

September–December 2025



# Bible reflections

for older people

**Tramping with Jesus**  
**Erica Roberts**

**Jars of clay**  
**April McIntyre**

**Time to serve**  
**'Tricia Williams**

**The hope of glory**  
**Angela Tilby**



# Bible reflections

## for older people



Ministries



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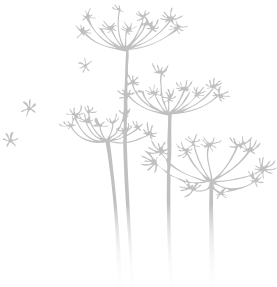
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## About the writers



**Erica Roberts** is a former paediatric oncologist. As an Anglican priest, she has been passionate about her role as city chaplain for older people in Southampton. Supporting this work, she founded the charity Caraway in 2019 which has worked in close partnership with Anna Chaplaincy ever since. This summer she and her husband ‘retired’ to Devon.



**April McIntyre** lives in Derbyshire with her husband Mike and serves as an Anglican lay minister. In recent years, she has been using writing as part of her Christian ministry. Now published locally and nationally, she is a member of the Association of Christian Writers and self-published a small book of reflections and poems in 2022.



**Tricia Williams** is a freelance writer and editor with a passion for helping people engage with God’s word. She has a special interest in the spiritual support of people living with dementia and is the author of *God’s Not Forgotten Me* (Cascade Books, 2022). She is married to Emlyn (also a writer for *Bible Reflections for Older People*) and has two adult children and one granddaughter.



**Angela Tilby** worked for the BBC as a producer of religious programmes for 22 years. Ordained in 1997, she became a tutor at Westcott House in Cambridge. After some years as a parish priest she moved to Oxford as diocesan canon of Christ Church Cathedral. She writes for the *Church Times*, broadcasts frequently on Radio 4’s *Thought for the Day* and is now a canon emeritus of Christ Church Cathedral.



## From the Editor

Welcome!

This issue spans the season of Remembrance. When Remembrance Sunday and Armistice Day come, I'm sure our screens will be full of images from the commemorations of the 80th anniversary of VE Day on 8 May. Inevitably there are fewer and fewer veterans on parade each year, but the proud nonagenarians in Whitehall, and at war memorials around the country, are a poignant and humbling reminder of the courageous sacrifices made in the name of service, peace and freedom.

Last November I visited the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire. A stunningly beautiful site hosting over 400 memorials and 25,000 trees, it's described as a '150 acre living landscape'. Planting only began in 1996, on the site of an old quarry. Officially opened in 2001, the Arboretum now, rightly, attracts over 300,000 visitors a year.

From the Armed Forces Memorial to the brightly painted carousel horse of the Showmen's Guild, the hundreds of memorials pay tribute to members not only of the armed forces, but of the emergency services and civilian organisations. At the heart of the arboretum is the Millennium Chapel of Peace and Forgiveness, the only place in the country where the Act of Remembrance is observed daily.

The National Memorial Arboretum is a remarkable embodiment of peace, reconciliation and remembrance, and on a site once scarred by decades of quarrying, the healing of the very earth beneath our feet.

Go well

Eley



## 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.



# Tramping with Jesus

Erica Roberts

**‘As they talked and discussed these things, Jesus himself suddenly came and began walking with them’ (Luke 24:15, NIV).**

In many stories about Jesus, we find him walking: around Lake Galilee, through Samaria en route to Judea, north towards Caesarea Philippi, across the river Jordan and always, of course, walking purposefully towards his final journey into Jerusalem. In Luke 24, although initially unrecognised, we join Jesus as he walks towards Emmaus with two of his followers.

On a recent trip to visit family in New Zealand, I was fortunate to go on a three-day hike, or tramp as they are known by the locals, carrying all our provisions and staying in walking huts along the way. With a chronic knee problem, this tramp felt like a significant achievement, and sharpened into focus the surrounding beauty, the people we met and the physical demands of a long walk.

The following notes are a result of my reflections over those three days as I imagined Jesus tramping with me, enjoying the scenery, joining in conversations and, as he did with his disciples, teaching me more about living as one of his followers. I invite you to join me on this tramp with Jesus over the coming days.





**Matthew 4:19–20 (NIV)**

## Anticipation

**‘Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will send you out to fish for people.’ At once they left their nets and followed him.**

I wonder what gives you that buzz of anticipation. Can you remember daydreaming about a long-planned holiday, poring over travel guides as the excitement builds or wondering what to pack? Of course, that wonderful feeling of anticipation often comes from the smaller things in life, waiting for a good friend to visit or a package to arrive, or perhaps imagining a square of chocolate melting in your mouth.

Called to follow Jesus, the disciples had no time to plan or pack a bag. We are told that they left their nets at once and followed him. However, they were not unprepared; they had been watching Jesus, talking about him and listening to him. I suspect God was already creating a longing in their hearts that was crying out to be met. In stepping out to follow Jesus, each day of their journey ahead would have been filled with glorious anticipation, as Jesus gradually revealed more about himself to them.

As we spend time with Jesus, I wonder how you feel about the journey ahead. I hope you’re also filled with glorious anticipation, unbri-dled curiosity and a willingness to go where Jesus leads. It is a great adventure.

### ■ PRAYER

*Lord Jesus, knowing our fears and our doubts, we pray for hearts full of glorious anticipation for the journey ahead with you. Amen*

**Luke 9:3 (NIV)**

## **The baggage we carry**

**[Jesus] told them: ‘Take nothing for the journey – no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra shirt.’**

Before we set off on our three-day tramp in New Zealand, I thought very carefully about what to pack. I didn’t want to carry any more than I needed, knowing how tired my legs would become as the miles stretched out, and yet I needed to ensure I had enough for the journey, including food, a first-aid kit and a head-torch.

When Jesus sent his disciples out, he instructed them to take nothing. I honestly can’t imagine taking absolutely nothing with me; in fact, it doesn’t even seem very responsible. However, Jesus wanted his disciples to depend on the hospitality of strangers and, in their vulnerability, enable others to bless them with generosity. In return, the disciples shared the most precious gift they had with them, the good news of Jesus.

Sometimes we are encumbered with a metaphorical bag that weighs us down. In Hebrews we are reminded to ‘throw off everything that hinders’ (12:1). We are burdened by our anxieties, weighed down by our guilt and entangled with shame. The author in Hebrews continues by encouraging us to ‘fix our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith’ (v. 2). Tramping with Jesus means we can lay down our burdens, lift our heads high and confidently step out with faith along the path ahead.

### **■ PRAYER**

*Loving Jesus, help us keep our eyes firmly fixed on you. Amen*

**Psalm 77:19 (NIV)**

## Making footprints

**Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters, though your footprints were not seen.**

I love the sensation of sand under my feet as I walk along an untouched beach. Looking back, a single line of footprints is visible, which lasts only a moment when the sand is wet and certainly no longer than it takes for the tide to rise and wash them away. Tramping in New Zealand came with strict instructions to leave nothing behind, including bagging up our rubbish to take away. Therefore, leaving our footprints, albeit for a moment, left only the briefest memory that we had passed that way as our footprints intermingled with others – young, old and all shapes and sizes.

Our psalm today refers to God's invisible footprints, despite the visible consequences of God's actions creating a life-changing path through the waters, referring to the parting of the Red Sea, as Moses led the Israelites to freedom. In our journey of faith, we may not see God's footprints, but the impact of his presence is so often known as lives are transformed and guidance revealed.

Like Moses, we need to trust that God will not only be our guide but also intervene to clear the path ahead of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. I wonder where you hope to see the impact of God's footprints today. Ask him now for what you need.

### ■ PRAYER

*Gracious Father, thank you for the footprints you leave in our lives.  
Amen*

## Exodus 13:17a (NIV)

# Detours

**When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter.**

Some of our New Zealand tramp was dependent on the tide-times. Not starting early enough one morning, I was disgruntled to miss the long and beautiful walk across a beach at sunrise and to then discover that the detour both was longer and included a steep hill. Nevertheless, the detour brought unexpected joys, a wonderful footbridge and glorious early-morning birdsong.

Detours are unexpected and usually unwelcome. Think about Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*. She hoped to find a land over the rainbow, where troubles would melt like lemon drops. In fact, her challenging adventures through Oz shaped and matured her and gave her a better appreciation of her home in Kansas.

The same is true for our lives, when something unexpected explodes into our daily routine, causing upheaval and unwelcome changes. These times can be hard, even painful to navigate, but in the same way that God protected the Israelites as they took a long detour through the wilderness, so God promises to protect and guide us through the detours in our own lives.

Detours may be confusing, complicated and challenging, but through them our lives can be shaped, as we learn to depend on God, and place our trust in him for the way ahead.

## ■ PRAYER

*God, our guide and protector, help us to trust you in the detours of our lives. Amen*

## Psalm 119:133 (NIV)

# Carrying poles

**Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me.**

Living for many years with a damaged knee, I have discovered how useful walking poles can be, particularly on those treacherous descents. Not only do they take weight off your knees, but they stabilise your core muscles and are useful to test the terrain ahead. Making use of poles engages many of our muscles, providing a good whole-body workout.

In our journeys through life, it can be easy to ‘go it alone’, not turning to God for help and guidance. We have a faith, we pray, but we leave God out of our daily lives. In our psalm today we are reminded that our footsteps can be directed by God’s word. Carrying God’s word with us throughout life, being steeped in the stories of God, memorising verses to encourage and comfort us when times are tough, is like carrying walking poles.

Scripture guides us on those treacherous descents when we feel anxious and afraid; God’s word helps us test the terrain ahead when we are making significant decisions; and the truth we find in scripture gives us the confidence to hold our heads high as we move through the complexities of life. Moreover, being grounded in God’s word maintains our spiritual fitness, so that when we stumble, we are equipped to deal with unexpected obstacles in our path.

## ■ PRAYER

*Read a favourite verse and give thanks to God for the gift of his word.*

## Psalm 25:4–5 (NIV)

# Signposts

**Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Saviour, and my hope is in you all day long.**

Navigation has changed dramatically over the years. I suspect you'll remember poring over a map when planning a long journey. And what about the local A-Z, always to be found dog-eared in the car ready for navigation to a particular address? In our youth, many of us will also have learnt to use a compass alongside a map. Nowadays of course, we just follow a satnav or a map on our phones: extremely efficient, but we can easily lose the wider geographical perspective.

On our tramp in New Zealand, we were fortunate to follow clear and efficient signposts, found in all the National Parks, with alternative routes offered depending on tide-times and weather. Good directions bring confidence and enable the journey to go smoothly.

Along our lifepath there will be twists, turns and signposts. Like the psalmist, we trust that God will show us the path to take. I believe that God loves to be creative in the way he directs us, speaking through the beauty of his creation, revealing himself in scripture, prayer or wise counsel from another. However, we will only hear the whisper of his voice if we choose to be attentive and make space to listen.

## ■ PRAYER

*Creator God, help us to be attentive to your voice today. Amen*

## 1 Kings 2:1, 7 (NIV)

# Companions on the way

**When the time drew near for David to die, he gave a charge to Solomon his son... ‘But show kindness to the sons of Barzillai of Gilead and let them be among those who eat at your table. They stood by me when I fled from your brother Absalom.’**

I love hearing stories from those who walk the Camino de Santiago, pilgrims journeying towards their goal of Santiago de Compostela, often travelling alone but meeting companions on the way – sharing stories, mutual support and encouragement. During our Antipodean tramp, enjoying a moment with a fellow walker was one of the joys, discovering something of their lives, sharing advice and even watching a sunset together.

Today we hear about Barzillai, perhaps my favourite hidden biblical character, an older man who offered support and companionship to David on his flight from Absalom. Do read the story in 2 Samuel 17:27–29 and 19:31–39. David is so grateful for Barzillai’s help that on his return he invites him to Jerusalem, where Barzillai can be provided for in his older years. With wisdom, Barzillai declines, acknowledging that he will be more comfortable near his own family, but suggests a younger man, Kimham, should go instead, providing an opportunity of a lifetime.

Spend some time giving thanks for companions that God has placed alongside you, those who have brought solace or support, for a moment, or maybe a lifetime.

## ■ PRAYER

*Lord Jesus, show us who we could offer companionship to today.  
Amen*

## Matthew 26:26 (NIV)

# Capturing memories

**While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take and eat; this is my body.’**

Throughout Jesus’ adult ministry he captivated his audiences with stories that were grounded in everyday life, stories that stretched their imagination and challenged their understanding of God. Stories such as the kingdom of heaven being like a mustard seed, a lost son who is welcomed home despite squandering his inheritance or that wonderful image of the bread and wine immortalised in the story of the last supper.

Stories like these are memorable and are captured in our imagination. We have our own stories of God’s faithfulness that can be passed on to others, just as the stories of Jesus have been passed down through the centuries. One story I share came as an auditory reminder of God’s compassionate care as I heard a bird singing outside, a moment that wonderfully spoke to me of God’s goodness at a time when I felt particularly vulnerable after a period of ill health and dependence on others.

Just as we love to capture memories of our lives in a photo, or perhaps a journal, so we can also capture our faith memories to share with others. I wonder if you could share some of your memories of God’s faithfulness with someone else today.

## ■ PRAYER

*Living Lord Jesus, as a master storyteller, help us to share our own stories of your hope and love. Amen*



## Psalm 121:1–2 (NIV)

### Pausing

**I lift up my eyes to the mountains – where does my help come from?  
My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.**

I wonder how often we are fully present in the moment, not distracted by the world around us or preoccupied by events unfolding in our own lives. I love watching my new grandson gaze intently at his mother, a smile breaking out across his face. Nothing will distract that gaze which is building trust and deepening the bond of love.

In Psalm 121 we can imagine the author pausing, embracing the beauty of the mountains. It is in the pausing that the psalmist has space to consider this life-changing question, ‘Where does my help come from?’ It is in the pausing that God reveals himself in profound ways, and we are fortunate that the psalmist recorded his revelation for us.

I slowly recited Psalm 121 as I paused at the foot of Aoraki, Mount Cook, hidden in the mist, and yet still imposing in its grandeur. As I paused and waited awhile, God reminded me that he, like Aoraki, may not be clearly visible, but he is and always will be present. I wonder if you could find a moment today to pause, lay aside any distractions and read Psalm 121 slowly, asking God your own question and see what he says in return.

### ■ PRAYER

*‘The Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore’ (Psalm 121:8). Amen*

## Matthew 2:1 (NIV)

# Arriving

**After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem.**

After a long journey, it is wonderful to arrive. Following our three-day tramp in New Zealand, we were extremely dusty with weary legs. A hot shower, a freshly prepared meal and clean sheets rather than our sleeping bags were readily welcomed. The tramp had taken us to places of outstanding beauty, we had met some interesting people, exchanged fascinating stories, and yet it was still good to arrive.

The journey of the Magi must have been exhausting and dangerous. Although they travelled for weeks searching for Jesus, we know little of their journey, the beauty or wildness of the terrain, the strangers they met or companionship they shared. For the Magi the focus was the destination, and they were determined to go to great lengths to find this new king.

Their destination is also our destination. Jesus was waiting for them, as he is waiting for us. How wonderful that Jesus tramps with us day by day, sustaining, encouraging and guiding us, and yet Jesus is also waiting to welcome us home when we arrive at our heavenly destination. One day, like the Magi, we will come face to face with Jesus and our response, like theirs, will be to bow down and worship.

### ■ PRAYER

*Heavenly Father, help us to have hearts full of hope and anticipation for the day when we will see you face to face. Amen*

## 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 helpful.



In the central section Debbie Thrower, founder of BRF Ministries' Anna Chaplaincy for Older People, offers interviews and ideas to encourage and inspire.



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

### In this issue...

We welcome April McIntyre to *Bible Reflections for Older People* and love her first series on 'Jars of clay'. Erica Roberts shares insights from a three day 'tramp' in New Zealand, 'Tricia Williams writes about the importance of responding to God's call whatever our age and Angela Tilby brings the issue to a close with a wonderful series on 'The hope of glory'.



**'God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.'**  
**Colossians 1:27 (NIV)**

