



*The BRF Book*  
*of 365*  
*Bible Reflections*

*with contributions from* BRF AUTHORS,  
SUPPORTERS AND WELL-WISHERS



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# Introduction

*The BRF Book of 365 Bible Reflections* is a celebration.

It celebrates BRF's long history of coming alongside people at all stages of faith, encouraging Bible reading and everyday faith ever since 1922. Even more than that, it's a celebration of the Bible itself and how it continues to speak into people's lives today. The overarching theme for BRF's centenary year, 'Sharing the Story', can be understood in a variety of different ways – referring to the Christian story in its broadest sense, to the story of the work of BRF and its ministries over the past century, and to the stories of God at work in the lives of countless individuals through the centuries before that.

This book contains a Bible reading and reflection for every day of the year. It's designed for people at all stages of faith; for those who already know something of BRF's work and those who don't. Our vision was to have each reflection written by a different contributor, and so we 'shared the story' between a large team of writers: those involved in BRF's ministries past and present, readers, supporters and well-wishers. We also included a section of reflections taken from the archives of our Bible reading notes. The result is a glorious range of different perspectives on God's word, and we are hugely grateful to everyone who has contributed to this celebration collection.

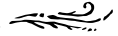
We have aimed to balance Old and New Testament content, seasonal material, favourite passages and thematic sections. As with any creative activity, storytelling isn't always neat and tidy, and we pondered how to achieve a coherent whole while allowing an element of free choice. Some

writers were asked to focus on particular passages in order to ensure reasonable coverage of the Bible narrative. Others were allocated a theme and asked to select a passage which explored that theme.

We hope that this mix of freedom and structure has worked – a controlled messiness to allow people's gifts and enthusiasms to shine through, rather than being too prescriptive. The writers also chose which Bible version they wished to use.

## How to use this book

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This is not a through-the-year devotional in the traditional sense. The reflections are not dated, and you will find yourself moving between sections rather than proceeding in a linear way from start to finish. The nature of the book, with its 365 readings, encourages daily Bible reading through the year, but don't worry if you miss a day here and there. The beginning is a good place to start, but there is nothing to stop you starting with one of the other sections instead.

The section 'Journeying through the Christian year' contains seasonal material to turn to at the appropriate point in the year. So, begin at the beginning, or anywhere else, but you can then turn to the section on Lent when that season arrives. There are precisely the correct number of reflections in that section to take you day by day from Ash Wednesday to Easter Day. However, we decided, perhaps controversially, to allow Advent only 24 days, assuming that the reader will read from 1 December to Christmas Eve, thus avoiding the issue of the variable length of Advent from year to year, depending on when Advent Sunday falls. Similarly, we opted for twelve days of Christmas, and a mere two weeks for Pentecost. So where there is a specific season to enjoy, do so. Otherwise, the book offers a selection of readings and reflections that progress through both Old and New Testaments, alongside other themed sections that can be read at any time. We hope that this is a resource you will find yourself coming back to time and again.

The final section is inspired by the five marks of mission adopted by the Anglican Communion: tell, teach, tend, transform and treasure. Through this framework, our writers explore how we should live and how the word of God can shape us and make a difference in our own lives and, through us, in the lives of others. Again, we can see the 'Sharing the Story' theme at work in relation to how faith is shared.

The Bible extract for each day is shown on the page, but we would encourage you to have a Bible to hand so that you can see the reading in the context of the whole chapter. Inevitably these passages only cover a tiny fraction of the Bible text, but you will find many of the key stories and most well-loved passages. We are delighted to have such a wide-ranging team of writers whose rich variety of tradition and Christian experience reflects BRF's ecumenical reach, and hope that you will enjoy the diversity of the contributions that this collection brings together. Within this diversity, you may not agree with every writer's approach, but we hope that there will be always something helpful to take away from your daily reading.

As a general rule, the readings and reflections stand by themselves and are not accompanied by a closing prayer. However, we would encourage you to pray through what you have read, to listen for what God may be saying, and to seek to apply it. For some suggestions of ways in which you can pray, please see [brf.org.uk/get-involved/pray](http://brf.org.uk/get-involved/pray).

We hope that *The BRF Book of 365 Bible Reflections* becomes your daily companion for this stage of your journey.

OLIVIA WARBURTON AND KAREN LAISTER

## The BRF Centenary Prayer

Gracious God,  
We rejoice in this centenary year  
that you have grown BRF  
from a local network of Bible readers  
into a worldwide family of ministries.  
Thank you for your faithfulness  
in nurturing small beginnings  
into surprising blessings.  
We rejoice that, from the youngest to the oldest,  
so many have encountered your word  
and grown as disciples of Christ.  
Keep us humble in your service,  
ambitious for your glory  
and open to new opportunities.  
For your name's sake  
Amen



# Seeing God in the Bible

**T**RY, FOR A MOMENT, to imagine what the Christian faith would be like if we had no Bible. No doubt something would exist, but it would have a very different shape to it. It is no accident that, down the centuries, followers of Christ have sought to dig deep into the Bible to allow it to shape their beliefs, their worship and the pattern of their lives.

But the Bible is not, of course, an end in itself. Like a signpost, its purpose is to point us to God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In the same way that a road sign points us to somewhere, but is not the place itself, so the Bible points us to the Trinity.

At the start of this year, as in every year, the Christian calendar leads us into the season of Epiphany – the time when we remember how Jesus was revealed to a wide variety of people: his family, the wise men, Simeon and Anna, as well as the shepherds earlier in the story. These were not the people many would have thought were the most obvious candidates for God to have chosen, but that is what he did, and from BRF's point of view it is interesting how they link so closely to many of the people touched by our key ministries.

Despite that revelation, that Epiphany, who Jesus really was remained a mystery to most, as is still the case today. But the Bible also speaks of another Epiphany – the end of time when all will be revealed and there will no longer be any doubt that Jesus is the Lord. Until then we are in 'in between' times, as we have been for the past 2,000 years. In these times the Bible remains that indispensable signpost, allowing us to discover more of the God we worship who revealed himself in Jesus and who actively discloses himself through the work of the Holy Spirit.

May you and many others discover more as you use this resource over the coming 365 days.

COLIN FLETCHER, BISHOP AND CHAIR OF TRUSTEES, BRF



## Ruth: the outsider's outsider

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**[Naomi] said, ‘See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.’ But Ruth said, ‘Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die – there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!’**

RUTH 1:15–17 (NRSV)

The book of Judges ends with the comment that at that time everyone did what was right in their own eyes. Ruth begins by setting itself in the time of the Judges. It is a story of fearing and loving God and one another in a time of anarchy, defeat and dismay.

It can rightly be read as a tale of morality and loyalty, yet it goes far beyond that to uncover in a minimum of words of surpassing beauty the key human issues of identity and covenant, of law and grace.

Ruth is the outsider's outsider. Everything in the first chapter provokes a sense of shock to the reader. She should never have been married to a good Jewish lad – she was from Moab, the enemy. And quite rightly everything goes wrong. Your self-righteous reader feels that the trauma is well deserved. But hang on a moment, like the sailors in Jonah – more faithful than the prophet – Ruth is surpassingly loyal and obeys the law. She honours Naomi. And she meets another person who in a time of anarchy is loyal to Yahweh. From Boaz' opening greeting to his workers and their cheerful reply (2:4), we see a man who has God at the centre. He obeys the command to leave the edges of the field for gleaners, the outdoor relief and social security of his day, and even goes beyond.

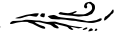
The end result is not only social justice – the poor are fed – but inclusion into the people of God, and not just any people but the forerunner of David and thus of Jesus. What a story! Romance, comedy (Boaz waking up to find a beautiful woman at his feet), integrity, dignity. The Lord is everywhere, yet never speaks.

This story is one for all time and all people. It reveals God in a fresh way, challenges our prejudices, demands our response. Read it and rejoice!

JUSTIN WELBY, ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY

## A text for our times

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**Look, O Lord, and see how worthless I have become. Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which was brought upon me, which the Lord inflicted on the day of his fierce anger.**

LAMENTATIONS 1:11b–12 (NRSV)

In Lamentations 1 we hear the situation of Jerusalem, lonely and comfortless after the destruction brought by the Babylonians in 586BC. We hear the city personified as a widow crying out in agonised lament to God at the catastrophe she faces.

It's a text for our times. The first line is painfully relevant as we recall lockdowns: 'How lonely sits the city that once was full of people!' (v. 1). Lamentations offers a roadmap through the valley of the shadow of death. This is not the way of avoidance, or denial, but the pathway of honesty. Hear the direct expression of pain and despair, the cry of profound loneliness: 'My eyes flow with tears; for a comforter is far from me' (v. 16). It is the cry of faith from one squeezed in the vice of suffering: 'My heart is wrung within me, because I have been very rebellious' (v. 20). She refuses to duck her responsibility for her situation, but still calls out to the Lord. There is tremendous courage here.

The book of Lamentations is a gift. To cry out to God from the place of despair is a confession of faith. To rage at the absence of light is to declare that you know the light. Lamentations is a poem painted in grey and muted tones: loneliness, grief, betrayal, sorrow; a world away from frothy worship songs and easy grace. The glory days are gone, replaced by darkness, accompanied by the soundtrack of suffering and mockery. It's a text to accompany images of NHS workers, faces bruised by masks; coffins stacked up; empty streets; soaring infection figures; raging twitterstorms; political maelstrom; businesses gone bust. It's a bleak read. But...

Lamentations is a statement of confession and a declaration of faith. The voice of lament screams into the night and in so doing she declares her faith in the light. Whatever lies behind and whatever we face, Lamentations urges us to radical trust in God, expressed with courageous and penitent honesty. It's a text for our times.

KATE BRUCE, RAF CHAPLAIN

## You too have seen the Lord

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**[Mary] saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?’ Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, ‘Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him...’ Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’... ‘Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers...’ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord.’**

JOHN 20:14–18 (NRSV, abridged)

It’s not hard to imagine how Mary Magdalene must have been feeling as she gazed helplessly into the empty tomb. The man who had transformed her life, and whom she believed would transform the world, had been brutally executed, and now she was unable even to find and anoint his body. Grief, tears and bewilderment have blinded her. When the risen Jesus comes alongside her, she doesn’t recognise him, until, crucially, he speaks her name.

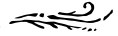
This is not just an encounter from long ago, but a wake-up call to moments in our own lives too. The risen Lord is all around us, approaching us in a thousand different guises, but we so often fail to recognise him. A stranger smiles at us and breaks through our loneliness. A friend offers help when we feel we can’t go a step further. A child’s laughter bubbles up through the tedium of a hard day. Notice, today, where you catch a glimpse of the risen Christ, inviting you, as he once invited Mary, to tell his story and reveal his love in the world. Such moments are the very presence of the resurrected Christ, speaking our name.

This process of recognition and empowerment begins as Jesus addresses his grieving friend simply as ‘Woman’ (v. 15). Then, when she is ready to hear it, he calls her by name, ‘Mary!’ (v. 16), breaking through the wall of her grief. Finally, in her full name and authorised by his Holy Spirit, he sends her to his brothers, as the first apostle, Mary Magdalene.

But this comes with a warning. ‘Don’t hold on to what has been and all you think you have lost,’ we might hear him say, ‘but walk forward, with me, to everything that is still to be, for you too, like Mary, have seen me and known me.’

MARGARET SILF, AUTHOR AND SPEAKER

## Dramatic deliverance



The very night before Herod was going to bring him out, Peter, bound with two chains, was sleeping between two soldiers, while guards in front of the door were keeping watch over the prison. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He tapped Peter on the side and woke him, saying, ‘Get up quickly.’ And the chains fell off his wrists. The angel said to him, ‘Fasten your belt and put on your sandals.’ He did so. Then he said to him, ‘Wrap your cloak around you and follow me.’

ACTS 12:6–8 (NRSV)

The story of Peter’s dramatic deliverance from prison in Acts 12 ends with the observation that ‘when morning came, there was no small commotion among the soldiers over what had become of Peter’ (v. 18).

I should say so! Herod searches for Peter but can’t find him. He examines the guards. After all, Peter was in prison, bound by two chains and sleeping between the soldiers while other guards kept watch at the door. We know it’s not their fault that Peter’s escaped. But it looks like negligence. Or, worse than that, they’d helped him get away.

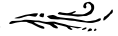
Justice in those days was swift and brutal. They are put to death. The execution of the guards is, I suspect, a detail of the story that is rarely examined or preached about. But I can’t help dwelling on it. God does this amazing thing. Peter is released from prison. His chains fall from his wrists. But the immediate consequence for those whose job it was to guard him is that they are killed.

Wouldn’t it be easier if the Christian story was played out in a perfect world, in which all our motives were good, wicked people didn’t do wicked things and when something good and beautiful happened there weren’t terrible, unintended consequences for some? But if it was a perfect world, there would be no need for God to set us free and no need for the Christian story. Peter was released. But the soldiers died. Jesus is raised from the dead. But there is still wickedness and sorrow in our world. Innocent people still suffer.

Until all of us are released from the chains that bind us, we will continue to tell this story, like Peter, in a challenging, fallen and imprisoned world.

STEPHEN COTTRELL, ARCHBISHOP OF YORK

## Hold tight



The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff – they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

PSALM 23 (NRSV)

Psalm 23 must be one of the best-known psalms in the Bible. Often sung as a hymn, the words have a comforting familiarity. It's a popular choice for funerals.

It's not hard to see why. In six short verses the psalm is a poignant cry of grief and loss, of pain and mourning. But also, and crucially, of comfort and compassion. Of hope, even in the face of death.

Poetic it may be, but it isn't sentimental. No chocolate hearts and fluffy cushions here. Think rather of being thrown overboard in the worst storm imaginable – and reaching out into the waves to grab hold of a life raft.

The author is David, the shepherd boy who became king. That metaphor is rich with resonance: the shepherd is someone who can track a route ('right paths'), however faint; who wants to steer us towards lush green grass and clear blue water, but knows the journey involves rocky, arid terrain along the way; who will be there to protect us when the wolves are on the prowl.

I like the psalmist's honesty. Life can be tough, he says. The valley of the shadow of death is a dark and chilly place. But take comfort: you're not on your own. Just cling on. God provides, says the psalmist. Rest in him, in those rich pastures.

*Relax, says God. I've got this.*

We don't need to be afraid. God will restore our soul.

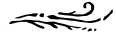
*Trust me, says God. I'm here.*

His promise? Goodness and mercy. A seat at his table. A feast of good things. All we have to do is accept the invitation.

'You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat,' writes the poet George Herbert. 'So I did sit and eat.'

SARAH MEYRICK, AUTHOR AND LAY CANON, CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL, OXFORD

## Sighs too deep for words



**Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.**

ROMANS 8:26 (NRSV)

Sighs – or groans, as some translations put it – that are too deep to be expressed in words. There is something about this verse which has always tugged at me.

Our experience of God inevitably takes us beyond what our imaginations can grasp or find words for. If we say God is infinite, we are saying that there is always more to God than we can reach for. If we say God is eternal – not just endless but outside time – then God is beyond the limits of what we can describe in words.

There are times when we sense something deeper, something beyond, that we barely glimpse and cannot put into words. For many of us, the experience of bereavement is one such time. I know a beautiful cliff-top in Cornwall where there is a bench with a view straight out to sea: a memorial plaque on the bench has a poem to a lost loved one, full of longing to meet again ‘where the sea meets the sky’. As I look out to sea, I can see what the poet sees: a transcendent reality, always receding beyond the reach of my understanding.

So often, those are moments of yearning. Paul understood this: hence the sighs – or groans – too deep for words. Why? Why is it that those moments when I am transported beyond words – by a piece of music, for example – are so often moments of melancholy, rather than of exhilaration?

Much of the time, we accumulate as though there were always a tomorrow; we spend as though there were no tomorrow. Until the day and the year come when we say – in the words of Ecclesiastes – that we have no pleasure in them. The day when we realise that there will someday be a tomorrow without us – and when we look back on the waste and the wrong in our lives and feel the loss.

Those times are often when it is least easy to pray. But those are the very times of weakness when, as Paul puts it, the Spirit of God is near us – in us, even – interceding with sighs too deep for words.

STEPHEN GREEN, MEMBER OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS



*Enabling all ages to grow in faith*



Anna Chaplaincy  
Living Faith  
Messy Church  
Parenting for Faith

## **100 years of BRF**

2022 is BRF's 100th anniversary! Look out for details of our special new centenary resources, a beautiful centenary rose and an online thanksgiving service that we hope you'll attend. This centenary year we're focusing on sharing the story of BRF, the story of the Bible – and we hope you'll share your stories of faith with us too.

Find out more at [brf.org.uk/centenary](https://brf.org.uk/centenary).

To find out more about our work, visit  
**[brf.org.uk](https://brf.org.uk)**





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