

January–April 2024



Bible reflections

for older people



Hineni: Here I am

Tony Horsfall

Giving and receiving

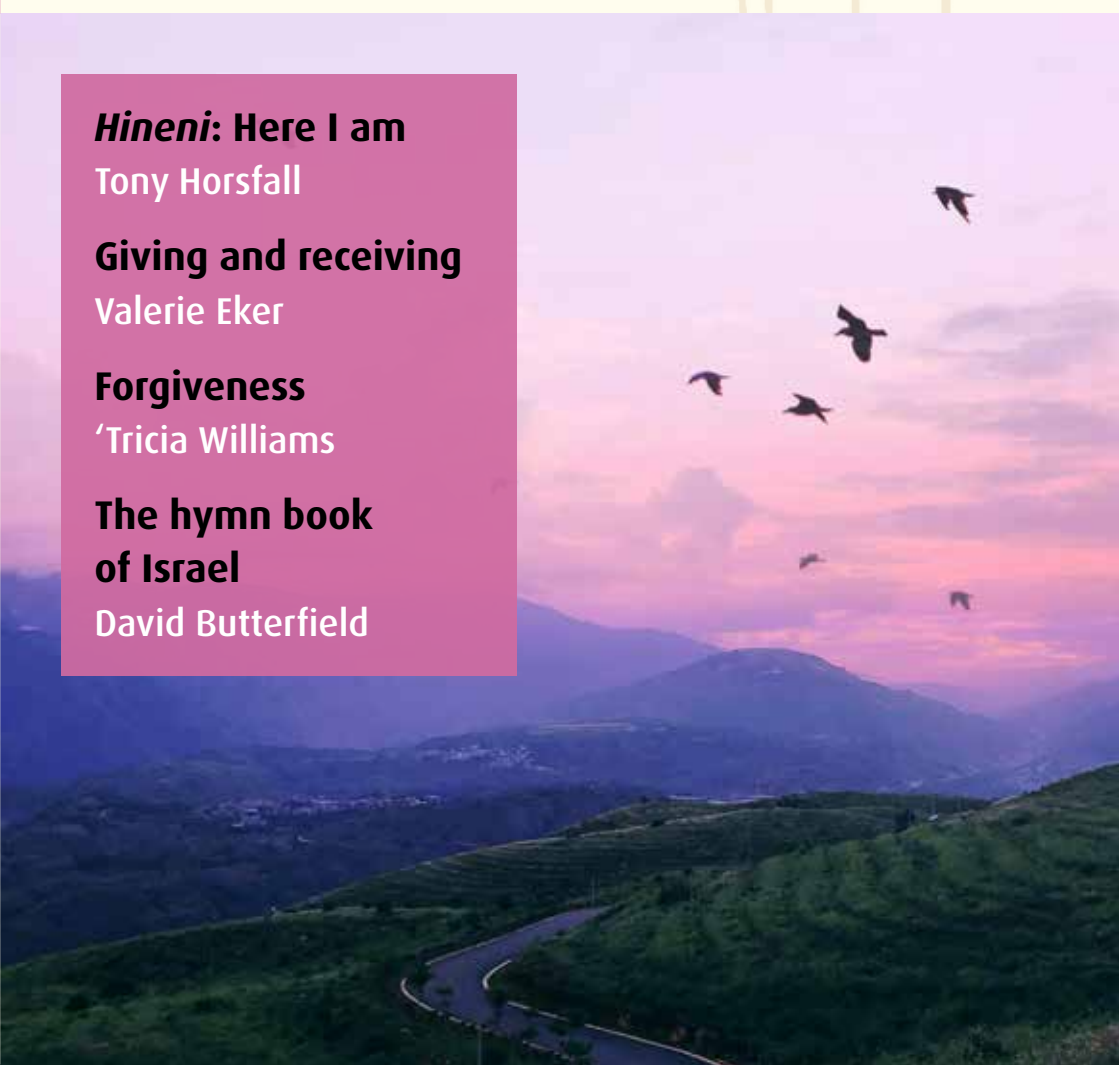
Valerie Eker

Forgiveness

'Tricia Williams

**The hymn book
of Israel**

David Butterfield



Bible reflections

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Ministries



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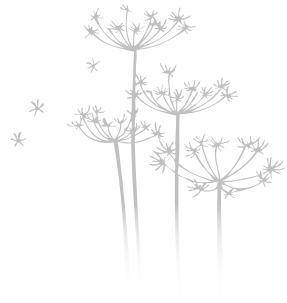
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About the writers



Tony Horsfall is an author, retreat leader and mentor based in Bournemouth. He is the author of *Rhythms of Grace*, *Working From a Place of Rest* and *Grief Notes*. He is married to Jilly, a counsellor, and between them they have four children and six grandchildren. They are part of GodFirst Church and share a passion to see people thrive in life and ministry.



Valerie Eker is a retired teacher and a spiritual director, currently involved with a dynamic church on a housing estate with many social problems. It has come as a wonderful surprise that the last lap of life is as full of adventure as its earlier phases. She is sustained by her love of silence and prayer, a rich variety of friendships and frequent visits to her children and grandchildren.



Tricia Williams is a freelance writer and editor with a passion for helping people engage with God's word. She has an interest in the spiritual support of those living with dementia and is the author of *God's Not Forgotten Me* (Cascade Books, 2022). She's married to Emlyn (also a writer for *Bible Reflections for Older People*) and has two children and a granddaughter.



David Butterfield was born in Yorkshire. After studying music, he felt the call 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.



From the Editor

Welcome

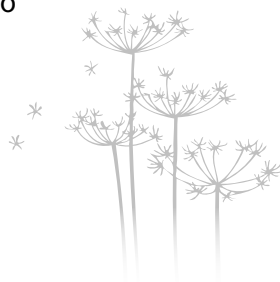
Tim and Jean Howlett (see p. 34) try to go on retreat once a year. They also try to make Sundays different from other days, and they try not to be driven by 'oughts' but rather allow themselves space to listen for God's gentle call.

It's easy to become driven and rule-bound in our desire to do the right thing. Tim and Jean's quiet talk of 'trying' to do certain things, while not always managing to do them, is honest and faithful, the very opposite of rule-bound.

For many years I also made an annual retreat. There were suggestions rather than rules to help us listen for God's call. We would keep silence, we might pray a number of times in the day and we wouldn't read apart from the Bible passages suggested by the retreat director.

One evening, sitting at the broad bay window watching the sun dip over the North Sea, I noticed a young couple in difficulty. The boy slumped on the verge, seemingly the worse for wear, and the girl struggled to prop him up against a lamppost. A few moments later I saw another retreatant, Carla (p. 33), a retired doctor, slip out the front door and go over to the couple. She knelt beside them, took the boy's pulse and waited until someone came to take them home. She could have protected her silence; she chose the kinder, far more Christian way.

Go well



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.



***Hineni*: Here I am**

Tony Horsfall

I don't pretend to be a Hebrew scholar. Indeed, during my time at Bible College I was de-selected from the stream learning Hebrew and allocated to do Old Testament history instead. I managed Greek, but not Hebrew.

However, in this series of notes we will be giving close attention to a Hebrew word often used in the Bible. It is the word *hineni*, and it means 'Here I am'. It is the word often used as a response to God, and indicates an offering of oneself to him, a willingness to do his will. It suggests surrender, a response of love to the prior love of God.

In her *Sensible Shoes* series of novels, published by IVP, writer Sharon Garlough Brown has a character called Nathan Allen, an Old Testament professor who has the word *hineni* tattooed on his ankle to remind him of the fact that his life is given over to God.

Wherever we find ourselves on our journey through life, it is helpful to be reminded of the importance of surrender to God and willingness to embrace his will for our life no matter what that looks like.



Exodus 3:1–2a (NIV)

God in the ordinary

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush.

Most days are ordinary days when we follow our normal routines and nothing special happens. Occasionally, though, we discover God is in the ordinary. It is as if heaven breaks through and we become conscious of God.

In this period of his life, Moses was working as a humble shepherd in an isolated part of the desert, perhaps feeling far away from God, neglected and forgotten. Yet that was not the case, and to grab his attention God speaks to him through the burning bush.

Maybe that is how you are feeling today? Perhaps you are isolated from friends and family, no longer able to attend church and cut off from fellowship. Or like Moses, you may be in a low period when life has become mundane, and you are simply going through the motions. Wherever we find ourselves today, and whatever our state of mind, God has not abandoned us and waits to break into this ordinary day.

■ PRAYER

Lord, help me become aware of your presence. May I recognise the signs of your nearness in the routine events of my life. Thank you that you will never leave me or forsake me. Amen

Exodus 3:2b–4a (NIV)

On being curious

Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, ‘I will go over and see this strange sight – why the bush does not burn up.’ When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, ‘Moses! Moses!’

I live in a first-floor flat, and we have a lovely view over the busy road below. I love to sit at the window and watch what is happening. There is so much coming and going, traffic and people, and lots of interesting things to see. Perhaps I am naturally curious.

People say, ‘Curiosity killed the cat,’ but curiosity is a good thing. Without curiosity we would never learn, and many discoveries would not have been made. And in the spiritual life, being curious and wanting to know more about God is a good thing.

Moses was curious about the bush, and God used that to grab his attention. Moses noticed what was happening and went to see what was going on – he stepped forward. If we are to meet God in our ordinary days we must be alert and attentive, looking for signs of his presence and then being willing to respond to what we notice.

■ PRAYER

Lord, make me spiritually curious. Give me eyes to see where you are at work, and ears to hear what you are saying. I want to know you more. 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!

I'm excited to dive into this issue as it features some of my favourite people and topics that are dear to me. Tim and Jean Howlett have been Anna Chaplaincy supporters since my earliest days at BRF. They have come on our training courses, joined the network and persevered in spreading the word of Anna Chaplaincy in their part of the home counties for years. What's more, the couple are always the first to send an encouraging note and promise to be praying for you.

A spiritual dividend of more people than ever in retirement is many choosing to spend time volunteering or using gifts in other ways. I applaud those featured in our notes finding a sense of purpose through writing. I'm keen to read 'Tricia Williams' insights, for example, on a perennial spiritual problem – the lack of forgiveness.

My son is called Samuel because I've always loved the Old Testament story of the young boy Samuel responding to that mysterious voice calling him with the words, 'Here I am.' What a fine quality, to be alert when the master calls and willing to serve. We're sure to gain a great deal from Tony Horsfall's focus on the loving call of God, whatever our age.





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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...

In this issue, **Tony Horsfall** reflects on the Hebrew word, *hineni*, meaning 'Here I am': our loving response to the love of God. **Tricia Williams** explores the 'transforming freedom' of forgiveness, **Valerie Eker** considers the ways in which both giving and receiving enrich our lives and **David Butterfield** celebrates Israel's 'hymn book', the Psalms.



Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. His love endures forever.
Psalms 136:1 (NIV)

