

January–April 2023



Bible reflections

for older people

Season of song

John Rackley

New beginnings

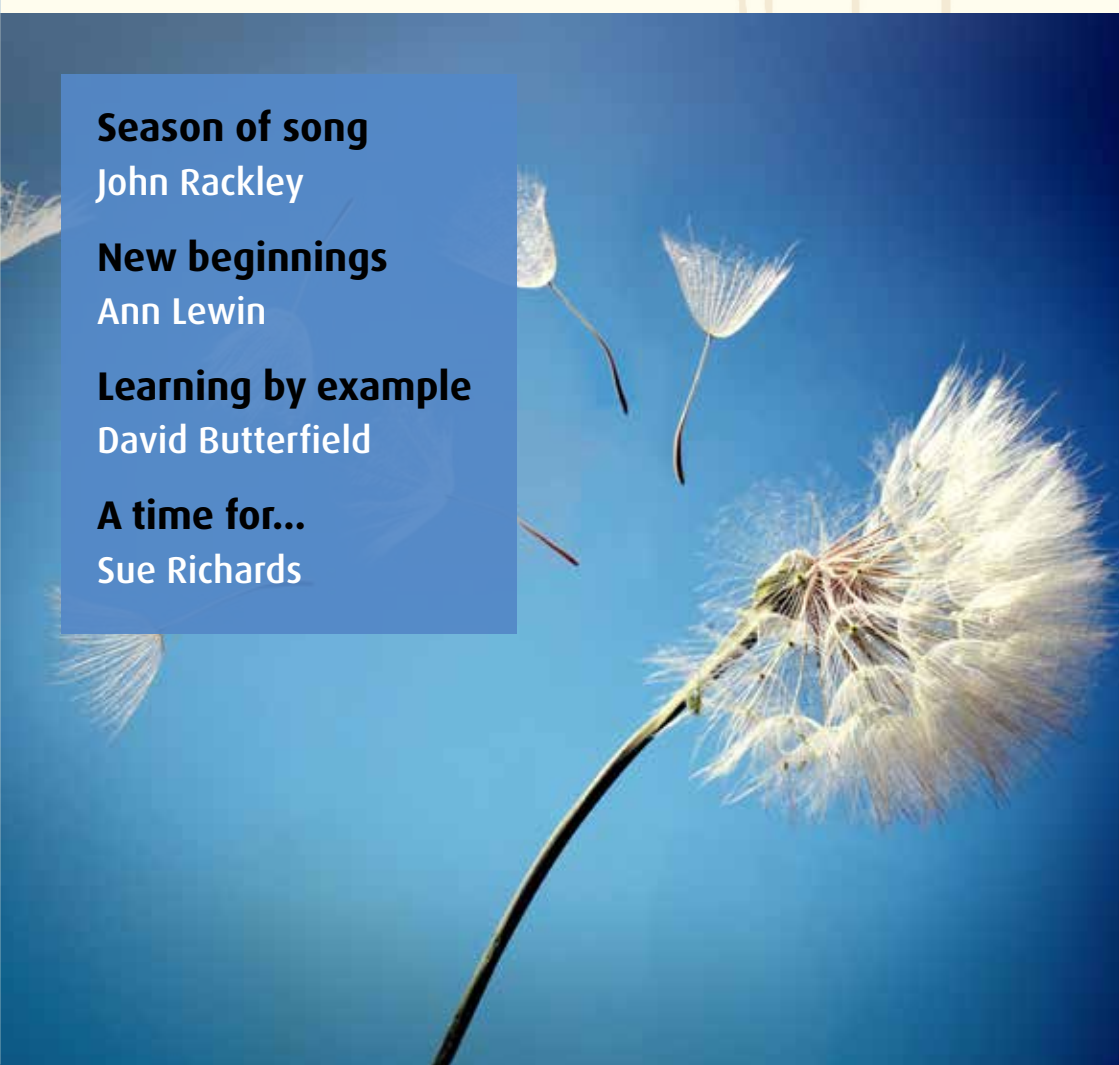
Ann Lewin

Learning by example

David Butterfield

A time for...

Sue Richards



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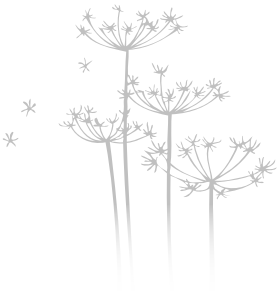
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About the writers



John Rackley has over 40 years' experience in pastoral ministry. He is an associate minister with a Leicestershire Local Ecumenical Partnership and Methodist Circuit. He is currently working on the relationship between biography and belief.



Ann Lewin was a teacher of RE and English for 27 years. Now retired, she writes, leads quiet days and retreats and works with individuals and groups, helping people explore their spirituality. She has had experience of caring for people living with dementia, first her mother and then one of her brothers, over a period of about 35 years.



David Butterfield was born in Yorkshire. After studying music, he felt called to ordination in the Church of England. During his 40-year ministry, he served at churches in Southport, the midlands and Shropshire. His final post was based at York Minster from which he retired in 2017. He and his wife Irene now live in Ripon in North Yorkshire. They have two adult children and one grandchild.



Sue Richards lives in Newport Pagnell with her husband, for whom she is a carer. She teaches functional skills English to adults, works as an invigilator and with the elections team and always has a writing project on the go. She also leads Milton Keynes Torch Fellowship for visually impaired people and is active in the Baptist church she attends.



From the Editor

Welcome.

As this issue of *Bible Reflections for Older People* comes through your letter box, I'll have just received my first state pension payment. It feels both surreally premature and, as a member of the 'WASPI'* generation, frustratingly overdue. It's a state-recognised stake in the ground while my own sense of ageing is fluid, to say the least.

Fridge magnets joke, 'Age is just a number', '80 is the new 60', 'You don't stop because you get old, you get old because you stop.' But as my friend Maggie Greaves explains later in this issue, our journey into old age will be far more rewarding if we forgo superficial positivity and engage consciously with the deep questions around ageing.

My dear dad was a proud chartered engineer and towards the end of his career, a company director. In pre-LinkedIn days, he was occasionally contacted by headhunters. He listened to their spiel and then enjoyed their flustered retreat when he asked, 'You do know how old I am?' One of the things I remember him saying most often, until Alzheimer's overtook him, was, 'But I don't feel any different inside.' I was probably in my mid-30s when I began to understand what he meant and now, in my mid-60s, his words are a constant refrain and a constant cue for reflection.

God bless you.



* Women Against State Pension Inequality

Using these reflections

Perhaps you have always had a special time each day 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 harder 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 might use these Bible reflections in the morning or last thing at night, but they work at any time of day. There are 40 reflections here, grouped around four themes, by four different writers. 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 you might prefer to follow them in your own Bible.

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 season of song

John Rackley

When I was growing up in a Baptist church in the 1950s, I was never aware of Epiphany. It was all about Christmas, with its lovely once-a-year range of carols. But that was soon over, and services went back to normal until Easter. These days Advent helps us prepare for Christmas, but I still don't think the weeks of Epiphany that follow get enough attention.

The scriptural basis of Epiphany is found in Matthew 2:1–12, where the Magi visit the baby Jesus – the first Gentiles to encounter him. This theme is taken up by Simeon in Luke 2 as he declares Jesus 'a light for revelation to the Gentiles' (v. 32, NRSV) when Jesus is presented in the temple by Mary and Joseph.

An epiphany is a moment of sudden and great revelation or recognition. It is a breakthrough moment after a time of searching. The Epiphany is about the disclosure of Christ to the Gentiles. As the New Testament writer puts it: 'We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our own eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our own hands, concerning the word of life' (1 John 1:1, NRSV).

I have chosen hymns and carols that explore Epiphany themes. All of them can be found in modern hymn selections. They capture and expand our emotions of delight, lament, uncertainty and hopefulness. They provide a world-embracing season of song and an invitation to proclaim Jesus as our wonderful Saviour.



Psalm 100:2 (NRSV)

'As with gladness men of old did the guiding star behold'

Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing.

I had to start with this one, didn't I? It captures so much of what Epiphany means, especially the note of gladness. If we cannot be glad after Christmas, when can we be? There is something down-to-earth about being glad. The hymn also describes the joyful steps of the travellers and the holy joy of our own devotion.

Gladness is unpretentious and unpremeditated cheerfulness. It welcomes with open arms. When my young grandchildren burst through the garden gate, I can't help but spread my arms wide. I want to embrace all their vigour and uncomplicated enthusiasm. I am so glad to be in their company.

At Christmas, too, I embrace all the wonder and power of the stories of the birth of my Lord. I want to smile. I want to be positive. I want to embrace again the gift of God's homely love surrounded by a cradle rude and bare.

The gladness of Christmastime can soon be left behind in the cold reality of the new year but in this hymn, we are asked to travel into God's future for us, overwhelmed by gladness and joy (Matthew 2:10).

■ PRAYER

Lord, through the Christmas story may my faith be gladdened each day no matter where I must go or what I need to deal with. Amen

Exodus 13:21 (NRSV)

**‘To the earth it gave great light,
and so it continued both day and night’**

The Lord went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day... and in a pillar of fire by night.

I wonder whether there's been a time in your life that you might describe as a 'star' moment. A time when God was very close, and his presence compelled you to worship.

I can't help but draw parallels between the exhortation to 'follow the star wherever it went' in this hymn and the pillars of cloud and of fire used by the Lord to lead his people by day and night across the wilderness. The star is an act of God which gave the Magi a direction for their searching. It is a powerful source of guidance and hope. It is not diminished by the passage of time. It inspires their perseverance and courage. In a similar way, this was the case for the people of Israel with their 'star' by day and night showing them the way, and giving them hope, courage and comfort.

This is a reminder of the way in which God will sometimes offer guidance through surprising events, as well as the ordinary and commonplace. Epiphany is a time to prayerfully consider the unique ways in which God revealed himself in Jesus and to each of us.

There is no time of the day or night that we are not travelling in the company of God. Doesn't that place everything in a positive light?

■ PRAYER

Lord, help us to be sustained by your presence and to keep searching for guidance and grace. 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...

Welcome!

Anna, the widow we meet in Luke's gospel, was 'steeped' in prayer. She's the inspiration behind our chaplaincy to older people.

Based at the University of Southampton for many years, Professor Peter Coleman interviewed the same people for a long-term study of older people's attitudes to the Christian faith. 'What came through strongly,' he says, 'was the value of prayer in people's later lives.' He found successive generations 'have become more questioning of what they have been taught', but 'those with prayerful religious practice were much less likely to lose their faith'. His stories of how prayer continues to sustain some people into their advanced old age are heartening.*

The contributors to this edition are also heartening, encouraging us to persist in prayer. Anna and Simeon stand for all time as people so prayerful and in touch with God that they recognised baby Jesus for who he really was. Ever since, many have chosen to put Jesus at the centre of their lives and found for themselves that:

'Jesus Christ never changes! He is the same yesterday, today, and forever' (Hebrews 13:8, CEV).

Best wishes

* Peter G. Coleman, Christine Ivani-Chalian and Maureen Robinson, *Self and Meaning in the Lives of Older People*: (Cambridge University Press, 2015).





Enabling all ages to grow in faith



Anna Chaplaincy
Living Faith
Messy Church
Parenting for Faith

BRF is a Christian charity that resources individuals and churches. 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.

To find out more about our work, visit

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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 helpful.



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



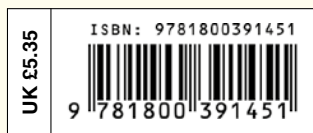
Bible Reflections for Older People is edited by Eley McAinsh.

In this issue...

In this issue we celebrate Epiphany, the 'season of song', with **John Rackley** and rejoice in new beginnings with poet **Ann Lewin**. We learn from the example of a number of Bible characters in the company of **David Butterfield**, and **Sue Richards** reflects on God's perfect timing.



The Lord has done great things for us,
and we are filled with joy.
Psalms 126:3 (NIV)



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