

MAY-AUGUST 2026



New Daylight

Sustaining your daily journey with the Bible



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The multicolours of scripture GORDON GILES

Amos CLARE HAYNS

Mountains and hills BARBARA MOSSE

New Daylight

Edited by Gordon Giles

May–August 2026

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Bible Reading Fellowship is a charity (233280) and company limited by guarantee (301324), registered in England and Wales

EU Authorised Representative: Easy Access System Europe –
Mustamäe tee 50, 10621 Tallinn, Estonia, gpsr.requests@easproject.com

ISBN 978 1 80039 478 0
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This edition © Bible Reading Fellowship 2026
Cover photo by pexels.com/@anete-lusina

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](mailto:suwwholesale@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. NRSV: 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. 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. ESV: The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, published by HarperCollins Publishers, © 2001 Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. KJV: The Authorised Version of the Bible (The King James Bible), the rights in which are vested in the Crown, reproduced by permission of the Crown's Patentee, Cambridge University Press.

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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 overfamiliar), 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 compact size edition. Visit your local Christian bookshop or BRF's online shop brfresources.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.

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Gordon Giles writes...



It is often said that you cannot put a value on friendship – it is priceless. I am sure this is true, but not long ago a group of students decided that they would try, and discovered, perhaps to their dismay, that the value of friendship is £22.

This they learned not after writing pages of dense text or yards of impossibly complex equations, but rather after a little experiment in marketing. Using eBay, they decided to sell the friendship of Big John, as they called him, who unwittingly had his friendship auctioned online. The person who offered the highest price became the proud, if not bemused, owner of Big John's friendship for exactly a year.

We speak of 'having' friends, and I think that there is an important sense in which we 'own' our friends and they own us. Our ownership consists in the sharing of experiences. Sharing is a kind of mutual owning, for what we share in friendship we jointly own. In that sense we are members not only of the Bible Reading Fellowship (the legal name of BRF Ministries), but of the Bible Reading *Friendship*. Friendships occur among like-minded people, among those with common interests or experiences. Friends care for and about one another, sometimes across vast distances.

We rejoice with our friends, not only because friendship is a gift from God exemplified in Christ, but also because, as Ralph Waldo Emerson put it: 'A friend may well be reckoned the masterpiece of nature.'

One of the chief characteristics of friendship is openness and vulnerability. Jesus called his disciples friends (John 15:15), and they shared his pain as well as his joy. Jesus tells them they are not servants, but friends. They are the first welcomed members of the Christian family – a family which, like all families, has its ups and downs.

The language of possession is also appropriate when we turn to God. We are possessed, in love, by God. In turn, God is ours – ours to love or deny, worship or reject. Yet at the heart of it all is the irreversible truth that God is ours and we are his. We belong to each other – us and God. And we belong among Christ's family of Christians. The basis of that belonging is love. And the chief symptom of love is friendship.

So we give thanks, above all, for each other. Friendship is a gift. By it we are blessed in one another.

Gordon

The prayer of BRF Ministries

*Faithful God,
thank you for growing BRF Ministries
from small beginnings
into the worldwide family it is today.
We rejoice as young and old
discover you through your word
and grow daily in faith and love.
Keep us humble in your service,
ambitious for your glory,
and open to new opportunities.
For your name's sake,
Amen.*

'It is such a joy to be part of this amazing project'

As part of our BRF Resources ministry, we're raising funds to give away copies of Bible reading notes and other resources to those who aren't able to access them any other way, working with food banks and chaplaincy services, in prisons, hospitals, and care homes.

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The multicolours of scripture



The Bible is written in black and white – dark ink on a pale surface, reproduced throughout the centuries, from parchment to screens, a set of texts presented as scripts. Sometimes it is interpreted in black and white, too – a monochrome either/or, a rule book of dos and don'ts.

Yet even monochrome has shades of grey, and the human eye can distinguish around 500 of them. When it comes to colours, the range increases significantly: we can distinguish up to ten million colours. Individual ability varies, colour-blindness and age-related eye conditions notwithstanding, yet the range of colours discernible by those of maximum discrimination is staggering. Such is the polychromatic beauty of God's creation. Some creatures can discern colours we cannot see – some insects, for example, can 'see' ultraviolet – while others have lesser ocular function.

A spectrophotometer can determine the colour of something in terms of light absorbed and reflected off a surface, but in daily life most of us can recognise and describe colour without much thought. Who knows whether the red I see is identical to what you see, yet we can agree that the fire engine is red nevertheless. By the same token we can safely assume that colours have not changed over the centuries. Thus when we read in the Bible that something is red, amber, green, or black, the colour it conjures up in our mind's eye is fundamentally the same.

There are some colourful characters in the Bible and some Technicolor stories. Some of these have been made into excellent films, biblical epics based on Noah, Moses, Joseph, David, Samson, Daniel, Esther, and of course Jesus and his disciples. Colours are mentioned in the Bible, as in life, by way of illustration. We are told that the robe Jesus is made to wear when he appears before Pilate is purple because it *was* purple, but also because it has meaning, being regal. So where we find colours mentioned in the Bible, they can add authenticity, emphasise a significance, or both.

As we shine a theological spectrophotometer onto some extracts from the black-and-white book that is the Bible, we realise how colourful it is, literally and metaphorically. Turn its pages with me, and let us see what we can see.

Brown

Joseph, being seventeen years old, was shepherding the flock with his brothers; he was a helper to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children because he was the son of his old age, and he made him an ornamented robe. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him.

Combining witty parodies of popular musical genres with punchy, rhyming lyrics, in *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice created a memorable retelling of this story which has cemented a myth in the popular imagination. Some Bible translations do say Joseph's coat had many colours, but more recent scholarship prefers to say it had long sleeves. It was not as multicoloured as the musical suggests; rather it was likely mainly brown.

But the coat was nonetheless special. It was a gift, perhaps embellished or ornate, perhaps made of different animal hides or fabrics, and it betokened singular, loving favour. It was this favouritism, not the colours, which riled Joseph's half-siblings.

Yet Joseph himself is a multicoloured character. He is sold into slavery, then resold, then taken advantage of sexually by someone with power, who shames him on rejection. He is unjustly imprisoned, but gains freedom by demonstrating a special gift for oneiromancy (interpreting dreams prophetically), and rises to great power and influence through skill, charm, and effort.

Joseph's robe reveals the risks of favouritism. Jacob should have known better, because his father Isaac had favoured Esau over him, but instead of breaking the cycle, he repeats history. Joseph did not choose his fancy coat and was probably obliged to wear it rather than offend his foolishly indulgent father. Jacob's role in this story is one of its subtler, darker colours, because it is his loving but ill-judged action that sets in motion a rollercoaster sequence of events for his favourite son, which brought disaster before success.

*Reflect on actions which have caused harm to others,
however well meant. Is reconciliation needed?*

Rainbow coloured

I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh, and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.

Joseph's robe may not have been technicoloured, but God's 'bow on the clouds' is. A rainbow is an arc showing red and violet on the outer and inner sides, with other colours appearing in between. Isaac Newton identified the sevenfold sequence of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet, remembered by many in the mnemonic 'Richard Of York Gave Battle In Vain' (a statement which is also historically true). Caused by light being refracted, reflected, and then refracted again when leaving a drop of water, a rainbow is a meteorological phenomenon usually associated with rainfall and sunlight.

Sirach wrote: 'Look at the rainbow and praise him who made it; it is exceedingly beautiful in its brightness. It encircles the sky with its glorious arc; the hands of the Most High have stretched it out' (43:11–12). In Revelation an angel is crowned with a rainbow (10:1) and around the heavenly throne is 'a rainbow that looks like an emerald' (4:3).

The 'bow in the clouds' is constant; rainbows will always occur and will always look the same. As such they symbolise an eternal hope, an unchanging promise of mutual faithfulness: a covenant. As sure as rainbows are in the sky, so sure is God.

Being colourful, rainbows are associated with positivity, and they have been used as a symbol for all sorts of causes. When South Africa became democratic, Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu hailed it as a 'rainbow nation'. The Pride movement deploys rainbows widely. During the Covid pandemic, rainbows were associated with key workers. Hope, diversity, gratitude, promise, joy, and affirmation have all displayed rainbow colours and will continue to do so. For whose heart is not lifted on seeing a rainbow?

*What does a rainbow signify to you?
Give thanks to God for it and be joyful.*

Purple

And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and after twisting some thorns into a crown they put it on him. And they began saluting him, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’ They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

The robe that the soldiers made Jesus wear when mocking him is one of the most colourful parts of the Passiontide story. If asked, most people would say it was purple, but it should be noted that in Matthew it is scarlet (27:28) and in Luke, the colour is unspecified, but likely white (23:11). Mark and John (19:2) say it is purple. Known as Tyrian purple, because it came from Tyre in Lebanon, the dye was very expensive, as it was manually extracted from rock snails and 12,000 snails were needed to get 1.4 grams of dye. Being a reddish-purple colour, it is understandable how gospel writers might disagree. Indeed, the darker red it was, the more it was prized. It was a labour-intensive, smelly, and lengthy process, but the result was luxurious.

In Acts 16:14, Paul meets a woman, Lydia, who is described as ‘a dealer in purple cloth’ and therefore presumably rather rich. The valuable purple dye was prized by Romans, who used it in ceremonial robes. That Jesus was publicly but briefly enrobed in it before crucifixion not only mocked any kingship claimed by or attributed to him, but also sent a warning to any Jews contemplating insurrection.

The humiliation of the purple robe is one of various physical and psychological attacks made on Jesus on his final day. As it happens, the dye, while normally obtained by crushing the molluscs, is also secreted by them when hunting prey and released when antagonised. So there is a tragic parallel to this when we consider the stress and abuse Jesus was enduring, reflected metaphorically in the purple robe he briefly wore. As Proverbs puts it: ‘Heartache crushes the spirit’ (15:13b, NIV).

Reflect on how the way people are treated can damage their mental health. Pray for all those crushed in this way.

GORDON GILES

Crimson red

She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle. She opens her hand to the poor, and reaches out her hands to the needy. She is not afraid for her household when it snows, for all her household are clothed in crimson. She makes herself coverings; her clothing is fine linen and purple. Her husband is known in the city gates, taking his seat among the elders of the land.

As noted yesterday, according to Matthew's gospel, the robe Jesus is given to wear before his crucifixion is not purple, but scarlet. We also noted that the rich colour of the kingly robe may be described as red or purple depending on the observer's use of language. Red is the colour of blood, and the most-prized Tyrian purple colouring was deep and dark like black-tinted, clotted blood. Purples are blends of red and blue, so the hue varies according to the mix and intensity. Think of the shirts which bishops wear: they range from maroon to an almost blue colour. Ask any bishop what happens when the shirt has been worn and washed many times. In ancient times the colour was renowned for being colour fast, but then it did not have to contend with today's washing machines!

The 'virtuous wife' of Proverbs 31 may be considered contentious in some circles, but we notice her today not because of washing or cooking, but because of her wealth and status, which is deducible from her ability to clothe her household in crimson and purple linen. Only rich people could do that. For some she is the personification of wisdom, so often feminised in the Bible, and so, dressing herself in red and/or purple is a sign of royalty.

Thus she is dressed in strength. To be wise is to be strong and regal; wisdom is the crown of virtues. For some this account is not about a woman at all, but about the regal nature of wisdom. Wisdom is therefore purple, and crimson its natural relation. To have wisdom in one's life is to be richly blessed, like a king or queen. To be clothed in red or purple is to be richly robed with wisdom.

Has wisdom changed over the ages? Do wise people have status today or are those who rule us strong sinners?

Black

I am black and beautiful, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon. Do not gaze at me because I am dark, because the sun has gazed on me... Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you pasture your flock, where you make it lie down at noon; for why should I be like one who is veiled beside the flocks of your companions?... His head is the finest gold; his locks are wavy, black as a raven. His eyes are like doves beside springs of water, bathed in milk, fitly set.

Black is not strictly a colour; rather it is the hue that absorbs all light or denotes its absence. Since the Roman period it has been used solemnly for death and mourning. Many wear black at funerals or, because of its sombre connotations, they are asked not to, where celebration of life is preferred.

Black is the colour of evil – *ater* ('black' in Latin) is the word from which we get 'atrocious'. Yet songwriter Sydney Carter turned Good Friday into Black Friday when he made us sing, 'I danced on a Friday when the sky turned black' – deftly describing the sombre day we call 'good'. The ambiguity of biblical black is a fascinating and provocative phenomenon. Casting light on it illuminates a paradoxical colour that is not a colour, a passive negativity that is full of energy and mystery.

In medieval times Benedictine monks wore black habits as a sign of humility and penitence, but Bernard of Clairvaux accused them of wearing the devil's colour. His Cistercians wore white for purity; by implication black meant the opposite.

The cultural resonances of black are strong. Yet it was one of the first colours used in art and has at various times been very fashionable. In the Song of Songs, traditionally associated with King Solomon, the woman's beauty is grounded in her dark skin, and her lover's raven-black hair is luscious: not sombre, but sensuous, positive, and attractive.

Of all the colours mentioned in the Bible, black is perhaps the one which, as it absorbs light, also absorbs whatever interpretation we wish to imbue it with. So let us be open to its varied and even positive potential.

*God, in whom there is no darkness,
help us see you in everything. Amen.*

White

Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse! Its rider is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name inscribed that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, wearing fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a sceptre of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.

From the Bible, western culture has gained the idea that white symbolises purity. In Christian cultures, brides and first Communion and confirmation candidates wear white. It is the liturgical colour of birth at Christmas, of baptism, and of Easter resurrection. Thus many clergy wear white for funerals nowadays. The black robes of mourning have been replaced with the white robes of hope. Some cultures do not interpret white in this way; in China, for example, red is for marriage and white for death.

However, the New Testament gives us the white robe of Jesus' transfiguration, the white-clad angels at the tomb, and the white horse in Revelation, where we also find white-robed saints, whose robes become white when washed in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:14; see also 6:11). White is the colour of heaven, and it is the colour of Christ. This is Christ's heavenly horse who rides in, a steed steered by faith and truth, a judge leading a white-robed army into the battle against injustice and sin. It is a vivid, terrifying image, as the King of kings rides in to defeat Satan and bring in the new heaven and the new earth.

It is a ferocious and far cry from the gentle 'whiter than white' idea of purity that we have now. We have softened our whites just as we have softened our faith. The harsh realities of martyrdom, judgement, and the fear of God have been turned into white-robed babies at the font and brides walking down the aisle.

Are you worthy of a white robe? How might you become so?

Blue

When the camp is to set out, Aaron and his sons shall go in and take down the screening curtain and cover the ark of the covenant with it; then they shall put on it a covering of fine leather, and spread over that a cloth all of blue and put its poles in place... They shall take a blue cloth and cover the lampstand for the light, with its lamps, its snuffers, its trays, and all the vessels for oil with which it is supplied... Over the golden altar they shall spread a blue cloth and cover it with a covering of fine leather and put its poles in place.

The sky appears blue because blue light has a shorter wavelength, scattering better in all directions heavenward. As the colour of the sky, some associate it with higher consciousness or divinity, and as the seas reflect the sky, blue can represent the infinite vastness of the universe. Blue is the colour of wonder.

In Judaism blue represents divine authority and holiness, as we see in the opulent use of blue for the tabernacle and temple decorations. The instruction to use blue for the ark of the covenant can also remind us of a call to obedience to God's law. In Christian art Mary is often depicted wearing blue, because of an association not only with obedience to God, but also with purity and royalty. In Catholic tradition, Mary is the 'queen of heaven' – blue in blue. Because she is the *theotokos*, the 'bearer of the incarnate Word', she can also be thought of as the new ark of the new covenant. The old covenant, or testament, is the law; the new covenant, or testament, is Jesus. Thus both are associated, covered even, with blue.

However, in popular culture 'the blues' can refer to a musical genre or the state of being sad. Two centuries ago the term 'blue devils' was used to describe the hallucinatory effects of severe alcohol withdrawal. Evolving to describe depressed and distressed states of mind, the genre of melancholic songs took on the colour. This sad cultural development diverts from a more ancient positivity about blue.

Creator God, who in vast blueness gave us life and light, inspire obedience in us, that we may joyfully worship Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

GORDON GILES

Green

And he said to them, ‘How many loaves have you? Go and see.’ When they had found out, they said, ‘Five, and two fish.’ Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and blessed and broke the loaves and gave them to his disciples to set before the people, and he divided the two fish among them all. And all ate and were filled.

Nowadays things are ‘green’ if they aspire to the world’s greening: the ecological salvation of our planet. The colourful adjective has gained a moral, and sometimes a political, hue, referencing issues about climate change, global warming, and energy.

In the Bible green is the colour of new life, flourishing, and most importantly spring. It is the colour of abundance, fertility, and hope. We recall the green pastures of Psalm 23 or perhaps Cecil Frances Alexander’s ‘green hill far away’, where Jesus died to save us all. Yet in the story of the feeding of the 5,000 we barely notice the passing reference to green grass.

Why are we told the grass was green? Perhaps simply because it was. It dates the story, too: springtime. Rain and the grass it greens are annual, seasonal events. In John’s version of the story, he mentions the imminent Passover, a celebration of liberation from Egyptian slavery which connects to the Roman regime in Palestine which many considered to be oppressive. Is this crowd of hungry people, who have fed on Jesus’ godly words, a crowd who might rebel against the Romans with Jesus as a kind of second Moses who would lead them to freedom?

The ‘people’ were men (*andres*) grouped together, a hungry army in the making. Jesus feeds them, grouped like troops in hundreds and fifties. Then he disperses them to prevent rather than inspire a revolt. He would rather teach and feed with the word of God amid the peace and promise of green pastures.

God, whose green grass calls us to work for the flourishing of all creation, renew in us justice and hope that this earth may yield enough to feed all your people, in body and soul. Amen.

Grey

Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from your birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age I am he; even when you turn grey I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save.

A 'silver surfer' is an older person who browses the internet, shops online, and uses social media. Online the over-50s are a growing demographic, contributing significantly to the economy. Nowadays everyone expects to live beyond their 50s, perhaps becoming silver-haired in the process. In Isaiah's time average life expectancy capped at about 40, for even while some did live out the 'four score years and ten', infant mortality, disease, and war took their toll. At the time of Jesus, average life expectancy was about 35.

Thus the word 'even' is significant: 'Even if you live long (which you cannot expect to), I will carry and save you', says the Lord. The 'remnant' have endured and survived the slings and arrows of ancient Palestinian life and death, and more specifically the exile imposed upon them by the Babylonians. The release from captivity in Babylon is akin to the Exodus led by Moses. This exile is reckoned to have lasted 70 years – a human lifetime. Thus there would be very few – if any – who returned as the remnant any time after 538BC. Whether or not they are grey-haired, God's covenant with his people endures from generation to generation. References to grey hair remind us of this long-lived promise (see Luke 21:18).

Grey might be considered a boring, dull colour: few people say it is their favourite! It sits between the extremes of white and black, where optimism and pessimism meet. It is the colour of balance, of wisdom. Here in Isaiah it is the colour of patience and constancy. Going grey is a fact of life, a natural phenomenon which may be resisted, but not prevented. Jesus said: 'Do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black' (Matthew 5:36). Symbolising the constant love of God, greyness is to be embraced, welcomed, even worn as a badge of honour.

*Reflect on your past and future life and how, no matter your age,
God has carried you and will carry you still.*

The game of faith: 1 and 2 Peter



The epistles known as 1 and 2 Peter were sent to churches in what is now Turkey. Peter was in ‘Babylon’ (Rome) when he wrote the first in about AD64, so we can assume he was there when the second was composed a couple of years later. Some disagreement exists about whether 2 Peter was from his hand, as it is more similar to Jude than to 1 Peter. At this distance we have no way of telling whether someone wrote 2 Peter under the apostle’s name, so I will take literally the claim in 1:1 and 3:1 that its author was indeed Simon Peter.

The first letter urges the Christian community not to give up in the face of opposition, to respond with grace to verbal challenges, to maintain high moral standards, and to respect the authorities. The second calls out an invasive, permissive belief system that is threatening their morality and way of living, stressing the importance of their holding on to belief in Jesus’ second coming as a motivation for patient holy living.

There is nothing in these letters about mission, church growth, or planning for evangelism. No great plans for serving the community. Nothing about public worship or how to pray. In a sense they are defensive and insular, rather than offering any world-changing agenda. It seems they were written simply with the aim of encouraging the churches to keep hold of the basics of Christian belief and living.

As such, these two epistles call to mind the themes a sports coach might commend to their squad, both new recruits and old hands, at the start of pre-season training. They would not at that stage be focussing on all the games and trophies they hope to win, but rather hone in on the fundamentals and disciplines of the sport, as individuals and as a group – the things to get right from day one if they want the season to go well. In the following reflections, I have imagined this through the lens of football (or soccer), but you could choose another sport if you prefer. Or, if you hate team sports, perhaps instead imagine a staff meeting at the start of a new project or school year.

The challenges Christians faced in the AD60s echo what we face today. We shall be exploring what these letters have to say to us.

The coach

This letter is from Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ. I am writing to God's chosen people who are living as foreigners in the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. God the Father knew you and chose you long ago, and his Spirit has made you holy. As a result, you have obeyed him and have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. May God give you more and more grace and peace.

If you are a team trainer or coach, you have to have the respect of the team. In football, senior players might say to a new coach, 'Show us your medals.' In other words, by what right do you tell us what to do? Peter has the medals! He had been with Jesus since the earliest days of his ministry, unique in his naming of Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, but also in his threefold denial and threefold restoration and as the apostles' spokesman on and after the Day of Pentecost. The churches he writes to can trust that he knows what he is talking about.

When a new minister comes to a church, offering a new insight or style of worship, it is tempting to dismiss him or her as young, naive, or over-ambitious. Let us resolve instead to let them show us their medals – their experience, training, and expertise – and resolve to respect them. In football terms, if our resistance causes them to 'lose the dressing room', the fault is ours, not theirs.

There is another angle to this. Peter, an epistle writer? When Jesus called him, could he read or write? Even if he has dictated these letters, he has come a long way. The football coach may have started his career in the humblest of Sunday league teams or playing boot-less on a dusty patch of ground somewhere abroad. Who could have imagined then where they are now?

So, how do established Christians, well-versed in doctrine and discipleship, view the humanly unpromising members of our church? Those noisy teenagers, that dyslexic adult? Maybe one day they will be Christian leaders. Peter says God knows and chose them.

Dear God, thank you for those who lead and teach in the church now, and for those who will do so in the future. Amen.

RICHARD MARTIN

Life away from the training ground

So prepare your minds for action and exercise self-control. Put all your hope in the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world. So you must live as God's obedient children. Don't slip back into your old ways of living to satisfy your own desires. You didn't know any better then. But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy.

Being a serious footballer is a lifestyle choice. It affects what you eat and drink, your sleep pattern, and how you treat your body. Or it should do! Many a famous career has nosedived because of bad influences taking hold. You can do everything right on the training ground, but if you do not live the life when you are at home or with your mates you will not last long in peak condition. A senior player taking a young star under their wing can be crucial.

That is Peter's point here. Those awe-inspiring words 'Be holy in everything you do' are for the churches he is addressing. For them, the temptations that could knock them off course would be about reverting to aspects of their pre-Christian way of living. Self-indulgence in whatever form is the opposite of love for God and neighbour, because love is about self-giving not self-gratification. Whatever they are like in church meetings, they must keep to this new way in the ordinary decisions of life.

There are two aspects of this for long-standing church members. First, new Christians, for whom old friends and lifestyle might still be a powerful draw, need a wise mentor. In advice and prayer, and forgiveness sometimes, could this be you?

Second, what does the call to be 'holy in *everything*' mean for us? Perhaps you can list things you used to do but do no longer, because of your faith. Thanks be to God for those. 'Everything', however, rules out complacency. For example, how holy is our spending and our investment portfolio or pension fund? Are the terms of my will holy? What about our instinctive alignment with shades of politics at home and abroad? Everything? Phew!

Dear God, please show me gently but clearly the next steps in my journey towards holiness. Amen.

Team spirit

You were cleansed from your sins when you obeyed the truth, so now you must show sincere love to each other as brothers and sisters. Love each other deeply with all your heart. For you have been born again, but not to a life that will quickly end. Your new life will last forever because it comes from the eternal, living word of God... So get rid of all evil behaviour. Be done with all deceit, hypocrisy, jealousy, and all unkind speech.

The England football players of 1996 were known as the 'golden generation'. Wonderfully talented individuals, starring weekly for their clubs. When they came together for international duty, though, the results were disappointing. Rumours abounded of splits in the camp, groups of players from one club not mixing with those from a rival, and personal grievances from club games creating a bad atmosphere. Did a lack of unity stymie their potential?

Any squad of players will contain old hands and young tyros; people with different pay levels; the extroverts and the loners; those who are popular with the fans, and those who never quite get accepted. A wise coach will include in the training regime a range of activities that nip cliques in the bud and which enhance bonding and unity.

Those who have been members of churches will hear the echoes. Rivalry and power games spoil worship and witness. When I was a child, one Sunday the vicar held up a completed child's jigsaw. 'The church should be like this,' he said, 'showing Christ to the world.' There was a long pause, then he said, 'But this church is like this.' He threw the jigsaw down the aisle and the pieces went everywhere. End of sermon. Silence.

Peter is a wise coach. He knows that without unity the churches he writes to will be churches in name only. He urges them to constantly remind themselves that they are all sinners redeemed by Christ, and to commit to good behaviour towards the others, nurturing love towards each other. That is not always easy, but discipleship is not a journey we make alone.

Dear God, thank you for my Christian sisters and brothers. Help me to love them all. Together let us show Jesus to others. Amen.

RICHARD MARTIN

Are you fit to wear the shirt?

Yes, you who trust him recognise the honour God has given him. But for those who reject him, 'The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone.' And, 'He is the stone that makes people stumble, the rock that makes them fall.' They stumble because they do not obey God's word, and so they meet the fate that was planned for them. But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.

Peter lists four immense privileges that his readers should never take for granted. Following on from his call to unity, they are aspects of a status they enjoy as a group rather than as individuals.

His readers, Peter says, are, like the people of Israel, chosen by God, belong to God, and a nation devoted to God. Their calling includes both authority and service ('royal priests', following Jesus the servant king). They are like the cosmos in Genesis 1, called out of darkness into light, or like a baby emerged from the womb.

It is as if Peter wants them to look in the mirror and remind themselves of who they are. Humility is a virtue, but imposter syndrome can be powerful, so Peter is asking the church members to see themselves as God sees them, to hear his words of affirmation that remain true however inadequate they may feel.

To put on the kit of a famous club is to enter into its heritage of players who have worn that shirt with distinction in the past or whose feats are part of the club's folklore. To have been chosen to take that heritage forward can feel like a burden and is not to be taken lightly. How many fans would love to wear that kit, even once? If they suspect you are not pulling your weight, they might chant the awful words: 'You're not fit to wear the shirt'.

Dear God, thank you for calling me to be part of your people. Help me to accept the responsibility that comes with privilege. Amen.

Never, referee!

For the Lord's sake, submit to all human authority – whether the king as head of state, or the officials he has appointed. For the king has sent them to punish those who do wrong and to honour those who do right... You who are slaves must submit to your masters with all respect. Do what they tell you – not only if they are kind and reasonable, but even if they are cruel. For God is pleased when, conscious of his will, you patiently endure unjust treatment.

Referees make mistakes. Even though dissent is in football a bookable offence, some teams (and managers) have made protest into an art form. To try to prevent such intimidation giving teams an unfair advantage, nowadays video-assisted refereeing (VAR) is in place for big games – but still the decisions are contested! Dissent is beginning to be seen in rugby, too, and even in cricket.

Some clubs, however, have told their players not to protest at a perceived injustice, but to accept the decision and focus on the next passage of play. Getting steamed up about a referee's mistake never gets it changed, and the frustration can adversely affect the team's performance: letting it go is best for you as well as for the referee. The wise coach will instil this attitude long before the first game.

Sadly, corruption and bribery of match officials have been proven on rare occasions. What if the team faces not so much mistakes but deliberate bias? A match where the playing field is far from level? This seems to have been the situation facing Peter's churches. The authorities were not neutral – they were against them and could be cruel. Even in these circumstances, Peter urges a response that rejects complaint and resentment. Twice he uses the word 'submit'. Injustice there may be, but the Christian way is patient endurance.

Sometimes we see court cases in which Christians challenge the decisions of those in authority. They may be our democratic and legal right – but I wonder what Peter would say?

Dear God, you have instilled in humans a sense of fairness. Help me to be Christlike when I or other Christians seem to face injustice. Amen.

RICHARD MARTIN

The dirty tricks they play...

Finally, all of you should be of one mind. Sympathise with each other. Love each other as brothers and sisters. Be tenderhearted, and keep a humble attitude. Don't repay evil for evil. Don't retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God has called you to do, and he will grant you his blessing.

There is a challenge when the opposing team tries to find ways of getting under your skin, employing tactics designed to make you lose focus. Just as avoiding dissent is key to calm play, so is the refusal to retaliate when the gamesmanship begins. The coach will bring to the team's attention underhand ways opponents might use, such as sly fouls, timewasting, and sledging (a cricket term indicating verbal intimidation or distraction). Inevitably if you do retaliate the referee will spot it and penalise you, rather than the original offender. To keep your head in the face of such provocation is the mark of a dedicated sportsperson – to refuse to stoop to their level but to let your skill shine through.

In the UK, unlike in some countries, Christians face no state persecution. Many, though, know what it is like to be insulted or to have their views rejected. This can go on for years, at home, at work, or socially. It can be exhausting and dispiriting. How tempting to give them a piece of your mind! Peter says that is not the Christian way. Instead, respond by blessing them, and God in turn will bless you.

Being 'fouled' physically or emotionally hurts. What do we do with that pain? We can become hard, and let it bounce off us so others get hurt too. Or we can embrace it and let God transform it in us so goodness flows from us to others and from God to ourselves. It is much easier said than done in the maelstrom of busy, stressful living, and in a culture where becoming offended attracts such attention. Yet the challenge remains. How might I put Peter's teaching into practice today?

Dear God, help me to do your work in your way. Amen.

Injuries are part of the game

So then, since Christ suffered physical pain, you must arm yourselves with the same attitude he had, and be ready to suffer, too. For if you have suffered physically for Christ, you have finished with sin. You won't spend the rest of your lives chasing your own desires, but you will be anxious to do the will of God... Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. Instead, be very glad – for these trials make you partners with Christ in his suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing his glory when it is revealed to all the world.

God's desire for 'shalom', wholeness, and peace for individuals, communities, nations, and the cosmos is at the heart of the gospel. The healing ministry of the church reminds us to believe it even if the healing that ensues is not in the form we had hoped or expected.

The work of The Guild of Health and St Raphael (GoHealth), the Society of Mary and Martha (Sheldon Retreat), and others, helps Christians and churches to see that healing is needed for us, not just for others. Among us there are many who are wounded, perhaps dramatically by a breakdown, loss of faith, bereavement, or relationship closure, but often just worn down and exhausted.

Peter reminds us here that churches are to some extent casualty wards – communities where compassion and space is mutually offered and given, because we are all trying to live out the Lord's Prayer. The petition 'Deliver us from evil' is the last one on our lips. The first is 'Hallowed be your name'. In truly praying this prayer we accept the risk that in putting God first we might become damaged, and we acknowledge the need for healing.

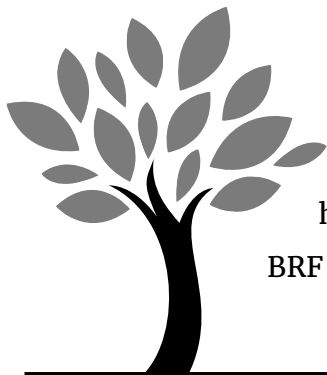
A footballer whose first priority is to avoid injury will not be very committed to the club's glory. Recognising this, modern teams employ experts in physiology and psychology, and create state of the art recuperation programmes and facilities. In showing the depth of God's love, Jesus embraced the pain of the cross. Peter says that in following him we should not be surprised if we get injured.

Dear God, help me to embrace the cross. Amen.

RICHARD MARTIN



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



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

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