

KNOWING YOU, JESUS

| 365 DEVOTIONAL

*following Jesus through
the gospels in a year*

Tony Horsfall
Jenny Brown

Mags Duggan
Melinda Hendry

John Ayrton
Steve Aisthorpe

‘Whenever I find myself at a low ebb spiritually it is to the gospels I always return, and without fail it is there that I find my faith reignited. I am reminded that there is no one in all of history who can compare with Jesus. I find in him the most challenging and comforting person that has ever lived. Therefore I warmly recommend *Knowing You, Jesus*, a devotional resource that draws us back to the Bible, to Jesus, and to his life-changing comfort and challenge.’

Krish Kandiah OBE, founder of Home for Good

‘What a brilliant way to get to know Jesus better – spending time each day with his stories and teachings. With depth and insight, Tony Horsfall and crew lead us through a chronological account of the gospels to help us to understand and love Jesus more. Encouraging, powerful, transformative – don’t miss this life-changing devotional that enlarges our love for Jesus and helps us become more like him.’

Amy Boucher Pye, retreat leader and author of *Holding onto Hope*

‘This is a gentle, leisurely introduction to the gospels, with devotional thoughts from wise and experienced Christians to help the reader see, discover and imitate Jesus. Whether you’ve read the accounts of his life a hundred times, or are encountering him for the very first time, this book will encourage you to linger in the presence of the greatest person who ever lived.’

Marcus Honeysett, director of Living Leadership, writer and speaker

‘This wonderful collection of daily devotions will help you know, love and follow Jesus as you journey through his life in scripture and with prayer. The reflections here will enrich anyone seeking intimacy with God, and would work wonderfully for a home group or a whole church community. Enter in, and be blessed!’

Ruth Bushyager, bishop of Horsham

‘Regular reading and engaging with the Bible leads to human flourishing. When we approach the Bible with an open heart and mind it will always lead us to Jesus. Written by six different authors, these devotions have different styles, but they all take us to the gospels, and each reflection holds the possibility of a fresh encounter with him. A year reflecting on the life of Jesus will change you from the inside out.’

Elaine Duncan, chief executive, Scottish Bible Society

‘Reading the gospels regularly is crucial if we want to stay near to the real Jesus. *Knowing You, Jesus* is a really helpful guide for doing just that – reflectively, attentively and at a gentle pace. The material is refreshing, relevant and well applied to real life, wherever we are in our relationship with Jesus.’

John and Alison Risbridger, leaders of the leadership and theology training course, Catalyst network of churches

‘Nothing is more important for growing more like Christ in life and faith and behaviour, than spending time in his presence. And nothing takes us into the presence of Jesus more than spending time with him in the gospels. This book enables you to do exactly that, and perhaps the best commendation I can give, having read some of it so far, is that I plan to use it myself and benefit from the whole of it.’

Chris Wright, global ambassador, Langham Partnership

‘These short reflections are loaded with deep insights and profound practical out-workings to invite Jesus to be the focus of everyday life. The writers encourage us to not only learn more about Jesus (which you will through reading these reflections), but also to get to know, encounter and become more like him. As I have read these reflections, I have sensed my soul slowing down to walk at the pace of Jesus, to choose his way of doing life and to care for those he cares for.’

Ruth Anderson, founder of The Sports Factory, and faith and sports hub coordinator for Scripture Union

‘*Knowing You, Jesus* is a wise navigation of the gospel accounts from men and women who know the challenge of walking with Christ and teaching others to do so. They have clearly known the highs and lows of the walk but remain committed to helping you become captivated by the one who has all authority and calls you to make apprentices in his likeness too. Follow their guidance and be inspired.’

Andy Peck, host of *The Leadership Show*, Premier Christian Radio

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preface

Do you long to know Jesus more deeply?

Do you want his example and teaching to shape you; to discover what being a follower of Jesus means today?

Well, here is an opportunity for you, an invitation to spend a year reading the gospels slowly and thoughtfully so you can grow in your relationship with Jesus. Whether you have been a Christian for many years or are new to faith, these daily readings will inspire you as you grow in love, knowledge and understanding.

Is this your desire?

If your answer is ‘Yes’, then read on. The purpose of this book is to make that possible, and those of us who are writing are sharing in that same strong desire with you, opening ourselves up in new ways to the transformative power of the life of Christ.

Knowing You, Jesus is not a commentary. It will not explain every question that arises in the text or comment on everything of note. Neither is it an exposition, carefully explaining every point of interest in the text. It is a devotional guide with an emphasis on spiritual formation. Its purpose is to bring you face-to-face with the life and teaching of Jesus every day for a year, and then to see what happens. If you meet him with openness and honesty, the whole process is likely to be highly transformative.

The inspiration for this approach is a 13th-century prayer from Richard of Chichester (1197–1253), a bishop well known for his godliness and care of the poor. In words that much later became popularised through the musical *Godspell* (could he ever have imagined that?), he expressed his own longing for spiritual growth like this:

Thanks be to you, my Lord Jesus, for all the benefits you have given me, for all the pains and insults you have borne for me. O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother, of you three things I pray: to see you more clearly, love you more dearly, follow you more nearly, day by day.

Our invitation is for you to make this prayer your own, asking God that as you read and pray you may come to understand Jesus more fully (*see*), be attached to him more deeply (*love*) and apply his teaching to your life more completely (*follow*).

As far as possible we have arranged the life of Christ chronologically, so that we follow his story like a thread through all four gospels, from his birth to his resurrection and ascension. This systematic arranging of the material has been attempted by many but is virtually impossible. It is not an exact science, so bear with us should you regard the chronology of events differently.

As you can imagine, there is a huge amount of material to be included, so some readings will have much more text than comment. Remember that the scripture is always primary. Linger over it, let it speak to you, notice how the Spirit applies it, make your own observations about it. It may also be helpful to compare the different gospel accounts of the same event. Notice, if you can, people and places that are mentioned, when the action takes place and in which period of the life of Christ things happen. Above all, seek to 'read, mark, learn and inwardly digest' the daily portion of scripture, as the Collect says. Respond to any prompts that are given to you in the daily note, perhaps journaling alongside your reading.

To help you interact with the text for yourself, we have included simple guidelines on four of the main ways we may do this – Bible meditation, reading the gospels prayerfully, imaginative reading of a passage and *lectio divina*. Use these at your own discretion, or when prompted by the writer.

As an aid to accountability, why not consider taking this journey in the company of another person or even in a small group? You might meet monthly to share your findings and discoveries, consider any questions that have arisen for you and discuss the practical application of your reading so that this exercise is, above all, transformative. Such a group could meet in person, and therefore be local, or could be online with an international flavour – the possibilities are endless, so use your imagination.

Even better, why not encourage the whole church to be involved? Imagine the impact this could have on a church if the whole congregation were to give themselves intentionally to the task of knowing Jesus more deeply!

So, the adventure awaits. Let's get started.

Your friends

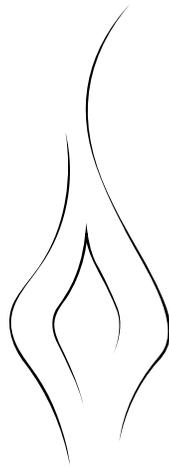
Tony, Mags, John, Jenny, Melinda and Steve

contents

Introduction	9
Ways to engage with the Bible: Bible meditation	10
Tony Horsfall	
Ways to engage with the Bible: praying the gospels	11
Tony Horsfall	
Ways to engage with the Bible: using our imagination in prayer	12
Mags Duggan	
Ways to engage with the Bible: <i>lectio divina</i>	13
Mags Duggan	
Beginnings Days 1–32	15
Tony Horsfall	
The first year: the year of inauguration Days 33–80	49
Mags Duggan	
The second year: the year of popularity Days 81–139	99
John Ayrton	
The third year: the year of opposition Days 140–160	159
Jenny Brown	
The last few months Days 161–195.....	181
Melinda Hendry	
The journey to Jerusalem Days 196–240	217
Mags Duggan	
The last few weeks Days 241–247	263
Jenny Brown	
The last week Days 248–306.....	271
Tony Horsfall	

Arrest and trial Days 307–325.....	341
Jenny Brown and Tony Horsfall	
The crucifixion Days 326–340.....	361
Steve Aisthorpe	
The resurrection and aftermath Days 341–366.....	377
Tony Horsfall	
List of Bible translations	404
Notes	406
Bibliography	408
About the authors	410

introduction



Ways to engage with the Bible: Bible meditation

In Bible meditation, we take a small portion of the word of God and chew it over in our minds, seeking both to understand it and to apply it to our lives in a very personal way. It is a process by which the truth sinks down from our heads into our hearts, and information becomes transformation.

This familiar Hebrew approach to scripture is mentioned in Genesis 24:63; Joshua 1:8; Psalms 1:2–3; 19:14; 104:34; 143:5; and 2 Timothy 2:7. We notice that Mary meditated on the events surrounding the birth of Jesus, she ‘treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart’ (Luke 2:19; see also v. 51). Meditation has been likened to a dog chewing a bone, a cow ruminating in the field or a person sucking a sweet.

- 1 It is helpful to begin by memorising a chosen verse. Repeat the words over and over again to yourself until they are fixed in your mind. Writing it down may help.
- 2 Next, begin to think about the individual words. Savour each one, asking God to reveal to you their meaning and significance. If you are unsure about the meaning of a word, use a dictionary to help you.
- 3 Consider then how these words touch your life. How should you respond to them? Do they challenge you to change in some way? Do they contain a promise that you can take hold of? Is there an encouragement for you, or a warning? Seek to apply them to your life. Personalise the verse, especially the pronouns.
- 4 Turn your thoughts into prayer and worship. Ask God to make this scripture a reality in your life. Thank him for the truth it contains.
- 5 Live in the light of your meditation. Act in line with the truth you have discovered. Speak in a way that is consistent with what you have learned. Do whatever is necessary to apply the word personally.

It may be helpful to continue meditating on the same scripture for several days, asking the Holy Spirit to reveal its significance and application to you.

Ways to engage with the Bible: praying the gospels

A helpful way to interact with scripture is to turn the words we are reading into prayer, both for ourselves and others. The gospels are steeped in both prayer and teaching about prayer, so we can pick up on this as we are reading and use it to stimulate our own prayer life. The example of Jesus, who continually withdrew in order to pray, is especially motivating.

- 1 Read scripture as a dialogue between yourself and God. Turn your thoughts into prayer. Have a conversation with God as you read. Allow your prayers to be formed and shaped by what you are reading.
- 2 Pray the Lord's Prayer, the basic pattern for prayer as taught by Jesus. (See Matthew 6:9–13; Luke 11:1–4.)
- 3 Pray the promises. Notice when Jesus makes a promise and make it your own. Personalise it, put your name there and remind him in prayer of what he has said. For example, based on Matthew 11:28, you could pray:

Lord, you say here that if we are weary and burdened we may come to you, and you will give us rest. So this day, Lord, I come just as I am. Yes, weary because of all that I have been doing, rushing here and there, trying to achieve so much. And burdened, too, carrying so much responsibility, with so many people looking to me for help and advice. To be honest, Lord, I am exhausted. So I come and lay my burdens down at your feet and allow you to refresh my soul this day. Amen.

- 4 Pray the stories. Look for examples to follow or avoid. Let them inspire you to ask for greater faith, to avoid certain temptations, to stand fast during trials or persevere under persecution, and so on.
- 5 Pray the prayers of Jesus, making them your own. See, for example, Matthew 26:39–42; Luke 22:31–32; John 11:41–42; 17:1–26.
- 6 Listen and respond to any commands to pray, or instructions about prayer, and put them into practice – for example, Matthew 5:44; 6:6; 9:38.
- 7 Use any prompts to prayer that are given to you in the daily notes.

Ways to engage with the Bible: using our imagination in prayer

Jesus constantly painted pictures with words. He drew his audience into his stories with vivid descriptions of mountains moving into the sea, of thorn bushes bearing figs and briars bearing grapes, of sons covered in pig muck and fathers who picked up their skirts and ran down the road, flinging their arms around their smelly son! Jesus graphically described people and places to fire the imagination of his hearers, inviting them to enter into the scene he was describing.

The parables of Jesus brilliantly lend themselves to this kind of reading – but so do other events in the gospels. When we engage with a Bible passage by building up a picture in our minds, we have the opportunity to enter into the events of the gospels, which are as relevant and life-changing today as they were 2,000 years ago. Our aim is to become as present as possible to what is happening in the passage we are reading, allowing ourselves to enter the scene and letting God speak through what we find, trusting his Spirit to lead us into all truth (John 14:17; 16:13).

Steps into reading and prayer

- Begin by asking the Holy Spirit to guide your thoughts, imagination and prayer.
- Read the Bible passage through several times until it becomes familiar.
- Then, explore the scene in your mind. You may find the following approaches helpful:
 - What can you see/hear/taste/smell? For example, what is the weather like? Windy? Still? Sunny? What about smells – animals, humans, grass, flowers, dust? What can you hear – wind, donkeys braying, waves hitting a boat, shouting, shuffling?
 - Next, imagine yourself as one of the participants in the scene. Who are you, where are you? Where is Jesus? What is he doing? Do you have any interaction with him – or are you a bystander?
- Gently sit with the passage and simply allow it to unfold in your mind.
- Take time to respond to the Lord in prayer over what you have seen/heard/felt.
- What do you sense Jesus is inviting you to be, or to do? Simply to sit in silent wonder is a response!
- Note down anything particular that struck you or seemed important. You may wish to come back to this in a subsequent prayer time.

Ways to engage with the Bible: *lectio divina*

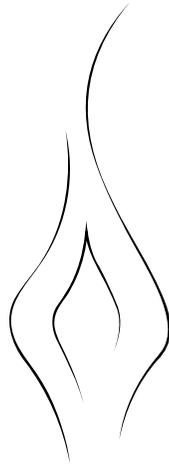
In reading the scriptures, how we read is as important as what we read. One ancient prayer practice helps us move from an analytical, informational approach to a more formational and relational one and is called *lectio divina* or spiritual reading. Rather than reading the Bible, we allow the Bible to read us and address us by name.

There are four basic moves to this practice: read; reflect; respond; rest.

We prepare by quietening ourselves, acknowledging God's presence with us and surrendering our hearts to God so that we can listen expectantly to what he wants to say to us from his word.

- *Read.* First, we read a short passage of scripture – just a few verses are enough. It helps to read aloud and slowly, so that we are not just glancing at the words with our eyes, but really hearing and noticing them, tasting and savouring them. As we read, we are listening, watching for whatever individual word or phrase seems to stand out and grab our attention, or in some way to be given to us. We ask, 'What do you want to say to me today, Lord?'
- *Reflect.* Next, staying with the word or phrase that we sense God has given to us as we have read, we reflect on it, perhaps asking, 'Why this word? What was it about this word that touched my heart? How does it speak to my life right now?' Take your time here, there is no rush to accomplish anything; simply reflect.
- *Respond.* We have listened and reflected, now is the time to respond in prayer and by action. What seems appropriate – praise and thanksgiving? Confession or an expression of sorrow or lament? A moment of surrender, giving yourself to God again in trust and faith? Taking the first step in obedience? Whatever has been stirred up in us by our reading, we bring to God, honestly and openly, in prayer.
- *Rest.* Finally, after we have said all we want or need to say, we rest in God's loving presence. So often after our Bible reading, we rush into our days, but the practice of *lectio divina* invites us to pause and to rest awhile in God's presence before moving off.

beginnings



TONY HORSFALL

Day 1



Why write a book?

LUKE 1:1-4

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eye witnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

As an author I am often asked, ‘How did you get into writing?’ Well, I had always wanted to write, even as a schoolboy, and dreamed of being a sports journalist, but that never materialised. Instead, I followed the path I felt God had for me, serving overseas as a missionary and then as a pastor of a local church in my home country. Eventually, when I felt I had something worth saying, I put pen to paper and my writing career began.

Luke is thought to have been a medical doctor and companion of the apostle Paul. His motivation in writing is clear – he wants to strengthen the faith of his friend Theophilus, and so has researched the whole story of Jesus and presented it in an organised way that would be easy for a Gentile to follow and believe. He may have gathered some material from Mary the mother of Jesus, and certainly seemed to have enjoyed writing – he is also responsible for the book of Acts (Acts 1:1).

I wonder why you have decided to read this particular book? Those of us who are writing are doing so because we have a similar aim to Luke. We want to strengthen the faith of our readers, even as our own faith is strengthened by writing and reflecting on the amazing story of Jesus. Above all, we want to encourage you to let the story impact your life and change you as you read day-by-day. As the writer and priest Henri Nouwen said: ‘The whole message of the gospel is this: Become like Jesus.’¹

Lord, as I begin this journey with Jesus, open my eyes to see his beauty and glory, and help me to become more like him in my thoughts and actions. Give me perseverance as I read and grace to stay the course. Amen.

TH

Day 2



The genealogy of Jesus (1)

MATTHEW 1:1-6

This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham: Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David.

Have you done any research into your family tree? I have, and it is fascinating to discover more about where I came from and the people who are part of my ancestry, mostly humble, working-class people.

Matthew begins his gospel with a long genealogy tracing the ancestors of Jesus, but not simply for the purpose of family history. Matthew writes to convince Jewish readers that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah. To achieve this, he has first to establish Jesus' credentials – that Jesus is descended not only from King David (and therefore is the son of David), but also from Abraham, the father of all who believe.

As you read this list of hard-to-pronounce names, and wonder who they all are, try to sense what Matthew is doing – connecting Jesus to the very beginning of Israel's history and making him the fulfilment of all the promises that God gave to father Abraham, and to that other great figure, King David. The plans and purposes of God have been worked out over many centuries. Despite many ups and downs and failures among God's chosen people, the river of blessing kept flowing, culminating in the arrival of Jesus. All the hopes of Israel's history are gathered up into his birth, and Matthew is laying a foundation of understanding so we can appreciate this.

History may not be your strong point, but if you remember that history is simply 'his story' you may appreciate it all so much more. And the amazing thing is that as a follower of Jesus you are now part of this sacred history.

Lord, you know who I am and where I am from. Thank you for including even me in your eternal purpose.

TH

Day 3



The genealogy of Jesus (2)

MATTHEW 1:6-11

David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife, Solomon the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asa, Asa the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram, Jehoram the father of Uzziah, Uzziah the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amon, Amon the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.

A popular British TV programme charts the ancestry of various celebrities. Called *Who Do You Think You Are?*, it uses experts to dig out the stories behind the facts and make forgotten people come alive, both heroes and villains, often to the surprise of those who are the subject of the documentary.

As we look at this list of names here, we will be familiar with some, for they are heroes, prominent in Israel's history: David, the man after God's own heart, slayer of Goliath and their champion against the Philistines; Solomon, builder of the temple; Jehoshaphat, who led their armies into battle with songs of praise; Uzziah, whose wise and prosperous reign brought peace and stability; Hezekiah and Josiah, who both purified the temple and brought spiritual renewal.

Some, however, were villains, like Jehoram, who passed away to no one's regret; Ahaz, who was pointedly not buried alongside the other kings; and Manasseh, who did evil in the sight of God. Yet they are included in the genealogy of the Messiah, and not airbrushed out. This says to me that grace is greater than our sin and shortcomings, and the purpose of God is stronger than human failure and weakness.

This I find greatly encouraging. My own spiritual history is mixed, with moments of high achievement and times of abject failure and demoralising folly. You probably feel much the same when you chart the course of your journey with God. Yet God not only forgives us when we repent but weaves our mistakes and sin into his overall good purpose for us.

Take a moment to review your spiritual history. What have been the highs? And the lows? Hand both over to God, knowing that his love for you is undiminished and his gracious purpose for you undefeatable.

TH



Enabling all ages to grow in faith



Anna Chaplaincy
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| KRISH KANDIAH OBE, FOUNDER OF HOME FOR GOOD

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This 365-day devotional is a response to the famous prayer of Richard of Chichester 'to see thee more clearly, to love thee more dearly and follow thee more nearly'. In it *Tony Horsfall, Mags Duggan, John Ayrton, Jenny Brown, Melinda Hendry* and *Steve Aisthorpe* present a detailed, chronological exploration of the life of Jesus of Nazareth, drawing from all four gospels.

As we immerse ourselves in the gospel story, may we not only understand it better but also experience transformation into the likeness of Christ our Saviour.

