

May–August 2022



Bible reflections

for older people

A wing and a prayer

Martin and Margot
Hodson

Absence to presence

Clare O'Driscoll

Everyday parables

Derek Morgan

Hymns of hope

Emlyn Williams



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

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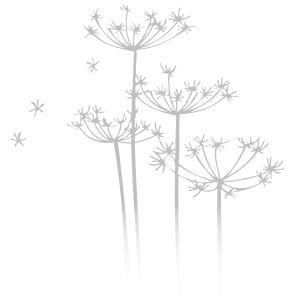
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About the writers



Margot Hodson is director of theology and education for The John Ray Initiative (JRI), an educational charity bringing together scientific and Christian understandings of the environment in a way that can be widely communicated and lead to effective action. She is also a vicar in Oxfordshire and on the board of Grove Ethics Editorial Group. **Martin Hodson** is a plant scientist, an environmental biologist and operations director for JRI.



Clare O'Driscoll was a runner-up in *The Upper Room* writing competition of 2020. After 13 years in Bible translation administration, she has been giving Spanish and French tuition, writing occasional articles for Christian publications and providing press support for a local youth charity. She is also on the team of volunteer editors at *magnet* magazine. She lives in West Sussex with her family and loves the sea.



Derek Morgan is a recently retired IT professional, after spending over 30 years in software development roles. Having been a Christian for 40+ years, he knows his gifting will never be as a preacher or evangelist, but his God-given passion is facilitating those who are. He lives on the south coast of England.



Emlyn Williams worked for Scripture Union for many years, in various places and roles, particularly relating to schools. He is a writer of many individual and group Bible materials. Following three years working with an Anglican church in Southampton, he retired and now lives in Norfolk, where he continues to write.



From the Editor

Welcome to this new collection of Bible reflections.

The saying *solvitur ambulando* – ‘it is solved by walking’ – is attributed to various sages, most commonly St Augustine of Hippo. The one-time Bishop of Durham, H.C.G. Moule (1841–1920) added two words to the saying: *solvitur ambulando cum Deo*: It is solved by walking with God.*

In late October 2020 I walked part of the South West Coast Path. This was to be a walking retreat – time to reflect, time to go deeper. As it turned out, wind, hail, mud, missing signposts, slippery rocks and rain that turned my maps to pulp meant that my only thoughts were how to stay upright and how to find my way. Meditation, no. Reflection, no.

Two contributors to this issue, SuperAger Angela Lucas and poet Victoria Field, have walked the Camino, the ancient pilgrim route to Santiago de Compostela. For both of them – and for me – the real wisdom of our walks came only after we’d arrived at our destination and loosened our boots.

At the end of her book about her Camino pilgrimage,** Victoria writes: ‘Something changed. My faith deepened. The veil is increasingly thinner and I see through it more often.’ Whether we knew it at the time or not, it is solved by walking with God.

Go well



* *Outlines of Christian Doctrine*, chapter 3, ‘The Doctrine of the Father’.

** *Baggage: A book of leavings* (Francis Boutle Publishers, 2016).

Using these reflections

Perhaps you have always had a special daily time for reading the Bible and praying. But now, as you grow older, you are finding it more difficult to keep to a regular pattern or find it hard to concentrate. Or maybe you've never done this before. Whatever your situation, these Bible reflections aim to help you take a few moments to read God's word and pray, whenever you have time or feel that would be helpful.

When to read them

You may find it helpful to use these Bible reflections in the morning or last thing at night, but they work at any time of the day you choose. There are 40 reflections here, grouped around four themes. Each one includes some verses from the Bible, a reflection to help you in your own thinking about God, and a prayer suggestion. The reflections aren't dated, so it doesn't matter if you don't want to read every day. The Bible verses are printed, but if you'd like to read from your own Bible that's fine too.

How to read them

- **Take time** to quieten yourself, becoming aware of God's presence, asking him to speak to you through the Bible and the reflection.
- **Read** the Bible verses and the reflection:
 - What do you especially like or find helpful in these verses?
 - What might God be saying to you through this reading?
 - Is there something to pray about or thank God for?
- **Pray.** Each reflection includes a prayer suggestion. You might like to pray for yourself or take the opportunity to think about and pray for others.



A wing and a prayer

Martin and Margot Hodson

Birds appear at the very beginning of the Bible, on the fifth day of creation when God said, ‘Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky’ (Genesis 1:20, NIV). As we go through the Bible, we see them in flight and nesting, both behaving more honourably than God’s people and acting badly. The last mention of birds is in a rather bloodthirsty passage from Revelation 19:21 (NIV): ‘The rest were killed with the sword coming out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.’

Bird are sometimes used to paint the background to a passage, and sometimes used to illustrate theological truths. Leviticus 11:13–19 lists 19 bird species considered unclean and not to be eaten. Bats would make 20, but we now know they are mammals, not birds. This list illustrates a problem of writing about birds in the Bible: different translations often give quite different species. To simplify, our reflections follow the species named in the NIV.

So come with us as we explore what our feathered friends can tell us about God, humanity and the wider creation.



Isaiah 40:31 (NIV)

The eagle

But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Breakfast with the eagles was a magical experience in the Alpujarra Mountains. Our holiday apartment had a small terrace overlooking the valley, and most mornings we would watch a pair of Booted Eagles as they circled upwards on thermals, their majestic wings spread wide. It seemed effortless and yet we knew they had terrific strength.

Losing strength is a terrible thing. It may be physical because of illness or increasing age, or it may be emotional because life's knocks have just become a bit too much. Whatever our situation, we can turn to the Lord for strength. We may look longingly at the effortless flight of the eagles, but God will strengthen us in ways we cannot know. God's strength comes through the Holy Spirit. He is with us at all times and understands our weaknesses. He knows our deepest desires, and his healing touch gives us all that we need to make us whole.

Experiencing God's power in our lives is an inner strengthening that enables us to face the future. We might not be running in the Olympics, but we will be running the race for Christ.

■ PRAYER

Dear Lord, only you can give us strength when we are weak. Help us to trust in you for the strength that we need each day. Amen

Zephaniah 2:14 (NIV)

The owl

Flocks and herds will lie down there, creatures of every kind. The desert owl and the screech owl will roost on her columns. Their hooting will echo through the windows, rubble will fill the doorways, the beams of cedar will be exposed.

Our reading forms part of a short prophecy by Zephaniah concerning what will happen to the city of Nineveh in Assyria because of their arrogance and pride. This is one of the passages where we are uncertain exactly which species the birds are, but whatever the writer intended, in the Bible these species are always associated with desolation and lack of human habitation. One can imagine the haunting cries of these birds across the levelled city. The picture is one of total destruction after a devastating attack by an opposing army.

Whenever I (Martin) think of desolate landscapes, it takes me back to a visit I made many years ago to Sudbury in Northern Ontario, Canada. This was the site of historic nickel and copper mining, which had so polluted the land that hardly anything could live there. Just a few dead tree stumps rose out of the blackened landscape, and there was an apocryphal story that the Sudbury wastelands had been used to practise moon landings.

War and environmental degradation can both lead to desolate landscapes. We think of wars damaging people, but they can be catastrophic for the natural environment too.

■ PRAYER

Lord, we pray for both peace and better care for your creation. Amen

The Gift of Years



Debbie Thrower is the pioneer of BRF's Anna Chaplaincy for Older People ministry, offering spiritual care to older people, and is widely involved in training and advocacy.

Visit annachaplaincy.org.uk to find out more.

Debbie writes...

A woman in a care home once told a visiting young priest how she'd never perceived the presence of God, despite praying for years. It was reading a new writer to us, Clare O'Driscoll, and her description of how Jesus 'gently guides us into the beauty of his presence', which reminded me of this story, told in *School for Prayer* by Metropolitan Anthony Bloom (Libra, 1970). Do you know what the minister suggested? That the old woman should sit in her chair, facing away from dark corners, and knit for 15 minutes – without saying a word of prayer.

She did as he suggested, facing the light. She admired her nice, neat room. Then she remembered the knitting. The needles hit the arm-rest of her chair. She noticed her clock ticking peacefully. There was nothing to bother about... then she perceived that this silence was not simply an absence of noise: the silence had substance, a richness: 'The silence around began to come and meet the silence in me' (p. 61).

It didn't mean she stopped praying, but that she could sustain a contemplative silence for a while and then turn to vocal prayer. What a timeless secret she had learned. And the young priest who gave her this clue to such presence went on to become Russian Orthodox bishop, writer and broadcaster, Metropolitan Anthony Bloom.

Best wishes





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.

To find out more about our work, visit
brf.org.uk

A daily companion to keep by your side

Written by older people for older people, these reflections are designed to bring hope, assurance and sustenance, reminding the reader of the presence and love of God. Each issue contains 40 Bible reflections and prayer suggestions to use and revisit as often as is needed.



In the central section, Pioneer of BRF's Anna Chaplaincy for Older People ministry **Debbie Thrower** offers interviews and ideas to encourage and inspire.



Bible Reflections for Older People is edited by Eley McAinsh.

In this, the second of our centenary year issues...

We welcome two writers new to *Bible Reflections for Older People*: **Derek Morgan** writes about everyday parables and **Clare O'Driscoll** muses on the relationship between absence and presence. **Emlyn Williams** explores ten favourite hymns of hope and **Martin and Margot Hodson** celebrate some of the many species of birds in the Bible.



And so we know and rely on
the love God has for us.
God is love. Whoever lives in love
lives in God, and God in them.
1 John 4:16 (NIV)



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