

September–December 2024



Day by Day with God

Rooting women's lives in the Bible

FEATURING ANNE LE TISSIER, EMMA SCRIVENER AND JEN BAKER

Sep–Dec 2024

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Rooting women's lives in the Bible



Ministries



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Day by Day with God

Edited by Jackie Harris

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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

James: journey into life



Jen Baker writes:

The book of James should come with a label that says: ‘Warning, this book is not for the fainthearted and will likely cause some distress!’ The themes and topics it covers can be applied to nearly every area of our lives, regardless of our age or circumstances. James’ writing contains several hard-hitting truths which have the potential to unlock our file drawer of excuses and tamper with any well-established comfort zones. To put it bluntly, after reading this book we cannot say, ‘I don’t know how to live the Christian life.’

Please don’t let the warning label put you off, though! The truths in this book are seeds of gold waiting to produce a harvest of freedom. Words, works and wisdom are repetitive themes throughout the book; they are not always obvious but the underlying truths of watching our words, honouring God through our works and being led by wisdom are repeatedly woven throughout the chapters.

Over the next two weeks we will cover the whole book of James in our daily readings. I would encourage you to view each reading through the lenses of words, works and wisdom, deciding each day where your perspective might need tweaking, if not cleansing.

In my group mentoring, I repeatedly say, ‘We don’t do shame and we don’t do guilt’, because our Heavenly Father does not have any part of these vices; they are always found in the enemy’s tool belt. We are under grace (Romans 6:14), and it would benefit us to read the book of James from that position. If we aim for perfection, we will easily become depressed, frustrated and achievement-focused, which is the opposite of what James is teaching us. Our transformative journey is ongoing until we meet Jesus face-to-face and are fully conformed into his likeness (2 Corinthians 3:18). What a glorious day that will be!

Therefore, might I suggest instead of perfection we aim for partnership? As you read, I want you to imagine Jesus sitting with you and cheering you on; the Heavenly Father loving you while you wrestle with hidden places in your heart; and the Holy Spirit counselling you as you unpick deep truths found in scripture.

On second thought, perhaps the warning label should read: ‘Warning, beautiful journey ahead.’

Count it all joy

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds. (v. 2, NIV)

If there was a vote on which sentence we wanted deleted from the Bible, I'm pretty certain verse two of this first chapter would make the top ten. How many of us, after reading the verse, have wanted to text James with an emoji-laden 'Are you kidding me?'

I've imagined him penning those words after emerging from a great time of worship which had caused his trials to be clouded by the afterglow of God's presence. Surely the challenges he faced weren't nearly as daunting as those we're battling in our lives today. Then I remember he was one of the early pillars in the church community (Acts 15:13) and historically is thought to have been martyred by being stoned to death. Okay, maybe he does speak with some authority.

Joy can be found in the harshest of seasons. James says we should consider it 'pure joy', and to consider means to think carefully about something or to ponder on it. It is intentional. Therefore, when trials come, we have a choice: deliberately tap into our joy or be led by our feelings.

I didn't become a Christian until I was 19 and up to that point feelings ruled my life. It never occurred to me that God had given us something – the fruit of the Spirit, which includes joy (Galatians 5:22-23) – that could override our feelings, regardless of our external circumstances.

After enduring painful trials and making a few feeble attempts to let God's word win over my whinging, I began noticing that out of the fire I was emerging stronger, bolder and wiser. The more I pressed into praise and trust, the less I felt confusion and fear. Perhaps James is on to something after all?

Lord, thank you for the joy and peace we have been given by the Holy Spirit living within us. I hand you my worries and cares, knowing they are safer in your hands than in my heart. Amen.

Wisdom over worry

Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do. (v. 8, NIV)

Have you ever stood in front of the open refrigerator bemoaning the fact there is nothing to eat as you stare at enough food to feed a small village? Can anyone relate to choosing prudence over preference when out to dinner with friends, resulting in food envy after the food arrives?

Indecision and regret have stolen hours (lifetimes) from too many people over the years, and I knew that it was regularly stealing mine. I grew up with tremendous insecurity, never wanting to put myself forward in case I looked foolish or, even worse, found myself standing alone. This fear of other people's opinions caused me to vacillate over the simplest of decisions, wasting hours of my life that I can never get back.

It wasn't until I was an adult well into my 40s that I decided I would no longer be a victim to indecision. I started audibly declaring, 'I am proactive and quick to make good decisions' each morning as I was getting ready. That one statement literally began changing my life. If I was indecisive at the refrigerator, I would repeat my declaration and then force myself to make a quick decision. When I was dining out with friends, I inwardly challenged myself to be the first person who chose her meal. Making life decisions became faster as I trusted my gut and believed that even if I got it wrong God would make it right.

If you find yourself in a place of instability or confusion, pause and ask for wisdom, then proactively follow whichever choice brings a calm to your inner being. Just as double-mindedness causes instability, single-mindedness can bring sure footedness when it is led by God's perfect peace.

If you struggle with indecision, begin declaring to yourself that you are single-minded and stable in all your ways. Don't go by what you see but trust God's Spirit to bring the stability for which you have been created.

JEN BAKER

What do you hear?

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. (v. 19, NIV)

Imagine a world where people stop to listen before they speak. What a different world we would be experiencing!

Instead of jumping to conclusions and shouting at the careless driver, letting the waitress know the service has been slow or judging the doctor for the length of time test results have taken, maybe we should consider what the other person is facing? Could it be that the driver has just been bereaved, the waitress is about to be evicted or the doctor hasn't slept in 24 hours?

I have to regularly remind myself that everyone is facing a challenge: the businesswoman you pass on the street, the person who serves you at the till, the child throwing a tantrum or the unengaged spouse all battle some type of uncertainty, fear, hope deferred, confusion or a multitude of other trials that happen because we live in a fallen world.

James asks us to look beyond ourselves to the needs of others and reminds us that we should not only study scripture, but also respond to what it teaches us. We can do this by speaking in love, sharing with others, visiting orphans and widows and being a godly representation of Jesus Christ.

Imagine Jesus interrupting someone who was talking, erupting in anger when his food wasn't ready on time or giving the cold shoulder to a disciple who had been acting less than godly that day. It's unthinkable!

I believe one key to Jesus' compassion is his ability to listen. Let's begin listening to the story, the pain, the confusion and the history of the one who is hurting us. It doesn't justify bad behaviour, but it can soften our hurting heart. As we read elsewhere in scripture, 'A soft answer turns away wrath' (Proverbs 15:1, NKJV).

If someone has hurt you and you are struggling to forgive them, ask the Holy Spirit to show you his heart for that person. Then pray as you are able, asking God to bless them and lead them into freedom.

Mercy or judgement?

Talk and act like a person expecting to be judged by the Rule that sets us free. For if you refuse to act kindly, you can hardly expect to be treated kindly. Kind mercy wins over harsh judgement every time. (vv. 12-13, MSG)

All of us deserve punishment for having sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Yet, because of Christ taking our place, dying on the cross and destroying the power of death, our punishment has been removed and replaced by a glorious mercy that we do not deserve. Thank you, Jesus!

It's helpful to remember that God's justice is not the opposite of God's mercy but rather God's mercy is revealed through God's justice. In other words, he loved us enough to send his only Son to take our punishment so that justice could be satisfied; that is mercy.

James does not mince his words here. He clearly says that by refusing kindness, which is walking in judgement, we are reverting to a lifestyle of legalism. Ouch. Let's apply this concept of justice and mercy to those we may strongly disagree with, including politicians, and people on social media, on television or in the streets.

How easy it is to judge them and forget the grace under which we live every moment of our day! When I treat someone as less than, I'm inferring I am more than. If I'm not careful that pride will lead me on to a judgement seat not meant for me. Am I all knowing? Have I walked in their shoes? Were they given the same set of blessings and equipping I have experienced in my life?

There is often a fine line between judgement and discernment, and a wise woman will tread this line carefully. While we cannot judge a person's heart, we are asked to judge their fruit, and it is there that the body of Christ must use discernment – discernment led by kindness, not criticism.

Lord, I understand judgement comes from a critical spirit, so please give me a heart of compassion for those I am tempted to judge. I want to see others through your eyes of love and not my eyes of pride. Amen.

JEN BAKER

Living as God's friend

You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,' and he was called God's friend. (vv. 22-23, NIV)

Best friends are those who stick with us through thick and thin. They don't leave when life gets tough or uncomfortable, but they go the extra mile to resolve conflict and walk in love. How would you describe your friendship with God? Does it shift with changing seasons or remain steadfast regardless of your circumstances?

In this passage Abraham is called a friend of God during the worst season of his life, when he was asked to sacrifice his much-loved son. Was it his faith that developed this friendship or the friendship which developed his faith?

In 2 Chronicles 20, we see that Abraham's friendship left a legacy still called upon by kings long after he had passed away. Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, was being attacked by the enemy when he reminded God of his friendship with Abraham and his promise to keep all of Abraham's descendants safe (vv. 7-9), a promise that extends to our lives today (Galatians 3:29).

Regardless of our position as a (spiritual) descendent of Abraham, a faith not tested remains only theory and never legacy. Yet, if Abraham's friendship with God helped establish a legacy of faith, wouldn't it make sense that our intimacy also carries the potential to surpass personal benefit, leaving in its wake a legacy seen by future generations?

Faith was completed by works – works between two friends (Abraham and God) who trusted one another to bring heaven's plans to fruition on earth. Today let's spend time with a friend who has taken our place in death and opened up the road to life, a friend who sticks closer than a brother, loves deeper than a mother and remains closer than any other: Jesus.

Lord, forgive me for making my friendship with you one-sided at times. I want to trust you even when I don't understand, because deep down, I know that you are good. Please help me in this journey. Amen.

Taming the tongue

Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? (vv. 10-11, NIV)

While the book of James is known for numerous hard-hitting truths, I believe the verses about our tongue are some of the most well-known and most challenging. Earlier in the chapter, James says that if anyone tames their tongue, they will be perfect (v. 2), but then he expounds the impossibility of that task. He doesn't mince words when he says, 'The tongue also is a fire' (v. 6) and 'No human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison' (v. 8).

We have all experienced times when regrettable words flew out of our mouths faster than the hallelujahs at a camp meeting. Our words may have lasted a moment, but the memory left behind can last a lifetime. I remember a time when the Lord highlighted the sheer depravity of what was coming out of my mouth, spotlighting the pain residing in my heart. I was a pastor at the time and, without realising it, I had learned the art of covering up with those I led and letting loose to those I loved.

In Luke 6:45 it says that out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks; what is inside can be seen outside. Realising that I couldn't blame my poor behaviour on stress, spiritual warfare or mood swings was a painful journey. I had chosen to treat others as less significant than myself, and it was sin. Once I owned up to my words, the Spirit of God began cleaning up my heart.

Let today be a day of cleansing, repenting and choosing to see the incredible responsibility of owning a muscle which, when used correctly, can bring blessing, joy, peace and transformation to a hurting world.

If you are bold enough, ask someone close to you what your words reveal about your heart. Are they life-filled, fear-filled, hope-filled or...? Take that answer to the Lord and listen for his guidance.

JEN BAKER

Sowing in peace

For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. (v. 16, NIV)

This verse has convicted me more times than I can count! I knew if anyone looked into my heart, they would see envy and selfish ambition enthusiastically waving back at them like a three-year old at the Christmas nativity who waves to her parents. It wasn't that I wanted to be centre stage; I was much too insecure for that. No, I opened the door to envy and ambition because I wanted to assist God with his plans for my life. Initially my desire was innocent, but I have learned that unchecked desire can become unwanted bondage.

We're about halfway through the book of James, and it's here that we face another stark reality check as he assures us that our conduct will one day reveal our character. He explains that those who are walking in jealousy and selfishness are being fuelled by the demonic (no mincing words here) and those walking in peace are led by wisdom that comes from heaven. Once again, he presents us with a choice as to which harvest we want to reap: disorder or unity.

One of the clearest examples of this can be seen through the lives of Saul and David in the Old Testament (1 Samuel 16–31). Saul was fuelled by insecurity, jealousy and envy, which eventually stole both his kingship and his life. David, on the other hand, was led by peace, unity and honour, which gave him grace to respond with wisdom and wait on God's timing.

If you find yourself trying to arrange circumstances to open doors, bring 'divine' appointments or make your voice heard, then it would be wise to throw up the white flag of surrender and meditate on these verses until the Holy Spirit saturates you with a peace that goes beyond performance.

Lord, thank you for always working behind the scenes on our behalf. Today I choose to stay in peace as I trust your handiwork of love and wisdom to work all things together for good. Amen.

Friendship with the world

You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. (v. 4, NIV)

How would you define avoiding friendship with the world? Does it mean avoiding television, news reports or friendships with those outside of our faith? A cursory reading of the New Testament, let alone common sense, would disagree with that reasoning. The Oxford English Dictionary defines a friend as: 'A person with whom one has developed a close and informal relationship of mutual trust and intimacy.' Therefore, the question to ask is whether we put more trust in the world than in God's word? Do we feel more comfortable with political correctness or personal holiness?

I think we would agree that in the past ten years (at least) the world has become a darker and more evil place. I have stopped saying that I can't be surprised because I continue to be shocked. Who could have envisioned the danger of gun violence, bullying on social media as well as in the classroom and wondering if what we are seeing is reality or a form of expertly enhanced artificial intelligence?

Friendship starts with a greeting and deepens over time; the same applies to the world. When we assert the opinions and thoughts of the media over God's message, we create a divide only grace can bridge. The other extreme is to close ourselves off, living a super-spiritual existence which refuses to acknowledge deeply rooted pain behind the shallow pleasures so blatantly flaunted in our world today.

How do we avoid the extremes? Jesus said: 'My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one' (John 17:15). Avoiding friendship with the world is not found in our absence from it but through our protection in it.

Are you putting more focus on people's opinions and society's acceptance rather than on what God has said in his word? If so, consider what might have to change to enable you to love the world but live according to God's ways.

JEN BAKER

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.

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