



## Growing in the grace of gratitude

George Lings, vice-president of BRF and author of *Seven Sacred Spaces*, reflects on the life-giving habit of gratitude.



I am finding gratitude is a helpful spiritual discipline, lived at two levels: the immediate and the life-long, the everyday and the

eternal. There is gratitude in the ordinary. This very day, I am alive, and I've just received good news of an all-clear from a hospital investigation. The house I live in provides for us and guests, and it happens that the sun is shining. I've just seen a blackbird hopping round the front garden, and my wife is playing her cello upstairs. Gratitude helps me notice and savour life. I try to spread gratitude by deliberately saying a 'thank you' to the shop assistant, the checkout cashier, the bus driver and the neighbour who calls. Then a narrow shaft of light brightens their life – and mine. I wonder what you will notice to be grateful for.

Then, at intervals, I practice gratitude for the long term. I look back and give thanks for God's hand of guidance and his callings across my life.

My mother had BRF Bible reading notes by her bedside. That sounds ordinary,

but it wasn't. She was on her own; my father had recently drowned on a family holiday, leaving her to raise three boys aged 7 (me), 5 and 2. In her grief and despair, one day God met her. Ancient words came alive and changed her life. They gave her hope, strength and fortitude to carry on. From then on, encountering God through the Bible became her daily discipline. For this memory, I say, 'Thank you, God, and thank you, BRF.'

I thank God for his wider and enduring work: for the many years of Richard Fisher's leadership of BRF, and the way tiny projects such as Messy Church near Portsmouth and Anna Chaplaincy in Alton have become wider blessings than anyone could ever have imagined when they started.

This year I'm writing about what I'm calling 'Living the autumn of life' – the season from retiring to becoming dependent. My interviewees and other authors stress that gratitude is a life-giving habit. Colossians 3:15–17 mentions gratitude three times. Why not read it, and see what God says to you.

'Thank you' for reading this!

### IN THIS ISSUE:

The course with 'massive impact'

A moment of hope and light

Everyone welcome!

A crown of comfort

Festival of Prayer 2023

and more...

### Pray with us

*Holy and gracious One,  
as we are surrounded by the  
light and warmth of the sun,  
may we know the surrounding  
of your Light and Warmth  
in our hearts and lives.  
May we know this not only  
because we see your Light,  
but because by it we see  
everything else.  
Amen.*

From 'Summer' in David  
Cole's *The Celtic Year*

Our prayer resources can be  
found at [brf.org.uk/pray](https://brf.org.uk/pray)

## Tips and tricks

The Messy Church team have just launched a series of 'How to...' video guides. Written and recorded by subject matter experts from across the Messy Church network, these ten-minute videos are for time-poor Messy Church teams to get some top tips for tackling particular challenges, such as 'How to do more with less!' After each video has been launched in a Zoom session for Messy Church leaders, they'll be available to watch anytime and will be accompanied by a one-page downloadable guide.

Find the series at [messychurch.org.uk/resource/how-to-guides](https://messychurch.org.uk/resource/how-to-guides)



How To

Video Guides

Coming soon!

*'Whatever you do, whether in word or deed,  
do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus,  
giving thanks to God the Father through him.'*

COLOSSIANS 3:17 (NIV)



# Hello from Julie and the fundraising team



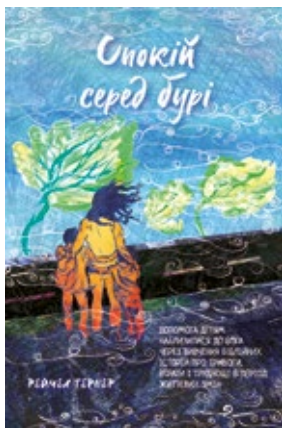
I can hardly believe that we are already in May. I am hugely grateful to everyone who supports BRF financially, through prayer and sharing our ministries and resources.

Thank you also to everyone who ordered BRF Easter cards for 2023. We

are already working on our Christmas card designs for this year, which will be on sale soon. To be the first to see our designs, and to shop our full selection of cards, visit [brfonline.org.uk/cards](http://brfonline.org.uk/cards).



We hope you have enjoyed reading the feedback from our book giveaway at the end of 2022. I personally delivered some books to a community kitchen near me, and it was a privilege to see the difference BRF is making to the lives of families and individuals.



Once again thanks to all who use Give As You Live. This is a great way of supporting us. Through this platform, when you shop online or in certain stores a portion of your purchase is given to BRF at no

cost to you. It is quick and easy to sign up and makes a real difference.



BRF Roses are still available to order and make a fabulous gift for every occasion. If you are ordering flowers and bouquets for any occasion, you can now support us by ordering them from The Real Flower Company, the same rose grower who produced the BRF Rose. Order any size bouquet and BRF will receive £5 from The Real Flower Company at no extra cost to you!\* Go to [realflowers.co.uk](http://realflowers.co.uk) and use code BRF5 at checkout.

*\*Does not apply to gifts such as sparkling wine, chocolates etc.*



Find our more at [brfonline.org.uk/flowers](http://brfonline.org.uk/flowers)

Julie

Julie MacNaughton, MCIOF (Dip)  
Head of Fundraising

## With grateful thanks...

All that we do would not possible without your generous support. I hope that you are able to make a donation to our annual appeal. When I say every penny really makes a difference – it does. As you read through this newsletter and the articles about our ministries and the impact they make upon people's lives, would you prayerfully consider making a gift to help us.



Part of our centenary giveaway for food banks, community kitchens and refuges.

These are some of the greetings sent to us on 'baubles' for our office Christmas tree:

Thank you for 100 years of blessings. Here's to the next 100 years!

Your work for young, older and in-between people is valued the world over.

Thank you, your message is needed more than ever.







## Transformational training: the Spiritual Care Series

Beverley Moore was the first commissioned Anna Chaplain in Cumbria. Based in Kendal, where she was born and raised, she has recently completed the Spiritual Care Series course and feels it has ‘transformed’ her ministry.

Beverley worked as a volunteer ‘dementia enabler’ with a Churches Together in Cumbria project from 2015 to 2020. When the project was coming to an end she was encouraged to look at Anna Chaplaincy as a way of continuing in a similar sort of ministry with older people in general, not only those living with dementia.

‘I’d already been thinking that God was calling me to something else, beyond being a dementia enabler,’ she says, ‘but I didn’t know what it was.’ She thought about becoming a reader, but that didn’t feel quite right. Then, when she heard about Anna Chaplaincy, she felt, ‘This is it! This is what God is wanting for me. I’d been praying so hard and I’d finally got to where he wanted me to be.’

‘I’d been praying so hard and I’d finally got to where God wanted me to be.’

Beverley was commissioned at the end of 2020, having completed training during lockdown. She was thrilled and thankful to be commissioned, with her family and church family present, at Holy Trinity Kendal Parish Church in ‘a window of opportunity’ between lockdowns.



Working alone, it took a while to establish Anna Chaplaincy, but now she has a brilliant team of volunteers in Kendal, as well as 11 other Anna Chaplain colleagues across Cumbria.

The Spiritual Care Series course came at just the right time and it’s had a massive impact.

‘Gradually a lot of volunteers came forward, and I felt we needed to be fully equipped for our pastoral work. The Spiritual Care Series course seemed to be ideal for us. It came at just the right time and it’s had a massive impact.

‘What most helped to equip us was learning about spirituality and ageing, and then the story telling and the reflective listening. I’m a talker, a fixer, so that was really powerful, and I use it all the time now. The course really enabled me to look at the whole ageing process and how I would like to age myself. With good spiritual care, you can age well. Without good spiritual care, that’s when you lose your purpose, value, meaning and hope.’

## The Spiritual Care Series



To find out more about the groundbreaking Spiritual Care Series, go to [annachaplaincy.org.uk/spiritual-care-series](http://annachaplaincy.org.uk/spiritual-care-series)

If you would like to talk with one of the team about the Spiritual Care Series, please email [spiritualcareseries@brf.org.uk](mailto:spiritualcareseries@brf.org.uk) to arrange a telephone call.





## Messy Church: where everyone is welcome

**Lisa McElroy's ten-year-old son James greatly impressed his teacher recently when he designed a poster to illustrate what religion meant to him. Lisa told us what happened, and how James came to find his 'happy place' in Messy Church.**

James is supported by a SENCO, a special educational needs coordinator. He's fascinated by the solar system, planets, rockets, satellites, the whole thing. In science, he was able to explain all the little details about the solar system: the difference between a satellite and a moon and an actual satellite and a man-made satellite and all those little intricacies. Then in RE they had to design a poster to show what Christianity meant to them. James drew the solar system, and on planet Earth was Messy Church.

### On planet Earth is Messy Church

When I picked James up from school, the SENCO pulled me aside and said he'd been magnificent in both RE and science. He'd drawn the solar system and explained how God had created it all and on Earth was Messy Church. The message of his poster was that Messy Church is there for everyone: it was one place where everyone was made to feel welcome and comfortable, whatever their background, race, abilities or disabilities. On top of that, he also said that you can't force people to believe what you believe, you can only show them the love of God.

**You can't force people to believe what you believe, you can only show them the love of God.**

About two years ago, James was referred for possible autism. He still doesn't have a diagnosis but we're pretty certain that's what it is. From about the age of five onwards, he found being in a church incredibly difficult: the acoustics and the feeling of being trapped made it really hard. A normal church service was almost torture for him.

### Normal church was almost torture

At first, when I took him to Messy Church, he would never leave my side. But then he just relaxed, because everyone is so accepting and there were none of the usual behavioural expectations: no one demanded that he looked them in the eye. The way that Messy Church people are with the children just makes them feel comfortable and relaxed, and not always on the lookout for what they should be doing.

So when you think that he's not listening, because he's not looking you in the eye, you don't realise just how much he's absorbing. He's come away with really important values: showing kindness towards others, warmth and generosity. Just by coming to Messy Church, just by being there, that's all coming through.

**Find out more about Messy Church at [messychurch.org.uk](https://messychurch.org.uk)**



## Get Messy! is changing...



*Get Messy!* provides session material, news, stories and inspiration for Messy Churches. After the current issue, May–August 2023, it's having a major makeover. Look out for more details and a sneak preview in the July issue of BRF News.

**To find out more about Get Messy! go to [brfonline.org.uk/new-get-messy](https://brfonline.org.uk/new-get-messy)**

# Hope and light



Gail Vlack is 'toddler coordinator' for St Mark's Church in Harrogate. She joined an online Parenting for Faith course arranged by Churches Together in Harrogate during lockdown. She was so appreciative of what became a 'time of real hope and light in our week' that she went on to lead her mums and toddlers group through the course when they were finally able to meet again in person. Gail tells us more.

It was the third lockdown in that dark, cold January, so it was quite poignant. The course gave us something to look forward to at the beginning of our week. We were seeing people face-to-face – on screen – and some of us hadn't met before, so you felt like you were part of something a little bit bigger; you were part of a network of churches around the city, and I think that's why it was so special.

And Rachel Turner [Parenting for Faith pioneer and course facilitator] is a funny lady, very entertaining, and she brought some brightness and hope into what was quite a tricky time. Nobody really knew at that point what was going to happen, and the course was a time of real hope and light in our week.

## So valuable...

After the course and after lockdown, I really wanted to share what I'd learned with other people at my church, because it was so valuable to me. I have a little group of mums that meets on a Monday morning, and their children come too. It used to be a traditional Bible study, but I thought these mums would really benefit from hearing this material. Sometimes, as mums, we don't have much confidence that we're doing it right, but we have a passion for wanting our kids to have a faith, because it's important to us and it gives us a purpose. We want them to have that, but we don't feel very well equipped to help them.

So we decided to run the course in our group. When you go back to the material,

and then you prepare it to lead it, it becomes really embedded. You can hear it over and over again, and it's still fresh. It's having a real impact. Sometimes we don't get the same people coming every time but we work with that, just building slowly, because we love these resources so much.

**You can hear it over and over again and it's still fresh.**

I'm grateful for all the resources, not just the course. I love the Parenting for Faith podcast: when I'm cleaning my floors at home, I put the podcasts on. And I love the Facebook Lives. It's so useful to have all those different resources and to be able to access them just as you need to.

parenting for faith®

**The original course**

To find out more about the Parenting for Faith course go to [parentingforfaith.brf.org.uk/course](https://parentingforfaith.brf.org.uk/course)

To browse Parenting for Faith podcasts go to [parentingforfaith.brf.org.uk/podcast](https://parentingforfaith.brf.org.uk/podcast)



## Parenting for Faith at New Wine

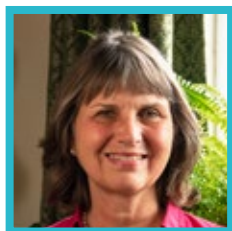
As a partner at New Wine United 23, Parenting for Faith will be running a seminar stream and exhibiting books and other information in the resources area. As always, the team will be ready to chat to anyone who wants to know more about the Parenting for Faith approach – whether that's how to nurture their children's faith at home, or how to change the spiritual temperature of their church by empowering parents to parent for faith.

■ For more information go to [new-wine.org/events/united23](https://new-wine.org/events/united23)





# This Crown of Comfort



Our new title for May is *This Crown of Comfort* by Eva Leaf. Here she reflects on her sense of gratitude for those who helped her complete the manuscript.

The other day I sorted through a pile of papers that had been sitting beside my

desk for years. One sheet had been torn from a notebook and was dated July 2016 – notes from a conversation with an older, wiser woman. She had asked me about the manuscript I was working on, *This Crown of Comfort*. At that time, I had just begun my fourth draft.

The process of writing had taken me to a place where I struggled to find adequate words. I felt lost in my heart, in a place where I had expected my words to flow. I tried to explain this, and my friend understood. She too had been in that place. Then she shared about how important it is for each of us to find our own words, our own language to explain the journey of our hearts. For each of us is different, and our understanding will be unique. And another person's words might not fit our heart.

She then spoke about her journey. In summary, she said, 'As I embrace my pain, I can see the mystery of God. He is both in darkness and in light. And even though he didn't mean for life to be like this, in it I have found joy.' How grateful I was for that conversation.

It gave me the courage to not give up, to keep searching for words in the journey I walked. It took me a further 29 drafts, a further six years, to discover that even in our brokenness we can be whole with God, that whatever our grief, he is there to comfort us. And with each new draft, I saw a bit more clearly. Those words finally came.

I am so grateful for friends, those who dare to come alongside others in their journeys with God. Mine could have given me their own words and said, 'Seek no more; my words are fine.' But they didn't. Instead, they modelled to me how I too might enable others to speak of God in creative ways.

I wonder what other treasures I will find in that pile of papers beside my desk.



To find out more about *This Crown of Comfort* and to order go to [brfonline.org.uk/this-crown-of-comfort](http://brfonline.org.uk/this-crown-of-comfort)

## Thank you, BRF!

It's encouraging and humbling in equal measure to receive almost daily expressions of gratitude for various BRF ministries and resources. One recent email about our Bible reading notes was particularly touching.

'I simply want to thank BRF and everyone in the organisation, present and past. I was first introduced to BRF notes by my mother, more than 70 years ago at a very early age. When I was sent away to boarding school, aged 8, and was at first very homesick and lonely, they were a link with home and a great comfort. I am delighted that BRF continues with the good work with children.

'I can't say there haven't been some gaps, but mostly I have kept up the practice of daily Bible reading over the many decades since. Especially in times of great need and difficulty the notes have accompanied and sustained me, and helped me keep alive a constantly flickering faith which sometimes threatened to go out altogether. I recently encouraged a house group I go to, to publicise BRF in our church, and as a result you will have, I think, seven new readers. I hope there will be more.'



## Festival of Prayer

Prayer as a way of life

We are delighted that BRF author David Runcorn is the keynote speaker for the 11th Festival of Prayer, taking place on Saturday 22 July 2023 at Ripon College, Cuddesdon, in Oxfordshire.

In addition to David's opening keynote talk, delegates have a choice of attending three further workshops, enjoying the peaceful college grounds and exploring the labyrinth. There are over 20 workshops to choose from, ranging from creative prayer ideas with Martyn Payne to the poetry and prayer of R.S. Thomas with Sarah Brush. This year's programme also includes Celtic prayer, Carmelite spirituality, the English spiritual tradition and experiencing God in nature.

The Festival of Prayer provides space to reenergise your prayer life and learn new ways to pray and draw closer to God.

To find out more, visit [brfonline.org.uk/festival-prayer-2023](http://brfonline.org.uk/festival-prayer-2023)

Previous Festival attendees have said:

“ Today was a real gift, a space and time to breathe and just be still. Thank you.

A wonderful God-filled day.

It was a tonic for body, mind and spirit. ”



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