

May–August 2022



Day by Day with God

Rooting women's lives in the Bible

FEATURING JACKIE HARRIS, CHAM KAUR MANN AND RUTH AKINRADEWO

May–August 2022

Day by Day with God

Rooting women's lives in the Bible





15 The Chambers, Vineyard
Abingdon OX14 3FE
brf.org.uk

Bible Reading Fellowship is a charity (233280)
and company limited by guarantee (301324),
registered in England and Wales

ISBN 978 1 80039 123 9
All rights reserved

This edition © 2022 Bible Reading Fellowship
Cover image © iStock.com/kali9

Distributed in Australia by:
MediaCom Education Inc, PO Box 610, Unley, SA 5061
Tel: 1 800 811 311 | admin@mediacom.org.au

Distributed in New Zealand by:
Scripture Union Wholesale, PO Box 760, Wellington
Tel: 04 385 0421 | suwholesale@clear.net.nz

Acknowledgements

Scripture quotations marked with the following abbreviations are taken from the version shown. Where no abbreviation is given, the quotation is taken from the same version as the headline reference. NIV: The Holy Bible, New International Version (Anglicised edition) copyright © 1979, 1984, 2011 by Biblica. Used by permission of Hodder & Stoughton Publishers, a Hachette UK company. All rights reserved. 'NIV' is a registered trademark of Biblica. UK trademark number 1448790. NKJV: The New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved. NLT: The Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007, 2013. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved. ESV: The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, published by HarperCollins Publishers, © 2001 Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. GNT: The Good News Bible published by The Bible Societies/HarperCollins Publishers Ltd, UK © American Bible Society 1966, 1971, 1976, 1992, used with permission. MSG: *The Message*, copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002 by Eugene H. Peterson. Used by permission of NavPress. All rights reserved. Represented by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. VOICE: The Voice Bible Copyright © 2012 Thomas Nelson, Inc. The Voice™ translation © 2012 Ecclesia Bible Society All rights reserved. TPT: The Passion Translation®. Copyright © 2017, 2018, 2020 by Passion & Fire Ministries, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. thePassionTranslation.com

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Printed and bound by Gutenberg Press, Tarxien, Malta

Day by Day with God

Edited by Jackie Harris

May–August 2022

- | | | |
|------------|--|--------------------------|
| 6 | Esther: seen <i>and</i> heard
Ruth Akinradewo | <i>1–7 May</i> |
| 14 | Life in the garden
Amy Boucher Pye | <i>8–21 May</i> |
| 29 | What the Bible teaches about age
Selina Stone | <i>22 May–4 June</i> |
| 44 | Ezra: a tale of revival and rebuilding
Caroline Fletcher | <i>5–11 June</i> |
| 52 | The parenthood of God
Hannah Fytche | <i>12–25 June</i> |
| 67 | Sisters united
Cham Kaur Mann | <i>26 June–2 July</i> |
| 75 | Naomi: a story of hope
Jackie Harris | <i>3–9 July</i> |
| 83 | Letters to the seven churches
Michele D. Morrison | <i>10–16 July</i> |
| 91 | Questions Jesus asked
Rachel Ridler | <i>17–30 July</i> |
| 106 | How to deal with doubt
Victoria Byrne | <i>31 July–13 August</i> |
| 121 | A time for everything
Claire Musters | <i>14–20 August</i> |
| 129 | Blessings from the psalms
Ensemble | <i>21–31 August</i> |

Writers in this issue

Ruth Akinradewo's passion for Jesus underpins her advocacy for the marginalised, which she does through her involvement with three different Christian charities in the UK. Connect with her at thechannelforchange.blogspot.com.

Amy Boucher Pye is a writer, speaker and spiritual director who runs the *Woman Alive* book club. She's the author of several books, including *Celebrating Christmas* (BRF, 2021). Find her at amyboucherpye.com.

Selina Stone is tutor and lecturer in theology at St Mellitus College, where her teaching focuses on social ethics, Christian leadership and political issues. She has been writing for BRF for two years.

Caroline Fletcher is a freelance writer with a background in biblical studies. She lives in Sheffield and has been writing for *Day by Day with God* for the last three years.

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

Cham Kaur Mann has over 25 years of leadership experience in the church, charity and voluntary sectors. She is the first (and currently only) Asian woman minister within the Baptist Union GB, and is co-director of Next Leadership.

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.com.

Rachel Ridler is mum to two energetic boys. She has used BRF's Parenting for Faith resources for many years and began writing for BRF in 2020. She loves exploring the Bible with others online, virtually and in person.

Victoria Byrne is married to Tim and is a lay pastor at St Stephen's Twickenham, leading ministry among older people. She has been writing for BRF since 2015.

Claire Musters is an author, speaker and editor with a passion for authenticity. Her most recent book (written with her husband) is *Grace-Filled Marriage*. Claire has been writing for *Day by Day with God* since 2012.

Welcome



Whether you have been part of *Day by Day with God* for many years or this is your very first issue, we're so glad you've joined us. We represent a diverse group of women – different ages, different backgrounds and with very different experiences – united by our love for God's word and desire to learn from it and draw strength and wisdom from it for our day-to-day lives.

In this issue, we welcome two new writers to the team. Ruth Akinradewo is a young Oxford graduate with a heart for those who are marginalised. She loves writing, music and singing, and begins our studies with one of her favourite characters – Esther. Later, we hear how Zelophehad's daughters, whose story is told in just a few verses in the book of Numbers, have continued to influence Cham Kaur Mann, who has many years' experience as a leader and mentor and is the first (and currently only) Asian woman Baptist minister.

It is always interesting to see how individual writers approach their topics and sometimes what they bring out of the same passage. In the course of our studies, two passages appear twice. The story of Jesus as a young boy – who left his parents without permission to spend time in the temple (Luke 2:41–50) – is referenced by both Selina and Rachel in their respective subjects, while Psalm 139 is used by Selina and then chosen by Ruth as her favourite psalm. Isn't it fascinating how God's word speaks to different people in different ways and at different times?

What is also interesting is how sometimes the same message can come through a variety of sources. We are exploring a wide range of topics, but as I read this issue through, a common theme seemed to emerge. In nearly every study there is something about God renewing and restoring, rewriting our stories, allowing new things to emerge or bringing something wonderful out of seemingly hopeless situations. Perhaps this is a message we need to hear.

Sometimes we forget that God's redeeming power can intervene in our lives, transforming situations, people and perceptions. As we study together over the next four months, may we hear God's word for us – a reminder of a promise, an assurance of his presence or a call to action – and draw strength and comfort from it.

Jackie Harris, Editor

Esther: seen *and* heard



Ruth Akinradewo writes:

Esther is an unusual book. Not only is it one of just two books in the Bible whose titles bear a woman's name (the other being Ruth), but it is also one of only two books in the Bible which do not mention the name of God (Song of Songs is the other). Oh, and where else do you find characters whose names begin with V, X and Z?

Perhaps, like me, if you hadn't been told, you wouldn't have noticed that this book does not explicitly reference God. But although his name does not appear, the story is clearly written by the hand of the creator. The young Jewess Esther is the pen that he holds to write the story; her older cousin Mordecai is the flowing ink whose help she cannot do without; and King Ahasuerus is the paper they must use to right the wrongs devised by the arch-enemy of the Jews, Haman.

Our God writes the best stories, and the book of Esther takes us masterfully through a number of different emotions. Who says God doesn't have a sense of humour? Haman is as fiendish as he is farcical. He reminds me of many a Shakespearean antagonist.

As is often the case with Shakespeare's plays, we know how the story of Esther will ultimately end. We know that good will triumph over evil. We know because 'if God is for us, who can be against us?' (Romans 8:31, NIV). Yet, though our Saviour promises us victory, he requires his children to be willing and obedient enough to fight in the battle he is leading. Esther is both. She starts off as a vulnerable young woman in a passive role, but when her people are threatened, she actively rises to their defence with courage.

Esther is one of my favourite characters in the Bible. She embodies what can happen when God turns things around. A woman in a man's world, she replaces a queen who is neither seen nor heard, but Esther makes herself both seen *and* heard, influencing the most powerful man in the kingdom to hang on to her every word. When we meet her, her heritage is exile and death. Her legacy for posterity? Togetherness – and *life*.

Esther and her courageous commitment to her people inspires me. I pray God speaks to you, too, in new ways as we learn from Esther together.

The kingdom starts at home

Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus (this was the Ahasuerus who reigned over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, from India to Ethiopia)... when he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the splendour of his excellent majesty for many days. (NKJV)

It is striking to me that the kingdom of King Ahasuerus – or Xerxes, as he is known in some versions – stretches over a range of ethnic groups. Contrary to the Eurocentric reading we often apply to the Bible, the book of Esther introduces us to a multicultural sphere where people of colour are in fact the majority. The story's setting is Persia (modern-day Iran), and Indians and Ethiopians feature too. With an array of peoples and tongues accounted for in the very word of God, we are reminded that the Bible is for *all* of us – just as God's kingdom is for all of us (Revelation 7:9).

King Ahasuerus clearly revels in the riches of his kingdom, which attest to his power. Giddy with his own acclaim (and wine), Ahasuerus fully expects his wife, Queen Vashti, to join the self-indulgence party he has been enjoying for a whopping 187 days already. She refuses.

I don't blame her for doing so: I certainly wouldn't want to parade in front of a bunch of drunken men! It is quite incredible that, despite being king over such a vast empire, Ahasuerus is incapable of effectively leading his own household.

Ahasuerus demonstrates what can happen to us when we focus more on status than we do on integrity. The king is so self-absorbed that he doesn't even see the problem with commanding his wife, whose beauty should be for him alone, to strut before a group of other men.

Our ministry, first and foremost, is to those closest to us. What does your family have to say about you? Your friends? Your local church? Even if you are revered the world over for your talents, if those closest to you have lost respect for you, your focus is probably in the wrong place.

Lord, help me to remember that your kingdom is for all, and that my most important role in it is to faithfully serve those closest to me with integrity – not to vie for everyone's attention. Amen

A reversal of fortune

And Mordecai had brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter, for she had neither father nor mother. The young woman was lovely and beautiful. When her father and mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter. (NKJV)

The story of Esther is full of reversals. Just like that, the deposition of Vashti and the coronation of Esther is complete (helped by some very poor advice). The reversals have only just begun.

Esther lost both her parents at a tender age. Though Mordecai took her in as his own daughter, he can do little to prevent the king's henchmen from bundling her off to the king's quarters as they please. Esther's face and figure will be pleasing to King Ahasuerus' eye – and so she is 'taken'. Just as Bathsheba had no say in being taken to King David's palace (2 Samuel 11), Esther is a woman subject to the orders of the king; she must simply follow instructions.

In modern-day terms, what happens to Esther and the other women in the harem is akin to human trafficking and sexual servitude. Esther starts off in obscurity and without a voice.

My dad died when I was 13, and during my childhood I suffered abuse. I can relate to the grief and powerlessness attached to Esther when we first meet her. Perhaps you can too.

The good news is that the story doesn't end there. Esther is promoted: her name becomes known throughout the empire and a feast is created in her honour. This is made possible because Esther wins over all who come into contact with her, gaining grace and favour. As followers of Jesus, we are called to walk in wisdom and speak with grace (Colossians 4:5-6), filling the air around us with 'fragrance' (2 Corinthians 2:14-15).

Esther reminds us of what can happen when God reverses our fortunes. He is in the business of rewriting our stories, beautifying the broken and removing shame – to clothe us with honour. We just need to be willing to be characters in his story of grace.

Father God, you are the redeemer of my past and my eternal Father. You have removed my shame and crowned me with victory. Help me to walk in your victory today, releasing your grace-filled fragrance to others. Amen

RUTH AKINRADEWO

The courage to stand

And all the king's servants who were within the king's gate bowed and paid homage to Haman, for so the king had commanded concerning him. But Mordecai would not bow or pay homage... for Mordecai had told them that he was a Jew. (NKJV)

Exposing the plan of King Ahasuerus' would-be assassins (2:21–22) could have been dangerous for Mordecai. What if the murderous eunuchs had caught wind of who had told on them before it was confirmed? Mordecai could have been dead meat!

Today's passage shows us Mordecai's consistent courage. He chooses to do the God-honouring thing, even when it could cost him dearly. He refuses to bow down to Haman, the king's second-in-command. Like Vashti in chapter 1, Mordecai cares more about integrity than the fragile ego of a self-absorbed man. His courageous resolve not to compromise reminds us of the actions of other exiled Jews in Persia: Daniel and his friends Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (Daniel 1, 3, 6).

It's so much easier to fit in, isn't it? Standing on the Rock, the truth of Jesus and his word, is hard when everyone around you is sitting comfortably in the sand.

We live in a world where we are encouraged to bow down to ourselves. We can do whatever we like with our bodies, we're told. We can say whatever we want, however we want. But the gospel of Jesus isn't about self-indulgence; it's about self-denial – for the one who denied himself to save us for eternity. Will we be courageous enough to stand for him and be the odd ones out – even when the risks are great? Is there enough evidence to publicly 'convict' us of being Christians?

Mordecai is persecuted because his behaviour is distinct from those around him. Of course, his persecution is no small thing – with Mordecai's courage comes the legalisation of the extermination of all his people! Such evil is unlikely to come to us as Christians today. But today, you *will* have opportunities to stand boldly in your faith. Will you take them?

What would you have done if you had been in Mordecai's shoes? Ask God for more grace to stand boldly for him, even when it means you're the odd one out – and even when the cost is high.

'If I perish, I perish!'

'Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews. For if you remain completely silent... you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?' (NKJV)

Esther reminds me of my favourite character in the Bible – which is Ruth (no surprises there!). Both Esther and Ruth (Ruth 1:16–17) speak and act with astonishing determination, inspired by dutiful love for their communities.

I love that Mordecai reminds his adopted daughter that just because she is a reigning queen doesn't mean she can forget her roots! He challenges her, 'Don't get too big for your boots! Do you think living in a palace makes you any less Jewish?' I find Mordecai's words amusing, yet full of daring truth.

As a black woman, I've experienced a fair bit of racism in my life. Yet despite the challenges I've faced, God has given me extraordinary opportunities – far more than I (or many with my skin colour) would imagine possible. Of course, I can't hide my skin colour like Esther could hide her Jewishness – but the challenge is the same: God does not elevate us simply for our own advancement.

As women, we live in a world where confines are systematically placed around us to limit the fullness of what God intends for us. When we break through these walls, God doesn't want us to replace them; he wants us to build doors to help others through.

It's important to remember where we came from – our progression doesn't make us better than anyone else. The ultimate example of this is to remember where we were before Jesus saved us. Now that we've been saved, we must extend a hand to others – to help save them too.

Helping others can be risky! Just ask Esther: her resolve to help her people could land her with a death sentence (4:11). Her bravery doesn't mean she is unbothered by that prospect – it shows that she loves her fellow Jews more than her own life.

Esther says, 'If I perish, I perish' (4:16). Appearing before the king to petition for her people could cost her life – yet she does it anyway. Ask God to give you Esther-like love for others – perfect love casts out fear!

RUTH AKINRADEWO

Haman: a lot of pride and a lot of falls

When Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happened to him, [they] said to him, ‘If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish descent, you will not prevail against him but will surely fall before him.’ (NKJV)

Today’s passage is full of comedy gold!

We talked about reversals earlier this week – these chapters are full of them. Despite being elevated ‘above all the princes’ (3:1) by the king himself, Haman is still hung up on not getting the worship he wants from Mordecai. Talk about a fragile ego!

Mordecai, as an exiled Jew, is in both an ethnic and religious minority. We are told he sits within the king’s gate, meaning he likely worked for King Ahasuerus – perhaps as a porter or guard. He’s dispossessed of Haman’s power. Yet Haman’s joy at being invited to dine with the royals turns into ‘rage’ (NIV) simply because Mordecai does not ‘tremble before him’ (NKJV).

It is dangerous to root our identity in how others perceive us. The opinions of others are changeable – and not everyone will cheer us on. But our Father God calls us his children (1 John 3:1). Like a monarch bestows titles upon their relatives, the king of the universe calls us ‘a *chosen* generation, a *royal* priesthood... his own special people’ (1 Peter 2:9, my emphasis). The opinions of everyone else don’t matter nearly as much!

Honour from the king wasn’t enough for Haman – and thus began his downfall. ‘Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall’ (Proverbs 16:18). Just imagine Haman’s face as he led Mordecai through the city in the kingly array he’d dreamed up for himself!

Through God’s divine orchestration, Mordecai is honoured for his loyalty to the king – albeit some four years later. In that time, Mordecai does not seek praise, but humbly and dutifully continues in service. Haman could have learnt a lot from him. Instead, he ends up in a heap at Queen Esther’s feet – and hanged from the very gallows he had built for Mordecai.

Do you care more than you’d like about the opinions of others? Ask God to root your identity securely in him: ‘Those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted’ (Luke 14:11, NIV).

RUTH AKINRADEWO

Signed, sealed, delivered

Now in the twelfth month... on the thirteenth day, the time came for the king's command and his decree to be executed. On the day that the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, the opposite occurred, in that the Jews themselves overpowered those who hated them. (NKJV)

There are a number of turnarounds in this passage before the ultimate one. The king gifts Queen Esther with Haman's estate. Mordecai, whose true identity was earlier unknown to the king, is now welcomed to the palace as King Ahasuerus' in-law. He is given the signet ring which Haman once wore.

Esther's manner towards the king changes, too. Where she previously requested the deliverance of her people with decorum and restraint, she now pleads for the Jews with tears falling down her face, and herself falling to the king's feet. Where Haman stood as he begged for his life, only to fall (7:7–8), Esther first falls humbly, and then the king invites her to stand (8:4). What confirmation that God exalts those who first humble themselves!

Even when Esther has the king's ear, she makes her request with incredible deference. (Ahasuerus likes his ego stroked.) Have you noticed that when you ask for something politely, you're more likely to get a positive response? Esther's approach isn't manipulative, but wise.

Ahasuerus isn't one for actioning anything himself though – he has his officials for that! This time, the Esther-Mordecai duo take matters into their own hands, with his blessing. And so the counter-decree allowing the Jews to destroy their would-be destroyers is signed, sealed and delivered. The glorious news is dispatched with urgency.

We all have been issued with a life-saving counter-decree: the gospel of Jesus. It revokes the death sentence we were born under (Romans 6:23) and equips us to destroy the ultimate destroyer (John 10:10). The decree is signed by God with the blood of Jesus. His signet ring – the cross – seals it. His fingerprint of grace is all over it. We are the couriers who must urgently send out the good news. Signed, sealed, delivered – we're his!

How does today's passage make you feel? Have you ever considered the gospel as a counter-decree, reversing your fate? Ask God to fill you with a sense of urgency to deliver the good news of eternal salvation to others today.

RUTH AKINRADEWO

Remember, remember

The Jews established and imposed it upon themselves and their descendants and all who would join them, that without fail they should celebrate these two days every year, according to the written instructions and according to the prescribed time, that these days should be remembered. (NKJV)

We humans are so quick to forget, aren't we? We see it time and again in the scriptures: no sooner have the Israelites been rescued from impending disaster than they start moaning again!

Esther and Mordecai were determined not to let collective amnesia arise again. Though his name isn't mentioned once in the book of Esther, we can be sure that the Jews knew that God had ordained their triumphant rescue. The king gave them permission to slaughter over 75,000 anti-Semites who wanted them dead – finishing a war that had begun in the time of King Saul (1 Samuel 15). Their sorrow, weeping and wailing in the face of looming extermination turns into joy, levity and laughter. Fast-ing turns into feasting. They rest from their hard-fought victory and give gifts to one another. That's a lot of reversals!

As we learned earlier in this study, it's important for us to remember where God has brought us from. It not only keeps us humble, but also reminds us that God is faithful to his people (Romans 8:28).

Even in its very name, the festival of Purim reminds Jewish people today that God reversed their fate (*pur* comes from the lot that Haman cast in the Jews' *disfavour*). We, as Christians, are exhorted to remember Jesus' crucifixion; it reminds us that God reversed our fate and gave us victory over the enemy – that's cause for celebration!

It doesn't matter how our enemies throw the dice: our Father has the final say (Proverbs 16:33). He gives everyone free will, but he will use even the wicked to accomplish his purposes. He's the God who elevates a young, orphaned Jewess to the position of queen over a kingdom – and uses her to save her entire race. He can use you too. That's worth remembering.

Father God, help me to remember that you are faithful to your people. You elevated Esther and Mordecai, and you can use me to accomplish your purpose, too. May I continue to learn from the life of Esther. Amen

RUTH AKINRADEWO



Enabling all ages to grow in faith



Anna Chaplaincy
Living Faith
Messy Church
Parenting for Faith

100 years of BRF

2022 is BRF's 100th anniversary! Look out for details of our special new centenary resources, a beautiful centenary rose and an online thanksgiving service that we hope you'll attend. This centenary year we're focusing on sharing the story of BRF, the story of the Bible – and we hope you'll share your stories of faith with us too.

Find out more at brf.org.uk/centenary.

To find out more about our work, visit
brf.org.uk



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.

BRF Bible reading notes are published three times a year, in January, May and September.

Also available:

App for Android, iPhone and iPad

Day by Day with God is edited by **Jackie Harris**.



Jackie is married to Ray and lives in Worthing. A freelance editor, Jackie was previously editor of *Woman Alive*, the magazine for today's Christian woman.



Contributors in this issue

Ruth Akinradewo

Amy Boucher Pye

Selina Stone

Caroline Fletcher

Hannah Fytche

Cham Kaur Mann

Jackie Harris

Michele D. Morrison

Rachel Ridler

Victoria Byrne

Claire Musters



Cover image © iStock.com/kali9



brf.org.uk