

September–December 2018



Bible reflections

for older people

The wisdom of trees

Martin & Margot Hodson

In remembrance of me

Katherine Hedderly

The gift of play

Anne Townsend

Friends for life

Roger Combes

The Bible Reading Fellowship

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About the writers



Martin Hodson is a plant scientist and environmental biologist. He is Operations Director for the John Ray Initiative (JRI), an organisation connecting environment, science and Christianity. **Margot Hodson** is Rector of Wychert Vale Benefice (six churches) in Buckinghamshire, and was previously Chaplain of Jesus College, Oxford. The Hodsons have published widely and have written several books including *A Christian Guide to Environmental Issues* (BRF, 2015). For more about the Hodsons, see their website www.hodsons.org.



Katherine Hedderly is Associate Vicar at St Martin-in-the-Fields, London. She has developed the church's work on dementia, bringing together those with lived experience, healthcare practitioners and theologians. Before ordination, she worked in broadcasting for 20 years, including as head of development for an independent production company.



Anne Townsend is a former OMF missionary doctor in Thailand. She is a new contributor to BRF but has written a number of books including *Faith without Pretending* (Hodder, 1990) and was founding editor of *Family* magazine. She is a psychotherapist and a (supposedly) retired priest in the Church of England.



Roger Combes lives in Crawley, West Sussex, with good views of planes taking off from Gatwick. After parish ministry in London, Cambridge and Hastings, he was Archdeacon of Horsham before retiring in 2014. He and his wife Christine have two daughters.



From the Editor

Welcome to this new collection of Bible reflections. We hope you find much to interest and inspire you in these pages, together with some nice surprises along the way.

Last summer, Channel 4 attracted a lot of positive attention for its series *Old People's Home for 4 Year Olds*. Even the most sceptical reviewers were won over by the joyous effects of introducing nursery-school children to care-home residents and allowing friendships to blossom between them over the course of six weeks.

Already popular in the US, Canada and Japan, similar schemes are beginning to take root here too, but you don't always need a formal project to mix the ages so creatively. One of our contributors, Anne Townsend, writes about 'the gift of play', and her experience helping to lead her church's holiday club: 'Three of us "nearly and over-80s" were team leaders. We offered wisdom and experience. Teenage "junior leaders" supported us. Not only were they highly mobile, but their hands could cut and shape in seconds – while arthritic fingers like mine took minutes. It wasn't "Do it my way!", "No, mine's better!" We pooled our resources and played together to build God's church of the future.'

What a hopeful vision of a community in which everyone, from the very young to the very old, has a place and a role, gifts to share and love to give.

God bless you



Using these reflections

Perhaps you have always had a special daily time 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 hard 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 are able.

When to read them

You can read these Bible reflections in the morning or last thing at night, or any time during the day. Why not use them as a way of making 'an appointment to be with God'?

There are 40 daily Bible reflections, grouped around four themes. Each one includes some verses from the Bible, a reflection to help you in your own thinking about God and a suggestion for prayer. The reflections aren't dated, so it doesn't matter if you're not able to read them every day. The Bible verses are printed, but if you'd like to read from your own Bible, that's fine too.

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.



The wisdom of trees

Martin and Margot Hodson

Do you have memories of particular trees? We can each remember climbing trees as children; as adults, we remember a large copper beech outside our last house; and we now have an apple tree that is especially fruitful. Trees can act as markers through our lives. Often in the background but always giving context, pointing back to the past and forward to the future.

Trees are mentioned hundreds of times in the Bible and in almost every book. Many of these are geographical, helping to show where a story is set, but sometimes trees are used to teach spiritual truths.

These reflections will use the trees as our teachers. We will begin to learn some of the spiritual truths that the Bible's first hearers would have understood, and find out how they apply to our lives today. We will discover how we can be sustained by our roots like the willow and bear fruit like the palm tree even when we stay still and the world changes around us.

So please join us on a spiritual journey through the Bible's woodland and find some truths for your own life from these majestic teachers.



Matthew 17:20 (NIV)**Mustard-seed faith**

[Jesus] replied, ‘Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, “Move from here to there,” and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.’

The mustard seed appears in two stories in the gospels, one concerning the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 13:31–32) and the other, faith. Botanists have debated which plant species Jesus is referring to in these accounts, as the mustard seed is not that small and its plant is at best a fair-sized shrub (certainly not a tree). But let’s put aside the arguments over species and think more generally about seeds and trees. We did a rough calculation and reckon that a mature oak tree is about three million times the weight of an acorn.

The good news is that Jesus clearly tells us that we don’t need faith the size of a massive tree, only a small seed’s worth. Just a small amount of faith can move mountains. What is it that you need faith for in your life at the moment? It may be a health issue, an upcoming house move or perhaps something you need to talk to a friend about. Remember the mustard seed and have faith.

■ PRAYER

Lord, we know that sometimes our faith can seem very small. Show us how to use that small amount of faith to build your kingdom. Amen

Genesis 8:11a (NIV)

Peace of the olive

When the dove returned to [Noah] in the evening, there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf!

At home, we have an olive-wood holding cross, which is smooth and curved and sits easily in the palm of a hand. It is a reminder of the transforming power of Christ and the connection between his suffering, redemption and healing. The olive is a long-lived tree and highly prized for its fruit. Olive oil is liquid gold as it provides food, light and heat. Priests and kings were anointed with olive oil as they entered service and Jesus' disciples used the oil for healing (Mark 6:13).

The olive tree is first mentioned in the Bible at the end of the flood. Noah sends out a dove and he returns with a sprig of olive, proving the existence of dry land. Because of this story, the olive is a symbol of peace-making and reconciliation. It was no coincidence that Jesus prayed in an olive grove, Gethsemane, as he awaited arrest on his journey to the cross.

Peace can seem an elusive dream for communities and families who long for harmony. The olive reminds us that there is hope. Jesus died and rose again so that one day all things will be reconciled (Colossians 1:20). We can trust Christ's reconciling power working in our world and in our own lives, families and communities.

■ PRAYER

Heavenly Father, help us to be bearers of olive branches and bringers of peace. Amen

The Gift of Years



Debbie Thrower founded and leads The Gift of Years programme. She has pioneered the Anna Chaplaincy model, offering spiritual care to older people, and is widely involved in training and advocacy. Visit thegiftofyears.org.uk to find out more.

Debbie writes...

Welcome to a thought-provoking series of reflections – all of them written by people with long and valuable life experience.

P.D. James once said that some things in life should be firmly relegated to the past: ‘They are over and must be accepted, made sense of and forgiven.’ Whether we spend time contentedly alone or at risk of spiralling into despair is, to some extent, down to us. Descartes said, famously: ‘I think therefore I am,’ and in a sense, we *are* what we think.

Few people reach an advanced age without knowing that their resilience (or lack of it) is largely dependent on what memories they allow to linger... or choose to dismiss.

Here, you may find kindred spirits or those with whom you disagree, but I guarantee our writers will prompt interesting reflections of your own as you consider what makes you uniquely YOU. Our conscious thoughts will have a bearing on how we discover our identity as we grow older. It’s one of the reasons we fear a loss of memory so much. But if our ability to remember does fade, these writers may console us with the thought that in God’s memory we remain safe, always: ‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever’ (Hebrews 13:8).

Best wishes





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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, **Debbie Thrower** of BRF's The Gift of Years ministry offers interviews and ideas to encourage and inspire.



Bible Reflections for Older People is edited by Eley McAinsh.

In this issue...

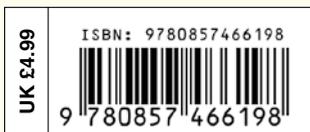
Martin and Margot Hodson explore the wisdom of trees in the Bible.

Katherine Hedderly celebrates the rich colours and textures of the church's year from Harvest to Remembrancetide. **Anne Townsend** ties up the threads between play and prayer and **Roger Combes** extols the virtues of friendship.



The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

Lamentations 3:22-23



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