

# THE LONG GAME

Chapters 9 & 10 • Based on *The First Few Years of Marriage* by Jim Burns and Doug Fields

## THE ARC OF THIS SESSION

From a **marriage running on feelings, fragile under pressure** → to a **marriage anchored in a forever promise that goes the distance**

### In One Paragraph

The series closes on the foundation that holds everything else up: the power of a promise. A great marriage is sustained not by constant romantic feeling but by covenant — the wedding vow that becomes the cement when the feelings get rocky. The Bible’s word for this is *ahava*, love as complete devotion: a verb, not a mood, expressed by staying and pursuing. Jim and Doug are candid that the toughest early test is often the “baby quake,” when sleep loss, financial strain, and a shift of focus can send marital satisfaction into a nose-dive. The way through is a clear relational hierarchy — God, marriage, children, vocation, everything else — plus intentional rest, the daily one percent, and a refusal to quit. The hope they leave couples with is striking: two-thirds of unhappy marriages become happy within five years if the couple simply doesn’t give up.

### Anchor Scriptures

*“Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.”*  
Ecclesiastes 4:12 (NIV)

*“Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.”*  
Ruth 1:16 (NIV)

*“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”*  
Galatians 6:9 (NIV)

### Four Core Shifts

From	To
Love as a feeling that fluctuates	Love as <i>ahava</i> — devotion that stays
Marriage held together by chemistry	Marriage held together by a promise
Child-centered (or work-centered) home	God, marriage, children — in order
Giving up when it gets hard	Persevering toward the harvest

### Key Language You’ll Hear Jim and Doug Use

**“The power of a promise.”** The covenant vow is the cement that holds a marriage through drift and rocky seasons — not the absence of conflict or the presence of constant feeling.

**“Ahava.”** The Hebrew word for marital love: complete devotion. A verb, modeled by staying and pursuing your spouse to the end.

**“The baby quake.”** The chaos a first child brings — sleep loss, doubled chores, financial strain, shifted focus — and the marital drift that can follow.

**“Fertilizer.”** The pain and adversity of marriage — unpleasant, but the very nutrients that grow patience, kindness, and self-control.

**“The 1% rule.”** Fifteen minutes a day — about one percent — of uninterrupted connection that defuses frustration and rebuilds intimacy.

### The Relational Hierarchy of Health

Mixing up these priorities — putting children or work before the marriage — is a leading cause of drift. The order itself is the course correction.

1. God	The first strand of the cord; the source of strength for everything below.
2. Marriage	The primary human relationship — protected before all others.
3. Children	Deeply loved, but not the center; a strong marriage is their security.
4. Vocation	Important work, kept in its place beneath the people you love.
5. Everything Else	Hobbies, commitments, and good things — ordered last, not first.

### The Anatomy of a Vow

Vow Component	What you are actually promising
"I take you..."	A conscious choice to forgo all other options for this one person.
"in plenty and in want"	The commitment doesn't depend on your bank account.
"in sickness and in health"	Loyalty even through trauma or chronic illness.
"in joy and in sorrow"	Using hard seasons to draw together, not drift apart.
"as long as we both shall live"	A lifelong promise that gives hope in troubled seasons.

### Story Snapshot: Sixty-Six Years

Exhausted new parents Jordan and Mia almost skipped church after a parking-lot fight over a diaper. There they met Walt and Eleanor, married sixty-six years. "What's the secret?" Jordan asked. Eleanor didn't hesitate: "There's no secret, honey. We just didn't quit. There were years I didn't feel a thing for him. We made a promise, and on the days the feeling was gone, the promise was still there." Walt added quietly, "Love's a verb, son. It's mostly the staying." Driving home, Mia reached for Jordan's hand — the same hand she'd wanted to swat two hours earlier. Why it matters: feelings come and go, but *ahava* is the choice to stay — and the feeling tends to come back around.

### Why This Session Matters

Everything in the first five sessions — noticing the drift, protecting fun, celebrating differences, fighting fair, pursuing intimacy — rests on this last foundation: a promise you refuse to break. The early years bring real pressure, and the baby quake is only the first of many. But couples who keep their priorities ordered, who rest on purpose, who reclaim the daily one percent, and who simply don't give up are the ones who reap the harvest. Good, strong marriages don't just happen. They're built — one course correction at a time.

| Keep the promise. Order your priorities. Don't grow weary — the harvest comes to those who don't give up.

### YOU HAVE FINISHED THE SERIES.

*Six sessions, six course corrections, one forever promise. The long game starts now — and small, steady choices are what carry a marriage the distance.*