

January–April 2019



# Bible reflections

for older people

**Pilgrim aspirations**

Russ Parker

**Strength in weakness**

Sue Richards

**Beautiful hindsight**

Paul Canon Harris

**Walking in shadow**

Tricia Williams



# **Bible reflections**

for older people



## **The Bible Reading Fellowship**

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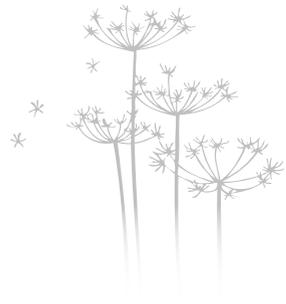
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## About the writers



**Russ Parker** was Director of the Acorn Christian Healing Foundation for 18 years before founding 2Restore, a resource for reconciliation and renewal for wounded churches. He is an author and travels extensively as a conference speaker. He is married to Roz and has two children, Emma and Joel. He supports Liverpool Football Club and lives in Surrey.



**Sue Richards** won *The Upper Room* writing competition in 2017 and this is her first series of reflections for BRF. She lives in Newport Pagnell with her husband and son, and has personal experience of caring for disabled members of her family. She teaches Functional Skills English to adults and has written for a wide variety of magazines and anthologies.



**Paul Canon Harris** is a poet, writer and broadcaster based in Bournemouth. His published work includes two poetry collections, and non-fiction works on spirituality, leadership and communication. His most recent book is the *Young Person's Quick Guide to Leadership* (Kevin Mayhew, 2018). He is married to Cathy, a speech therapist, and they have four sons, nine grandchildren and a dog called Hope.



**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 providing spiritual support for people living with dementia and has recently completed research in this area. Tricia is married to Emlyn (also a writer for *Bible Reflections for Older People*) and they have two adult children.



## From the Editor

Welcome to this new collection of Bible reflections.

If I have a pilgrimage destination, it is Whitby on the North Yorkshire coast. Whitby is what the Celts would call a ‘thin place’ – a place where the border between spirit and geography is especially permeable. For many years I went on retreat in Whitby, and have twice spent 30 days in silence there, in sight of the ruined abbey on the cliff.

In 2015, in response to the growing interest in pilgrimage, a new route was established: St Hilda’s Way. Modest in comparison with some longer, more famous routes, St Hilda’s Way wends 40 miles from Saltburn, up over the Moors and back down the Esk Valley to Whitby. One day, I would like to walk St Hilda’s Way, but for now my pilgrimage is one of the heart – and as our first writer, Russ Parker, makes clear in his series ‘Pilgrim aspirations’, this is a perfectly valid form of pilgrimage.

In 2014, the then-Bishop of Oxford, the Rt Revd John Pritchard, inaugurated the Thames Pilgrim Way. This route runs for 104 miles through the heart of the Diocese of Oxford. Bishop John wrote a prayer to mark the opening of the new path. It begins: ‘Pilgrim God, you are our origin and our destination. Travel with us, we pray, in every pilgrimage of faith, and every journey of the heart.’

I pray that God will travel with you – and bless you richly – as you journey through these readings and reflections.

God bless you

*Eley*  
✓x



# 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 have time or feel that would be helpful.

## When to read them

You may find it helpful to use these Bible reflections in the morning or last thing at night, or any time during the day. There are 40 daily reflections here, 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 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 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.



## Pilgrim aspirations

Russ Parker

For the last ten years, I have been leading pilgrimages to Celtic holy sites in the British Isles. For me, the current popularity of pilgrimage reflects a growing restlessness to encounter the presence of God in deeper and fresher ways. Pilgrimage is a reminder that we were not called to a static but to a moving-forward faith. Consider the following quote:

God's sanctuary is a mobile Ark, his house is a tent, his altar a cairn of rough stones: he leads the Israelites out of Egypt, gives them the solemn feast of Passover and tells them to eat in haste with shodden feet and stick in hand to remind them forever that their viability lies in movement.\*

Of course, movement does not necessarily mean moving physically. It can mean moving within: having a constant capacity to grow in God, a constant hunger for more of God, in order to flourish in our circumstances, whatever they are. Even if we find walking difficult or are confined to home, we can still set the compass of our heart to the path of internal pilgrimage.



\*Quoted by Arthur Paul Boers, *The Way is Made by Walking* (IVP, 2007), p. 39.

## Psalm 84:5 (NIV)

# A different way to travel

*Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.*

*The Message* translation has, 'And how blessed all those in whom you live, whose lives become roads you travel.' It evokes the adventure of God exploring our hearts in order to deepen our awareness of his presence in our lives. The whole psalm balances the benefits of being at home in the safety of God's dwelling place with the call to be open to fresh insights and new journeys.

Whether through going on retreat, visiting a holy place or finding spacious quiet in the confines of our home, it is essential that we are always open to discover more of the God who is with us.

Blessing is mentioned three times in this psalm: in verse 4, where it refers to those who know how to be at home with God and keep their worship ever fresh; in verse 5, where it describes the kind of life which draws its strength from God and not itself; and finally in verse 12, which speaks of the one who trusts God with his life. These three blessings sum up what it means to set your heart on pilgrimage.

### ■ PRAYER

*Wild Spirit of the living God, be so deeply rooted in me that I know when to be still and when to set my heart on pilgrimage. Amen*

## Hebrews 12:1–2 (MSG)

# Travel light

*Do you see what this means – all these pioneers who blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on? It means we'd better get on with it. Strip down, start running – and never quit! No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins. Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we are in. Study how he did it.*

Three essential ingredients for the Christian walk emerge from this text: passion, pace and travelling light. Passion is the business of taking seriously the path we have chosen and fully committing to it. Paul describes the faith journey as a race, but we needn't be intimidated by that idea. If we stay focused on Jesus, he will set a pace we can manage according to our years and abilities.

What we must do, however, is travel light, letting go of anything that weighs us down or holds us back. For Moses, it meant giving up the benefits of a quiet old age as a part-time shepherd. For Paul, it meant giving up his crusade of hate against the new Christians. We may not have the stamina we once had, but the principle of letting go and travelling light in order to press on in our journey of faith applies to pilgrims of all ages.

### ■ PRAYER

*Dear Lord, show me what I need to part with so that I can run the race you set before me. 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](http://thegiftofyears.org.uk) to find out more.

## Debbie writes...

Welcome, and I hope you enjoy mining a rich seam of subjects in this edition of Bible reflections. A recent holiday to Lindisfarne set me thinking about pilgrim paths to many far-flung parts of the world. There's great appeal in spending time in wilderness areas, where the intrusions of modern-day living are kept to a minimum. May these reflections be a form of armchair pilgrimage for you, lending a different perspective on our place in the grand scheme of things.

Each of us has 20:20 vision in hindsight. The what ifs and if onlys of the past can disturb our peace of mind if we're not careful. So these reflections are an antidote to negative feelings which might mar the present, if we're prone to dwelling unhelpfully on days gone by.

Oscar Wilde said that his time in jail showed him that 'where there is sorrow there is holy ground... Someday, people will realise what that means. They will know nothing of life until they do.' We're invited to see our times of weakness as fertile opportunities for spiritual growth.

My hope is that, within these pages, you'll find a blend of light and shade. We walk alongside skilful writers sensitively highlighting some of the mysteries of what it is to be human, especially so as years advance.

Best wishes





# Transforming lives and communities

## Christian growth and understanding of the Bible

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Working with churches and families to explore Christianity creatively and bring the Bible alive



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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.



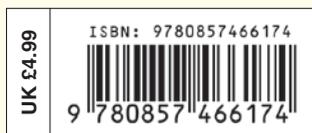
**Bible Reflections for Older People** is edited by Eley McAinsh.

### In this issue...

**Russ Parker** explores the inner pilgrimage of the heart and new writer **Sue Richards** shares how she has found God's strength when she has felt most weak and vulnerable. **Paul Canon Harris** enjoys the beauty of hindsight and **Tricia Williams** discovers shafts of light and joy in the darkest days. There's also a poem by **Maggie Jackson**, former Poet in Residence at the Community of the Resurrection, Mirfield, and an interview with **James Woodward**, Principal of Sarum College, Salisbury.



Blessed are those whose strength is in you,  
whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.  
**Psalm 84:5**



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