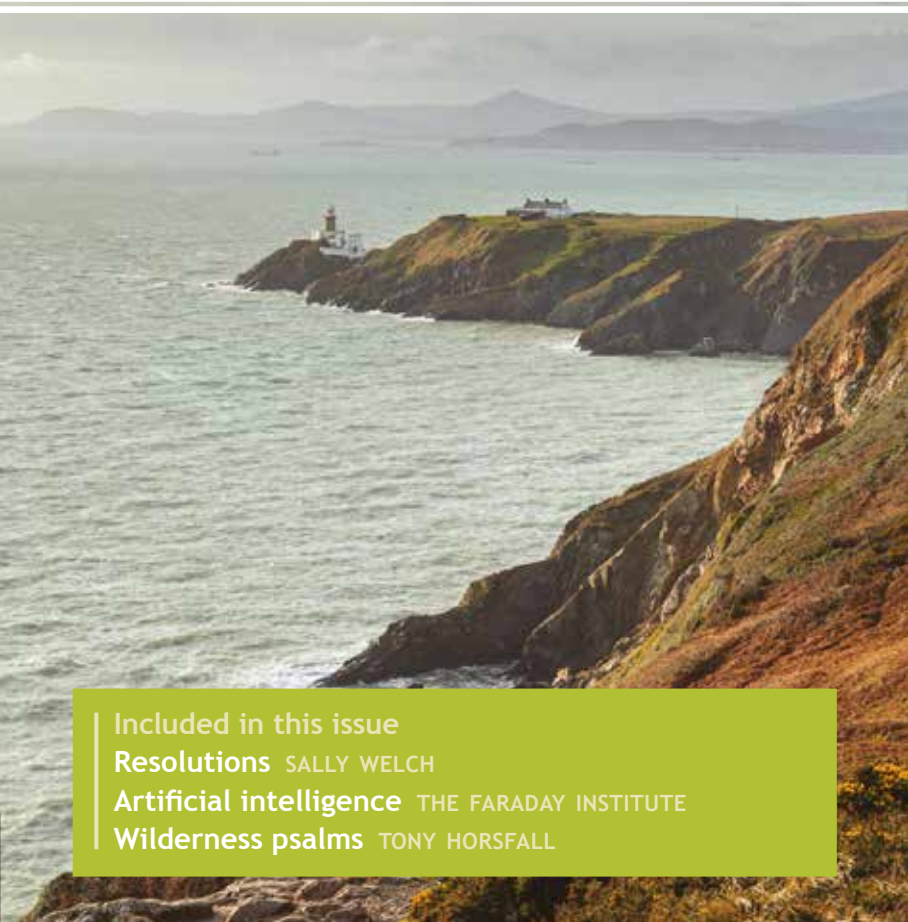


JANUARY-APRIL 2025



New Daylight

Sustaining your daily journey with the Bible



Included in this issue

Resolutions SALLY WELCH

Artificial intelligence THE FARADAY INSTITUTE

Wilderness psalms TONY HORSFALL

New Daylight

Edited by **Gordon Giles**

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ISBN 978 1 80039 356 1
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Cover image: Baily Lighthouse, Dublin, Ireland by Bhargava Marripati/pexels.com
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Distributed in Australia by:
MediaCom Education Inc, PO Box 610, Unley, SA 5061
Tel: 1 800 811 311 | admin@mediacom.org.au

Distributed in New Zealand by:
Scripture Union Wholesale, PO Box 760, Wellington 6140
Tel: 04 385 0421 | suwholesale@clear.net.nz

Acknowledgements

Scripture quotations marked with the following abbreviations are taken from the version shown. Where no abbreviation is given, the quotation is taken from the same version as the headline reference. **NIV**: The Holy Bible, New International Version, Anglicised edition, copyright © 1979, 1984, 2011 by Biblica. Used by permission of Hodder & Stoughton Publishers, an Hachette UK company. All rights reserved. 'NIV' is a registered trademark of Biblica. UK trademark number 1448790. **NRSV** (except 12 and 13 January): the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. The quotations on 12 and 13 January are taken from the New Revised Standard Version 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. **RSV**: the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1946, 1952, 1971 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.

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

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

Suggestions for using *New Daylight*

Find a regular time and place, if possible, where you can read and pray undisturbed. Before you begin, take time to be still and perhaps use the prayer of BRF Ministries on page 6. Then read the Bible passage slowly (try reading it aloud if you find it over-familiar), followed by the comment. You can also use *New Daylight* for group study and discussion, if you prefer.

The prayer or point for reflection can be a starting point for your own meditation and prayer. Many people like to keep a journal to record their thoughts about a Bible passage and items for prayer. In *New Daylight* we also note the Sundays and some special festivals from the church calendar, to keep in step with the Christian year.

New Daylight and the Bible

New Daylight contributors use a range of Bible versions, and you will find a list of the versions used opposite. You are welcome to use your own preferred version alongside the passage printed in the notes. This can be particularly helpful if the Bible text has been abridged.

New Daylight affirms that the whole of the Bible is God's revelation to us, and we should read, reflect on and learn from every part of both Old and New Testaments. Usually the printed comment presents a straightforward 'thought for the day', but sometimes it may also raise questions rather than simply providing answers, as we wrestle with some of the more difficult passages of scripture.

New Daylight is also available in a deluxe (large print) edition. Visit your local Christian bookshop or BRF's online shop brfonline.org.uk. To obtain an audio version for the blind or partially sighted, contact Torch Trust for the Blind, Torch House, Torch Way, Northampton Road, Market Harborough LE16 9HL; +44 (0)1858 438260; info@torchtrust.org.

Comment on *New Daylight*

To send feedback, please email enquiries@brf.org.uk, phone +44 (0)1865 319700 or write to the address shown opposite.

Writers in this issue

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The notes on **artificial intelligence** are written by different people; more details can be found in the 'Meet the authors' section on page 148.

Gordon Giles writes...



It is said that ‘time and tide wait for no man’. We find an older version of the phrase in the *Canterbury Tales*, which date from about 1395: ‘For thogh we slepe, or wake, or rome, or ryde, Ay fleeth the tyme; it nyl no man abyde.’ A tide is not a set of waves upon the seashore, but rather refers to time and the seasons. Chaucer’s phrase is not a maritime one, although it has been adopted in common usage, because tides, while not governed by time, do mark time with some regularity. For many the phrase is about ageing: time (tide) does not wait for anyone; we cannot control it or ignore it.

So another year begins, a new tide sweeps in, and with it a new edition of *New Daylight*. A new set of readings brings a blend of the familiar with the new – fresh words and reflections from our authors, aligned to a rhythm of tides which wash upon us with a reliable regularity.

Easter is different every year, but there are rules to determine its date. Easter Day is the first Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox (March 21). Last year Easter was early (March 31), this year much later (April 20). Each Lent and Easter lands with us differently, because a year has turned, in which things have happened, friends and family have been born or died. The sanctuary of our souls has been touched by events, emotions, experiences. This is how God deals with and in us, making fresh what is stale, renewing what is careworn by the tides of time.

The Scottish poet Charles Sorley, who was killed in action in October 1915, aged 20, wrote a poem called ‘Expectans Expectavi’, inspired by Psalm 40. It serves us well as we stand at the gate of another year:

*This sanctuary of my soul,
Unwitting I keep white and whole,
Unlatched and lit, if Thou should’st care
To enter or to tarry there.*

*With parted lips and outstretch’d hands,
And listening ears Thy servant stands.
Call Thou early, call Thou late,
to Thy great service dedicate.*

Gordon

Wilderness psalms: Psalms 30—40



In this series of readings, we focus on Psalms 30—40, all of which are attributed to David. We know that he was described as the ‘sweet psalmist of Israel’ and that God inspired him to write many of the songs in the book of Psalms (2 Samuel 23:1, KJV).

These particular psalms come from the period in David’s life before he became king in Israel, when he was on the run from Saul in the wilderness, with many enemies. He often hid in the desert, fearful for his life, but David’s response was always the same. He would turn to God with his sorrows, lift his heart up to the Lord and cry for the Lord’s help. Out of his adversity he has left us a lasting legacy of deep spiritual truth and words which we can use to approach God in our own times of stress and anxiety. His honesty and humility shine through. There is no attempt to maintain an image of perfection. His relationship with God is open and frank. We see David in his raw humanity, which helps us to accept our own flawed and frail selves.

Several themes shine through these songs. One is that of *trust*, the belief that God will hear and answer prayer and eventually bring his deliverance. This seems to me to be what Christian living is all about, hanging on to God in childlike faith when all around us is in turmoil. Allied to this is the idea of *waiting*, waiting for God to act and for his timing to come to pass. It is in our waiting that we learn patience, that most elusive of virtues. Yet another theme is that of *praise and thanksgiving*, sometimes before prayer is answered, sometimes afterwards. Gratitude should characterise God’s people because we are recipients of so much goodness, but sadly we often forget what God has done.

Finally, notice the *presence of Jesus*, who is referred to several times prophetically and who quoted from these psalms in his own ministry. He was soaked in the psalms, and that in itself is an incentive for us to spend time immersed in these ancient hymns.

Look out for these recurring ideas, and more. May you be blessed as you read.

Joy in the morning

I will exalt you, Lord, for you lifted me out of the depths and did not let my enemies gloat over me. Lord my God, I called to you for help, and you healed me... Sing the praises of the Lord, you his faithful people; praise his holy name. For his anger lasts only for a moment, but his favour lasts a lifetime; weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.

Although this psalm is said to have been written for the dedication of the temple, it is more likely to have been David's palace or house that he had in mind. Either way, an occasion for thanksgiving and reflection on the faithfulness of God presents David with an opportunity to share his testimony with the assembled guests. What God has done for him, he can do for all.

We are not told the specifics of the situation, but what is clear is that David was in dire straits and needed divine assistance. He had become proud and complacent, and God humbled him. In his moment of need, though, he cried out for help, and God reached down and rescued him. His sorrow was turned to joy, his mourning to dancing, and praise filled his heart.

The abiding lesson is that even though we go through times of tearful loss and deep sadness when we can see no way through, the darkness will not last forever. Joy will come in the morning because God is faithful.

Our response to God's intervention in our lives is threefold. First, it is appropriate to give thanks to him, to sing his praises and rejoice in his mercy towards us. We cannot keep silent before God's goodness. Second, it is right to seek opportunities to tell others about the grace we have received, to share our story with them so that their faith is strengthened. Third, we should never take his favour for granted but walk humbly with him.

Lord, help me to trust you in my times of darkness and give me grace to hold on to your promises. You are faithful. You have helped me before, and you will help me now. Amen.

TONY HORSFALL

The wonders of his love

In you, Lord, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness. Turn you ear to me, come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me... Keep me from the trap that is set for me, for you are my refuge. Into your hands I commit my spirit; deliver me, Lord, my faithful God.

You may well recognise the words of trust in this psalm (v. 5), which were echoed by Jesus on the cross: ‘Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, he breathed his last’ (Luke 23:46).

I am encouraged to know that in this moment of extreme need, Jesus was fortified by recalling the words of scripture and this particular psalm, which he clearly knew well. Notice he makes his declaration of faith with a loud voice, defiantly shouting its truth into the darkness that was seeking to engulf him. And notice too, he begins with a word not used in the psalm, but so often on his lips – ‘Father’. His trust is placed securely not in some impersonal force, but in his heavenly Father who he knows will bring him through the darkness of death.

Both David and Jesus testify that God is worthy of our trust, yet trust is not always easy. In the deep darkness of bereavement and loss some years ago, I could see no hope for the future. I tried earnestly to trust God, but no matter how hard I tried I knew I was not trusting him and still felt afraid and uncertain.

Then, in conversation with a friend, I suddenly realised that my trust was not the issue. What mattered was that God is trustworthy. Whether I trusted him or not, he would remain faithful and would bring me through – ‘If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself’ (2 Timothy 2:13). Once I grasped this I relaxed and found I did trust God, because it was about him and not me.

*Why not meditate on these precious words: ‘Father, into your hands
I commit my spirit’?*

Forgiveness and fellowship

Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent my bones wasted away... Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.' And you forgave the guilt of my sin.

Where can true happiness be found? In a world that craves excitement and thrills, yet seems never to be totally content, David reminds us that only in relationship with God can lasting peace be found. It is the blessing of knowing we are forgiven and restored to fellowship with God that we need above all else if we are to thrive as human beings.

Sin creates a dislocation not only with God but also within us. Breaking God's laws leads to a troubled conscience, and guilt and shame. These painful emotions in turn can cause a dis-ease within our bodies, especially if we try to hide our sin. Only in confessing our sin to God can we find the relief that comes with knowing we are forgiven.

God deals with sin, not by pretending it doesn't matter, but by providing a 'covering' for it. In Old Testament times this was done through the sacrificial system, but these find their complete fulfilment in the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross, by which our sins were dealt with once and for all. Paul quotes verses 1–2 as confirmation that this blessing is a gift of grace, given freely to all who trust in God for forgiveness (Romans 4:4–8).

Being forgiven in this way opens up for us a life of fellowship with God. Not only are we reconnected to God, but we learn to walk with him through life, listening to his voice and following where he leads us on the adventure of faith (vv. 8–9).

Lord, no one is immune from the pull of sin, even the most seasoned followers of Jesus. Thank you that forgiveness is freely available. Help me to keep my conscience clear and my heart always open to receive your forgiveness. Amen.

TONY HORSFALL

Waiting in hope

For the word of the Lord is right and true; he is faithful in all he does... By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth... For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm... We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield.

Nowadays we are used to instant responses. We can order something online, and it will be with us the next day. We send a text and expect an immediate reply. We are impatient if we get held up in traffic, frustrated if our train is late.

The life of faith does not work like this, however, and the apparent slowness of God is a cause of difficulty for many. We expect God to answer our prayers immediately and for situations to change quickly. If things do not happen rapidly, we conclude that either God did not hear us or our prayers are in vain.

Waiting is a common theme throughout the psalms, and we see it here. There is no doubt that God is our helper and that he is worthy of our trust. His word of promise can be relied upon, for he is a faithful God and his word has power – in creation he spoke and things came into being. But his timing is often different to ours. God is never in a hurry and makes all things beautiful *in his time* (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Trusting God therefore requires us to wait patiently for God to act.

God uses times of waiting to strengthen our desire. If we are serious about our prayers, we will persevere in our asking and not give up at the first sign of delay. Waiting develops our faith, for we are forced to rest in the character of God and trust in his reliability. The joy of answered prayer is sweeter for the waiting, more appreciated and valued.

Lord, I know you are at work in me, ridding me of my immature demandingness and creating in me a mature, restful confidence in you. Help me to cooperate with you in my waiting. Amen.

Taste and see

I will extol the Lord at all times; his praise will always be on my lips... I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame. This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles... Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.

This psalm comes from a specific situation in David's life when he sought refuge with the Philistine king Achish. When his true identity became known, David feigned madness and was sent away, finding refuge in the cave of Adullam (1 Samuel 21:10–22:1).

David is full of praise for his deliverance, calling others to join him in celebration. His song is an acrostic, each sentence beginning with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. In particular, David invites those who are afflicted and in trouble to experience for themselves that God is good and takes care of his people.

The principle of 'taste and see' is a tried and tested one. Have you been in a supermarket and been invited to taste fresh bread from the bakery? It tastes wonderful, and you immediately think, 'I'll buy a loaf of that.' Personal experience convinces you of the quality of the offer being made.

Today, God invites us to 'taste' what is on offer through the gospel, and to 'see' for ourselves that he is good, faithful and caring. How will you respond?

Perhaps you feel broken-hearted (v. 18). Perhaps your world has fallen apart. Maybe a marriage has ended, a loved one has died, your hopes have been shattered. Yet David says that God is close to those whose hearts ache with pain. You are not alone, he is there with you in all the mess, giving hope.

Perhaps you feel crushed in your spirit. Life has knocked the stuffing out of you. The demands on you are overwhelming, the pressure unsustainable. You are ready to give up. David reminds us that God saves those who are crushed in spirit. He can bring you through, he can give you strength to keep going.

Lord, cause me to taste and see your goodness today. Amen.

TONY HORSFALL

Unanswered prayers

Contend, Lord, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me. Take up shield and armour; arise and come to my aid... Then my soul will rejoice in the Lord and delight in his salvation... When my prayers returned to me unanswered, I went about mourning as though for my friend or brother. I bowed my head in grief as though weeping for my mother.

Prayer remains a great mystery to me. Who has not been baffled by the fact that sometimes our prayers are answered, and sometimes it seems they are not? David was certainly confused when his prayers were returned unanswered.

After the great deliverance described in Psalm 34, David is again embroiled in conflict with enemies on every side, false witnesses accusing him and some even seeking his life. It all felt unjust and without good reason. He did not know whom he could trust, but he did assume he could trust God. And since God had recently acted on his behalf, he assumed he would do so again. Yet in his moment of great need and despite his persistent cry for help, God is unresponsive. He feels let down.

When hopes are not fulfilled and dreams are shattered, we experience grief. Unanswered prayer is a form of loss, because it challenges our understanding of who God is and how he works. How are we to understand such times?

Prayer does not work like a slot machine, and there is no formula that guarantees God will always do what we want. Delays do not mean he is uninterested; rather, they suggest that we may be asking wrongly or that he has a greater purpose in mind, perhaps allowing us to experience trouble so that our character can be shaped and formed. God's timing may be different to ours, and his agenda may be beyond our present understanding. What is crucial is that we trust him as much in the darkness as in the light; to steadfastly hold onto him in our confusion as in our clarity.

Lord, you know my present struggles and the darkness that surrounds me. Be the light for my path and give me grace to wait patiently for you. Amen.

Do not be silent

How long, Lord, will you look on? Rescue me from their ravages, my precious life from these lions... Do not let those gloat over me who are my enemies without cause; do not let those who hate me without reason maliciously wink the eye... May those who delight in my vindication shout for joy and gladness; may they always say, 'The Lord be exalted, who delights in the well-being of his servant.'

It was an English clergyman, Thomas Fuller (1608–61), who coined the phrase, 'The darkest hour is just before the dawn.' This psalm does not have a happy ending, but there are glimpses of light breaking through the darkness and evidence that hope is rising within David's heart that he will come through this ordeal. Perhaps his time of waiting is drawing to a close.

The false accusations and vicious taunts continue to wound David, however, who again asserts his innocence. What troubles him most is the absence of any response from his God who appears to be silent and far away (v. 22).

Interestingly, Jesus saw a fulfilment of the words of this psalm in the rejection and hostility he experienced from the religious leaders of his day, identifying with David's experience in verse 19: 'They hated me without reason' (John 15:25). Not only did Jesus endure similar situations to us, but the fact that he knew the kind of pain that we suffer means he can understand our hurt and can help us in our time of need: 'For we do not have a high priest who is unable to feel sympathy for our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin' (Hebrews 4:15).

David is strengthened by the knowledge he still has some faithful friends and takes heart from his assurance that God 'delights in the well-being of his servant' (v. 27). These are two anchor points in the storms of life – for him and for all who seek to follow God in tumultuous times.

*Lord, thank you for the grip of grace. Your hold on me remains firm,
even though my hold on you is sometimes weak. Amen.*

TONY HORSFALL



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'Thank you to all the wonderful writers who bring scriptures to life and make them relevant for us in the here and now.'

'I just wanted to say how much I appreciate the notes for helping to keep me going with reading the Bible and shedding light on demanding passages.'

Published three times a year, in January, May and September.



New Daylight is edited by Gordon Giles, Canon Chancellor of Rochester Cathedral.

In this issue

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Amy Boucher Pye
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et al.
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Elizabeth Rundle
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Cover image: Baily Lighthouse, Dublin, Ireland
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