

September–December 2023



Bible reflections

for older people

Breath of God

Erica Roberts

Seasons of silence

John Rackley

The birds and the bees

Derek Morgan

Of greater worth

Clare O'Driscoll



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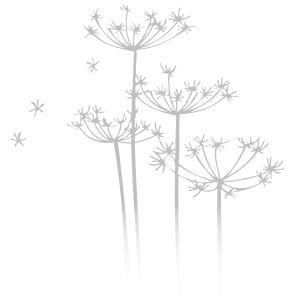
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About the writers



Erica Roberts is a former paediatric oncologist. As an Anglican priest, she is passionate about her role as city chaplain for older people in Southampton. Supporting this work, she founded the charity Caraway and is delighted to be part of the BRF Anna Chaplaincy network. She loves being creative in worship and engaging those who live with dementia. In her free time, you'll find her walking along a deserted beach with her Westie.



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



Derek Morgan is a recently retired IT professional, having spent over 30 years in software development roles. From his 40-plus years as a Christian, he knows his gifting will never be as a preacher or evangelist, but his God-given passion is facilitating those who are! You will always find him somewhere in church using his gifts in technical, practical, musical and IT activities. He lives on the south coast of England.



Clare O'Driscoll worked in Bible translation administration for 13 years, before leaving for a more freelance, child-friendly set-up. Since then, she's been giving Spanish and French tuition, writing 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.



From the Editor

Welcome.

Autumn is my favourite season, forever associated with new pencils, new school uniforms and frosts which turn the mundane magical. Many dread the coming of winter but I relish the shortening days and the falling temperatures. I love feeling cocooned in the dark.

Older people are sometimes described as being 'in the autumn of life', implying waning, declining, ebbing. This belies the vibrancy and potential of autumn. Autumn has a beauty as compelling as spring, even if our frosts are not as sharp nor as frequent as they used to be: rich colours, ripe fruit, brown furrowed fields newly sown, flooded water meadows shimmering as the sun sets in the late afternoon.

Pauline Matarasso's poem 'Autumn', which you can read on page 33, captures all this. Born in 1929, Pauline is writing and publishing into her 90s. Her poem ends with these darkly hopeful lines:

*Darkly the chrysalis
In armoured womb gestates
Tomorrow.*

Autumn is a great season. In nature and in life, it has both challenges and joys. Even French existentialist, Albert Camus, agrees: 'Autumn is a second spring... when every leaf is a flower.' Autumn is to be embraced, not feared. It is a season of new beginnings, abundance and hope.

God bless you.

Eley
✓x



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.



Breath of God

Erica Roberts

Although we are mostly unaware of the breaths we take, from our first to our last, our physical survival is dependent on the exchange of carbon dioxide for life-giving oxygen. Maya Angelou, the American poet and civil rights activist, speaks of the deep connection between our breath and fullness of life when she said, ‘Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away.’ As I have reflected on how God breathes his life into us – a breath that animates, sustains, inspires and restores – I have had my own breath taken away by the deep intimacy of God’s life-giving breath.

Jesus said, ‘I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly’ (John 10:10, NRSV). We discover that living abundantly depends on receiving this gift of God’s breath, a metaphor for the Holy Spirit, who was present at the beginning of time, breathing life into creation. The Spirit continues to fill us with new life in Jesus, so that we may be ‘transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit’ (2 Corinthians 3:18, NIV).



Genesis 2:7 (NIV)

The first breath

Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

The unadorned joy of hearing a baby's first breath represents not only our delight in the gift of new life, but also the anticipation of all that lies ahead. Each first breath reminds me of that wonderful refrain of praise in Psalm 139:14, 'I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful.'

Our verse today paints a beautiful picture of how God crafted humanity. The Hebrew word for 'formed' is also used for a potter, who artistically shapes clay with their own hands. We see God here shaping us with his hands, a deeply personal portrayal of God skillfully creating us in his own image (Genesis 1:27). Of course, however, we are created from the dust of the ground, a reminder that it will be to the ground that our bodies return after we take our last breath.

Yet what unfolds next never ceases to take my breath away. We join the story in which God, who has just spoken the universe into existence, intimately comes face to face with his creation and breathes his own eternal life into humankind. This marks the beginning of our lifelong and life-transforming relationship with our creator God.

■ PRAYER

'Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord'
(Psalm 150:6). Amen

Job 32:7–8 (NIV)

The breath of wisdom

I thought, ‘Age should speak; advanced years should teach wisdom.’ But it is the spirit in a person, the breath of the Almighty, that gives them understanding.

Most of us would like to be wise; but what is wisdom and how do we gain it? The ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle, said that ‘knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom’. Psychological study has shown that wisdom comes with age as values like empathy, resilience and humility develop throughout life, enabling a person to find resolution rather than fear in their later years. Despite the breadth of experience that comes with ageing, these studies also show that attributes of wisdom can be exhibited in our earlier years.

In Job 32, the young man Elihu bursts on to the scene. He has respectfully listened to Job’s three older friends’ unhelpful reflections about suffering and now, rather impetuously, demands a hearing. Whatever we think of Elihu, his passionate outburst in the following chapters provides a pause, preparing the way for God to eventually speak ‘out of the storm’ (Job 38:1). Elihu reminds Job of God’s presence and purpose, even through suffering. In his own defence, Elihu declares that ‘it is not only the old who are wise’ (Job 32:9), but instead we should seek God’s wisdom throughout all seasons of life. It is ‘the breath of the Almighty’ that will bring understanding and wisdom.

■ PRAYER

Almighty God, we pray for your understanding and wisdom in our older years. 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.

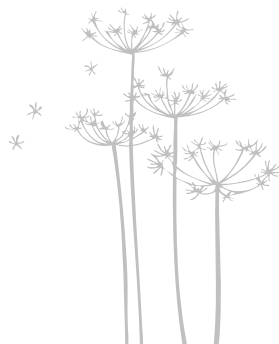
Debbie writes...

Welcome!

When a child is born, everyone waits eagerly to hear what name the parents will give the baby. Whatever they choose will have a bearing on the child's sense of identity for life. My name, Deborah, has Hebrew origins and means 'bee'. In the Jewish scriptures – the Old Testament – Deborah was a prophetess and became known as a poet and judge. Sometimes I feel a bit like a busy bee; as a part of the Anna Chaplaincy team, we work hard to develop this way of offering spiritual care, love and friendship to older people across the country.

From a baby's first gasp, it is God's gift of breath that enables each of us to live. Breath as a metaphor for the divine gift of the Holy Spirit is explored in these pages. So too is the gift of silence – if we can stop being quite so busy occasionally, we might make room for God's 'still small voice' to get through. Another set of reflections considers the birds and bees of the natural world and what blessings they bring us. So, as you can see, it is a rich mix we set out for you in this edition. Enjoy!

Best wishes





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 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 issue...

Erica Roberts reflects on the power and mystery of the breath of God, while **John Rackley** wonders when to talk and when to keep silent. **Derek Morgan** celebrates some of God's smallest creatures, the birds and the bees, and **Clare O'Driscoll** considers what God says about our worth and our values.



Whom have I in heaven but you?
And earth has nothing I desire
besides you.
Psalm 73:25 (NIV)

