



Journeying through Lent

with **New Daylight**

Daily Bible readings
and group study material

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with **New Daylight**



The Bible Reading Fellowship

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Brother Ramon SSF was an Anglican Franciscan friar and a writer on everyday spirituality. His numerous books include *Praying the Jesus Prayer Together* (BRF, 2001) and *When They Crucified My Lord* (BRF, 1999). Brother Ramon died in 2000.

Introduction

SALLY WELCH

I have known my friend Julie for 30 years. We met in a church crèche which we went on to lead, graduating to toddler services, then ordination training one after the other, and now we are both parish priests. We have shared issues with children, had discussions over church management, swapped ideas for Christmas plays and supported each other through the challenges and joys of parenting, ministry and all the other things which make up our everyday lives. We try to see each other regularly, but even if some months pass before we meet, each time we do it, it is as if we had only met yesterday. We know each other's weaknesses and gifts, triumphs and failures. We value our friendship.

The writers who are journeying alongside us in this Lent book are old friends of The Bible Reading Fellowship. They have offered their wisdom and experience, their thoughts and reflections, to many readers through the years. Two of them are no longer with us, having made their final journey into eternity, but their words remain to comfort and challenge us as we look to those 40 days of prayer and study in preparation for the glorious event of Easter. The subjects which have been chosen are studies of some of the most important elements of our faith, and to each of these the

writer brings their own unique interpretation. Helen Julian takes the theme of feasting and fasting beyond the narrow confines of eating or abstaining from food and explores generosity and self-control, choices and priorities. Rachel Boulding helps us to examine the radical nature of the beatitudes and apply their teaching to our own lives, while Stephen Cottrell unpacks the wisdom of Christ and carefully reveals its loving, sacrificial nature. Finally, as we head towards that most solemn of weeks, Tony Horsfall examines the love poem which is 1 Corinthians 13, before Brother Ramon gently but firmly leads us through Holy Week, knowing we must face the darkness before we can see the light.

I pray that these five writers – new to some of you, old friends to many – will prove to be valuable companions on the road to Easter. May their words encourage and support you, offering new ways of thinking and bringing new meaning to familiar passages so that you arrive at Easter refreshed and energised, ready to join in the cry: ‘He is not here. He is risen!’

Sally Mulvender

How to use this material in a group

This material can be used in a number of different ways by all sorts of groups. It can form the basis for a weekly Lent group or provide topics of discussion at Lent lunches or suppers. It can be used as conversation starters for groups that already meet, such as midweek fellowship groups, Mothers' Union meetings or men's breakfasts.

If a new group is beginning, it is a good idea to include refreshments with each meeting – some groups find an evening meal with discussion round the table very popular, while others feel that drinks and biscuits or cake are more appropriate. This kind of hospitality can break down barriers and introduce people to each other in a relaxed way, which in turn will lead to a livelier, more fruitful discussion.

Remember to provide prospective members of the group with booklets well before the beginning of Lent. The reflections begin before Ash Wednesday and they will provide a useful way into the first theme and style of writing before the meetings begin.

The group leader may or may not also be the group host. Either or both of these roles may be fixed for the whole of Lent or rotate among the group.

If the group leader and host are different people, they should liaise beforehand to ensure arrangements are in place, the time and date are fixed and refreshments are available.

Introduction Make sure each person has a copy of the booklet and that spares are available for those who do not. Introduce newcomers to the group and make them feel welcome. Remind everyone that they do not have to contribute to the discussion if they don't want to, but that conversation will be livelier if they do!

Opening prayer Use a prayer within the traditions of the group; this will help put people at ease, and those who are familiar with the traditions will lend confidence to those who are not. A song or hymn can be sung.

Discussion If the group is large, split into twos or threes to discuss reactions to the week's reflections. Allow time for each person to share, if they wish. If discussion is slow to start, suggest that each member offers one word or sentence that sums up their reaction.

Forum As one group, try to discern some themes that are common to most members. If it helps, write these down and circulate them among the group.

Reflection Each set of study questions relates to one specific day's reading. You may wish to read that day's reflection aloud together first. Then study the group questions, and spend some time in silence so that individuals can

reflect on the theme personally. Come together to discuss the questions. Again, if the group is large it is helpful to split into smaller groups.

Plenary The leader draws together the themes arising from the discussion, and sees whether they mirror those from the week's reflections. Again, these can be noted for later distribution.

Prayer It can be helpful to begin your prayer time with silence, in order to meditate on the results of the discussion. This can be followed by open prayer. Be flexible, allowing time for each person to contribute if they wish.

Closing prayer.

Feasting and fasting

HELEN JULIAN CSF



Wisdom to choose

Luke 7:31-35 (NRSV)

‘To what then will I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like? They are like children sitting in the market-place and calling to one another, “We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not weep.” For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, “He has a demon”; the Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, “Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!” Nevertheless, wisdom is vindicated by all her children.’

Reflection

‘Some people are never satisfied,’ you can almost hear Jesus say in exasperation. He has just healed the centurion’s slave and the widow of Nain’s son. He has named John the Baptist as a great prophet and God’s messenger, preparing the way for the Messiah. Yet, many of the religious people, the Pharisees and the lawyers, refuse to accept either John or Jesus. They are, says Jesus, like spoilt, sulky children, who won’t join in with the game their friends are playing, because it’s always the wrong game.

So, John comes, living an ascetic life, living in the wilderness and fasting, and they accuse him of being possessed. Jesus comes, eating and drinking, often with the less-respectable people, and they accuse him of being a greedy drunkard. God, though, has sent both John and Jesus. Each is honouring God in the way he lives, and each has his own followers.

Certainly Jesus had fasted and would fast again, but, for now, it was right to feast, to share meals with those who were not usually invited to feasts. John's ministry and Jesus' ministry complement each other, yet each is criticised for not doing what the other does.

'For everything there is a season... a time to mourn, and a time to dance' (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4). We need the wisdom to know what is right for this season and time. Jesus, the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24), leads his children so we know when it is time to fast or to feast, to mourn or to dance.



Jesus, wisdom of God, make me sensitive to your leading and ready to follow wholeheartedly.

HELEN JULIAN CSF

Generous God

Isaiah 55:1–3a (NRSV)

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live.

Reflection

Visiting India, I was struck by the number of people selling water by the roadside. A very small sum bought a glass of water with a squeeze of lime. Imagine having to buy your water by the glassful or, even worse, being too poor to pay even the tiny price of a drink. Especially in a hot country, that really is being in want.

In this parable, God is a water seller like no other. The familiar cry, drawing attention to what he has to sell, is transformed. This water seller is giving away his stock free to anyone who needs it. His stock is not only water, but also bread; and not only bread and water, the necessities of life, but also wine and milk, the luxuries.

In Isaiah's parable, God is not only the street seller, but also the rich benefactor. Someone wishing to be generous would buy up the entire stock of a water carrier or a baker and order him to distribute it free. God does this not once but continuously. His generosity is unmatched.

There is still more. Not content with supplying free both the necessities of life and the luxuries, he goes on to promise the gift of life itself. Bread and water, wine and milk – these may be necessary and pleasurable, but they are not enough. If all our energies are focused on them and what they stand for, we will ultimately not be satisfied. Only in coming to God and listening to his word – the Word, Jesus – will we receive the greatest gift of our generous God: 'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly' (John 10:10).



On what do I spend my money and my labour?

HELEN JULIAN CSF

Show me

Joel 2:1, 2, 12-14 (NRSV, abridged)

Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near... a great and powerful army comes... Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing. Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain-offering and a drink-offering for the Lord, your God?

Reflection

'Don't talk of love, show me,' sang Eliza Doolittle in *My Fair Lady*. Here are God's people, facing a great calamity, a mighty army advancing on them, and this is God's doing – 'the day of the Lord is coming'. Recognising this, the people want to demonstrate to God their sorrow for their sins, their unfaithfulness, everything that has brought this day on them. Just talking about it won't do. Like Eliza Doolittle, God wants something more concrete. Fasting and weeping

and mourning are ways of showing God their love and sorrow. They back up the words and strengthen them.

But even such dramatic action, though more effective than words alone, is not enough. The call is to repent 'with all your heart'. For the Hebrews, this did not necessarily mean 'with all your feeling'. The heart represented intellect and will as much as emotions, so perhaps 'with all your heart' could be translated as 'with purpose and resolve'. The heart must also be torn, broken, as mourners tore their clothes as a sign of grief.

The heart, broken open, with a real resolution to change, can then truly turn, return, repent and come back into a relationship with the gracious and merciful God. This return is celebrated with feasting, grain and drink offering to God, who waits with steadfast love to feast with his people.



**What authentic ways can I find of showing God
my penitence for sin?**

HELEN JULIAN CSF

Glory to God

Matthew 6:16–18 (NRSV)

‘And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.’

Reflection

The key word here is ‘whenever’. Jesus takes it for granted that his disciples will give alms, pray and fast, and here he tells them how to go about these practices. ‘How to’ is only the beginning, though – far more important, and far more demanding, is ‘why’.

‘Beware of practising your piety before others in order to be seen by them’ (6:1). The almsgiver should not be accompanied down the street by a servant blowing a trumpet. The one who prays should go into their room and shut the door. When Jesus’ disciples fast, it should be as a personal act of devotion between them and God. No one else should be able to tell. They should look and act as they normally do.

Does this contradict what Jesus said just a little earlier in the sermon on the mount – ‘Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works’ (5:16)? No, because, again, the motivation is all-important. Verse 16 goes on to say, ‘And give glory to your Father in heaven.’ God must be the focus of almsgiving, prayer and fasting, and God’s reward is the only one the disciples long for. It’s a good test of our Lent resolutions this Ash Wednesday.

Our natural human tendency to want others to think well of us is a problem for the spiritual life. It makes us self-conscious, aware of being seen. The great saints, Francis among them, seem to have escaped this. Francis responded directly to God, praying, singing, dancing, weeping, fasting or feasting. He was so intoxicated with God that he was oblivious of others’ opinions of him. His eyes were fixed on God and God’s was all the glory.



God of glory, help me to fix my eyes only on you.

HELEN JULIAN CSF



Enabling all ages to grow in faith



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The Bible Reading Fellowship (BRF) is a Christian charity that resources individuals and churches and provides a professional education service to primary schools.

Our vision is to enable people of all ages to grow in faith and understanding of the Bible and to see more people equipped to exercise their gifts in leadership and ministry.

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Eight weeks of Lent material for church groups and individuals, offering themed reflections by well-loved contributors from the **New Daylight** archive alongside specially written questions for group discussion.

Weeks 1 and 2: Feasting and fasting – Helen Julian CSF

Weeks 3 and 4: The sermon on the mount – Rachel Boulding

Weeks 5 and 6: Jesus' wisdom in Luke – Stephen Cottrell

Week 7: 1 Corinthians 13 – Tony Horsfall

Week 8: From upper room to Easter Day – Brother Ramon SSF

With an introduction by **New Daylight** editor Sally Welch.



Praise for *Lent with New Daylight*:

‘People are saying it’s the best Lent book they’ve had and are asking for more! It brought them together across seven small, rural churches and faith journeys were shared in a new way.’

Church leader, Severn Loop Parishes, Shrewsbury



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