

The  *Rings of*
MARRIAGE™

Practical Biblical Wisdom
for Every Season of Your Marriage



JACKIE BLEDSOE

The **7** *Rings of*
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for Every Season of Your Marriage



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Nashville, Tennessee

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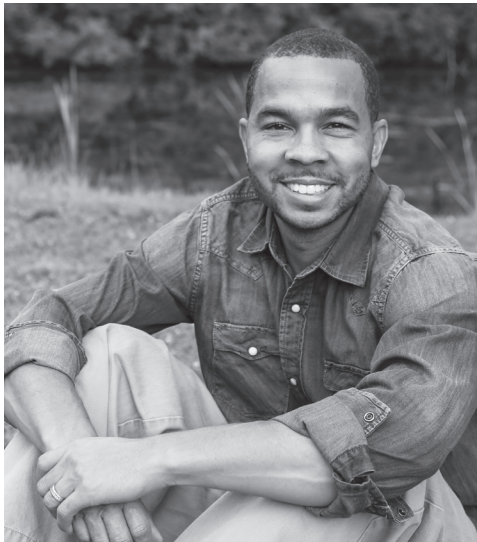
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jackie Bledsoe is a professional blogger, author, and speaker, but first and foremost a husband and father who encourages men to better lead and love their families. He's a contributor to All Pro Dad, Disney's Babble.com, The Good Men Project, and Huffington Post. His work has also been featured on Yahoo!, USA Football, MichaelHyatt.com, Black and Married with Kids, Coach Up, and more.

Jackie and his wife, Stephana, have been friends since they were teenagers, more than half of their lives, and will celebrate 15 years of marriage in June 2016. They are the proud parents of three beautiful children, and together they co-host The 7 Rings of Marriage™ Show, where they share practical marriage lessons and interview couples who have lasting and fulfilling marriages.

The Bledsoes reside in Indianapolis and have a heart for marriage forged through God's grace in their own marriage, which has thrived through homelessness (twice!), job loss and financial despair, loneliness, and in-law and intimacy issues. Their desire is for God to use their story as one of hope and inspiration to other marriages.

Find more about Jackie on his blog, *JackieBledsoe.com*, where he offers some amazing resources created to help you have a lasting and fulfilling marriage and meaningful influence on your kids.

You can also get additional free *7 Rings of Marriage Bible Study* resources at www.jackiebledsoe.com/7ringsResources.

Want to connect with Jackie? Visit his website, *JackieBledsoe.com*, and find out how to book him for your next event, read his blog, and connect with him on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Jackie loves meeting and connecting with new people, so be sure to stop by and say hello!

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Welcome to *The 7 Rings of Marriage* Bible study created to give you practical biblical wisdom for every season of your marriage. I hope your group experiences results as they gain a greater understanding of God's design for a lasting and fulfilling marriage and the important role your marriage serves for your family, friends, community, and—ultimately—the body of Christ.

The 7 Rings of Marriage Bible study is an 8-session study. Most groups meet weekly, completing one session per week, but feel free to follow a plan that meets the needs and schedule of the couples in your group.

To make the best use of this study, your first session together will be your introduction. Use this session as a way to break the ice, have some fun, get to know each other better, and prepare to venture together through each of the 7 Rings.

Be sure each couple receives a copy of the Bible study book during the first session so they come prepared for following group meetings.

Each session consists of two major sections of content, each with its own features, purpose, and means of interaction: group time and couple time.

GROUP TIME

START. This section includes questions the group leaders can use to get the conversation started and introduce the video segment of the session. Some questions will ask you to reflect back on your activity from a previous section. Other questions can be used as ice-breakers to jumpstart discussions.

WATCH. Stephana and I will lead a teaching time on the topic for each session. Watching the video together and taking notes will enrich your discussion and provide additional insight into the session's discussion questions.

DISCUSS. This section includes questions, statements, and passages of Scripture that build on the lessons taught in the video. Each couple will be able to participate and benefit from the discussion just by showing up for each session. Small groups have been an important part of our marriage, and we believe they will be for your marriage too.

We suggest briefly working through the questions as couples before discussing them with the group, allowing you to better prepare yourself to share what God has revealed through the videos. If you get stuck, ask for the insight of other couples in the group during the discussion time.

WRAP-UP. After ending your group discussion you will find some key points listed that will serve as highlights from your time together. Use these points to re-emphasize the primary message of each session.

PRAY. As a group, spend time in prayer. Pray *for* and *with* each other as you go through this journey of understanding and growing in your marriages. Use the points to help guide your prayers.

COUPLE TIME

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES. In each session I've provided some practical steps to help you put into action what you've learned from God's Word about marriage. Spend the first few days after your group session to do these activities.

Feel free to refer to your group discussion notes, key points, and Scriptures as a refresher in completing the activities. We suggest scheduling the time to do these activities in your calendars.

DATE NIGHT. I included a few date night ideas at the end of each session. Enjoy time with your spouse each week by completing one of the dates or choose a date night idea of your own. Note that at least one of the date night ideas included will be directly related to the key points in the current session. Date night is an important part of the study—and your marriage overall—and you don't want to miss out on it.

Let's get started!



SESSION 1:
BEGIN WITH
THE END

“Will you take _____ to be your lawfully wedded...”

If you’re reading this, then you have answered—or perhaps are soon to be answering—that question. Hopefully, you’ve made the choice to live out the promise that follows as best as you can: *“for better or for worse.”*

The good news is the “better” can be way better than the worse. While none of our marriages are perfect, there is a perfect plan and purpose for them. In the Book of Genesis, we see how God created this institution of marriage to meet some of our deepest desires and needs but also to play a part in His magnificent plan for humanity.

God’s design was that we would reach a level of intimacy in marriage that isn’t possible through any other relationship with any other human being. He wants that for us. He wants that for you.

And when intimacy happens, not only are our own desires met, but His purpose is fulfilled and He is glorified. So, let’s begin this journey together with the help, support, and accountability of those who’ve chosen to journey with us. And let’s experience marriages that are both lasting and fulfilling.

START

Welcome to the first group session.

If this is your first time meeting as a group, or if there are new couples, take a few minutes for couples to introduce themselves. Ask everyone to share their names, how long they've been married/engaged, and if/how many children they have.

WATCH

GOAL: To understand why we get married and define the purpose of marriage.

WATCH SESSION 1: "BEGIN WITH THE END." Use the following statements to follow along and record key quotes and ideas that stand out to you on the notes page.

Marriage is risky when we look for fulfillment in the wrong places.

There is a greater purpose for my marriage than my happiness.

God has given us a guide for marriage and with it comes hope.

Marriage is not just for you, it's for your spouse and everyone else connected to you.

Our start doesn't have to determine our finish.

A lasting and fulfilling marriage will require a significant investment on your part.

You have to be willing to take a hard stance in your marriage.

DISCUSS

God laid out a miraculous plan and purpose for marriage in the Book of Genesis beginning with the creation of the world and the story of the first husband and wife.

This first union between Adam and Eve and the commands God gave them apply to our marriages this very day. These commands are not outdated but are as relevant now as they were when God instituted the first marriage.

Let's see exactly what God did and said to Adam and Eve and then discuss how that relates to our own marriages.

READ GENESIS 2:18-25 AND THEN DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.

(You may want to discuss questions first as couples or in small groups of two or four for a few minutes and then share your answers with the larger group.)

What does this passage say Adam was missing, or lacking?

In what ways do you and your spouse complement each other?

What were the barriers, if any, between Adam and Eve?

What prevents you from being truly vulnerable with your spouse?

God's intention for marriage from the beginning was for man and woman to come together as one (v. 24) and find fulfillment in each other.

READ GENESIS 1:26-31 AND PROVERBS 5:18.

What blessing did God give man (and woman)?

How has God blessed your marriage as you think about how you and your spouse are created in God's image?

What did God command Adam and Eve to do?

In what ways can you steward your marriage so that your spouse, family, friends, and community benefit?

READ HEBREWS 13:4A.

What does this verse say about how we should view or hold marriage?

Share examples of how you have seen this done? How have you seen marriage disrespected?

WRAP-UP

Your marriage has a God-given purpose.

God created Eve to be Adam's perfect complement and helper. One of the primary roles in your marriage, whether husband or wife, is to serve your spouse.

Your marriage can be fruitful and fulfilling, no matter the circumstances, but you have to know its purpose and keep your eyes set on what God can accomplish.

PRAY

Spend the next few minutes praying with and for one another. Use the points below for guidance.

Thank God for your spouse and the amazing things He can do through your marriage.

Pray that God will open your eyes to see your spouse as He does. Ask God to help you focus more on your spouse than yourself.

Ask God to give you wisdom as you seek His instruction and apply it to your life and marriage.

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1

Answer the following questions as a couple on your own. Respond according to your season of life or marriage.

READ PROVERBS 18:22.

*A man who finds a wife finds a good thing
and obtains favor from the Lord.*

Do you consider your marriage to be a “good thing” from the Lord?
Why or why not?

How has our culture hindered many people from seeing marriage as a gift?

Think back to the Engagement RING period in your relationship. What
were the top reasons you wanted to marry your spouse?

What thoughts and feelings did you experience?

When we say “I do” we have many different thoughts, feelings, and emotions. After a while, we learn that these “feelings” can sometimes come and go. Reflecting on the moments when these emotions and feelings were strongest is a fun exercise, but it’s also a great reminder of why you married one other.

As you move through each of the 7 Rings, it's good to remember where it all started.

Before the next group session plan a time to watch your wedding videos, look at wedding and engagement photos, or talk about that special day when you said “I do.”

Use the space below and document this experience.

ACTIVITY 2

Now that you've reflected on the past, specifically your wedding day, let's begin to look ahead. Goal setting is a great practice that helps successful people become successful. It's also a great practice that helps successful marriages become successful. The "goal" of goal setting is to allow you to imagine or paint a picture of the end result you are looking for—in this case, for your marriage.

READ PHILIPPIANS 2:1-2.

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by thinking the same way, having the same love, sharing the same feelings, focusing on one goal.

The "one goal" Paul wanted the Philippians to focus on was their work for the gospel. Are you and your spouse focused on the same goals in your marriage? Explain.

Do you think the same way about what you want your marriage to look like? Do you share the same thoughts and feelings about what a lasting and fulfilling marriage should be? Why or why not?

I want to renew our wedding vows on our 25th anniversary.

I want to be the person God uses to help my wife (or husband) discover and fulfill her (or his) dreams and greatest passions.

ACTIVITY 3

READ ROMANS 8:26.

In the same way the Spirit also joins to help in our weakness, because we do not know what to pray for as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with unspoken groanings.

Marriage is challenging, and help is always needed. Fortunately, we constantly have help for our marriages, and this help through the Holy Spirit is accessible through prayer. Establishing a habit of prayer is foundational for your marriage relationship to stand through all circumstances

READ EPHESIANS 6:18.

Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request, and stay alert in this with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints.

What do you think Paul means to “pray at all times”?

What does this look like practically in your marriage?

If you haven't already, establish at least five minutes per day to pray together as a couple. Once you determine the most feasible time when you can accomplish this daily, then schedule it on both of your calendars. Make it non-negotiable. If something unavoidable does come up and you miss that time, be sure to make it up some time the same day. And then get back on track the next day.

Use the space below to record specific prayer requests you have for your marriage. What is the time and place where you will pray together?

DATE NIGHT

Date nights are important, and should be a staple in your marriage. They are also fun and a great way to deepen your connection with your spouse. Choose one (or both) of the following date night ideas to do before the next group session.

OPTION 1—SUNSET/SUNRISE DATE

Choose night (or early morning) to sit together and watch the sunset or sunrise. Prior to doing so, create a playlist of some of your favorite music in iTunes, Spotify, or on a CD. Be sure there are songs you both enjoy.

On your date night (or early morning), grab some chairs, go outside, turn on your music, and enjoy the sunset/sunrise and each other. Here is a conversation starter if needed:

CONVERSATION STARTER: What would you say is your biggest strength? Weakness? How do these strengths and weaknesses bring balance to the marriage relationship?

OPTION 2—SCRAPBOOK DATE

Grab some old photos and special items, some scrapbooking supplies, and your favorite playlist. Spend an evening talking about some of the most memorable experiences you've had as a married couple, and create scrapbook pages to fill your book.

CONVERSATION STARTER: What are some of the best times we've had as a couple?

BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN THE MARRIAGE YOU HAVE & THE MARRIAGE YOU HOPE FOR.

Studies show that roughly half of all marriages end in divorce. One reason for this is couples today are not prepared for the good—and bad—that may happen in marriage. The adrenaline rush of new love eventually fades. Unexpected challenges arise and unmet expectations come. Couples can feel lost, hopeless, and alone. Dreams of holy matrimony and happily ever after can turn into their worst nightmares.

The 7 Rings of Marriage will help couples see the big picture and allow them to begin with the end in mind—“until death do us part.” When couples know the end result they want, they can begin to take steps to get there.

This Bible study not only outlines *The 7 Rings of Marriages* but provides practical biblical insight and activities to equip couples in all stages of marriage. Discover the pathway to a fulfilling and lasting marriage. Revisit the covenant you made and live out your calling as a couple, believing that God’s best for your marriage is yet to come.