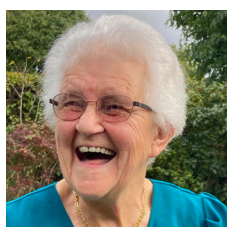


Building community through Bible reading notes

Say ‘Bible reading notes’ and most Christians will think of times of private prayer and reflection, or of the Quiet Time. Whether a few minutes snatched from a busy day or a carefully guarded silent hour of study and contemplation, the image conjured is of the lone Christian communing with God.

But many readers of BRF’s Bible reading notes also use them in groups, or with friends, as a means of sharing and growing in their faith. Among them is **Beryl Fudge**, a long-standing reader with vivid memories of going with her mother to BRF’s 25th anniversary service in 1947.



‘BRF Bible reading notes have been a part of virtually my whole life,’ Beryl explains, ‘and I’ve found them so useful. I’ve always handed them on to others and organised group subscriptions and Bible reading groups in whatever church I’ve been in.’

Beryl moved to Abingdon with her husband, Alan, in 1957, long before BRF came to be based in the town. She trained as a florist at the renowned Constance Spry floristry school in London and went on to work at The Savoy hotel, but she left the city behind when Alan got a job at the Atomic Energy Research Establishment at Harwell. Over the years, they were both actively involved in the life of various local churches. Sadly, Alan died in 2016 but Beryl continues as active as ever, and even when she visits her daughter in New Zealand she does her best ‘to spread the word about Bible reading notes there’.

Beryl does use *New Daylight* for her own daily prayer time, but she also uses the notes with friends and in a Bible study group, forging ever deeper bonds of faith and friendship:

‘I’ve got quite a few friends who also take the notes and we discuss them at our Bible study group. I find there’s so much in them every day, which is just what you want. What I most value about the notes is the way that they connect both the Old and New Testament scriptures with what’s happening here and now; they show how the Bible relates to the present day and they give you so much to work on and think about.’



Someone else who uses Bible reading notes in a group setting is ‘retired but active’ Anglican priest, **Neville Manning** who lives with his wife in Eastbourne. As a teenager in Oxford, Neville became involved in St Ebbe’s Church, ‘where faith came alive for me and became something real and definite.’ He was introduced to Bible study groups – ‘which were totally new to me’ – and Bible reading notes. This had a lasting influence on his ministry:

‘Ever since, in each parish we’ve been in we’ve formed small Bible study groups, and when I retired to Eastbourne I said to the then vicar after a year or so “is there any possibility of doing something with the Bible Reading Fellowship?” I just felt there was a gap there and that there might be people who would be interested to subscribe to BRF Bible notes, and meet together to talk about them. That was about 12 years ago and it took off from there. I was quite surprised by the number of people who asked to sign up for the notes and from when we started to hold group meetings every two to three months we’ve had about 12–13 people each time. Obviously we had to put the meetings on hold because of all the coronavirus restrictions, which was sad.’

Neville explains the added dimension that comes with using Bible reading notes in a group:

'I think several minds are better than one, and in the sharing together you can give each other encouragement. Some in our group are more vocal than others but most of them respond and contribute. We have space to stop, think, ask questions and make comments and I'm always struck by the way you discover depths of spirituality in people that surprise you. On a Sunday there isn't always the chance to talk and share, but it's different in the group. And sometimes in a group like ours, people have the courage to express concerns that they would hesitate to express in a larger meeting. Sometimes things will emerge almost incidentally which can be quite revealing.'

'The group is about people sharing scripture together and if you're struggling with something there's a kind of mutual learning that wouldn't be possible on your own.'

'We're not in the first instance a pastoral support group but often when you do things together you become closer and bonds are made so that it does become a place where people are supported and cared for.'

So even with his theological training and long years of ministry, does Neville still discover new things in the group?

'Yes, of course, because everyone in the group will see things from a different perspective, depending on their experience and situation. It took me a long time to realise this, but what we find in scripture depends a bit on our own situation and what we bring to it. That doesn't mean we make it up as we go along, but it does mean that what we see ties in with our personal experience in all sorts of ways.'

During lockdown, when the group wasn't able to meet as usual, what did Neville and the other member miss most?

'The physical meeting together. Zoom is okay to some extent, but nothing replaces the experience of real living people meeting together. Of course, we still had our Bible reading notes, and valued them, but that didn't make up for not being able to meet as a group.'

If you have enjoyed this article you might like to explore our resources further ...

If you would like to try any of our Bible reading notes, please email enquiries@brf.org.uk quoting the code BRNFREESAMPLE and including your name and address.

Holy Habits resources provide an ideal way of exploring different aspects of discipleship in a group setting. Visit holyhabs.org.uk for more information.

