

January–April 2025



Bible reflections

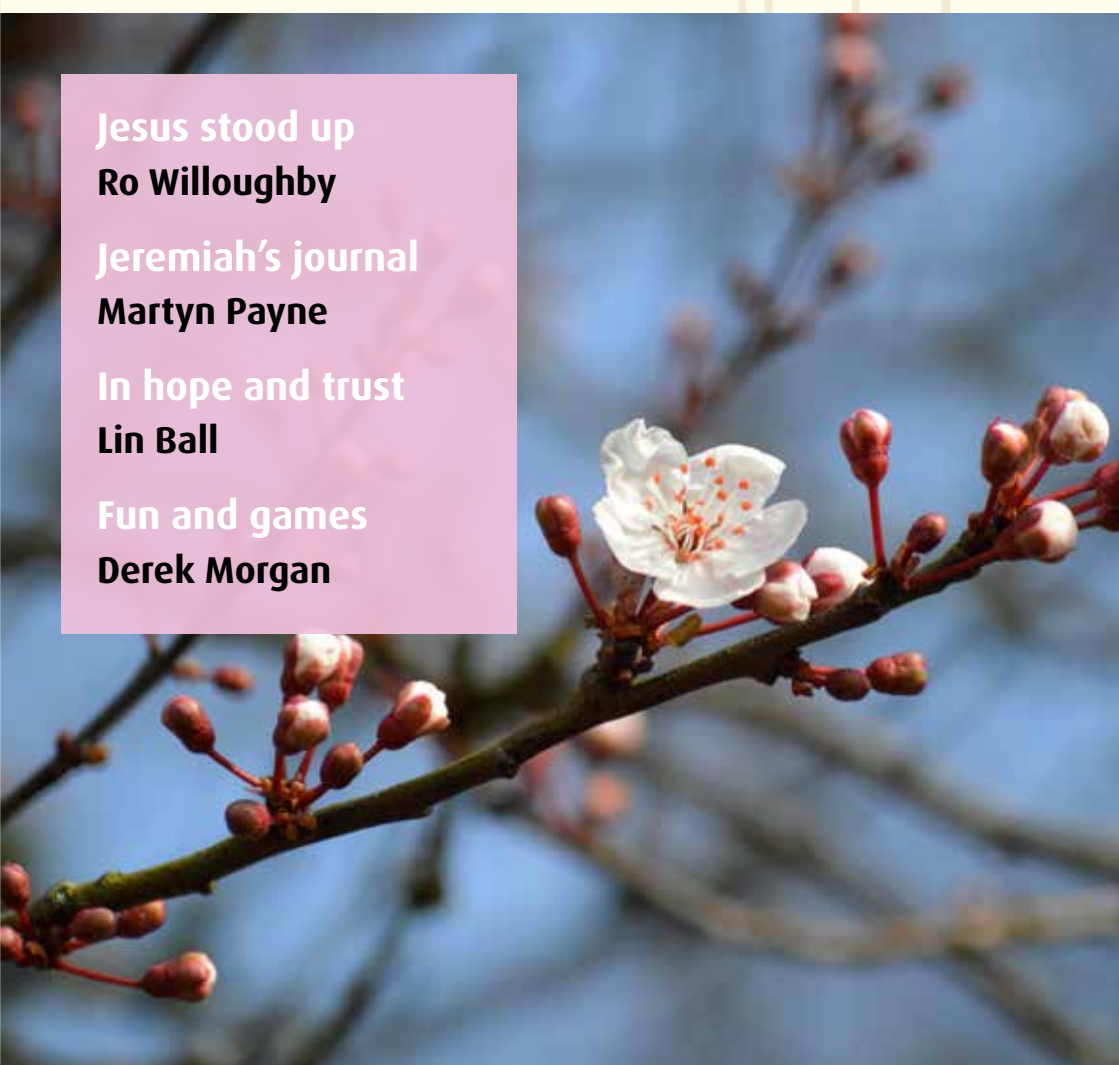
for older people

Jesus stood up
Ro Willoughby

Jeremiah's journal
Martyn Payne

In hope and trust
Lin Ball

Fun and games
Derek Morgan



Bible reflections

for older people



Ministries



BRF Ministries

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Acknowledgements

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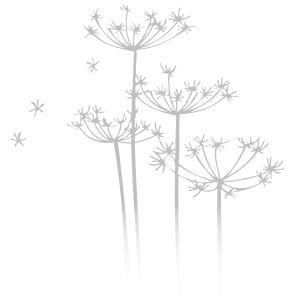
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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Printed and bound in the UK by Zenith Media NP4 0DQ

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About the writers



Ro Willoughby has been writing and editing Christian resources for many years. Licensed as a lay minister at St Chad's Woodseats in Sheffield, 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!



Martyn Payne worked with BRF Ministries for 15 years before his retirement at the end of 2017. He has a background in Bible storytelling and leading all-age worship, and is passionate about the blessing that comes when generations explore faith together. For the past four years he has been the volunteer prayer advocate for BRF Ministries.



Lin Ball's career began in journalism over 40 years ago. She delights in the variety of work that's come her way: ghost written books, magazine articles about missionary work, communications for Christian charities and radio interviews on disability. Lin lives in the East Midlands, where she still writes, is active in eco-groups in her market town and enjoys long walks.



Derek Morgan is a retired IT professional having spent over 30 years in software development roles. A Christian for over 40 years, he knows his gifting will never be as a preacher or evangelist but his God-given passion is facilitating those who are! You will always find him somewhere in church using his gifts in technical, practical, musical and IT activities. He lives on the south coast of England.



From the Editor

Welcome!

I still have some of my dear mum's leather gloves, including a beautiful purple pair she bought for our last trip away, to the Christmas markets in Vienna. Soft and pliable, unworn for over a decade, they hold the imprint of her arthritic fingers.

A few days ago, I took a pair of my own gloves from a coat pocket and was startled to see uncannily similar distortions. I inherited many wonderful things from my mum but arthritic fingers weren't her best gift. Three joint replacements and a small square of rubber grip cloth in every pocket, bag and drawer help me function, but my hands seem much older than the rest of me and I miss their strength and grace.

In his moving meditation on hands (page 35), Robert Glenny writes:

Isaiah 49:16 talks of God's hands: God says to Israel: 'See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands.' Earlier in the chapter, we read 'the Lord called me before I was born' (v. 1). You were known, before you were capable of knowledge. There was no time when God's love for you was not etched into his very being. God knows you like the back of his hand.

'It fits like a glove!' we say, when a fit feels precise and personal. To look at my gloves and see such a tangible reminder of my mother's imprint on my being is poignant and powerful, a faint reflection of the eternal imprint of our loving God on each one of us.

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 stood up

Ro Willoughby

Have you ever been to a Proms concert at the Royal Albert Hall in London? Just before the concert begins, concert-goers in the ground floor Arena are instructed to stand-up. They remain standing throughout the performance. At the end, the audience usually joins them, rising to their feet in appreciation to give what we call ‘a standing ovation’.

We stand for all sorts of reasons, not just to begin walking. We stand in queues waiting for a bus. We stand up to welcome a newcomer entering a room. We stand to see over the heads of people in front of us. People in authority stand to address a crowd. We stand for others to see us, as in church or a school assembly. We stand to give up our seat to someone in greater need of it; older people, who may find it hard to stand for long, accept gratefully.

In this series we will reflect on the times when Jesus stood up. These occasions tell us a lot about him and his ministry. May you discover more about him and experience Jesus, our risen Lord, who continually stands with us wherever we find ourselves.

The Bible passages in this section are the author’s own abridged paraphrases, but based on and occasionally directly quoting the NIV.



Matthew 8:23–27**Stood in a boat**

Jesus got into the boat with his disciples. Suddenly a furious storm broke over the lake. Waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was asleep. The disciples woke him, ‘Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!’ Jesus replied, ‘Why are you so afraid?’ He stood up, rebuked the winds and waves, and it was completely calm... His disciples were amazed!

I’ve walked in the hills when I was soaked to the skin and the wind made it almost impossible to remain upright. It would have been far more terrifying if I had been in a boat. Imagine just how petrified Jesus’ disciples were. How long had they tried to save themselves before waking Jesus?

Jesus could remain asleep because he knew how storms, winds and waves worked. After all, he was present when the world came into being. He was, and is, the creator. When he woke and stood up, he was facing his created world, a world that had gone wrong ever since the fall. As Lord, as creator, he had the authority to command that calm order to be restored. His disciples hadn’t yet grasped that. With Jesus, in their boat, there was no need to be afraid.

■ PRAYER

Everything in our world comes under Jesus’ rule. He’s brought in the kingdom of God. Tell God what is causing you to fear right now. Ask him to calm that fear, as though you’re in a boat and Jesus stands there with you.

Luke 4:16–21

Stood up to read

One sabbath day in the synagogue, Jesus stood up to read from the prophet Isaiah: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor’... He rolled up the scroll and sat down. The eyes of everyone were fixed on him. Jesus announced, ‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’

I doubt any PE teacher sits at the start of a lesson and says, ‘I know you don’t like cross country running and today it’s cold, but perhaps you could put on your kit.’ Instead, the teacher stands to announce, ‘It’s cross country running today. You’ve five minutes to get your kit on.’ It is all about having authority. The teacher expects children to accept what they’re told to do.

Here Jesus stands up to read the sacred scriptures, God’s word, to be read with authority and conviction. Imagine the authority with which Jesus read from the prophet Isaiah. He is reading about himself. The congregation is transfixed. They’ve never heard anything like it. Jesus explains, ‘These ancient precious words are about me! Believe me. Take me seriously.’

■ PRAYER

Every time we read the Bible, or hear the Bible read, we are opening ourselves to hear God’s word for us. Pray that these words from Psalm 119 will be true for you: ‘Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law... your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path’ (vv. 18, 105).

Luke 18:35–43

Stood still to heal

A blind beggar sitting by the roadside as Jesus entered Jericho shouted out many times, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’ Jesus stopped and stood still. ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ he asked the man. ‘I want to see.’ Jesus said, ‘Your faith has healed you.’ Immediately the man could see. He followed Jesus, praising God.

At the Wimbledon tennis tournament, if you get a seat by the players’ exit from the Centre Court, a top-ranked player, as they leave, might pause for five seconds to sign your programme. No more than six seconds. No eye contact.

That would not be long enough for this blind beggar. He has heard about Jesus’ power to heal. He already believes Jesus can restore his sight. He is determined not to be ignored. It must have been obvious what the man wanted most of all. Jesus could have healed him in a matter of seconds. Instead, in this moment, as the man tells Jesus what he wants, Jesus stands to give the blind man 100% of his attention. Sight is restored. The man recognises this is God’s work.

■ PRAYER

God longs for us to tell him exactly what, deep in our hearts, we most desire for him to do. Even if you’ve already told him, tell him once again. Our desires are shaped the more we talk with God, and God is always ready to listen.

John 7:37–39 (NIV)

Stood up to proclaim

On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.’ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.

The climax of any festival is usually the last day. Tickets for events on that day are harder to come by, though I doubt if people needed tickets for this seven-day annual Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. The festival celebrated the recent harvest as well as God’s provision for his people during their wanderings in the wilderness. Every day, water from the Pool of Siloam was poured out in the temple, offering special thanks for the rainfall necessary for a good harvest.

Jesus came into the temple to teach. On the last day, standing up, he made an impassioned speech, his voice echoing around. Influenced by the water at the festival, he offered to quench anyone’s thirst for God. Once Jesus had returned to heaven, the Holy Spirit would come, bringing God’s living water to bubble away forever inside those who believe in Jesus.

■ PRAYER

As you take a sip of water, thank Jesus that his promise on this occasion is true for you too. Ask his Spirit to continue to become in you ‘a spring of water welling up to eternal life’ (John 4:14, NIV).

John 19:5–11**Stood for his trial**

Pilate, the Roman governor, said to the chief priests and their officials, ‘Here is the man!’ They shouted, ‘Crucify! Crucify!’ Later Pilate said to Jesus who stood before him, ‘Don’t you realise I have power to free you or crucify you?’ Jesus answered, ‘You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.’

Judges in a courtroom sit on a raised platform, above everyone else present. Everyone stands when they enter. It’s a statement of who is in charge. Jesus was accused by the Jewish and Roman authorities in his trial. Both subjected him to maximum humiliation. He was bound, mocked, slapped, dressed in a crown of thorns and a purple robe and physically flogged – all this even before his crucifixion. But his power remained undiminished. Still in control, he chose to be humiliated.

We’re told Jesus stood before Pilate, who sat on a throne representing Roman authority. Jesus pointed out Pilate’s claim to power was paper thin. The religious leaders stayed outside, not wanting to become ‘unclean’ by close association with non-Jews. Their power was limited to what the Romans granted them, though they tried to challenge Pilate’s authority.

■ PRAYER

Throughout this world, power is wielded unjustly, abusively and destructively. In God’s sight this power is paper thin. Pray for one place in the world that troubles you, remembering that God ‘will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness’ (Psalm 96:13, NIV).

John 20:11–16

Stands – resurrected

Weeping, Mary looked inside the tomb and saw two angels sitting where Jesus' body had been. She said to them, 'Where have they put my Lord?' Turning around she saw Jesus standing there. She did not realise it was him. Thinking he was the gardener she asked him where he had put Jesus. Then Jesus said to her, 'Mary.'

As a result of incomprehensible personal life events or world disasters, it's easy to become confused, reach the wrong conclusions, repeat ourselves or simply not cope. Jesus' disciples, including Mary Magdalene, were facing a tragic bereavement, betrayal by Judas Iscariot, disappointment that Jesus was not the Messiah they'd believed him to be and fear for their own lives.

How confusing for Mary to discover that the stone blocking the entrance to Jesus' tomb had been moved. She instinctively runs to tell the disciples, then comes back, desperately wanting to find Jesus' body. Seeing two angels inside the tomb, she blurts out, 'Where's Jesus gone?' and repeats the same question to the gardener. But this is no gardener. She can't understand how Jesus can be alive, but rejoices that he knows her name. There's time enough for making sense of that.

■ PRAYER

However out of control life might seem, we can be reassured that Jesus knows us by name and comes to give us hope for the present and future. Begin praying to Jesus with these words, 'Jesus, you know me by name, inside out, so I want to tell you...'

Luke 24:36–45

Stands among them

Jesus himself stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ The disciples were frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said, ‘Look at my hands and my feet! Touch me and see; a ghost doesn’t have flesh and bones.’ Then he asked them, ‘Do you have anything here to eat?’ He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.

‘I find it hard to believe,’ we might say about something we’d describe as a miracle. New parents gaze in wonder at their newborn child. Is this real? A badly damaged relationship begins to heal. Is this possible? A friend with no time for God expresses an interest. Can it be true?

Jesus’ disciples were stunned when the women claimed they’d encountered angels and Jesus. Apparently, he’d appeared to Simon and two people walking to Emmaus. Wishful thinking? A case of mistaken identity? Many try to explain away the reality of Jesus’ resurrection.

Jesus was not a ghost. He backed this up by requesting food and offering an invitation to be touched. Still in shock, his disciples needed help to understand. We can’t meet Jesus as they did since he’s ascended to his Father. But by faith we know he’s alive. His resurrection has destroyed the power of death.

■ PRAYER

Just like the first disciples, we need our minds to be opened to grasp all that’s said about Jesus in the scriptures. Ask him to continue by his Spirit to deepen your experience of the resurrected Jesus, alive within you.

Acts 6:15; 7:51–56

Stands to welcome

Everyone looked at Stephen. His face seemed like an angel's. He continued, 'You stiff-necked people. Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute?' Hearing this, they dragged him out of the city to stone him. Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looking up to heaven, saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

Throughout church history, Christians have been martyred for their faith. Stephen is known as the first. He was one of the key leaders of the church in Jerusalem, filled with the Spirit of God and blessed with gifts to perform great wonders and signs. These included the gift of preaching, judging by how he addressed the Sanhedrin (Jewish Council). He aroused strong opposition and was violently evicted from the building, to be stoned to death.

The ascended Jesus is usually described as sitting at his Father's right hand. But on this rare occasion, Stephen sees Jesus standing. Why standing? Maybe, since the Jewish leaders had rejected Stephen's call to accept Jesus as Messiah, Jesus stood to express his acceptance of Stephen's message. Maybe it reminded Stephen that Jesus himself stood before Pilate and the Jewish authorities. Maybe, put simply, Jesus stood to welcome Stephen. For whatever reason, this vision of the standing Jesus must have brought great comfort to Stephen.

■ PRAYER

Ask Jesus to reassure you that he will welcome you into his presence to spend eternity with him, 'Good and faithful servant!'

Acts 23:10–11

Stands to encourage

The Roman commander brought Paul before the Jewish Council, where a dispute over Paul's teaching became so violent the commander feared Paul would be torn to pieces. He ordered troops to bring Paul into the barracks. The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, 'Take courage! You have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.'

Sometimes, we wake in the middle of the night and cannot get back to sleep. Our anxieties can get out of hand in the early hours. What do you do?

This story about Paul is less well-known. It's one I love and often return to. The apostle Paul has returned to Jerusalem. His Jewish opponents attempt to kill him and on two occasions nearly succeed. Paul is only saved by the intervention of Roman soldiers. The commander, knowing Paul was a Roman citizen, does not know what to do. Perhaps the Sanhedrin (Jewish Council) can enlighten him.

Imagine Paul's emotions at night, under guard in the barracks, fearing for his life. It's beautiful to read how the resurrected Jesus comes to stand near him, to reassure him. Jesus may not often speak to us like that, but he has promised never to forsake us.

■ PRAYER

The psalmist boldly claims: 'God, you're my refuge. I trust in you and I'm safe!... Fear nothing – not wild wolves in the night... Not disease that prowls through the darkness' (Psalm 91:2, 5, MSG). Claim these words when you next toss and turn in your bed.

Revelation 3:15, 19b–20 (NIV)

Stands to knock

‘I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other... So be earnest and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.’

For several years I took a class of children to St Paul’s Cathedral in London. Our tour included a viewing of Holman Hunt’s famous, large painting, *Light of the World*. Jesus stands to knock on a door that is surrounded by weeds and thistles. This door has only one handle, on the other side. Jesus wears a crown and holds a lamp. The children were always curious.

John, who wrote the Revelation from Jesus Christ, was a prisoner on the island of Patmos. He heard, and then delivered, messages from Jesus to seven churches. His last message was to the church in Laodicea, a banking centre famous for its textiles and unique eye ointment. These Christians were no longer totally committed to Christ. John invites them to turn from their half-heartedness and recommit themselves, to open the door and welcome him in.

■ PRAYER

This is a message for anyone whose joy in following Jesus has gone tepid, maybe for such reasons as distraction, disappointment or disillusionment. But Jesus still stands to welcome anyone who opens the door, even a chink. Pray for yourself, or for anyone you know whose faith in Christ has gone cold.

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...

Ro Willoughby complements her earlier reflections on those occasions when 'Jesus sat down', with a new series on the times 'Jesus stood up'. Martyn Payne celebrates the survival of 'Jeremiah's journal', Lin Ball offers a moving series called 'In hope and trust' and Derek Morgan recalls some favourite childhood games.



'Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.'

Jeremiah 33:3 (NIV)

