

January–April 2026



Bible reflections

for older people

High places

Geoff Lowson

Calling in later life

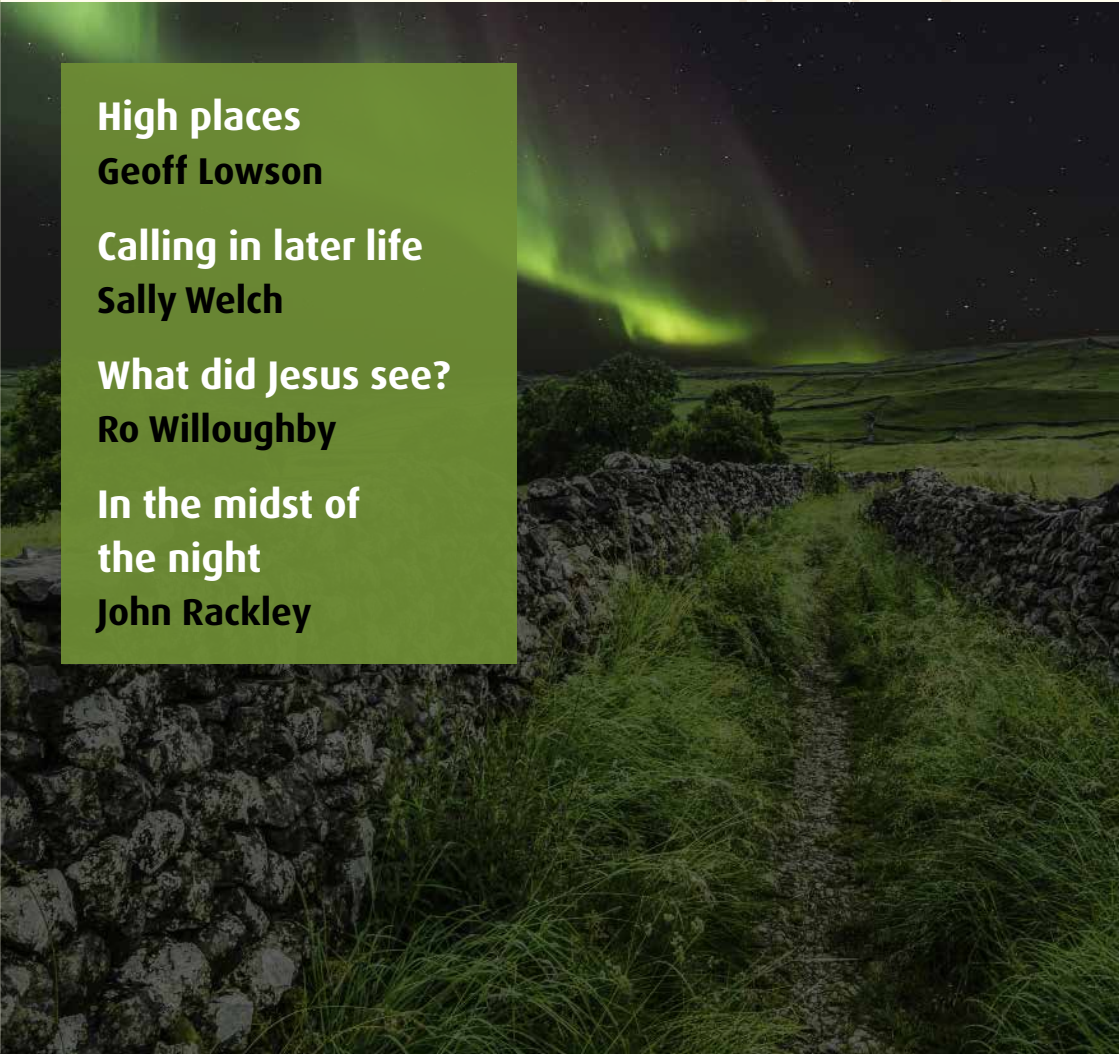
Sally Welch

What did Jesus see?

Ro Willoughby

**In the midst of
the night**

John Rackley



Bible reflections

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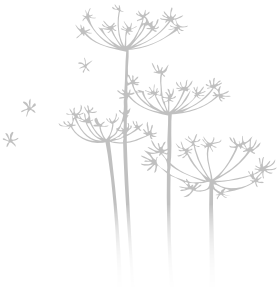
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About the writers



Geoffrey Lowson is a retired priest living in Upper Teesdale, an area of southwest Durham. In addition to teaching and parish ministry, he spent 21 years working for the mission agency USPG. He has also written for *New Daylight*.



Sally Welch is vicar of the Kington group of parishes in the diocese of Hereford and is an expert on pilgrimage and labyrinths. She has written numerous books for BRF Ministries and other publishers and was the editor of *New Daylight* Bible reading notes for many years. She was a residentiary canon at Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, and was formerly prayer and spirituality advisor for Oxford Diocese.



Ro Willoughby has been writing and editing Christian resources for many years. She has recently been licensed as a lay minister at St Chad's Woodseats in Sheffield where she is engaged in ministry with people of all ages. It is a great joy that she now lives close to her children and grandchildren as well as close to Bakewell and Chatsworth House, although she hasn't yet received an invitation to the ball!



John Rackley has over 40 years' experience in pastoral ministry. He is an associate minister with a Leicestershire LEP and Methodist circuit. He is currently working on the relationship between biography and belief.



From the Editor

Welcome!

Two people who feature in our Gift of Years pages contacted BRF Ministries to tell us how touched they'd been by something they'd read in our resources. For Sue Wightman, it was a series of reflections on 'the gift of creativity' in *Day by Day with God* and for Jean Haigh it was a prayer, 'The rock of ages', in our prayer diary.

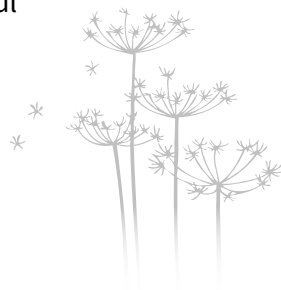
Sue wrote about her practice of praying while knitting. 'I think it's a gift God has given me and it just shows that as you get older and you can't do as much, you can still mentally spend time with God and do beautiful things for him.'

And Jean told us: 'The words in the prayer are so true and I can vouch that God really does still help us to bear fruit in old age. Now at 86, I am privileged that God has blessed me with so many people contacting and confiding in me.'

As I write, I have a newspaper cutting on my desk about a little town in Italy where the mayor has recruited some of his older residents to help monitor problems around the town. Potholes, untrimmed verges... The team is delighted to have a role that recognises the contribution they can still make even though they're long retired. One of them, Roberto Cremona, said, 'You feel useful to society and yourself. You're doing something valuable with your time. For me, it's a calling.'

The theme of calling echoes through this whole edition.

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.



High places

Geoff Lawson

I live in the Northern Pennines and so I am surrounded by high places. From the spare bedroom window on a clear day, I can see Cross Fell, which is the highest point in the Pennine Chain. But of course, every area has high places; it is just all relative. For example, the city of Ely in the Fens is higher than the surrounding countryside and the cathedral in particular dominates the skyline.

The Bible is full of references to hills and mountains, indeed some of them are explicitly named and the names live on, Mount Sinai and Mount Ararat to name but two. A few names are so familiar that they probably conjure up certain images in your mind: think of the Mount of Olives.

But we can also think of this a little less literally. I am sure that you can think of periods or events in your life that you could call 'high points'. And life being what it is, there would be 'low points' too.

Let us look then at some high places and perhaps the occasional low one and see where that leads us.



Deuteronomy 32:48–50, 52 (NRSV, abridged)

Not quite getting there

The Lord addressed Moses as follows: ‘Ascend... Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, across from Jericho, and view the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites for a possession; you shall die there on the mountain... Although you may view the land from a distance, you shall not enter it.’

These verses towards the end of Deuteronomy always move me.

After all his efforts and struggles to fulfil God’s will and lead the people to the promised land, Moses was not to get there himself. Rather, he was to look over it from a high place and contemplate what might have been. I wonder if he was disappointed?

I imagine that many people can identify with this story in various ways. I had an older cousin who, over the years, made a huge contribution to the work of the church and community in this area. In midlife he offered himself for ordination several times but to everyone’s bemusement he was never selected. I wonder if he was disappointed?

He would have made a wonderful priest, but I also know that as a lay person and a palliative care nurse he occupied a very high place in this community. And he did it in such a way that he enabled many to have a glimpse of the kingdom of God.

■ PRAYER

Ponder these words C. S. Lewis wrote: ‘Don’t shine so that others can see you. Shine so that through you, others can see God.’

Psalm 128:1–2 (NRSV)

Awe and wonder

Happy is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways. You shall eat the fruit of the labour of your hands; you shall be happy, and it shall go well with you.

I was visiting a school one day and it happened that an Ofsted inspection was taking place. In a quiet, informal moment and by way of conversation, I asked the inspector how it was going. His answer was unexpected: ‘I am troubled by the lack of awe and wonder.’

I did understand what he was saying; in this fast-paced, digital, consumer-driven world, many young people are not easily overtaken by a sense of wonder. Indeed, the same could be said of adults. How many times have you seen holiday travellers completely oblivious to some beautiful scenery as they focus on their social media accounts?

The psalm above is part of a group known as psalms of ascent; they were sung by the people as they went up the hill to the temple to worship God. In this context, it is helpful to know that ‘who fears the Lord’ could be translated as ‘who is in awe of the Lord’.

Part of our relationship with God and with God’s creation is to react with awe and wonder. In turn, our response to that is to go up to God and offer our worship.

■ PRAYER

Creator God, open my eyes as I look up to see the wonder of your works. Amen

Mark 6:45–46 (NRSV)

Pausing to look back

Immediately [Jesus] made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. After saying farewell to them, he went up on the mountain to pray.

When my two sons were young, we lived in the Lake District and, unsurprisingly, we had friends who also had children. Going for walks in groups was a regular thing and, given the topography of the area, we would often walk up to a viewpoint at a high place.

One of the things I tried to instil into the boys was the notion of pausing from time to time to look back at where we had come from – not just to take in the view, but also to put their position in some sort of context. I still remind myself to do it all these years later.

As we trudge up well-worn paths it is so easy to focus only on the next step and the next goal and completely forget the purpose of the journey or where we have come from.

In today's passage Jesus went up the mountain to pray. It had been a busy time – after all, he had just fed 5,000 people! He needed to reflect; to look back and put things into context before moving on. We need to do the same.

■ PRAYER

Ponder these words of our late Queen Elizabeth II: 'Reflection and prayer help us to renew ourselves in God's love, as we strive daily to become better people.'

Matthew 5:1–2 (NRSV)

Pictures from childhood

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he began to speak and taught them.

‘Ladybird Books’. Do those two words bring back memories? Perhaps you had some; many of you will have read them to children or grandchildren. The brand goes back to the 19th century, but paper rationing in the war forced the company to develop the optimum and most economical design. They created the classic format that readers are familiar with: a book of 56 pages in full colour, printed on a large single paper known as a ‘quad crown’. The one-size format enabled books to be produced efficiently and cheaply, which became vital to their success. They were sold at 2/6d for 30 years.

There were 48 books in the ‘Bible and religion’ series; I have a copy of *Jesus by the Sea of Galilee* on my desk now, with a picture of Jesus teaching his disciples on the side of the mountain with the Sea of Galilee below and in the distance. Some disciples are beside him; others are lower down looking up at him. I wonder what it was really like? Who knows. But even now, that beautifully drawn picture is a powerful image in my mind. I wonder if you can recall similar images?

■ PRAYER

*Encircling God, we thank you for the stories, words and images of our early years and give thanks for those who introduced them to us.
Amen*

Matthew 4:8–9 (NRSV)**Gosh! You can see for miles**

Again, the devil took [Jesus] to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; and he said to him, ‘All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.’

My village is on the side of a valley and sometimes I walk the dog about a mile further up the hill to a high place called Neamour which is about 1,500 ft above sea level. On a clear day one can see for miles; to the east the industrial skyline of Teesside 40 miles away; the beautiful North York Moors to the southeast; the awesome high Pennines to the west and years ago, when there were still blast furnaces at Consett to the north, one could see those too. Furthermore, because I know the area well, I can visualise all the communities between me and these far-off places.

Looking down on the world, we can feel either superior to it or humbled by it; we can take from the world or give to it; we can feel separate from it or an integral part of it; we can rule it or serve it.

We know what Jesus decided to do when he looked down from a high place. When we look down from high places, either real or metaphorical, we have decisions to make too.

■ PRAYER

O Lord, go before us. With your grace and help may we press on, grow and give you the glory. Amen

2 Chronicles 34:3–4a (NRSV)

Beware of false gods

For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was still a boy, [Josiah] began to seek the God of his ancestor David, and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the sacred poles, and the carved and the cast images. In his presence they pulled down the altars of the Baals.

The term ‘high place’ crops up nearly 80 times in the Bible, but interestingly, most often it is used negatively to refer to the worship of idols or other deities. At various stages throughout their history, the people of God would be attracted to the gods of other peoples, particularly the Canaanite god Baal, and so they would build altars on the tops of hills and mountains and there they would offer up sacrifices and so on. At other times, as in the passage above, a leader would emerge who would draw the people back to the true God and tear down the pagan altars, sometimes replacing them with an altar to God.

Of course, we must not be too pious. We too can easily be tempted to worship other things and perhaps replace our God with some of the gods of today; for example, power; materialism; money; pride; success; and increasingly in today’s world, technology and social media.

■ PRAYER

Guide us and strengthen us, O Lord, to turn away from any harmful gods of our age, and focus on you, the one true God. Amen

Psalm 65:12–13 (NRSV)

One man and his dog

The pastures of the wilderness overflow; the hills gird themselves with joy; the meadows clothe themselves with flocks; the valleys deck themselves with grain; they shout and sing together for joy.

Many years ago, I was involved in hosting a group of Christians gathered from all over the world for a conference in the Lake District. Part of my role was to organise the time out of the conference room; we walked; we canoed; we went on a lake steamer and much more. One activity involved a trip to a hill farm at the head of a steep-sided valley called Langdale. The farmer ran the sheep dog for us and so imagine, if you will, the vast hillside ‘clothed’ with white dots and then the dog rounding them up and bringing them down to meet their overseas visitors who were open mouthed in fascination.

The word wilderness is interesting here. The thrust of this lovely psalm is to emphasise God’s generosity – a wilderness is suddenly swamped with goodness; the arid comes to life and rejoices in it. The same sentiments can be applied to us human beings; our God of grace and God of plenty pours his blessings over us so that anything negative in our lives can be transformed and hopefully, in response, we sing for joy.

■ PRAYER

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; praise him, all creatures here below; praise him above, ye heav’nly host; praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. (Thomas Ken, 1637–1711)

Mark 9:2–4 (NRSV)

Suddenly getting it

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling bright, such as no one on earth could brighten them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

When I visited the mountain of transfiguration many years ago, the arrangement was that the tour coach arrived at the car park at the foot of the mountain but then visitors transferred to large taxis – they were what we would now refer to as ‘stretch limos’. A constant stream of huge black taxis whisked visitors up the hairpin bends to the top of the mountain.

The road up the mountain was fairly wooded and so there was little to see, but from the top there were stunning views over the surrounding countryside. It was possible to put the site into context and make sense of where you were.

The story of the transfiguration is about making sense. At one level it makes no sense at all – it is full of the fantastic – but at another level it is there to help us appreciate and understand who Jesus was and is. Some scholars suggest that this was the very first epiphany story, where the veil separating the visible from the invisible was removed for a moment.

■ PRAYER

All praise we would render, O help us to see 'tis only the splendour of light hideth thee. (Walter C. Smith 1824–1908)

Isaiah 40:3–5 (NRSV, abridged)

God's superhighway

A voice cries out: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low... Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed.

I am interested in railways; quite a lot of clergy are railway enthusiasts and the suggested reason is that at least you know where a railway is going. I am sure that even if you have no particular interest, you cannot help but be amazed at the building of the railways; those mighty embankments lifting the line through valleys or those deep cuttings through the mountains and the hills.

The long exile in Babylon had come to an end and the image here is that of building a superhighway along which God would lead his people through the desert to Jerusalem. Add to that the image of the road being lined with crowds who are in awe of the wonderful procession with God in all his majesty. The glory of God has been revealed.

I guess we all have our own way of thinking about the glory of God; it may be a Hollywood-type image; it may be manifested in nature or through art or music. It is worth taking time to reflect on how we see or experience God's glory.

■ PRAYER

'Yours, O Lord, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and on earth is yours' (1 Chronicles 29:11).

Luke 22:39 (NRSV)

Favourite places

[Jesus] came out [from the upper room] and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him.

When I was a child, most holidays were by the sea and Scarborough was a favourite destination. It had everything for a family – beaches, a harbour, a funfair, walks and parks. My parents continued to holiday there until my dad died. He and my mother had a favourite place to park the car: on a road overlooking the promenade and the beach with a café just a short walk away. They could watch all that was going on but sit in peace.

In the verse above the phrase ‘as was his custom’ is lovely. We know that Jesus went to the Mount of Olives on several occasions for specific reasons – it is just over half a mile to the east of the city walls – but this hints to me that perhaps it was a favourite place. Yes, he would go there to pray, but I wonder if he occasionally went there just to sit and look at the city from the other side of the valley. As we might say today, he went ‘to take time out’; ‘for a bit of me time’; ‘to chill out’ or, like my parents, ‘to watch the world go by’. We all need that, so why wouldn’t he? I am sure you do.

■ PRAYER

Gentle God, be with us in our times of quiet contemplation. Amen



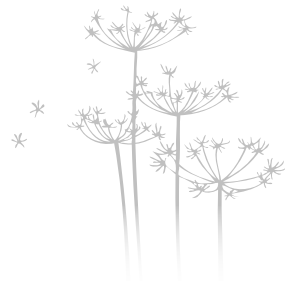
Calling in later life

Sally Welch

The dictionary definition of ‘calling’ is ‘a strong urge towards a particular way of life’. I think the Christian understanding of the word is both simpler and more complicated. Simpler perhaps because it’s a matter of listening to God’s voice and following where he leads. More complicated because we don’t always know where God is leading us – and if we do know, we don’t always want to go there.

Our calling is an individual one – uniquely designed for us by a God who gives us exactly the gifts we need to carry out the purposes he has for our lives. It is a fluid and flexible one, changing over the years, moderating according to the other demands made upon our lives, adapting to our different circumstances, contracting and expanding as our capabilities increase or lessen.

We can be sure, however, that it never disappears entirely. Even when our lives appear constrained and our circle of influence diminished, the voice of God is never absent. God never ceases to invite us to a deeper knowledge of ourselves, to a more loving interaction with our neighbours and, above all, to a closer relationship with the creator of the universe, through his Son, our guide, companion and the one who calls out of the darkness in the light of his love.



Job 32:8–9 (NIV)

A note of caution

But it is the spirit in a person, the breath of the Almighty, that gives them understanding. It is not only the old who are wise, not only the aged who understand what is right.

It seems odd to begin this set of reflections with a speech from Elihu, who is a self-confessed youngster, but right to introduce a note of caution from the start. Elihu is addressing the friends of Job, who have, he feels, doubted God's providence as they sought to comfort Job in his suffering. He admits that he hesitated to speak at first, as he was taught to respect his elders, but he became so angry that he felt he must contribute to the discussion. 'It is unthinkable that God would do wrong,' he reminds his listeners, and calls them to find proof of this in creation: 'stop and consider God's wonders.'

We hear no more of Elihu after this one speech but it is a reminder to all of us that in God's eyes, our calendrical age is irrelevant. It is the Holy Spirit, the 'breath of the Almighty', who holds all wisdom. This 'Spirit' is the gift of all Christians, young and old alike. What matters is how we listen to it and react to it.

■ PRAYER

Lord God, help me to hear your voice in the words of those around me, respecting the words of young and old alike, so that I recognise your wisdom however it presents itself. 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...

In this issue we're delighted to welcome Geoffrey Lowson, with his vivid series on 'high places'. Sally Welch brings her rich experience and insight to the theme of calling in later life, while Ro Willoughby considers some of the different ways Jesus sees, looks, watches and never misses a thing. Last but not least, John Rackley seeks God's comfort and peace in the dark watches of the night.



**'Happy is everyone who fears the Lord,
who walks in his ways. You shall eat the
fruit of the labour of your hands; you shall
be happy, and it shall go well with you.'
Psalm 128:1-2 (NRSV)**



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