

September–December 2019



# Bible reflections

for older people

**Sing a new song**

Ann Lewin

**Sixty per cent water**

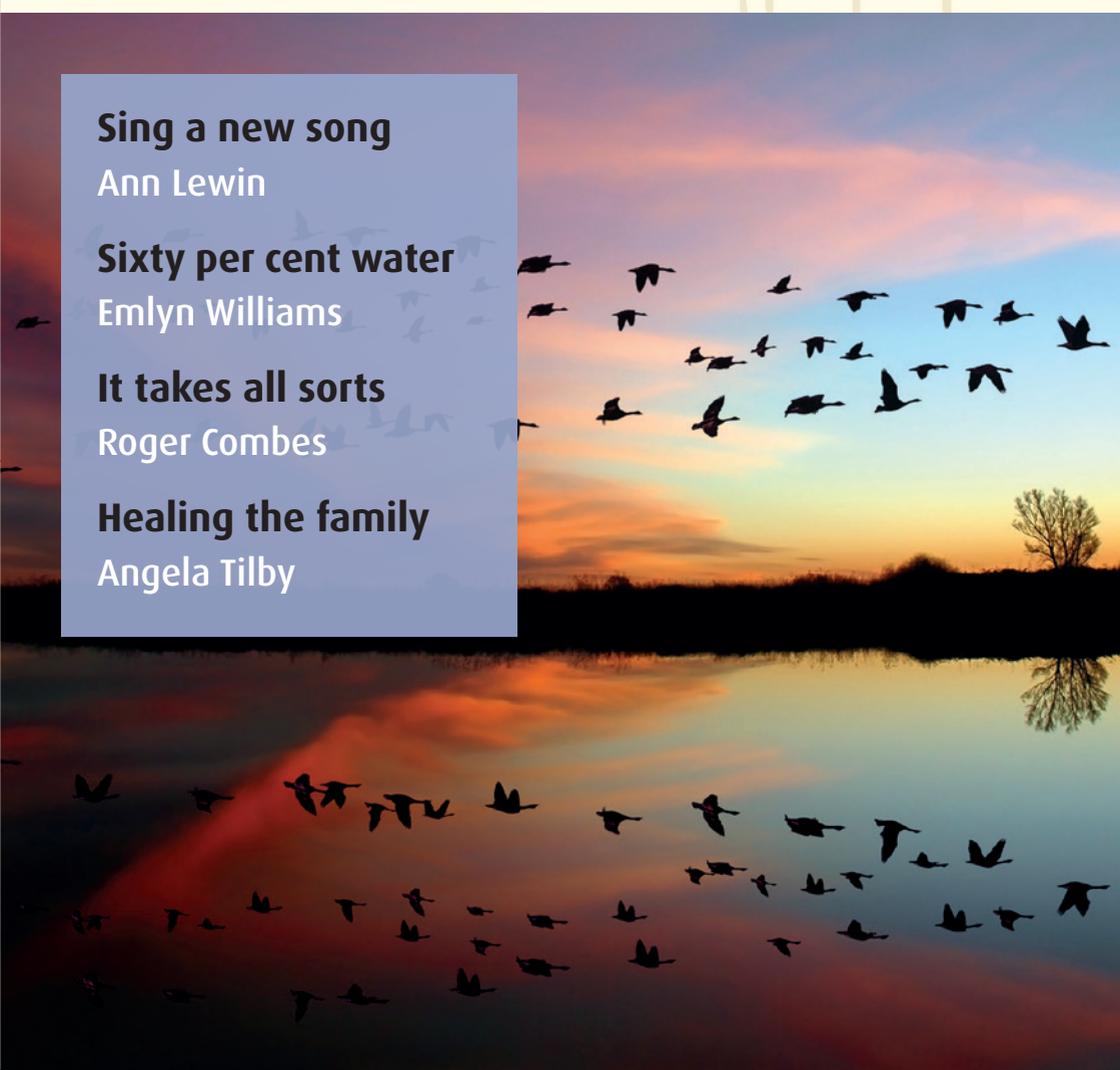
Emlyn Williams

**It takes all sorts**

Roger Combes

**Healing the family**

Angela Tilby



# **Bible reflections**

for older people



### **The Bible Reading Fellowship**

15 The Chambers, Vineyard  
Abingdon OX14 3FE  
[brf.org.uk](http://brf.org.uk)

The Bible Reading Fellowship (BRF) is a Registered Charity (233280)

ISBN 978 0 85746 782 9  
All rights reserved

This edition © The Bible Reading Fellowship 2019  
Cover image © Thinkstock

### **Acknowledgements**

Scripture quotations marked BCP are taken from The Book of Common Prayer of 1662, the rights of which are vested in the Crown in perpetuity within the United Kingdom, and are reproduced by permission of Cambridge University Press, Her Majesty's Printers.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version (Anglicised edition) copyright © 1979, 1984, 2011 by Biblica. Used by permission of Hodder & Stoughton Publishers, a Hachette UK company. All rights reserved. 'NIV' is a registered trademark of Biblica. UK trademark number 1448790.

Scripture quotations marked NRSV are taken from The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, Anglicised edition, copyright © 1989, 1995 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

'It Is Not Over' on page 34 © Ann Weems, from her collection *Kneeling in Bethlehem: Poetry for Advent and Christmas* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1993). Used with kind permission.

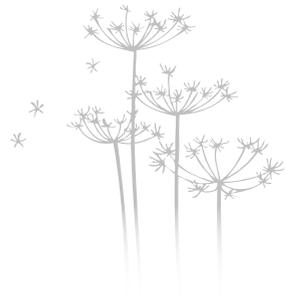
Every effort has been made to trace and contact copyright owners for material used in this resource. We apologise for any inadvertent omissions or errors, and would ask those concerned to contact us so that full acknowledgement can be made in the future.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Printed and bound in the UK by Zenith Media NP4 0DQ

# Contents

About the writers.....	4
From the Editor .....	5
Using these reflections .....	6
<b>Sing a new song</b> Ann Lewin .....	7
<b>Sixty per cent water</b> Emlyn Williams .....	18
<b>The Gift of Years</b> Debbie Thrower .....	29
<b>It takes all sorts</b> Roger Combes .....	37
<b>Healing the family</b> Angela Tilby .....	48



## About the writers



**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.



**Emlyn Williams** worked for many years for Scripture Union, latterly for SU International, and spent much of his time with Christians in eastern Europe. He is a writer of many individual and group Bible materials and is currently Discipleship Pastor at a large Anglican church.



**Roger Combes** was a vicar in Hastings for 17 years after serving parishes in London and Cambridge. Before retiring, he served as an archdeacon in West Sussex. He and his wife live in Crawley. He has been a supporter of Bournemouth Football Club for 60 years, and still finds it slightly unbelievable that they are now playing in the Premier League.



**Angela Tilby** worked for the BBC as a producer of religious programmes for 22 years. Ordained in 1997, she became a tutor at Westcott House in Cambridge. After some years as a parish priest, she moved to Oxford as Diocesan Canon of Christ Church Cathedral. She writes for the *Church Times* and broadcasts frequently on Radio 4's *Thought for the Day*.



## From the Editor

Welcome to this new collection of Bible reflections.

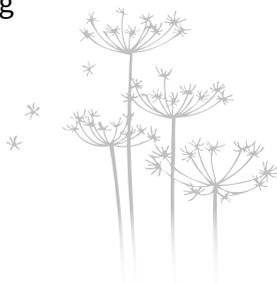
One of my all-time favourite films is *Ordinary People*, the 1980 American drama directed by Robert Redford and starring Donald Sutherland and Mary Tyler Moore. ‘Ordinary’ is a bit of a stretch, given the grandeur of the family home in which the tragic tale plays out, but it is a compelling film with stellar performances and it has stayed in my mind ever since I first saw it.

Two of our writers have focused on ‘ordinary’ people in the Bible, some of them so ordinary that they’re not even named, unlike the stars who fill our cinema screens.

Another of our writers, the priest and one-time television filmmaker Angela Tilby, shows that complex, sometimes tragic family dynamics and the timeless themes of love, lust, jealousy and greed are as prominent in the Bible and in ‘ordinary’ life as they are in glossy Hollywood dramas.

A much older Donald Sutherland recently starred as the patriarch J. Paul Getty in the television series *Trust*, exposing the dark underbelly of one of America’s wealthiest and most dysfunctional families. It’s a story that would sit convincingly in the Old Testament, but then so too could a touching tale of late-blooming love, released at about the same time: *Our Souls at Night* starred two lined but still beautiful octogenarians, Robert Redford and Jane Fonda.

God bless you



## 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, or any time during the day. There are 40 daily 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.



## Sing a new song

Ann Lewin

O come, let us sing unto the Lord... and show ourselves glad in him with psalms.

PSALM 95:1-2 (BCP)

All human life is reflected in the Psalms: joys and sorrows, hopes, fears and confusion. The people who wrote the psalms were not afraid to tell God what they were feeling, and they encourage us to be honest with God too.

The Psalms are sometimes referred to as the Jewish hymn book, but they would not have been used as we use hymn books, for there were no books as we know them, and most people would not have been able to read. The psalms were composed for particular occasions at different stages in the story of the Jewish people, to respond to situations, to accompany rituals, to express personal emotion. They would have been sung, and remembered through repetition.

The psalms are poetry, opening us up to explore new ways of understanding God and experiencing God's grace. Many of us have come to know the psalms through their use in worship over long years. Let's explore them together.

(The Bible quotations used in these reflections are taken from the Book of Common Prayer, which will be familiar to many. Some verse references may be slightly different to those you will find in other common translations.)



## Psalm 118:24 (BCP)

# Thanks for today

*This is the day which the Lord hath made, we will rejoice and be glad in it.*

Sometimes, as we grow older and life becomes complicated by physical, mental or emotional difficulties, we find ourselves wishing that life could be as it used to be: life when we were full of energy, never forgot what we had gone upstairs for and felt ourselves valued by those around us.

The psalmist says that kind of nostalgia won't help us to live today, for today is the day we are given by God. Rather than wishing it was something different, he suggests that we need to rejoice and be glad.

So we need to redirect our thinking, see what there is in our life today that can lift our spirits. It may be a fresh awareness of the beauty of the natural world; it may be a smile from a stranger; it may be a realisation of the blessings we are given by those who care for us. There are many things, great and small, which can make us thankful, an attitude to work at every day. As George Herbert wrote:

*Not grateful when it pleaseth me  
As though thy blessings had spare days,  
But such a heart whose pulse may be  
Thy praise.\**

### ■ PRAYER

*'Lord, thou hast given so much to me, give one thing more, a grateful heart.'*\* Amen

\* George Herbert, 'Gratefulnesse' (1633)

## Psalm 92:1 (BCP)

# Thanks for God's love

*It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord.*

'Count your blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord has done,' sang Johnson Oatman in 1897.

There are many expressions of thanksgiving in the Psalms, and much encouragement to be thankful, corporately and alone. The psalmists were grateful for a whole range of things: the created world; God's faithful care of his people; our bodies (each one of us 'fearfully and wonderfully made', Psalm 139:14); good coming out of unpromising situations. There will be parallels to all these in our own lives.

Thankfulness puts life back into perspective when we are feeling sorry for ourselves. It does not always express what we are feeling – sometimes it is an act of the will, which needs to become habitual so that we can challenge the voices around or inside us that pull us towards despair about the world or about our own situation. Thankfulness is rooted in a recognition of the many blessings God gives us. There is no escaping the realities of life: the challenges and difficulties may well remain. We are not asked to be thankful for them, but to be thankful that in everything God's faithful love sustains us.

### ■ PRAYER

*Loving God, thank you for your goodness, shown to us in so many ways. When life is hard, help us to remember that you are still faithfully holding us in your love. 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](http://annachaplaincy.org.uk) to find out more.

## Debbie writes...

Welcome! The older I get, the more I recognise a tendency to stoop; too much time spent in a sedentary role, I expect. A photo of my grandmother, though, on a stage accepting an award in her later years shows her with a marked bent back, so perhaps it runs in the family?

As we age, our bodies bear traces of our habits and life experiences, as well as our genetic inheritance. It's striking that Jesus bore the marks of being nailed to the cross in his risen body.

I hope you find these reflections inspiring, as I do, for the way they contrast the ordinariness of us all with the extraordinary story of humankind being continually sought out by God. The fact that, in the Christmas story particularly, God stooped down to become 'one of us' is truly humbling.

*Blessed art thou  
O Christmas Christ,  
that thy cradle was so low  
that shepherds  
poorest and simplest of earthly folk  
could yet kneel beside it,  
and look level-eyed into the face of God.*

Anonymous, from *The Christmas Stories* (SPCK, 2007)

Best wishes





# Transforming lives and communities

## Christian growth and understanding of the Bible

Resourcing individuals, groups and leaders in churches for their own spiritual journey and for their ministry

## Church outreach in the local community

Offering two programmes that churches are embracing to great effect as they seek to engage with their local communities and transform lives



## Teaching Christianity in primary schools

Working with children and teachers to explore Christianity creatively and confidently

## Children's and family ministry

Working with churches and families to explore Christianity creatively and bring the Bible alive



Visit [brf.org.uk](http://brf.org.uk) for more information on BRF's work

[brf.org.uk](http://brf.org.uk)

The Bible Reading Fellowship (BRF) is a Registered Charity (No. 233280)

## 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.



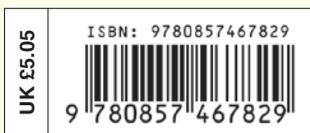
**Bible Reflections for Older People** is edited by **Eley McAinsh**.

### In this issue...

Poet, teacher and retreat leader **Ann Lewin** finds all human life reflected in the Psalms – ‘the Jewish hymnbook’ – while writer, broadcaster and priest **Angela Tilby** considers God’s involvement in the life of our families. We welcome back **Emlyn Williams** and **Roger Combes** and enjoy both writers’ encounters with some of the ‘ordinary’, even nameless, characters in the Bible.



This is the day which the Lord hath made, we will rejoice and be glad in it.  
**Psalm 118:24 (BCP)**



[brf.org.uk](http://brf.org.uk)