



# Green Reflections

Biblical inspiration for sustainable living

**Martin and Margot  
Hodson**

Paintings by Martin Beek



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**Martin J. Hodson and Margot R. Hodson**

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This book is dedicated to our friends in **Sage, Oxford's Christian environmental group**. Thank you for travelling with us over the 30 years of Sage and we remember with thanks those whose journey in this life has ended. We will meet again in the new creation!

We are very grateful to Olivia Warburton, Daniele Och and the staff at The Bible Reading Fellowship for their patience and advice during the publication process.

Thanks to Lisa Cherrett, Eley McAinsh and Andrew Roberts for inviting us to write for them, and then skilfully editing our various reflections. Martin Beek's artwork is superb, and we are immensely grateful that it could be used in our book.



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## Introduction



Welcome to *Green Reflections*. We hope that you will find this book a useful resource. We love writing biblical reflections and are grateful to The Bible Reading Fellowship for giving us several opportunities to do this. Our particular interest is in the environment, and so our reflections have always had a green flavour. With the publication of the second edition of *A Christian Guide to Environmental Issues* (BRF, 2021) we wanted a more reflective resource to go with it.

The idea came to bring together all of the reflections that we had written for BRF over the past few years under one roof. The reflections Margot wrote for *Guidelines* in 2013 have been updated, and they provide a biblical introduction to creation care. We have also written three sets of reflections for *Bible Reflections for Older People*, starting with ‘The wisdom of trees’. The focus of these reflections is more pastoral and spiritual. We soon discovered that you don’t need to be an older person to use these and like them!

Our most practical set of reflections were written for *Holy Habits Bible Reflections: Sharing Resources*. Not all of these are obviously ‘green’, but we would argue that the whole idea of sharing resources is environmentally friendly.

The final set we wrote specially to accompany the second edition of *A Christian Guide to Environmental Issues* and look at all the issues covered in that book, including climate change and biodiversity loss. They end with a focus on hope.

In total we have 62 reflections. Amazingly, after all this reflection writing, we only have one passage that was used twice! We have arranged them so that the more pastoral and spiritual reflections interweave with the others. This is so that a person using the reflections daily and sequentially will have a more varied diet than if we had blocked all the pastoral and spiritual reflections together.

How can you use these reflections? The obvious way would be to read one reflection a day as part of your daily devotions. If you did that you would have enough for two months. But there are other ways of using this resource.

You might be running a day at your church looking at climate change, and want a few biblical reflections to intersperse with the science, theology and practical responses. Look up 'climate change' in the index of themes, and see if any of the reflections referenced matches your needs.

You might have to write a sermon or lead a Bible study on a passage or topic. Again, look at the indexes in the back of the book. You might use some of these reflections in conjunction with the Bible studies at the end of each chapter in *A Christian Guide to Environmental Issues*.

Then you might get really inventive. We were once invited to a retreat day where the leader had taken our reflections on 'The wisdom of trees' and found all sorts

of foods and items to represent the different tree species. Then we ate or looked at each of these as the reflections were read out to the assembled group. Let us know if you do something like that!

There now follow brief descriptions of the six series of reflections. Our prayer is that however you use them, these reflections will inspire you to take better care of God's wonderful creation.

## 1 The wisdom of trees

Trees are mentioned hundreds of times in the Bible and were used to teach spiritual truths. These reflections use the trees as our teachers. By understanding some of the spiritual truths important for the Bible's first hearers, we find out how they apply to our lives today.

## 2 Biblical guidelines for understanding the environment

These studies explore the biblical basis for valuing and caring for creation. Covering both Old and New Testament readings, we discover how the Bible can help us understand God's love for his creation and our role in caring for it as part of Christian discipleship and mission.

## 3 Landscapes of promise

Our journey through life takes us through many different landscapes, and we can learn about ourselves when the geography around us changes. These reflections



take different biblical landscapes, and we learn how God can speak to us at all stages of our life's journey.

## 4 Sharing resources

The book of Acts presents a way of Christian living where all things were shared widely. These studies dig into some Old Testament passages exploring the biblical teaching on sharing: how to live compassionately in a world of limited resources, as we draw from the generous and persistent giving of God.

## 5 Storms and fair weather

The Bible is full of weather. Through different weather, God's people learned how to depend on him and how to follow him in all circumstances. We hope these studies guide you to see the brightening hand of God working in your life, through storms and fair weather, to lead you to know him better.

## 6 Christian reflections on environmental issues

These studies are a companion to *A Christian Guide to Environmental Issues*. With an introduction on love and a conclusion on hope, they take eight contemporary environmental issues and reflect on them from a biblical perspective.



## 1



## The wisdom of trees

Do you have memories of particular trees? We can each remember climbing trees as children; as adults, we had an apple tree that was especially fruitful at our last house, and now we have a beautiful lime tree. Trees can act as markers through our lives. Often in the background but always giving context, pointing back to the past and forward to the future.

Trees are mentioned hundreds of times in the Bible and in almost every book. Many of these are geographical, helping to show where a story is set, but sometimes trees are used to teach spiritual truths.

These reflections will use the trees as our teachers. We will begin to learn some of the spiritual truths that the Bible's first hearers would have understood, and find out how they apply to our lives today. We will discover how we can be sustained by our roots like the willow and bear fruit like the palm tree even when we stay still and the world changes around us.

So please join us on a spiritual journey through the Bible's woodland and find some truths for your own life from these majestic teachers.

First published in *Bible Reflections for Older People*, September–December 2018.

# 1 Mustard-seed faith

## Matthew 17:20

[Jesus] replied, 'Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, "Move from here to there," and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.'

The mustard seed appears in two stories in the gospels, one concerning the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 13:31–32) and the other, faith. Botanists have debated which plant species Jesus is referring to in these accounts, as the mustard seed is not that small and its plant is at best a fair-sized shrub (certainly not a tree). But let's put aside the arguments over species and think more generally about seeds and trees. We did a rough calculation and reckon that a mature oak tree is about three million times the weight of an acorn.

The good news is that Jesus clearly tells us that we don't need faith the size of a massive tree, only a small seed's worth. Just a small amount of faith can move mountains. What is it that you need faith for in your life at the moment? It may be a health issue, an upcoming house move or perhaps something you need to talk to a friend about. Remember the mustard seed and have faith.

#### PRAYER

Lord,  
we know that sometimes our faith can seem very small.  
Show us how to use that small amount of faith  
to build your kingdom.  
Amen



## 2 Peace of the olive

### Genesis 8:11a

When the dove returned to [Noah] in the evening, there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf!

At home, we have an olive-wood holding cross, which is smooth and curved and sits easily in the palm of a hand. It is a reminder of the transforming power of Christ and the connection between his suffering, redemption and healing. The olive is a long-lived tree and highly prized for its fruit. Olive oil is liquid gold, as it provides food, light and heat. Priests and kings were anointed with olive oil as they entered service and Jesus' disciples used the oil for healing (Mark 6:13).

The olive tree is first mentioned in the Bible at the end of the flood. Noah sends out a dove and he returns with a sprig of olive, proving the existence of dry land. Because of this story, the olive is a symbol of peace-making and reconciliation. It was no coincidence that Jesus prayed in an olive grove, Gethsemane, as he awaited arrest on his journey to the cross.

Peace can seem an elusive dream for communities and families who long for harmony. The olive reminds us that there is hope. Jesus died and rose again so that one day all things will be reconciled (Colossians 1:20). We can trust Christ's reconciling power working in our world and in our own lives, families and communities.

#### PRAYER

Heavenly Father,  
help us to be bearers of olive branches  
and bringers of peace.  
Amen



‘Margot and Martin are a tremendous resource to the church as we seek to understand the challenges of climate change. These reflections are sensitive, honest and timely.’

**Rt Revd Dr Steven Croft, Bishop of Oxford**

‘A wonderful introduction to anyone wanting to discover just what the Bible does have to say about the environmental challenges we’re facing today.’

**Dr Ruth Valerio, Global Advocacy and Influencing Director, Tearfund**

## How should we look after the world we inhabit?

Martin and Margot Hodson bring together scientific and theological wisdom to offer 62 reflections inspired by the Bible. Encouraging both contemplation and response, these thoughtful explorations include themes such as the wisdom of trees, landscapes of promise and sharing resources.



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