

September–December 2024



# Day by Day with God

Rooting women's lives in the Bible

FEATURING ANNE LE TISSIER, EMMA SCRIVENER AND JEN BAKER

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Rooting women's lives in the Bible



Ministries



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15 The Chambers, Vineyard  
Abingdon OX14 3FE  
+44 (0)1865 319700 | [brf.org.uk](http://brf.org.uk)

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# Day by Day with God

Edited by Jackie Harris

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# Writers in this issue

**Jen Baker** is a speaker, author and mentor. Her mission is to see a global movement of Christian women living with courageous faith and creating kingdom impact.

**Hannah Fytche** is studying for her PhD in theology at the University of Cambridge. She has been writing for BRF Ministries since 2015, when she wrote her first book, *God's Daughters*, and has written for *Day by Day with God* since 2018.

**Anne Le Tissier** is an author, preacher and conference speaker, called to disciple others in their ongoing walk with God. She has been writing for *Day by Day with God* since 2005. Connect with her at [anneletissier.com](http://anneletissier.com).

**Christine Platt** has lived and ministered in the UK, Africa and Asia. She has written several Bible study booklets and devotional notes in multiple languages. She currently lives in New Zealand and teaches English to Asian immigrants.

**Amy Boucher Pye** is a London-based writer, speaker, retreat leader and spiritual director. She's the author of several books and has an MA in Christian spirituality from the University of London. Find her at [amyboucherpye.com](http://amyboucherpye.com).

**Tracy Williamson** lives in Kent, working with blind singer/songwriter Marilyn Baker for MBM Trust. Her latest book is *Unashamed: Discover the healing power of God's love for your wounded soul* (Authentic Media, 2023). Connect with her at [mbm-ministries.org](http://mbm-ministries.org).

**Rachel Turner** is the discipleship pastor at Hope Church, Harrogate and the founder of Parenting for Faith. She is an international speaker and author of ten books, including *Parenting Children for a Life of Faith*, *It Takes a Church to Raise a Parent* and *Comfort in the Darkness*.

**Emma Scrivener** was born in Belfast, but now lives with her husband and two children in southeast England. She is the author of several books, including *A New Name* and *A New Day* (IVP), and blogs at [emmascrivener.net](http://emmascrivener.net).

**Sheila Jacobs** is a writer, an editor and an award-winning author. She lives in rural north Essex, attends an Elim church where she serves as deacon and is a day chaplain at a retreat centre.

**Michele D. Morrison** is a freelance writer, wife, mother and grandmother. She loves digging into God's word, listening for God's voice in the daily routines of life and blogging at [tearsamidthealiencorn.blogspot.com](http://tearsamidthealiencorn.blogspot.com).

# Welcome



Someone once described reading Bible notes as like hanging out with a group of friends who you chat things over with. We love to think that *Day by Day with God* feels like that. We may not always agree, and there may be some individuals we feel more or less comfortable with, but overall we feel better for having spent time together and appreciate that we are all seeking to grow in our relationship with God and understanding of his word.

If you are a regular reader of these notes, you will recognise most of our contributors, but we are pleased to welcome Emma Scrivener and Jen Baker to the team. Both are authors and speakers; Emma grew up in Belfast but now lives in the south of England, and Jen grew up in the USA before moving to the UK in 2003.

With her deep love for the Bible and a passion to see lives changed, Jen starts us off with a study of James. She says studying James is like being on a beautiful journey, and we hope that will be your experience as you work through the topics in this issue.

We'll be tackling some familiar passages – the parable Jesus told of the prodigal son and the Christmas story – but we'll be seeking fresh interpretations and asking questions of these well-known passages. We'll be learning from the lives of Solomon and John the Baptist, and working through the book of Joel.

For those who like a topical study, we'll discover what the Bible says about family and the different family structures we find within its pages, and we consider what the Bible says about home and how often homes play a key part in biblical stories.

We'll also be encouraged to consider what is needed to enjoy a deeper intimacy with God and seek refreshment and inspiration from the Psalms.

Augustine of Hippo wrote: 'The holy scriptures are our letters from home.' Let's read them together and pray for each other, that we will hear what God wants to say to us, remind us of or call us to do.

*Teach us, Father God, as we reflect on your words. May we hear your voice through the stories of long ago guiding us, comforting us, challenging us where necessary and reminding us of where we belong. Amen.*

Jackie

**Jackie Harris, Editor**

# John, the patron saint of Advent



*Emma Scrivener writes:*

If Advent had a soundtrack, it would be that haunting carol ‘O come, O come Emmanuel’ because it’s all about waiting for Christ – straining ahead with breathless anticipation for the long-awaited Messiah.

If Advent had a patron saint, it would be John the Baptist. He appears in the New Testament, but he is often considered to be the last of the Old Testament prophets, and his message is the summary of theirs. He is ‘A voice of one calling: “In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord”’ (Isaiah 40:3, NIV). John is like Advent personified, preparing us for the coming Christ.

My favourite depiction of John is from a painting by Matthias Grünewald (1470–1528). He is shown at the crucifixion of Jesus. In real life John was beheaded before Jesus died, but the painting is rich in symbolism. You get a true sense of John when you see him next to his Saviour. He stands at the foot of the cross holding the Old Testament in one hand and pointing to Christ with the other – with the longest finger you’ve ever seen. Next to him are the words of John 3:30 (NKJV): ‘He must increase, but I *must* decrease.’

That’s John: a witness. He’s the witness to Jesus in the Bible. His whole life is like that finger, pointing to ‘the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’ (John 1:29, NIV). This means that as we study John over the next seven days, we will be taken in two directions.

On the one hand we will be confronted by the most dazzling example of a follower of Christ. As Jesus said, ‘John was a lamp that burned and gave light’ (John 5:35, NIV). Have you ever said of someone, ‘They’re on fire for Jesus’? Well, that’s what Jesus says about John! As a blazing witness to Christ, John will challenge us all. That’s because as we follow Jesus, we are called to be witnesses too (Acts 1:8).

On the other hand, John is not simply an example for us to follow. Our eyes should not remain on him. We need to follow that pointing finger all the way to Jesus. So, this week, let’s pray that, like John, we will also ‘behold the Lamb’.

## Leap for joy

**When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby [John the Baptist] leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. (v. 41, NIV)**

The coming of John was prophesied three times in the Old Testament (Isaiah 40:1-3; Malachi 3:1; 4:5). He began testifying to Christ before the very first Christmas – in fact, before his own birth! In this sense, John is the last of the Old Testament prophets. As Jesus said, 'For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come' (Matthew 11:13-14). The Old Testament predicted a prophet who would be like Elijah. In other words, someone anointed by the Lord to preach repentance to the people and salvation in his name. That's John's job description – and he starts work before he's even left the womb.

Even in his mother's tummy, John leaps to be near Jesus. What a prophet! He's not even been born and already he's preaching to his mum. John's excitement at the presence of Jesus is infectious; and as her child moves, Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit. So, John is introduced to us as someone who is utterly sold out for Jesus. From before birth through to his death, he is captivated by the Lord, which leads us to ask: what was Jesus like?

The Bible tells us that John came to prepare the way of the Lord (Isaiah 40:3). In the original Hebrew, 'Lord' describes the sacred name of 'Yahweh'. This is like God saying, 'The God who always was and is and will be.' That's who Jesus is, right from the womb. Notice that Elizabeth calls Mary 'the mother of my Lord' (Luke 1:43). John might be an exalted prophet, but Jesus is the great I am, the maker of heaven and earth, the Lord!

In a deep sense, the wonder is not that John leapt for joy, it's how anyone wouldn't.

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*Lord, thank you for your word and for your servant John. May we share John's excitement and wonder at the Lord who came for us. May we rejoice in Jesus today and recognise his nearness to us. Amen.*

EMMA SCRIVENER



## Go against the grain

**And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the wilderness until he appeared publicly to Israel. (v. 80, NIV)**

It's hard to go against the grain, isn't it? We want to fit in and to be accepted. Life can be tough enough without courting controversy; but what if, as believers, we're called to something else?

John the Baptist knew what it meant to stand out from the crowd. As an adult he famously lived on a diet of honey and locusts – desert food (Matthew 3:4) – but, as our reading today makes clear, John was a desert-dweller from the beginning, and after his birth he was dedicated as a Nazirite (Luke 1:15). This meant that he had to follow certain rules about holiness, like not cutting his hair, not drinking alcohol and avoiding contact with dead bodies and graves. His was a life of self-denial and service and, despite mockery and rejection, he wasn't afraid to be different. In fact, he 'grew and became strong in spirit'.

How did he do this? The gospel he proclaimed was central. His whole message was 'to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God' (1:77).

As witnesses to Jesus, we are called to something similar. We proclaim a gospel that is sometimes despised. We do this not to be difficult, but because we want to give people 'knowledge of salvation'. We stand against sin not because we're moralists but because we believe in 'the forgiveness of their sins'. At times we embrace the wilderness, not because we want to be stoics, but because this is where we can meet 'the tender mercy of our God'.

We may find ourselves going against the grain of the world but, from God's perspective, we're travelling 'the path of peace' (1:79).

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*Father, help us to endure with grace whatever rejection or difficulty your gospel demands and to know all the comforts and blessings your Son provides. Guide our feet in the path of his peace, in Jesus' name. Amen.*

EMMA SCRIVENER

## Turn around!

**‘I baptise you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire.’ (v. 16, NIV)**

John the Baptist preached to both princes and paupers, but his message always remained the same: *A king is coming, and he changes everything.* ‘Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low’ (v. 5).

In the Bible, mountains are associated with kingdoms, while valleys represent difficulties (think of ‘the valley of the shadow of death’ in Psalm 23). John testifies that the coming king (Jesus) will bring down the lofty and raise up the lowly. Whether high or humble, those who come to his kingdom must all accept the same thing: a baptism of repentance.

A baptism is a wash, and ‘repentance’ means turning around. The people queued to be washed by John, so that they could start again with Jesus. This makes what happens next even more surprising. Incredibly, Jesus himself comes to the River Jordan and is baptised by John. Jesus joins all the messy, sinful people in the waters – not because he *is* a sinner but because he is *for* sinners. He is the high and lofty one who joins us in the valley of our humanity. He keeps on descending, all the way to the cross where he becomes our sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). Then, he can lift us from our valley and raise us to his heights.

It’s a wonderful gospel. No wonder ‘John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them’ (Luke 3:18). John’s baptisms didn’t save people, but the gospel he preached did. John could only make people wet, but Jesus gives the true baptism (3:16). He endured our sin on the cross, to give us his Spirit. So today, let’s once again repent and believe the good news.

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*Jesus, I bring before you all that’s high and lifted up – my pride and sin – and I turn from it. I bring before you all that’s poor and lowly – my needs and weakness – and I seek your Spirit’s help. Amen.*

EMMA SCRIVENER

## Behold the Lamb

The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’ (v. 29, NIV)

John is famous for baptising people, but it’s his preaching that continues to impact the world. The heart of his message is this: *Look at Jesus, the Lamb of God.*

John could have described Jesus as ‘the word of God’, ‘the Christ of God’, ‘the priest of God’ or a thousand other titles. But, according to John, our first need is to encounter Jesus as our Lamb. Why?

Rewind to 2,000 BC. Abraham is trudging up a hill near modern-day Jerusalem with his beloved son, Isaac. Isaac asks: ‘Father... where is the lamb for the burnt offering?’ (Genesis 22:7). Abraham replies: ‘God himself will provide the lamb’ (v. 8). As we read on in Genesis 22, we discover that the Lord provides a ram for the burnt offering and from then on, the mountain is called ‘The Lord Will Provide’ (Genesis 22:14). The Lamb will be given on this mountain in the region of Jerusalem!

Fast forward 500 years. It’s Passover, and the Lord provides a different kind of lamb. This one will die in the place of the eldest son of the household, and its blood will be painted on the door frame with hyssop. The lamb saves.

Fast forward another 500 years, and David is begging the Lord for forgiveness. ‘Cleanse me with hyssop and I shall be clean,’ he prays in Psalm 51. God has hyssop, but does he have a lamb?

Fast forward yet another 500 years and Isaiah is foretelling the coming of Christ. He would be led ‘like a lamb to the slaughter’ to bring us peace (Isaiah 53:7).

When John sees Jesus, it is the fulfilment of the ages. With Jesus we have God’s provision, salvation, forgiveness and peace. He is the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. In response we are called to ‘look’!

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*Father, help us to see Jesus with the eyes of faith. May we know the wonders of his sacrificial love ever more deeply. Amen.*

## The humility of John

**‘The friend who attends the bridegroom... is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less.’ (3:29–30, NIV)**

Jesus described John the Baptist as ‘a lamp that burned and gave light’ (John 5:35). He was a dazzling witness to Christ. That’s important to know because we too are called to witness to Jesus (Acts 1:8). We are commanded not to put our light under a bowl (Matthew 5:14–15). So how can we learn from John?

John shone, but not by drawing attention to his many achievements. He might have been the most naturally gifted man ever to walk the planet – that seems to have been Jesus’ view anyway (Matthew 11:11) – but instead of pointing to himself, John pointed to Christ.

‘He himself was not the light,’ as John 1:8 tells us, ‘he came only as a witness to the light.’ John testified to the truth (John 5:33). He was always pointing beyond himself and towards Jesus.

We’re all meant to shine, but John shows us how. We’re all witnesses, but John is the ultimate example. John teaches us to think of ourselves in relation to Jesus. Like a best man on the groom’s wedding day, we know it’s not about us. We are just filled with joy to be his friend and so, happily, we point to him. We shine the most when we simply turn to the true light of the world. May his self-appraisal be ours:

- ‘I am not the Messiah’ (John 1:20).
- ‘I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, “Make straight the way for the Lord”’ (John 1:23).
- ‘He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie’ (John 1:27).
- ‘He must become greater; I must become less’ (John 3:30).

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*Jesus, help me to hear your voice and fill me with your joy. May I gladly point to you all my days. Amen.*

## The doubts of John

**When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to ask him, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?’ (vv. 2–3, NIV)**

Even John had doubts and we can understand why. He’s locked up in a first-century prison and it will prove to be death row for him. He has proclaimed a gospel in which the Lord raises up every valley and brings down every lofty mountain (Luke 3:5). Surely that means John should be lifted from this pit, and Herod (who has imprisoned him) should be brought low? Sadly not. Herod remains on top, and John is left to rot at the bottom of a dungeon. Perhaps John had it all wrong – maybe Jesus wasn’t the Lord he thought he was.

Imagine John alone in his cell, asking himself, ‘Have I trusted in the wrong person?’ It’s very human!

We too have questions. Perhaps we see the wicked on top and the righteous suffering. Perhaps we look at Jesus and wonder, ‘Is he really the one?’

If that’s us today, then we need to see how Jesus responds to John. Jesus encouraged John to do the opposite of what he’s been doing. John has been reading the scriptures through the lens of his life circumstances. Jesus tells him to read his life circumstances through the lens of the scriptures: ‘The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor’ (v. 5).

In effect he’s saying, ‘Who else has ever fulfilled the prophecies of Isaiah 35 (and all the rest!)? Who else could you be waiting for, except me?’

These are questions for us too. Right now, we may be in a pit or filled with doubts. Yet Jesus has fulfilled the scriptures and changed eternal history. No one is more powerful, more loving or more trustworthy than him. So, when our hearts and feelings start to wobble, let’s follow John’s lead and bring them to Jesus.

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*Lord Jesus, I am often in a pit, and I don’t know what you’re doing. Help me to see you, and to see my life and my doubts in the light of your word and your truth. Amen.*

## The death of John

John had been saying to Herod, ‘It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife’... When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him. (vv. 18, 20, NIV)

Jesus said, ‘The truth will set you free’ (John 8:32). If that’s true, how do we make sense of John the Baptist’s death? John preached the truth about King Herod’s unlawful marriage, and yet he was thrown in prison! Something much deeper was going on.

Herod had a complicated relationship with the truth. He liked to hear John preach but he never acted on it. His wife, on the other hand, was more decisive. She started plotting to kill John (v. 19) and at Herod’s birthday feast, she saw her opportunity. While the king and guests were drunk, she sent her daughter to dance for the court. Foolishly, Herod promised to give her anything she asked for (vv. 21–23). With one careless oath, John’s fate was sealed. Having consulted with her mother, the girl asks for the head of John the Baptist on a platter (v. 25). It is done. John was sentenced to death, and Herod cut off the head of the one person who dared to tell him the truth.

So, does the truth really set us free? Yes! It could have liberated Herod, if only he had listened. It could have released him from his besetting sin and brought him to God. And, in a strange way, the truth *did* set John free. In his martyrdom, he completed a life of witness — a life lived pointing to Jesus. He died for truth but lives now in an eternal kingdom and is famous across the globe. Herod, however, is a petty, largely vilified man. The truth came knocking and he refused to answer. So, when it comes to truth, will we stand with Herod or with John?

Psalm 95:7–8 puts our challenge most plainly: ‘Today, if only you would hear his voice, “Do not harden your hearts.”’

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*Father, today may we hear your voice, may we not harden our hearts and may your truth set us free. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

# Treat yourself to time out with God every day!

Day by Day with God provides a short printed Bible passage, explained and applied especially for women, by women who have themselves found the Bible a source of strength and inspiration for life.

A suggested daily prayer or meditation helps you connect the daily notes with your own spiritual journey as you seek to follow Jesus more closely.

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Day by Day with God is edited by Jackie Harris.



Jackie is a freelance editor with a background in Christian magazines. She is married to Ray and lives in Worthing where she serves as office coordinator at her local church.



## In this issue

Jen Baker  
Hannah Fytche  
Anne Le Tissier  
Christine Platt  
Amy Boucher Pye  
Tracy Williamson  
Rachel Turner  
Emma Scrivener  
Sheila Jacobs  
Michele D. Morrison  
Jackie Harris

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