

THE LONG GAME

Chapters 9 & 10 • 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 feelings, fragile under pressure** → to a **marriage anchored in a forever promise that goes the distance**

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)

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. This is the final session — the close of the series. Each session includes Scripture for reflection, real-life stories that illustrate the principles, and questions for group conversation.

For best results: Read Chapters 9 and 10 of the book, then watch Session 6 together. Open your Bibles. Then work through this guide using the group discussion questions. Close with the prayer and a moment to celebrate what God has done across these six weeks.

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 to the final session. Take a moment to acknowledge it: these couples have walked through drift, fun, differences, conflict, and intimacy together, and now they finish on the foundation that holds it all — the power of a promise.

Jim and Doug land the series on covenant: marriage is held together not by feelings but by ahava, love as complete devotion, a verb modeled by staying. They're honest about the "baby quake" and the drift that any major life change can bring, and they leave couples with a hopeful statistic — two-thirds of unhappy marriages become happy within five years if couples don't give up. As the leader, your job today is part teacher, part cheerleader: send these couples out with hope and a plan for the long game.

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:

- Think back over these six sessions. What's one course correction that has already made a difference?

Scripture Foundation

Before we talk about what to do, we start with what is true. These three passages anchor everything in Session 4. Read each one slowly — out loud and together if you can.

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

The strongest marriage isn't two strands but three — husband, wife, and God woven together. It's the picture of the relational hierarchy: God first, then the marriage, holding everything else.

"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)


This is ahava — the Hebrew love that is complete devotion. Not a feeling, but a choice to stay and pursue, to bind your life to another's no matter where the road leads.

"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)

The long game in one verse. The pain and adversity of marriage are fertilizer; perseverance is the planting. Two-thirds of unhappy marriages become happy within five years — if the couple does not give up

Reflect Questions

- Which of these three verses speaks most directly to where your marriage is today? Why that one?
- Ecclesiastes 4:12 describes a cord of three strands. What would it look like to weave God more intentionally into your marriage as the third strand?

 **Video (15-20 Minutes)**

Play Session 6 Video

In the final session, Kelly and Leah facilitate the small group couples and bring the series to a close. The teaching covers the power of a promise and the meaning of ahava, then turns to the “baby quake” and the course corrections that keep a marriage in its proper place: the relational hierarchy, intentional rest, the daily one percent, and a refusal to give up.

 **Group Discussion Questions (30 Minutes)**

These questions are designed for small groups. Take your time. Listen more than you speak. Since this is the last session, leave room for couples to reflect on the whole journey.

1. Jim and Doug say the power of a promise — not feelings — is the cement of a marriage. Where have you been relying on feelings, and what would it look like to lean on the promise instead?
2. The Hebrew word ahava means love as complete devotion — an action, not an emotion. What’s one concrete action of devotion you could offer your spouse this week?
3. The relational hierarchy is God, marriage, children, vocation, everything else. Honestly, what does your current order look like? What’s one adjustment to make?
4. Two-thirds of unhappy marriages become happy within five years if couples persevere — and pain is “fertilizer.” Where might a current difficulty be growing something good?
5. Jim and Doug urge couples to Sabbath — to “exhale” — and to use teamwork so each spouse can rest. What’s one way you could help your spouse rest this week?
6. Looking back across all six sessions, what’s the one course correction you most want to carry forward into the long game of your marriage?

 **Practical Activity Assignment (5 Minutes)**

THIS WEEK: A PRACTICE TO TRY

Keep the Promise. Reorder. Reclaim the 1%.

The long game is won in small, repeatable choices. As you finish the series, commit to three:

- 1. Reread your promise.** Find your wedding vows (or write down what you remember) and read them aloud together. Pick the one line that feels most important for this season and name why.
- 2. Reorder your priorities.** Talk through the relational hierarchy — God, marriage, children, vocation, everything else. Name one thing that’s currently out of order, and one concrete step to put your marriage back in its place.
- 3. Reclaim the daily 1%.** Commit to fifteen minutes a day of uninterrupted, phones-away connection. If a “baby quake” or busy season is hitting you, build in teamwork so each of you can also rest.

 **Closing Prayer & Sending**

Take a moment to celebrate the finish, then close in prayer.

God, thank You for these six weeks and for every couple in this room. You have been the third strand in this circle. As these marriages go back into ordinary life, hold them to the promises they've made. Teach them the staying kind of love — ahava — that doesn't bail when life gets hard. Keep their priorities in order: You first, each other next, everything else after. And when they grow weary, remind them that the harvest comes to those who don't give up. Bless the long game of every marriage here. Amen.

YOU HAVE FINISHED THE SERIES.

Six sessions down — but the long game is just beginning. Keep making the small course corrections. They add up to a marriage that goes the distance.