

May–August 2024



Bible reflections

for older people



**Conversations with
Jesus**

Lynn Goslin

Have faith in God

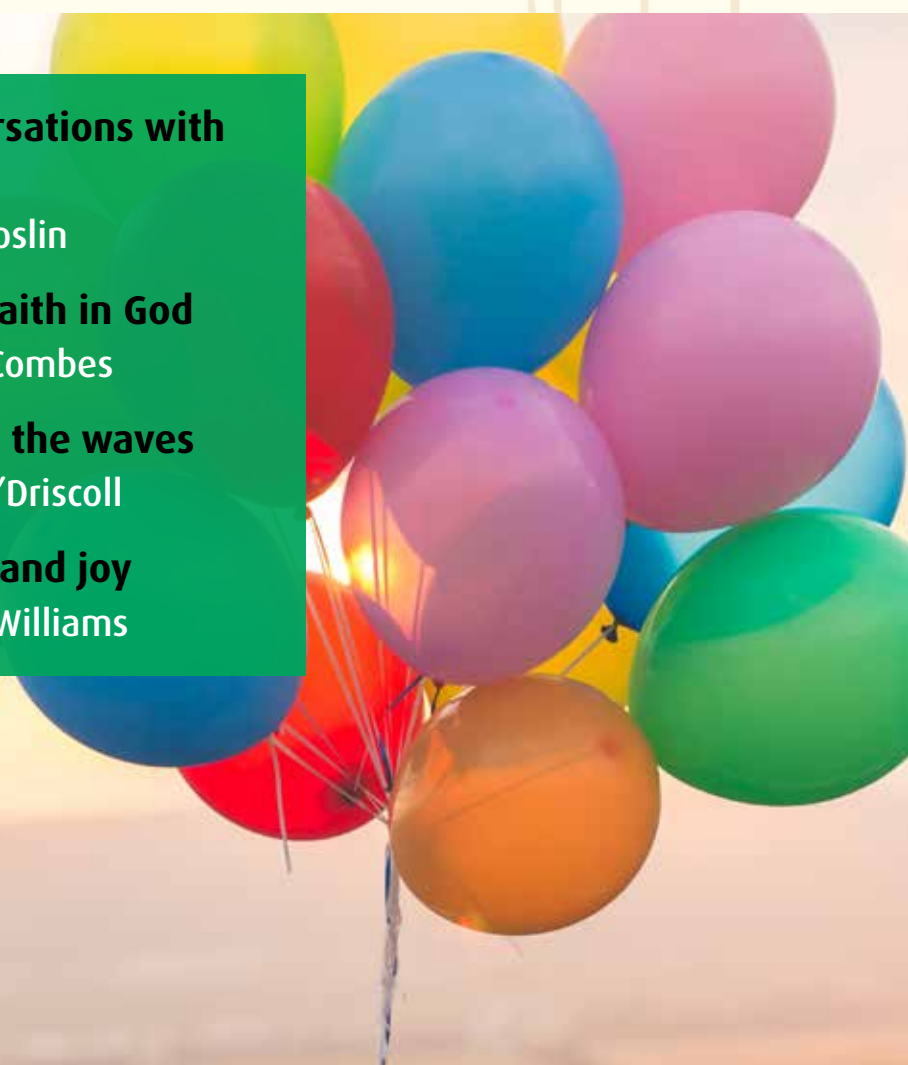
Roger Combes

Within the waves

Clare O'Driscoll

Peace and joy

Emlyn Williams



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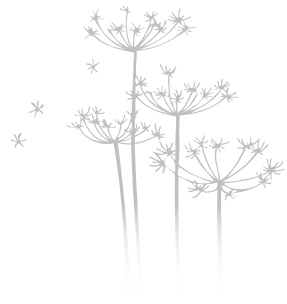
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About the writers



Lynn Goslin was born in Edinburgh and brought up in the Scottish Episcopal Church. She acquired a degree in linguistics and English language before training as a speech and language therapist. Her first marriage took her, as a vicar's wife, to the diocese of Yukon in 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.



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, near Gatwick airport. They have two daughters and a small, energetic grandson.



Clare O'Driscoll worked in Bible translation administration for 13 years before leaving for a more freelance life. Since then, she has been giving Spanish and French tuition and writing occasional articles for Christian publications. She is also part of the team of volunteer editors at *Magnet* magazine. She loves the sea and is currently working on a writing project about beach cafés. Clare lives in West Sussex with her family.



Emlyn Williams worked for Scripture Union for many years, in various places and roles, particularly relating to schools. He is a writer of many individual and group Bible materials. Following three years working with an Anglican church in Southampton, he retired and now lives in Norfolk, where he continues to write.



From the Editor

Welcome

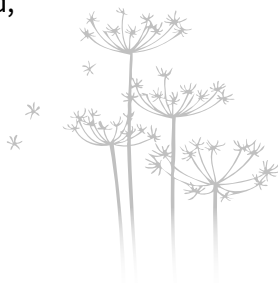
Walking near my home one day, a tiny hazelnut bounced off my head and into the tangle of brambles at the side of the track. So small and new, the nut was bone white, with a spikey green ruff. Rolling it on my palm, I thought of Chicken Licken, who was convinced the sky was falling in when an acorn landed on her head. She rushed around, spreading panic about an imagined catastrophe, like so many lurid social media campaigns today. It did not end well.

Many of the reflections in this issue are, by contrast, about good endings: about how keeping faith in the face of real problems and catastrophes, large and small, can make us in some way deeper, stronger, more peaceful.

One of the most enduring encouragements to faith and trust in God comes to us from the 14th-century mystic, Mother Julian of Norwich. In her *Revelations of Divine Love*, she recalled contemplating ‘a little thing the size of a hazel nut’ in the palm of her hand. She wrote:

‘I looked at it with my mind’s eye and I thought, “What can this be?” And the answer came, “It is all that is made.” I marvelled that it could last, for I thought it might have crumbled to nothing, it was so small. And the answer came into my mind, “It lasts and ever shall because God loves it.”’

Go well



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.



Conversations with Jesus

Lynn Goslin

In my previous work as a speech and language therapist, I spent hours listening to, transcribing and dissecting conversations between people. The skills of listening, turn-taking, relevance, grammar and speech never cease to amaze me, and it is no wonder that, for many people, communication is difficult or unsuccessful.

In this series I have 'listened to' conversations between Jesus and individuals where both sides' contributions have been 'transcribed' by the gospel writers. What surprised me is not so much Jesus' graciousness and sensitivity, his quickness of perception and his understanding of the human situation, but rather the way in which he draws out from the other person their deepest and truest selves, accepts them as they are and leads them on to think differently.

We too have our own conversations with this same Jesus: sometimes they seem one-sided, fraught with difficulty in expressing our complex needs and feelings. These gospel conversations assure us that Jesus seeks us out as individuals and meets us where we are and as we are.

If possible, take time to read the entire conversation for each reflection, given next to the Bible reference.



John 4:17–18 (NRSV, abridged)
Full conversation: John 4:5–30

Getting to the truth

**The woman answered him, ‘I have no husband.’ Jesus said to her...
 ‘What you have said is true!’**

It was a family joke that my father, left on a seat while we went shopping, would invariably be chatting with a total stranger on our return.

Jesus starts this conversation with the unnamed woman at the well by simply requesting a drink; what follows is a full-blown debate about honesty before God. The woman does everything to deflect attempts to delve into the truth of her life; she brings out all the divisive stereotypes – Jew versus Samaritan, male versus female, differing religious history and practices. But at each deflection Jesus presses her to face and acknowledge her truth.

Finally, a direct challenge from Jesus results in her first honest response, ‘I have no husband’, which Jesus acknowledges as true. Again she resorts to distraction – worship here, or in Jerusalem? – but Jesus returns the focus to her relationship with God who is to be worshipped in spirit and, tellingly, in truth. Her eventual honesty is rewarded by Jesus’ own honesty: for the first time he openly admits his Messianic role: ‘I am he’.

As our conversations with Jesus deepen, we find ourselves confronting uncomfortable truths. Only then do we understand, not only that he knows everything that we have ever done, but that he does not turn away.

■ PRAYER

Lord, help me to face my uncomfortable truths and know your loving acceptance. Amen

Luke 19:4–5 (NRSV, abridged)
Full conversation: Luke 19:1–10

Trying to see

[Zacchaeus] ran ahead... to see him, because he was going to pass that way... [Jesus] looked up and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.’

At a recent pop concert my daughter was thrilled to be picked out of the 21,000-strong crowd and shown on the on-stage screen, chatting with the star herself. ‘She loved my bright pink top, Mum!’

Imagine Zacchaeus, caught up in the crowd’s excitement but unable to see, climbing up a tree (probably uncomfortably) to then be noticed and addressed by the ‘star’ out of all the people amassed there. For Zacchaeus, right time, right place.

It wasn’t totally by luck, however; he had worked at this: ‘he was trying to see who Jesus was’ and he followed the lead of his restless heart, working out Jesus’ probable route and overcoming the problem of seeing over the crowd. He placed himself at the scene, and Jesus responded with the challenge ‘I must stay at your house’ – not a fleeting encounter but one that will change Zacchaeus’ life. He in turn rises to the challenge and finds that, while he thought he was searching for Jesus, Jesus was searching for him: ‘The Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.’

Sometimes, when we feel lost, all we need to do is sit – physically, mentally, emotionally and sometimes uncomfortably – in the place where we are most likely to be met by the one who seeks us.

■ PRAYER

Lord, stay at my house today. Amen

The Gift of Years



Debbie Thrower is the pioneer of BRF Ministries' 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!

In this issue, I am drawn to all that Lynn Goslin has discovered about Jesus' approach to people. He is the consummate listener. We can learn much from his example; 'What do you want me to do for you?' is his oft-repeated question. Jesus knows how to reach into the heart of our concerns. When I first came across Abraham Schmitt's words, I knew I wanted to share them in the *Anna Chaplaincy Handbook*. They are useful pointers for all of us in our different relationships:

'Listening with love transforms what it loves... To listen totally means that one takes another's whole life into one's being and cares for it... People intuitively measure the depth of love of all persons in all interpersonal relationships. If love is felt to be genuine, they will reveal much. If it is lacking, they will then say nothing important... Listening on this level is a creative art. It means that the fragmented pieces of a person are brought together into a single meaningful whole. A new life is born at that moment.'*

I hope this edition of reflections conveys to you the peace and joy of Christ's love.



* Abraham Schmitt, *The Art of Listening with Love* (Abingdon Press, 1982)



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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 helpful.



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



Bible Reflections for Older People is edited by Eley McAinsh.

In this issue...

Lynn Goslin listens in on some illuminating conversations with Jesus and Roger Combes explores inspiring stories of faith from Moses to Mary. Clare O'Driscoll finds vivid metaphors for the Christian life 'within the waves' and Emlyn Williams reflects on the source of true peace and joy.



Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.

John 7:38 (NIV)

