

Generously told story of journeying to ever-deeper trust in God

Living Well in the Presence of God: Everyday Spirituality for the Twenty-First Century, by James Harlow Brown (Morning Star Publishing, 2018)

reviewed by
Bishop Philip Huggins

PURITY OF intention marks James Harlow Brown's writing in *Living Well in the Presence of God*.

He begins: "I wrote this book because I want everyone to know God. Why? Because God is love and our lives are fuller, more joyful, less anxious" when we know God loves us day by day.

Somewhere the poet Rilke writes that you must have had many experiences of life's ups and downs, adventures and misadventures, everything from sunrises in the desert to sitting beside the dying, before maybe someday a poem, or in James' case a book, might emerge which distils that experience.

James writes out of his late in life discovery, helped by St Teresa of Ávila, the spiritual exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola and wise soul friends, that God has been drawing him into divine communion for decades!

James writes specifically from his own struggle and insights to see and appreciate the sacred in daily life, notwithstanding the impact of the "dominant western secular scientific culture".

It is a very personal book. James makes himself vulnerable to us as he shares from his journey of conversion and illumination.

This of itself is a generous gift but James is also a scholar and a teacher.

He has read widely and thought deeply about what will really help people live well in the awareness of divine presence. He wants to help us find an "Everyday Spirituality for the 21st Century".

Aside from the classical spiritual writers on the journey of a soul, he examines cognitive therapy, meditation and healing ministries to help guide our steps.

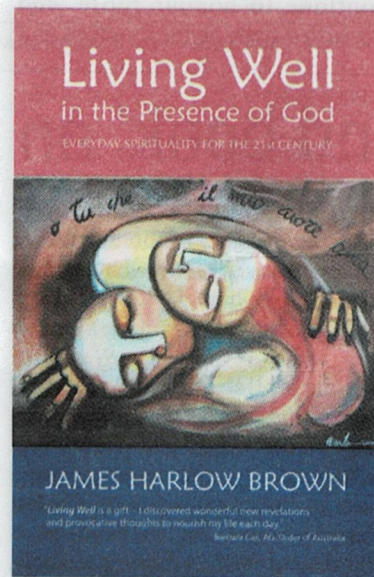
The middle of the book includes an elaboration of these steps: from "Pausing", through "Love" and "Passion", to "Waiting" and "Acting", so as to develop a transformed mindset.

There are biblical reflections, poems and personal stories to colour in the encouragement that James wants to give us as to God's providence and presence.

Now much older, James writes well about learning to live with paradox, including the paradox of ageing: holding on and letting go, trusting in God's love.

He also writes about how important it is, along the way, for people to really belong to a local church, not just to attend.

To this end, James retells the divine narrative, the "big picture"



of living in this amazing universe of God's creation. He wants to help us remember our story amidst the dominance of the surrounding "secular scientific" worldview.

This is a brave venture and

further conveys James' pure and loving intention. He retells the biblical narrative to help us "continually live well in God's presence", trusting in Jesus' encouragement and promises.

Accordingly, the cover of the book is a beautiful painting by Alba Lavermicocca about the intimate relationship between God and our soul.

Some fine people have already endorsed this book, including our own Bishop Brad Billings.

James, who has lived all over the world and worked in such diverse places as the Marine Corps, NASA and IBM, now offers us this gift from the journey of his soul into an ever-deeper, childlike trust in God's love. Thanks be to God!

Bishop Philip Huggins is President of the National Council of Churches in Australia and a retired assistant bishop in the Diocese of Melbourne.