

HANNAH FYTCHE

# Rooted in God's Grace

Dwelling in the knowledge of God



## **The Bible Reading Fellowship**

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

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To God – who is immeasurably kind,  
always present and overwhelmingly life-giving –  
and to all those who long to find their home in him.

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## Foreword

To write with simultaneous simplicity and depth is a skill which eludes many established writers. In this honest mix of *lectio divina*, spiritual autobiography and prayerful advice, Hannah Fytche proposes a vision of Christian discipleship which is authentic and attentive to the realities of human life rooted in the overwhelming reality of God's gracious, providential and relentless generosity. The narrative here is one of Easter, and of the summons to the Christian to enter into the Paschal Mystery. But this is a book at once homely as well as profound; around the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Lutheran reformation, Christians from many traditions have been pondering afresh what it might mean to be rooted *sola fide et sola gratia*, that fundamental insight of Paul that it is only by faith alone, by grace alone, that we are grafted into the saving work of Christ. Hannah's answer to these questions is to learn how to accept the gift of redemption, truly knowing yourself redeemed, loved, overwhelmed by grace and thus transformed for Christian action.

The heart of this book is a great encouragement to a deeper relationship with Christ, honed in prayer and learned by heart. Scripture, silence, the curiosity awoken in prayer – none of these is something to be afraid of. Rather, in embracing the journey of discipleship, with all its inevitable ups and downs, we learn further how to receive the gift. Not through striving, as if we could ever achieve this alone, or fulfil some kind of imposed necessary criteria. But rather in an honest joy which seeks Christ with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Hannah invites us to a shaped life, a life which is patterned on the shapes of scripture and liturgy, and on the friendship we discover with fellow pilgrims en route. We call

that pilgrimage the church, a dynamic place, where we are inspired by our Christian ancestors as well as our contemporary sisters and brothers; a place where, as Hannah puts it, we encounter 'diverse unity, boundless love and risky faith' as we 'remind each other of the grace of Christ'. This is a vision which can re-enchant our communities, and which encourages us to trust that if we are rooted in Christ we will indeed grow up, gradually, imperceptibly, even 'into the full stature of Christ' (Ephesians 4:13).

**Revd Dr Jamie Hawkey**

Dean of Clare College, Cambridge

Chaplain to H.M. The Queen



## Like a tree planted by water

Over the last few years, in whispers like zephyrs, God has spoken to me in these ancient words from the book of Jeremiah:

But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord,  
whose confidence is in him.

They will be like a tree planted by the water  
that sends out its roots by the stream.

It does not fear when heat comes;  
its leaves are always green.

It has no worries in a year of drought,  
and never fails to bear fruit.

JEREMIAH 17:7-8

The picture that's painted here is vital, vibrant and full of life, and within it there's a promise. It's a promise from God that's firm and true: that he will make something beautiful out of people who choose to trust and hope in him, wherever they find themselves in life. As I type these first few words, and as you read them, let's dwell on this image for a while. Let it become the promise against which the rest of this book will unfold.

**Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him.**

Blessed is the one who gazes towards God and has him as their vision. When things are shaky, blessed is the one who makes God their author. Blessed is the one who lets God write their story and

give them confidence – confidence that is unwavering and firm, not based on performance, feelings or circumstance, but based on the never-failing, powerful-heart-beating love of God.

### **They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream.**

This is the most beautiful image for trust. As we find our confidence in God, we become like a tree. It sounds a bit strange when written so bluntly but, in reality, it is a stunning simile to use.

The increase of trust in God is like the growth of deep roots. To trust is to become like a tree with roots growing deep down into cool water, streams of God's grace running fast and free. Our roots draw up the sustenance we need to thrive; God provides the grace and strength we need to grow.

### **It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green.**

With roots buried deep in the grace of God, the tree grows. It grows fearless and brave in the face of scorching heat – as the sun blazes down, the leaves defiantly stay green and lush. By the grace of God, they do not wither or turn crackly and brown – they rustle with life rather than death.

When we trust God, he upholds us and breathes life into us even when we're pressured or persecuted or feeling worn down to the bone. He breathes strength so that we persevere and 'rustle' with life always, like evergreen leaves.

### **It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.**

Even in times of drought, the tree doesn't need to worry. There are deeper springs that give it the water it needs and living springs

bubbling up to everlasting life. This water allows the fruit to swell into abundance.

When it feels dry and desert-like, either because of difficult circumstances or because we feel distant from God, we must keep trusting our Father. When we keep trusting and walking by faith rather than sight, we can be certain that we will have the water – the grace – that we need. When we trust God, he will bring life. Fruit will grow.

At the start of my second university year, I found myself in a desert-like place. Not literally – my university town is still there and thriving, not sandy and desolate! But inside, I felt like I was in a desert. There were days where I had completely had enough – had enough of trying to pray and feeling like I was getting absolutely nowhere. I didn't know why and it was exhausting.

I've come to describe this time by using Elijah's story in 1 Kings 19. This was the story I opened my previous book, *God's Daughters*, with, and it's a story I've oft-returned to over the past few months. Elijah stood up for God radically and bravely. Despite powerful opposition, he preached against the kingdom's practice of idol worship, showing that God was the true God by bringing down fire from heaven (you can read this story in 1 Kings 18). Having disproved and captured the prophets of the false god, Baal, Elijah's life is in danger – and so he runs hard from his pursuers and ends up in the desert. He lies down in exhaustion under a scratchy broom bush. He's had enough, and he lets God know about it.

On hearing Elijah's cries for an end to his life, God (beautifully) doesn't tell Elijah to get up, man up and plunge back into the fray. He doesn't pluck Elijah out from under the broom bush and dust him off, send him back out. Instead, he listens.

He listens to Elijah's needs and responds to them. He gives Elijah food and water, sustenance for his worn-out body. Then, responding

to Elijah's greatest need, he takes him on a journey. Elijah needs to walk through the wilderness and learn to long for God with hope, to pursue God with faith even when he feels downhearted.

So, God takes Elijah on a journey, leading him into the wilderness and keeping him there for 40 days.

The number 40 in the Bible symbolises struggle. Noah endured 40 days in the ark; the Israelites searched for their homeland for 40 years; Jesus spent 40 days in the desert being tempted. Elijah, in his weariness and grief over his plight, is given the gift of 40 days of struggle too.

It is a gift because it gives Elijah space to long with the certain hope of the most compelling vision: God himself. And it's even more of a gift because God was in this with him, sustaining him. I conjecture this, but with reason: Elijah started his journey with food given by God and ended it by hearing from God on the mountain. God must have been in the middle, too, sustaining Elijah along the way.

I think we all have these wilderness times in our lives, times where we long to see God but find it really difficult. We may not know why and it's really hard – but it's also a reality. For me, the hardest part of these times is knowing how to keep walking through the wilderness, and how to keep growing roots in God's grace even when it feels like a monumental effort with no reward. We can be encouraged by knowing that God is walking *with* us – we do not seek him alone.

The question is: how can we learn to walk in this knowledge that God is *with* us, even in difficult times? What do we do to keep going with God in the wilderness?

If you've grown up around Christians or you are a Christian yourself, you'll know the obvious answers: read the Bible and pray! These are the two top answers wherever you are in life, and rightly so. But I've realised that, while it's easy to say, 'Ah yes! We must read the Bible

and pray!’, it’s infinitely harder, of course, to *actually* pray and read the Bible – particularly in a way that satisfies the soul.

Myriad questions swirl around inside my head as I come to ‘spend time with God’. How do I read the Bible well? Where should I start – with Genesis, a gospel or something really obscure like Habakkuk? What words should I use to pray? Is it okay to ask God for things? Why are prayer and the Bible so good anyway? And the biggest question of all: why on earth do people call it ‘quiet time’, when sometimes I want to shout loudly at God?

I’m sure that you’ll have asked these questions before, or questions like them. Take a moment to jot your queries down somewhere – on a sticky note, in the margins, in a notebook. Refer back to them as you’re reading this book. I hope, in the following chapters, to start to answer some of them – or spark your thoughts so you can answer them yourself.

I’m not an expert on prayer or the Bible, just someone who’s on the same journey as you: the journey of trying to grow roots in God’s grace and follow him meaningfully and riskily. I won’t be able to give you perfect answers, and I won’t be able to solve struggles in your own prayer life. I simply hope to share some simple and practical stories of my own and, in doing so, help and encourage you to keep going! Seek his face always; it’s worth it.

With these hopes in mind, here’s how the book will unfold. We’ll start with the truths we are rooted in as God’s children. By grace we belong to God. We are precious in his sight and he delights in us just as he delights in his Son; he calls us his own. He made us and he redeemed us – and he promises to be with us always. How do these fantastic, startling truths shape how we pray? We’ll explore this question in Section I.

Section II will be a practical uncovering of rhythms which can help us to become ever-more rooted in God’s truths. We’ll discuss the

value and practice of everyday faithfulness, placing specific rhythms of rootedness – Bible study, prayer, experiencing creation, dwelling in silence or rest and being a part of church – within the context of such faithfulness.

In the chapters of Section II, we'll look at why each rhythm can be helpful and what we can do to practise it. I'll pack them full of creative suggestions and stories for you to be inspired by – just remember that each suggestion is exactly that: a *suggestion*. I'm not writing a checklist for you to live your life by; my aim is to provide you with ideas and stories which give you the passion and confidence to pursue God in your own way.

To this end, there'll be questions to help you think through these rhythms and truths at the end of each chapter. I've called this 'headphones time', a phrase borrowed from a friend of mine who was my youth worker a few years ago. She once said to me that I needed to put headphones in – not to listen to louder music, but to block out other noise and listen only to God's voice. You can use the questions I've put together to help you with this if you'd like.

Finally, scattered throughout Section II you'll find 'story stops', little interludes in which I've written stories from different points in my life. These – as well as being a bit of fun – are there to illuminate the main chapters by looking at past experiences which have formed and influenced my thoughts about knowing God. As you read them, take a few moments to think back on your own life. What memories or moments do you have that offer you glimpses of God's grace?

With that roadmap, I think we should begin – and begin with a prayer. This is my prayer for me as I write this book, and for you as you read it. Take a moment to turn to our God.



Father, may your Spirit fill us with hunger for you.

Inspire us to pray with your passion, the joy of your presence motivating us and your will sustaining us. Let us lay down our own agendas and aims.

Give us fresh vision of the fruit you want to bring from our lives. Teach us to be rooted deep in you and help us to make space to listen to you.

Make us radically confident in you. Help us to know Jesus and joyfully follow his voice without comparing ourselves to others. May we keep our eyes fixed only on you as you write our stories.

Father, bring us to full, vibrant, world-changing life as we find ourselves in you.

In your everlasting, heart-beating-love, grace-running-wild name,

Amen



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Are reading the Bible and praying just part of a to-do list?

Is ticking them off each day as much as we can hope for?

Hannah Fytche is adamant that it isn't, and she suggests that we start by recognising our relationship with God through Jesus Christ as a place of freedom and grace rather than a striving to earn approval by getting things done. *Rooted in God's Grace* will give you passion and confidence to grow creatively in the knowledge of God.

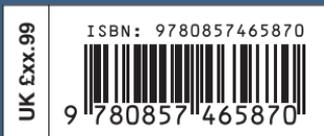


**Hannah Fytche** graduated in Theology from the University of Cambridge. She has previously written *God's Daughters* (BRF, 2016) and blogs at [createdenough.com](http://createdenough.com), sharing stories which celebrate God's love and explore his word.

'Reading this has done my soul good! Can I encourage you to grab your journal, shut the door and go on an adventure in going deeper with Jesus? Hannah hasn't written a book, she's prepared a feast. Enjoy!'

**Matt Wild, Director of CROPS**

'Hannah's second book – like her first – is a delight. Simple, gospel truths written with warmth, humour, and wisdom. It ministered to me as I read it, and I have no doubt it will minister to anyone else who delves into its pages.' **Nell Goddard, author of *Musings of a Clergy Child* (BRF, 2017)**



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