



INTERVIEW

Debbie Thrower

 Pioneer of Anna Chaplaincy

What introduced you to BRNs and when?

Some good person must have bought me a set of BRNs when I was getting confirmed. I was at boarding school and it was a very lively, full-on, full-of-people environment and I remember feeling 'this is really nice – this is my little time on my own, thinking my own personal thoughts,' and that's developed over the years into the sense that this is my appointment with God. I had a spell when I didn't read them in my 20s, but I found my way back in my early 30s and I've read them ever since. I don't think I actually began with *New Daylight*, but they're the notes I've used regularly for years now.

However busy the rest of the day may be, this is the time I carve out to sit and be quiet with God, and hopefully allow the Holy Spirit the chance to give me a few nudges and prompts. It's a time that's entirely personal, quiet, and I would say it's part of my 'Rule of Life', which sounds a bit grand, but just means it's part of my routine, my spiritual routine.

What do you find so appealing about *New Daylight*?

I like the fact that you get a sense of who these authors are: they're people who have done their own reading and reflecting and they're giving you the gems that they have culled. You can always tell my favourite writers because I turn down the corners of the pages and when you look at any of my Bible notes at the end of the four months' worth of readings, you'll see that there are some sections that haven't been turned down at all and others that are completely dog-eared because I've turned down so many corners.

What is your routine? When do you use the notes?

Usually I read them first thing in the morning. So it's put the kettle on, make a cup of tea, and read my notes. Hopefully that's a prompt for a longer prayer time, so I often use the notes as my way into saying the daily office – Morning Prayer – first thing in the morning.

Sometimes it can be very early! When life's going through a bit of a rough patch and I find myself awake at three in the morning feeling agitated and anxious, I might read my Bible notes then and that settles me.

Do you refer back to them as the day goes on?

Yes, the lovely thing about *New Daylight* is that you get to know the authors. Very often I find their words will come back to me during the day and I'm sure this is the work of the Holy Spirit: when a phrase that's been used or a theme that's been introduced gets echoed during the day in something someone says, or something else you read, or something you hear in the news. I really do believe that's the way the Holy Spirit informs us and makes connections: it's the 'go-between God' that John V. Taylor, the late Bishop of Winchester, talked about. I think this is very much the way God speaks to us.

Do you have any stand-out moments or experiences: a light-bulb moment, or something that's happened as a result of something you've read in your Bible notes?

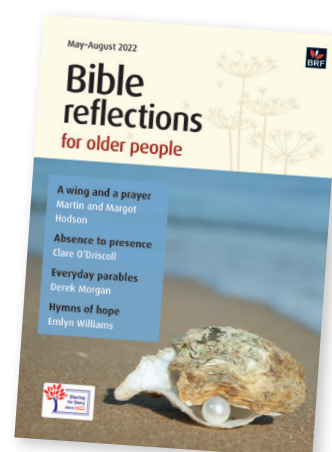
Not so much a 'moment', but there's a Bible reading note that I cut out from *New Daylight* years ago and every New Year I just tuck it inside my new diary to keep for the following year. It's a reading by Margaret Silf and relates to our identity and how we're held in God's love and clearly when I read it, I didn't want to lose it. I didn't want it to be ephemeral, just for that day so I put it in my diary and I've now transferred it from diary to diary, year after year, and it's so old it's yellow round the edges.

Some people have said BRNs are a good way to explore some of the more obscure books of the Bible. Have you found that?

Yes. You might otherwise not read the minor prophets, for example; writers like Habakkuk perhaps. For people who gravitate more happily to the New Testament, it's really important to be informed and educated about the role of the Hebrew scriptures; the scriptures which Jesus knew and loved and quoted from.

So what would you say to recommend them to someone who isn't used to using them?

I'd say, 'Try them'. Don't be diffident about it, just see if this is something that might appeal to you. I'm reminded of a particular woman in a care home, an elderly woman I knew because I used to visit her. One day the care home manager rang me and said 'If you have time, do come and visit... She's very agitated at the moment.' So I went to see her and found that she was having really bad dreams at night and she couldn't sleep well. So I suggested that she take a sample of BRF's *Bible Reflections for Older People* to read during the evening and it might help her. And indeed that's what she did. She started reading the notes last thing at night and when I went to see her again a week or two later she said 'those notes are marvellous. They've really helped to settle me and I'm sleeping so much better. I even tuck them under my pillow.' And I thought that was so lovely and touching, and it's part of the reason why we've got together to produce these *Bible Reflections for Older People*. I'm so convinced that they could help so many more people to find an anchor in their day, and if they're consciously making time to sit with God, they might well be surprised by what God chooses to disclose to them in that time. We all need a framework, especially as we get older when we're not getting up and going to work in quite the way we used to, and we all need something that reminds us that we are loved and cherished and still have meaning and purpose in life.



Is there anything else you'd like to say?

Just that I think BRNs are really underrated. At any age – there I was as a teenager getting as much out of them then as I am now – so they're for every age group, not just the very young and the very old. I think to have them as your bedside companion is a really wise idea throughout life.

