it's fine." It was not fine. He filed it away, and without quite deciding to, he started keeping the wound handy — pulling it out in his mind whenever he wanted to feel justified about pulling away.

They didn't fight much after that. They just... cooled. The easy affection thinned out. Date nights stopped. They were polite roommates managing a household, and the distance had a way of feeding itself: the further apart they felt, the less either of them reached.

Daniel knew, somewhere, that he was holding the comment like a stone in his pocket. Their study put words to it: you have four options with a hurt — forget it (you can't), repress it (it leaks), hold onto it (it builds a prison), or forgive it. He realized he'd been living in the prison and calling it self-protection. One night he told Priya the truth: that her words nine months ago had cut deeper than he'd let on, and that he wanted to actually forgive it, not just say "it's fine."

It wasn't a tidy conversation. She cried. He did too. But forgiveness, they were learning, is a choice you make before it's a feeling you have. He chose it. And as the stone left his pocket, something thawed. He started reaching for her hand again. They started small — coffee in the mornings, a real kiss goodbye instead of an absent peck. The emotional distance had been the real barrier all along; once it cleared, the closeness they'd been missing came back on its own.

They learned the order the book kept insisting on: emotional intimacy comes first. You can't shortcut to closeness while a wound sits unforgiven between you. Forgiveness wasn't the end of the conversation — it was the door back to each other.

BIG IDEA

A held offense is a prison you build for two. Forgiveness is the only one of the four options that actually heals — and emotional closeness almost always has to clear the wound before it can return.

Reflect on the Story

- Daniel was holding an offense like a stone in his pocket. Is there a hurt you've said "it's fine" about that isn't actually fine? What option have you been choosing — forgetting, repressing, holding on, or forgiving?
- The book says forgiveness is a choice before it's a feeling. Is there something you could choose to forgive this week, even before the feeling catches up?
- Their closeness came back only after the wound cleared. Where might unresolved emotional distance be quietly blocking connection in 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 say most fights aren't about the surface topic but about relational fear. Think of a recurring argument. What fear might be hiding underneath it for each of you?
2. In the Fear Chase, one person explodes and the other implodes — and each reaction triggers the other. Which are you? How does your pattern collide with your spouse's?
3. You are 100% responsible for your own hot button and response, 0% for your spouse's. How does that change what you can actually do in your next argument, even if your spouse doesn't change?
4. There are four things you can do with an offense — forget, repress, hold on, or forgive. Where are you tempted to repress or hold on? What would forgiving look like in practice?
5. Jim and Doug call the sex life an emotional thermometer and say emotional intimacy precedes physical intimacy — "foreplay starts in the morning." What does emotionally connecting throughout the day look like in your marriage?
6. Couples who date weekly are far more likely to report being very happy. What's one intentional thing — a standing date, a kept promise, a guarded rhythm — you could commit to that protects both connection and intimacy?

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 relational fear that gets triggered in me most often is..."
- Finish this sentence: "The offense I'm still holding — the stone in my pocket — is..."
- Where have you been waiting to feel like forgiving instead of choosing to forgive? What would it take to choose it?
- What is one small course correction — doable this week — to fight the fear instead of your spouse, or to rebuild emotional closeness?

A Prayer

God, You know the fights that aren't really about what they're about. You see the old fears under our anger. Help us stop fighting each other and start fighting the fear, side by side. Give us the courage to forgive the way You forgave us — not as a feeling, but as a choice that sets us both free. Don't let us go to bed with the sun down on our anger, and restore the closeness we've let drift. We trust You. Amen.