

**Convener’s Challenge**

**2023-24**

**Book reviews**

**by Guild members**

**FOREWORD by Rae Lind, National Convener, 2023-24**

My aim this past year was to encourage people to tell me about good books which have had an influence on their faith and to have them write a short account, sharing how that special ‘one’ impacted their thinking most.

The featured selection of books is as varied as we are. The variety demonstrates our individuality, not only in our preferences, but in our relationship with God.

As you will know, the Holy Spirit of God is able to use any written word to influence our lives. You will therefore find in these resumés how certain writings contain words which have challenged the reader’s approach to life, contain various concepts which have enriched the mind and included themes which have brought reassurance to the heart.

Books, in my own experience, have been catalysts in shifting my thinking from general concepts about God to a much more expansive view of the God of the universe who, despite his vastness, is the God who knows and loves each of us through and through. Peterson’s wonderful paraphrase of John 4: 38 *The Message* puts the text this way: “*Come see a man who knows me inside out* “.

I hope that you will find this collection of resumés as fascinating as I did and that you, like me, will be moved to obtain some of these books for yourselves and enjoy devouring them in the days that lie ahead. I know that my Autumn reading list is now “sorted” thanks to the way which many have risen to this year’s Challenge. I am both hugely grateful and very impressed by the ways in which contributors have spoken of their choices and of the ways they have been inspired by them.

Should any book in the future make an impact, please feel free to let me know, via the Guild Office.

 **“Conversations – *The Message*, with its Translator”**

The book I have chosen is a contemporary version of the best book, the Bible. The language and metaphors are so accessible, bringing to life familiar and unfamiliar passages alike.

Eugene H. Peterson who produced “*The Message*” taught the languages of the Bible, Hebrew and Greek then became Pastor of the one congregation for thirty years. This paraphrase of the Scriptures was born out of his teaching and pastoral work within that one congregation. He found that very few were interested in reading the Bible, not caring to learn or explore its words or truths.

The aim of this paraphrase is to encourage and facilitate the individual’s walk with God through contemporary language, contemplative summaries, prayers and reflections. It also provides a nutshell outline of each book giving the reason why it was written.

It does not replace the translations which are more technical or expository, but I love its impact and tempo which brings an immediacy to the story of Scripture. Peterson said: “When we submit our lives to what we read in Scripture, we find that we’re being led, not to see God in *our* stories but to see our stories in *God’s*. God is the larger context and plot in which our stories find themselves.”

There is a freshness and challenging aspect to this translation which seems personal. The reader is asked to ponder questions reflecting on the text at certain intervals, leading to insightful truths about the individual as well as the Bible.

This is not a study Bible but a reading Bible. It is *well* worth a read!

***Rae Lind*, National Convener, 2023-24**.

**She had a Magic – The Story of Mary Slessor by Brian O’Brien**

The story of Mary Slessor is well known in Dundee. Born in 1848 in Aberdeen, the Slessor family moved to Dundee in 1859 and Mary, like most working class girls started work in the Jute mill as a half timer at age eleven, working half a day in the mill and attending the mill school the other half.

She was largely self-educated, studying at her loom and reading on the way to and from work. She applied to the Foreign Mission Board of the United Presbyterian Church, setting sail on the SS Ethiopia in 1876. On arrival in Africa she was assigned to Calabar. She faced many challenges as a woman in a country where women were not respected, but her faith sustained her throughout. She is well known for challenging the practice of abandoning twins in the jungle because they were thought to be evil, but she did much more than that. She gained the respect of the local people because she took the trouble to learn the local language so that she could communicate the gospel in words that people could understand.

As a child there were still people, like my grandmother Alice, who were alive when Mary Slessor came back to Dundee on furlough and who remembered when the news of her death at Calabar came in 1915. She was spoken about often in our house when I was growing up.

My admiration for Mary Slessor comes from the knowledge that she was not daunted by seemingly unsurmountable obstacles. She went forward in faith believing that this was her calling. When we think that we have things hard with fewer worshippers and fewer believers in Scotland, we should recall the example of Mary Slessor. If you are ever in Dundee, you can see the Mary Slessor stained glass window in the McManus Gallery.

***June Anderson, Broughty Ferry Guild***

**Unaplogetic, Francis Spufford**

When a few years ago I came across a 21st century defence of Christianity in a book entitled "Unapologetic" by an author named Francis Spufford, I was intrigued. The very first sentence had me hooked and I quote: "My daughter has just turned six. Some time over the next year or so she will discover that her parents are *weird.* We're weird because we go to church."

I have often felt very inarticulate when faced with trying to explain to non-churchgoers why I go to church and wondered if this was my way in.

He wants to warn his daughter about all the stereotypes with which non-Christian's label us - that we revel in pain and suffering, we are judgemental, dogmatic and a host of other labels which I am sure many of us have grown up with. He warns us that this book is called "Unapologetic" because it isn't giving an "apologia" - a defence, and he isn't sorry. He is not defending Christian ideas, many others have done that, rather it is a defence of Christian emotions.

Francis Spufford is not for the faint hearted. His argument is full of very pithy phrases as he dismisses any wish-washy approach to religion. What resonates with me is his claim that we ALL have the propensity to mess things up, we all FAIL, because we are HUMAN. Christianity is "insanely perfectionist" he points out, and if perfection is unattainable we need to "find the crack in everything". This for Spufford is where religion comes in. Christianity isn't for the "good" people, there aren't any "good" people, we cannot mend all that Is broken, we need help, and this, he says, Is "where we have arrived at God". Other books have given me inspiration, but this one has given me something more concrete to go into battle with.

***Glennys Ardin, Lochend & New Abbey Guild***

**The Drama of Living:  Becoming Wise in the Spirit, David F. Ford Canterbury Press, 2014.**

This book is well-written and easy to read.  It delves into the poetry of Michael O'Siadhail as well as the Gospel of John while offering insight on a rich life.  It is written as a sequel but you don't need to read the first book to thoroughly enjoy this one.  He speaks of wisdom from the perspective of different traditions, and includes chapters considering the importance of face-to-face interaction, the daily office and Sabbath.  One chapter asks through the lens of John's Gospel, what if the universe really is made by and for love?  He asks the reader to explore with him ending the book with an open ending, and what that might mean building on the concept of improvisation in music.  This book addresses many current issues from how we view politics to how we cope with genocide to "John's abiding/remaining/continuing is the secret of fruitfulness, shaped by our habits of mind, heart and body" (p. 19).  It is worth taking time to read this book.

***Rev Amy Bender, Moray Guilds Together***

**An Open Door by Maud Kells with Jean Gibson**

This story is set in The Congo and reveals the remarkable life of a young woman, Maud Kells who at 25 years of age, left Ireland to begin life as a missionary in the full knowledge, by choice, that she was replacing the previous missionaries who were martyred in the course of their work. As a trained midwife, she had to learn to turn her hand to anything in this, often volatile environment.

In every situation she found herself in, she prayed for guidance, strength and safety. Before each difficult and dangerous journey or operation or civil unrest, or even to overcome her fear of rats and mice, she prayed to be kept safe to continue her work and manage the situation.

In the knowledge that God would giver her a sign to know the way to go, she worked with the Congolese people for over 50 years. Maud always gave thanks for Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF)who provided the safe flight journeys as she accompanied the sick and injured in her own work, remaining appreciative that MAF pilots always prayed before a flight.

My prayers every morning have been my rock for many years. Maud Kells story and faith have encouraged me to increase my praying and have shown me a deeper understanding of that faith and what it means to know that God looks after me too.

***C M Butler, Grantully, Logierait and Strathtay Church***

**Jesus Calling by Sarah Young**

Eleven years ago, during a spell in hospital, I was given a present of a book entitled "Jesus Calling", by Sarah Young. It's a lovely book of devotions for every day of the year, and has become very precious to me, having read and re-read it most days over eleven years.

Each day is written as if Jesus Himself were speaking, and I still find it truly amazing how often I feel that the words are written specially for me! My stay in hospital was entirely unexpected and resulted in my having an emergency operation, so imagine my delight to find the following words in the devotional for the day on which the book was delivered to me: "Let Me infuse My peace into your innermost being I have taken you along a path that has highlighted your need for Me: placing you in a situation where your strengths were irrelevant and your weaknesses were glaringly obvious" . These words really spoke to

me then and I have come to love the words of the Saviour encouraging, challenging and so often reassuring me in my walk with Him. Every day there are two or maybe three Bible references, which, over the years I have read and marked in my Bible along with a relevant comment found in the book. I have given away many copies of this publication - and usually have a spare copy to pass on to someone who is finding life difficult. I would highly recommend this to anyone - but maybe especially to those who find it hard to concentrate on a novel, but can cope with short readings and retain what has been written.

***Margaret Clark, St Andrew’s Lhanbryde & Urquart Guild***

**Bruchko by Bruce Olson**

“Bruchko” is without doubt the finest book on Christian missionary enterprise which I have read in a very long time.

Its first incarnation was titled “For this Cross I’ll kill you!” - taken from the threat made by an oil-greedy opponent who set out to thwart the work of the author Bruce Olson.

Olson left home in the USA, without the blessing or support of his parents or his Church, as a 19-year-old boy with a burning Call/ desire to evangelise a murderous tribe of South American Indians. He arrived in the country with only 19 US dollars in his possession.For him, his initial experience meant capture, disease, terror, loneliness, and torture. But what he discovered by trial and error has revolutionised the world of missions.

Olson was “adopted” by a tribal family who taught him their language. It took 4 years before he was able to speak of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That opportunity came in a miraculous way, for he hit upon the idea of using the tribe’s traditional legend of the “Mighty Hunter” who had been offended and rejected by the tribe, and whose trail they had been unable to trace in the jungle. Olson explained he had found the trail and that it was in the heart of those who wished to pursue it.

Living with the Motilone Indians in Colombia since 1961, Olson has translated several books of the New Testament into their language, taught them health measures, agricultural techniques and the value of persevering their cultural heritage. He has won the friendship of five presidents of Colombia and has made appearances before the United Nations because of his efforts. Bruchko includes the story of his 1988 kidnapping by communist guerrillas and the nine months of captivity that followed when many of his captors were converted to Christ – so many, they had to release him. Olson's original story is an amazing account of how simple faith in Christ can make anything possible. His holistic approach to missionary endeavour is a model from which other cultures could learn, including our own.

I cannot speak highly enough of this book and I strongly commend it to fellow Guild members.

***Adam Donaldson, Individual member***

**Before the days draw in by Mary Kissell**

In this short and very readable book, written by Mary Kissell, we meet someone who lays out in simple chapters what she describes as, “My ordinary journey towards and extraordinary God”.

Mary is a woman of faith, and has been since hers teens, but her life changes quite dramatically when she feels prompted by the Holy Spirit to get up an hour earlier each day in order to make time to pray.

Chapter by chapter, Mary describes how, through prayer and an openness to the working of the Holy Spirit, her relationship with God deepens and she recognises how God has, does and will lead her through life.

Her life story is of course unique, describing life as a daughter, a woman, a wife, a mother, a nurse and most importantly as a woman of great faith. At times it may well chime with elements of our own experiences.

She would probably say that her Bible knowledge was not that great when she started out on this journey but it grows as the years go by and words of Scripture become fundamental to how she lives and the choices she makes.

***Chris Fulcher, Stranraer Guild***

**I heard the owl call my name by Margaret Craven**

 In some wildlife TV programmes the landscape seems strangely familiar although I had never been there. When in answer to the challenge this novel popped into my mind I knew why. Published first in 1967 it is set in the watery wilderness of British Columbia and has been read by me several times, lent to others who in turn have lent it on. It is a slim volume, easily lost on my crowded bookshelves but never forgotten. It is a story of life and death both of a man and a community.

A young priest, Mark who is unaware that he his dying, is sent to minister to a remote community. Brought up in a Christian context I have sometimes wondered about the effect of a new faith where there is an ancient cultures with long held beliefs. In this story it is with mutual respect, tolerance and patience which grow into love. The people Mark has come to serve know hardship and understand sacrifice.

The back story is inferred rather than told and the future unknown but in the present change is underway as the community faces up to the loss of old ways and patterns of living that is likely to be far reaching. Mark expects to leave this community and fears the return to the different values of the life he left on coming to be amongst these people. But there is mercy too in this story and it is on an errand of mercy when two men in a boat on a stormy night suffer a disaster of the fragile land itself. One man dies and the other returns to the place where a girl waits for him with love and with grief for Mark.

***Trish Gentry ( independent member formerly of Yetholm Guild)***

**Patrick Bronte Father of Genius by Dudley Green**

Revd. Patrick Bronte AB graduated from St John’s College Cambridge 1802, beginning his ministry with the Church of England.

Green users letters written by PB which have survived through the collections of the late

Revd. A. B. Nicholls.1 The letters are used in two ways: with an extract followed by a reflection, expanding both the significance and context of the letter, giving examples of PB as a social reformer, writing to the local press on important issues.

Letters exist between William Wilberforce MP and Mr Bronte who made known his views on the practice of slavery and the desperate need to abolish it. Whilst visiting Wilberforce House Museum in Kingston upon Hull, horror of suffering touched my school girl mind.

The book highlights PB’s ministry to the people of Haworth, his tireless campaigning to improve the living conditions of the poor cottars such as the village water supply tainted by the overflow from privies.

‘There is now a great want of pure water’ part of a letter from PB to the Secretary of the General Board of Health July 1851. The campaign for clean water resulted in an inspector conducting an enquiry on the sanitation of the village known as the Babbage report. In 1856 work began on a reservoir and eventually a constant supply of fresh water flowed to the whole village.

PB strove to establish a village school, in 1832 the New School Room was completed, opening first as a Sunday School, and then in 1844 also on weekdays. A master was employed with £80 from the National School Society.

For me, throughout the book I see an ambassador of Christ, may the Guild continue to serve the Lord, may we be ambassadors of Christ too.

In his own words

 ‘My aim has been … to teach Christ’

Note 1. The husband of PB’s daughter Charlotte.

***Brenda M Graham, Freuchie Parish Church Guild – North East Fife Guilds Together***

**The Scarlet Thread a novel by Francine Rivers which includes a Reading Group guide.**

This novel is about two women, centuries apart, who are joined through a tattered journal as they contend with God, husbands -even themselves- until they fall into the arms of the One who loves them unconditionally.  Many of us will identify with the emotions and dilemmas these women face and with the need to rely on whose we truly are.

**Sleeping Giant by Tommy MacNeil**

This book is a wake up call to us all to reconnect our hearts with God's heart, passion and vision.  A book to inspire us all at a time of so much uncertainty.  It is a book to read slowly and use the questions at the end of each chapter to reflect and pray.  To remember we are God's messengers but God is still in control.

**Help is Here by Max Lucado**

This book helped me to find fresh strength and purpose in the power of the Holy Spirit.   As max says God does not want a bunch of stressed-out, worn-out, done-in, and washed-up children representing him in the world.  He wants us to be fresher day by day, hour by hour. There are questions for reflection which can be used by a study group.

***Norma Henderson, Craiglockhart Guild***

**Romans: A letter that makes sense of life by Andrew Ollerton**

I probably never would have been aware of the book had I not been attending a Bible study group where we watched a video and the book was mentioned. Although Romans has sixteen chapters, the book covers them fully in ten and they are described by the author as a ‘mountain to climb’. The excitement of reaching the summit and then the descent are challenging but made me want to keep on the journey! There was much to consider in each chapter and the questions posed in the book were challenging. There was some repetition but as I read it helped me focus on the progress being made. It felt like an achievement to finish the book and encouraged me to keep referring to the Bible for further clarity. It made me consider what must it have felt like for those fledgling Roman believers taking a risk to follow Paul’s words of encouragement. For me, this book captures the message contained in Romans so well, that I feel I could read it again quite soon and learn so much more. I found that the book was interesting in content and reinforced its message which kept me on the right track as the chapters unfolded. Personally, I think it enhanced my understanding of Romans and I would recommend it to anyone thinking of studying this interesting Book of the New Testament.

***Yvonne Keith, Portobello & Joppa Parish Church Guild***

**The boy, the mole, the fox and the horse by Charlie Mackesy**

What a remarkable book. Do enjoy reading it; it is unique.

Meet the four ‘philosophers’ - the boy, the mole, the fox and the horse.

The Boy - asked by the Mole: “What do you want to be when you grow up?”

The Boy replied: “Kind”. Sometimes he admitted to feeling lost.

The Mole - so small, but “if at first you don’t succeed, have some cake”.

The Fox - silent, because “I often feel I have nothing interesting to say”.

The Horse - who can fly, “we are less scared together.”

So, they travel together, sometimes the boy and the mole riding on the horse’s back and the fox trotting along side.

They sit together and contemplate the beauty of the countryside, by day and by night.

They talk together about dark clouds and hurting hearts.

They talk about kindness and love and cake.

They talk about the things we talk about or maybe the things we do not talk about.

They are looking at the swans in the pond. “How do they look so together and perfect?”, asked the boy.

“There’s a lot of frantic paddling going on beneath”, said the horse.

The illustrations are wonderful; in particular the fox making a paw-printed heart on the earth, watched by the boy and the mole sitting on a branch.

There is also a piece of music to play. A wonderful gift for a friend. Thank you, Mr Mackesy.

***Elspeth Kerr, Jordanhill Guild***

**Billy Graham Freedom From The Seven Deadly Sins and Forgiveness by J Marsden.**

Both books meet me in a different place each time I read them as I have changed or just simply seeing things differently. Both are challenging, short and fit in my carry everything bag.

Praying many will table books that have been an influence in their Christian Walk.

***Helen Kerr, Glasgow East Guilds Together***

**Prayer, a biblical perspective by Eric J. Alexander**

As a worship leader in the local church, corporate prayer presents a challenge. How to lead the congregation effectively into the presence of God through prayer. It was for this reason that I was drawn to this slim volume about seeing prayer from a Biblical perspective- and what a journey of prayer adventure that was! The author traces prayer through the Psalms, the Old Testament and the New Testament, following the words of Jesus and Paul.

Our Lord Jesus prayed often, going away to lonely places to commune with His Father, and He taught His disciples how to pray by example, as well as responding when they asked Him to teach them to pray by giving them a pattern to follow. ‘This, then, is how you should pray,” Our Father in heaven hallowed be your name…..” (Matthew 5:9 NIV)

Surely, this is the plea of many Christians to God – Teach us **how** to pray.

The book assures us that prayer is for everyone, unrestricted by place or time while the Bible insists that prayer should be a priority in our Christian life, reminding us to pray always and not lose heart (Luke 18:1); to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17) and to devote ourselves to prayer (Acts 6:4). Alexander quotes John Calvin who is reported as saying, “Prayer is nothing else than opening up of our heart before God.”

Feeling inadequate before God when praying, I was reassured that this is a common issue with many, including those of the calibre of Martin Luther and the author himself.

While this book can be read easily in one sitting there is merit in taking longer and reviewing all the Biblical passages quoted.

***Elaine Melrose , Dunkeld and Meigle West Guilds Together***

**The Torn Veil -  The Story of Gulshan Esther as told to Thelma Sangster**

This is the story of how Jesus’ healing power breaks through to a Muslim girl.

Gulshan Esther was the youngest of five children born into a wealthy Muslin Family. Her mother died giving birth to her. Her father lover her dearly but she was a cripple and couldn’t  walk or look after herself.

Her father did everything he could to get her healed, by praying, seeking medical advice and even a trip to Mecca, still no healing.

Distraught after her father died she cried out in prayer - not using the formal ritual prayers, but from her heart in her own words. Jesus answered her and told her to read about Him in the Urdu translation of the Quran, in the Sura Maryam. She did and he healed her.

  When the family witnessed her healing they were all delighted but didn’t want all the honour to go to Jesus as it would bring dishonour on the family. But Gulshan Esther still gave all the honour and her life to Jesus, no matter the cost.

I was challenged by her willingness to give up her family, position, and wealth to be able to serve and follow Jesus.

I was encouraged that if we seek him with all our heart we too will find and know God our Saviour and Redeemer.

***Jean Mitchell, Cowdenbeath Trinity Guild***

**The word of the wives by Abbey Guinnes**

It was the title that attracted me to this book. The men in the bible are such dominant figures that I am afraid [ have never given much thought to their wives as people in their own right.

The author *with* her imagination and some humour gives them a voice. We find Mrs Cain struggling to understand her husband's rage and reading between the lines I think she might have been the victim of domestic abuse and Sheba, Mrs Solomon, who believing that she was the number one wife but is only one of many hundreds. My two favourites were Mrs Noah who patiently cleaned up

the filth created by all those animals in the ark and Mrs Abraham who having become a first time mother at, what about 100 years old, gladly suffered the smirks and gossip.

These are just four of the wives the author brings to life in ways that we can relate to while bearing in mind that this is a work of fiction.

I really enjoyed this book and found that while learning about the women gave me an understanding of the men in the bible and their faith and devotion to God.

***Mary McConachie St Leonard's Guild Dunfermline.***

**My Secret Life In Hut Six by Mair and Gethin Russell-Jones**

This is the remarkable story of Mair Russell-Jones who grew up in the Welsh Valleys and became one of the Code Breakers at Bletchley Park during World War 2.

When Mair left school, she went to train as a missionary at Mount Hermon Missionary Training School, London. She said that being a Christian made her feel alive and excited. After two terms she left and went back to Wales to study Music and German at Cardiff University where she became involved in leading the Christian Union. Her zeal and enthusiasm increased their numbers from “a small group of eccentric academics to one of the largest societies in the University.”

Mair’s degree in Music and German provided her with the skills required for Bletchley Park where she was to play her part in this extraordinary and secret operation. The story tells of her personal experiences including the stress of the work, the cramped and unhealthy conditions and long hours worked. Mair’s religious faith continued to be an important and sustaining part of her life and her relationship with her future husband, Russ, blossomed.

The Official Secrets Act was highly significant over most of Mair’s life as she could not divulge her role in the War and this was particularly stressful. However, unlike many of her colleagues Mair was eventually allowed to tell her story of the most wonderful time she had in Bletchley Park.

Mair’s son Gethin Russell-Jones, is the author of this book. It is both a pleasure to read and hugely informative.

The reader is drawn into the life of Mair which is simply told. I admired her strong faith and Christian values. In her own words
“Education lifts you up
Faith opens your eyes
Music is the language of love.”

**Gladys Montgomery, Liberton Kirk Guild.**

**Forgive by Timothy Keller**

Tim Keller writes books which always have a positive effect on my thinking. Keller who passed away this year, leaves a wonderful legacy of making Christian living accessible and attainable in an honest and winsome way. In his book FORGIVE, he excels in taking what seems to be often unachievable to become not only desirable but also ‘do- able’.

He quotes a movie ‘Places in the Heart’ to illustrate that the entrenched evils of racism and poverty cannot be overcome with the ‘pieties of liberalism, better education and simply trying harder to become good people’ but that ‘it is going to take something supernatural, something out of this world to change it’. Only the supernatural power of God will enable us not only to forgive our enemies but also to will for their good,

One abused person demonstrates how the justice of God sustains her by the cross of Jesus, where she states that the atonement ‘fills my pain with joy, hope and meaning’. This book expands on doctrine which works. Stoics instructed people not to take revenge in accordance with their philosophy of ‘let nothing bother you’. But mere resignation and detachment is not Christian forgiveness, and I can kid myself that I am forgiving when I am detaching and need to work on that. And Stoics despised wrong doers. This also challenged my thinking as it is easy to take the high moral ground and look down on oppressors and bullies.

I try to keep this quote in mind by Dostoyevsky: ‘loving humility is marvellously strong and there is nothing else like it. to not only forgive our enemies but also to will for their good’.

***Irene Munro – Ross Guilds Together (Ferintosh)***

**Recalibrate: Bible Study and Workbook.**

**Written by national and international staff serving with Mission Aviation Fellowship**

This book contains 28 biblical reflections with an opportunity to consider the themes of, “character, compassion, courage and commitment”, through what feels like, a kind conversation with God. This book could be used by an individual or as a group. It includes prayers, related bible passages, and questions to consider, based around an initial story from a MAF representative. At the end of each reflection, the book encourages the reader to consider a personal response. This personal response is the opportunity to **re-calibrate,** adjust, - just as the book title suggests.

This book has given me the chance to respond to the Bible and God’s word in a way that suits me. I found using the book a peaceful and contemplative process which makes praying easier, based on my own situation giving a focus to the experience. I really enjoyed the thematic approach that I could relate to – things that I worry about eg *time*- there is not enough; *love*- sometimes it is easy to love others, but not always; *isolation*- when it seems you are alone; *failure*-feelings of never being good enough or making mistakes; or *rest*, and how we can mange that. The workbook offers these themes and much more through the inspiring short stories from the MAF representatives to the bible passages, the prayers and questions.

This is a book that I have been able to pick up any time and I know that I will revisit, the stories, passages and questions for me. I feel that life changes how we respond to different things, at different times. but this, offers a reminder, that God is constant. The strength in this book lies with the carefully thought-out process, allowing a gentle and personal walk with God.

Thank you MAF.

***M Sherriffs, Grantully, Logierait and Strathtay Church Guild***

**The Hidden Years: a novel about Jesus by Neil Boyd**

As the title says, this is a novel about Jesus. It is a fictional account of how he may have lived the three years of his life before being baptised by John in the Jordan.

It paints vivid pictures of life in Nazareth and around the Sea of Galilee and beyond. Boyd describes vividly what might have happened when a huge swarm of locusts descended on Nazareth, destroying all the growing crops and the stored grain, forcing young men like Jesus to leave home and try to find work far away so that they could buy food for their families. It describes how they would stand in the market place waiting to be hired. It describes how Jesus may have met a group of fishermen who had a boat needing repaired. We walk with Jesus as he goes from Jerusalem to Jerico and is attacked by Zealots, and left injured by the roadside. And there is much more.

Although this is a novel, it helps to paint a very clear picture of the kind of life Jesus probably led, giving him the insight and experience which made his teaching and his parables so easily understood by the ordinary folk. We also meet a young man who was not afraid to stand up to authority and advocate for the voiceless in the society of his day.

To quote the book cover: *Jesus emerges at the advent of his public ministry as a person the reader has watched grow toward a heightened state of readiness, through three intense years of prayer, hardship, travel, relationships and temptations, in a world so desperately crying out to be saved.*

A very readable book of around 250 pages, depending on the version

***Elspeth Smith, Fife Guilds Together***