

May–August 2023



Bible reflections

for older people

Do not be afraid

Lynn Goslin

**Think about these
things**

Martyn Payne

Bless you!

Lin Ball

Surprising saviours

Roger Combes



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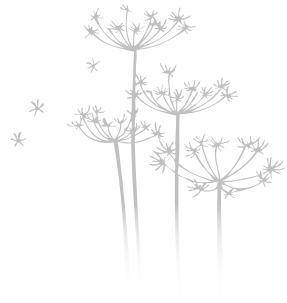
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About the writers



Lynn Goslin was born in Edinburgh and brought up in the Scottish Episcopal Church. She completed her degree in linguistics and English language before training as a speech and language therapist. Her first marriage took her, as vicar's wife, to Canada for a few years and then to parishes in Norfolk and Yorkshire. She's a home group leader and ardent bell ringer at her church in North Yorkshire.



Martyn Payne worked with BRF for 15 years before retiring in 2017. His last role was Messy Church researcher. He has a background in Bible storytelling and leading all-age worship and is passionate about the blessing that comes from intergenerational worship. For the past three years, he has been BRF's volunteer prayer advocate, writing prayers for social media and putting together the BRF prayer diary.



Lin Ball's career began in journalism over 40 years ago. She delights in the variety of work that has come her way: ghost-written books, magazine articles about missionary work, communications for Christian charities and radio interviews on disability. She spent twelve years as Bible resources editor with Scripture Union. Lin lives in the east Midlands, where she still writes, is active in eco-groups in her market town and enjoys long walks.



Roger Combes has served in a variety of parishes in London, Cambridge and Hastings. Before retiring he was archdeacon of Horsham. He and his wife, Christine, now live in Crawley, West Sussex, where Christine is the gardener and he cuts the grass.



From the Editor

Welcome.

I love the idea of ‘proper’ paper maps, but on a wet and windy moor, reading faint brown contour lines through foggy varifocals is a challenge, so I’m a recent convert to GPS devices. It took persistence to master the technology, but the effort paid off when I walked St Oswald’s Way last autumn. For much of the route, there was ‘no visible path’. Without my new best friend, Garmin, I might still be lost in Harewood Forest.

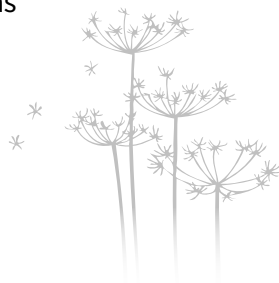
The device beeped when I was on course and helped me find my way back when I had strayed. It was a rare and quietly awesome experience to be alone in a landscape for hours and miles on end; it would have been daunting without the gadget in my hand.

Feeling lost, physically and spiritually, can be terrifying. But if we can resist panic in the midst of disorientation, we can learn new ways of thinking and being; we discover new depths of confidence both in our own resilience and in our trust in the constancy of God and the new paths he opens up before us.

Approaching Holy Island, at the end of St Oswald’s Way, the so-called pilgrim’s path is washed away twice a day. A line of slender marker posts shows the route across the wet sand at low tide, as powerfully symbolic of God’s guiding hand as the beep of my GPS device.

God bless you.

A handwritten signature in cursive that reads 'Eley'. Below the signature is a checkmark.



Using these reflections

Perhaps you have always had a special time each day for reading the Bible and praying. But now, as you grow older, you are finding it more difficult to keep to a regular pattern or find it harder to concentrate. Or, maybe you've never done this before. Whatever your situation, these Bible reflections aim to help you take a few moments to read God's word and pray whenever you have time or feel that would be helpful.

When to read them

You might use these Bible reflections in the morning or last thing at night, but they work at any time of day. There are 40 reflections here, grouped around four themes, by four different writers. Each one includes some verses from the Bible, a reflection to help you in your own thinking about God, and a prayer suggestion. The reflections aren't dated, so it doesn't matter if you don't want to read every day. The Bible verses are printed, but you might prefer to follow them in your own Bible.

How to read them

- **Take time** to quieten yourself, becoming aware of God's presence, asking him to speak to you through the Bible and the reflection.
- **Read** the Bible verses and the reflection:
 - What do you especially like or find helpful in these verses?
 - What might God be saying to you through this reading?
 - Is there something to pray about or thank God for?
- **Pray.** Each reflection includes a prayer suggestion. You might like to pray for yourself or take the opportunity to think about and pray for others.



Do not be afraid

Lynn Goslin

What would it be like to live without fear? It's difficult to imagine when 24-hour news broadcasts and social media bring us reports of wars and rumours of wars, of national disasters and individual tragedies.

Our circumstances may produce fear: of poverty, homelessness, loneliness, collapse of relationships, illness, death.

Even our faith can bring fear: perhaps the deep-seated fear of an early (mis)understanding of God as a God of impossible rules, of judgement and wrath. Or perhaps our own lack of self-esteem and self-worth results in fear: we feel only failure and unworthiness, believing ourselves to be unacceptable and unlovable.

I am always struck by the assurance and reassurance of the 'Comfortable Words' in the Book of Common Prayer service of Holy Communion. Again and again, in challenging situations in both Old and New Testaments, people are told not to be afraid and are given encouragement to persevere. This series explores some of those occasions so that we too might look past our fear and be comforted and encouraged.



Isaiah 43:1b (NRSV)

Called by name

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.

In many cultures knowing someone's name gives power. To be called by name can have negative connotations: you can be summoned; be discussed in your absence; be called out for bad behaviour; be identified as the person responsible.

On the other hand, your name said by a family member or friend instantly brings you and all that you are into the hearer's mind. In a family, a nickname or diminutive of your name identifies you as a treasured and loved part of the group.

In this verse from Isaiah, God first assures you – 'Do not fear' – then he calls you. This is not a summoning by the great headmaster in the sky, nor a suggestion that you belong to him as property. Rather, it is a loving call to one who is, as the metaphors have it, one of his flock, a branch of his vine and, loveliest of all, one of his children, identified as having his likeness upon you and known intimately to him by your own name. So hear his call and do not fear.

■ PRAYER

*Father of love, thank you that you know my name and know all that I am. Help me not to let fear stop me from answering your loving call.
Amen*

Isaiah 41:9b–10 (NRSV, abridged)

Chosen

I have chosen you and not cast you off; do not fear, for I am with you... I will strengthen you, I will help you.

Sorting out my overstuffed wardrobe involves conceding that choices I made while shopping have not always been good ones, and many clothes deservedly end up being cast off.

When Jesus chose his disciples, he made some odd choices: fishermen, a tax collector, a zealot. Fortunately, as Isaiah makes clear, God's choices do not get cast off as easily as clothing. When Peter hears Jesus say that his friends will leave him at the final moment, he declares unwavering faithfulness, only to then hear Jesus' prediction of his three-times denial. His utter desolation when he realises that he has done precisely as Jesus predicted is one of the most heartrending moments of the passion story. We have all been there, looking at Jesus and knowing that we have failed him yet again.

But we continue to be chosen. At the empty tomb, an angel sends a message of hope to the disciples 'and Peter' (Mark 16:7). What a cheering and encouraging message, assuring Peter that he was still chosen, loved and part of God's plans. Even after total failure, the promise stands for us as well: 'I will strengthen you, I will help you.'

■ PRAYER

*Lord, help me to rejoice in the knowledge that I am chosen as I am.
Strengthen me and help me in times of failure. Amen*

The Gift of Years



Debbie Thrower is the pioneer of BRF's Anna Chaplaincy for Older People ministry, offering spiritual care to older people, and is widely involved in training and advocacy.

Visit annachaplaincy.org.uk to find out more.

Debbie writes...

Welcome!

Martyn Payne has chosen one of my favourite Bible passages to focus on in this issue. It's from Philippians, so, as the old Collect goes, 'mark, learn and inwardly digest':

'Whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things' (Philippians 4:8, ESV).

It is wise advice Paul dispenses here. Cognitive behavioural therapy helps people to manage problems by changing the way they think and behave. In a similar vein, by reading the Bible, exposing ourselves to what is positive and truthful, we can reframe our perspective.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul's urging to concentrate on what is honourable, pure, pleasing and commendable is not just wishful thinking. It is a vital tool for resilience, for combatting thoughts and images which can drag us down.

I hope you'll find much in these pages to 'think about', be encouraged by and to buoy you up.

Best wishes





Enabling all ages to grow in faith



Anna Chaplaincy
Living Faith
Messy Church
Parenting for Faith

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A daily companion to keep by your side

Written by older people for older people, these reflections are designed to bring hope, assurance and sustenance, reminding the reader of the presence and love of God. Each issue contains 40 Bible reflections and prayer suggestions to use and revisit as often as is needed.



In the central section, Pioneer of BRF's Anna Chaplaincy for Older People ministry **Debbie Thrower** offers interviews and ideas to encourage and inspire.



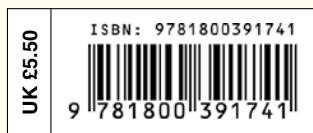
Bible Reflections for Older People is edited by **Eley McAinsh**.

In this issue...

We welcome **Lynn Goslin**, whose reflections on letting go of fear are thoughtful, encouraging and comforting in equal measure. **Martyn Payne** writes on Paul's call to the Philippians to focus on all that is honourable, true and pure, **Lin Ball** considers what it means to be 'blessed' and **Roger Combes** writes about the surprising saviours who have such an important role in both Old and New Testaments.



The Lord will keep your going
out and your coming in from
this time on and forevermore.
Psalm 121:8 (NRSV)



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