

September–December 2024



Bible reflections

for older people



Jesus sat down

Ro Willoughby

Faith in autumn

John Rackley

**God's many-legged
creatures**

the Hodsons

Let the children come

'Tricia Williams



Bible reflections

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Ministries



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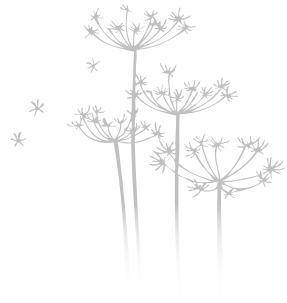
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About the writers



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. She has the great joy of living 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 Local Ecumenical Partnership and Methodist Circuit. He is currently working on the relationship between biography and belief.



Margot Hodson is director of theology and education for The John Ray Initiative, an educational charity with a vision to bring together scientific and Christian understandings of the environment. She is an Anglican priest and on the board of Grove Ethics Editorial Group. **Martin Hodson** is a plant scientist and environmental biologist, and is the principal tutor for Christian rural and environmental studies at The John Ray Initiative. They live in Oxfordshire.



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.



From the Editor

Welcome.

It was a tatty blue cool box, scattered with leaves, perched on a rickety table beside a forest path. Distracted by the fact I'd almost run out of water and still had several miles to go to reach my destination, I rushed past it. A few steps later, something made me stop and go back.

I brushed off the leaves. A note stuck to the lid read 'Honesty box', in faded felt tip. Tentatively, I opened the box. Inside were bottles of water and cartons of juice, a few KitKats and flapjacks and an old yoghurt pot weighted with coins. I was quite overwhelmed with surprise and gratitude – wonder would not be too strong a word.

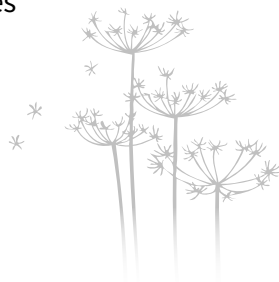
In the days that followed, I came across other honesty boxes, on isolated tracks, in open churches and old stone bothies: all in the tradition of offering hospitality and respite to travellers and pilgrims. I thought a lot about who might have organised the box which saved my day and also about what made me go back.

In 'The gift of years' pages in this issue, George Lings says the 'gift of time to notice' is one of the fruits of older age. Margaret Barnes talks about God's 'cough in the ear': that moment when God whispers 'ahem', to alert you to something you might have missed.

My experience with the honesty box underlines the importance of taking both time to notice and time to listen.

Go well.

Eley
✓
x



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.



Jesus sat down

Ro Willoughby

Maybe you are like me and since childhood you've loved sitting at the front on the top deck of a double decker bus. In the 1950s, research was conducted into double decker bus drivers and conductors. It was discovered that drivers were twice as likely to have a heart attack as their conductor colleagues. They sat for 90% of their shift, whereas conductors climbed about 600 stairs in a day's work.

In Jesus' time, people walked everywhere. While they could ride on a donkey, be carried in a cart or sail in a boat, there were no other forms of transport and they mainly walked. Jesus would have had dirty feet, blisters and splinters. Yet we are specifically told of the times he sat down – to eat, to rest, to be with people, to teach and tell stories, to sit upon a throne in heaven.

We're encouraged to stand up and walk frequently throughout the day to maintain good health, like those bus conductors. Movement and exercise are important, but depending on age, abilities and lifestyle, this is easier for some than for others. We may wish we could walk more and sit less, but take heart. This series invites you to sit down with Jesus and to learn from him.

The Bible passages are the author's own abridged paraphrases, but based on and occasionally directly quoting the NLT.



Luke 2:42–49

Sat in the temple

Aged twelve, Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Passover. When his parents set off for home, Jesus stayed in Jerusalem. Realising he was missing, his parents rushed back and discovered him in the temple, sitting, listening to religious teachers, asking them questions. His anxious mother scolded him. But Jesus replied, 'I had to be in my Father's house?'

Most primary school teachers are on their feet most of the time – it's a physically demanding job. Most public speakers stand to deliver their message – standing is a mark of authority. Preachers rarely sit down to preach. However, at the time of Jesus, any distinguished teacher sat down while his audience gathered around, sitting or standing, to listen intently.

Imagine the twelve-year-old Jesus sitting in the audience among the learned Jewish teachers. He becomes the centre of attention by his insightful questions and the answers he gives when questioned. The audience, turning towards him, is astounded by how he speaks. Maybe they are puzzled by what he means by his 'Father's house'. Clearly, he already knows who his Father is and has a deep understanding of his identity. It's possibly 18 years before crowds gathered around again to listen to him.

■ PRAYER

We call God 'our Father' every time we say the Lord's Prayer. We are God's sons and daughters, although not in the way Jesus, as the Son of God, was. Say the Lord's Prayer, thanking God for being your Father in heaven and for his love for you.

Mark 2:13–17

Sat for dinner

Jesus called Levi, the tax collector, to follow him and be his disciple. Later, Levi invited Jesus to come for dinner, along with tax collectors and other disreputable sinners. Seeing this, the religious teachers asked, ‘Why does he eat with such scum?’ Jesus replied, ‘I’ve not come to call those who think they’re good, but those who know they’re sinners.’

Sometimes we don’t even notice a person sleeping rough on the streets. If we do, we may look away or look down on them with scorn, unable to recognise that this is a person who’s probably had a challenging past, with heartaches and broken relationships. Not many people choose to be homeless. They almost certainly know they’ve made mistakes.

We don’t know how Levi, also known as Matthew, became a tax collector. This probably made him rich – tax collectors were expert cheats. Levi works for the hated Roman authorities, so people despise him, but Jesus notices and loves people like Levi. What’s more, Jesus gladly eats with society’s outsiders. Technically, Jesus will not have sat to eat, but will have lain on the floor, leaning on his left elbow, eating with his right hand. How thrilled Levi must be that Jesus accepted his invitation.

■ PRAYER

Next time you see someone begging, someone looking lonely or dejected, someone in trouble, remind yourself that Jesus loves them. Pray now for God to help you notice people like this and ask him to inspire you with ideas for how to share God’s love with them.

The Gift of Years



Debbie Thrower is the founder of BRF Ministries' Anna Chaplaincy for Older People. She retired in late 2023 and is now a vice president of BRF Ministries.

Visit annachaplaincy.org.uk to find out more.

Debbie writes...

Welcome!

One day I went to see Jessie, who'd recently moved into a care home, and I wondered how she was coping. I needn't have worried. Although blind, Jessie was full of spiritual insight. She told me that she spoke to Jesus every day. 'He's with me all the time. I can tell him whatever I want, and he never leaves me.' It may take a lifetime to develop such confidence. Jessie's example has stayed with me as a life lesson.

'Take it to the Lord in prayer' is the refrain of a well-known hymn – 'What a friend we have in Jesus' – and Jessie lived this out. It was as if he were her closest companion.

Our writer Ro Willoughby has looked at the times Jesus 'sat down', drawing alongside – sometimes the most unexpected – people. I'm reminded of the old 18th-century Dutch description of a good friend as a 'table friend'. Jesus heartily enjoyed meals with friends. One commentator says he 'wanted to be remembered as a man with a cup in his hand'*

May all our writers' reflections provide a wealth of fresh insights to encourage and inspire you.

Best wishes



* John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God* (SCM, 1972), p. 93.



Ministries

Inspiring people of all ages to grow in Christian faith



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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 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...

John Rackley sings the praises of autumn and **Tricia Williams** listens to the wisdom of children. **Margot and Martin Hodson** celebrate God's many-legged creatures and **Ro Willoughby** reflects on the significant moments when Jesus sat down.



May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.
Psalm 126:5-6 (NRSV)

