

January–April 2018



Bible reflections

for older people

The good neighbour
Jennifer Rees Larcombe

Hungry for hope
Paul Harris

Memory's treasure
Albert Jewell

Made to feel welcome
Ro Willoughby



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About the writers



Jennifer Rees Larcombe is one of BRF's most popular writers. She has six children and 15 grandchildren. She loves her garden, but sometimes tears herself away to speak at conferences around the country. She still works as a counsellor as well as a writer, but most of all she enjoys being a grandmother.



Paul 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. He performs poetry at festivals and venues in the UK and abroad, and is currently co-writing a TV sitcom. He is married to Cathy, a speech therapist, and they have four sons and eight grandchildren.



Albert Jewell lives in Leeds and has been a Methodist minister for 55 years, serving in a succession of pastoral, ecumenical and educational positions. Since 'retiring', he has completed a PhD in ageing studies and is currently researching in the field of dementia. He and his wife Gill have two children and five grandchildren, and rejoice in the recent addition of a great-granddaughter.



Ro Willoughby has been writing and editing Christian resources for many years. She is currently a Licensed Lay Minister at St Michael's Highgate, where she is engaged in ministry with people of all ages, and regularly leads Barnabas in Schools RE Days. She loves creating food that looks and tastes good! No surprise that she also enjoys entertaining.



From the Editor

Welcome! We hope you enjoy this new collection of Bible reflections and find encouragement and inspiration in these pages.

Our writers are all very different, but each one of them brings fresh, intriguing insights, drawn from long years of experience and a deep knowledge of the Bible. **Jennifer Rees Larcombe** wanders around Capernaum watching Jesus meet his neighbours. **Paul Harris** writes of an exuberant, overflowing, ridiculous hope forged from pain and loss. **Albert Jewell** writes with sensitivity and understanding of the gift, and fragility, of memory, and **Ro Willoughby** begins her series on welcome and acceptance with a delightful story of her then four-year-old son solemnly offering to take visitors' coats and make them tea.

In the centre pages, **Debbie Thrower**, Team Leader of BRF's The Gift of Years ministry, meets fascinating, inspiring people like climate change activist **Christine Whild**, and introduces newly discovered poets like **Carla McCowen**, who has been writing all her adult life but has only recently released her work into the wild.

As you read these Bible reflections and spend time with God, we pray that you will know his presence, and know, as Ro Willoughby puts it so well, that 'God loves us so we love him. We come close to him, so he comes close to us.'

God bless you





The good neighbour

Jennifer Rees Larcombe

When someone new moved into our village, everyone was eager to know what they were like and if they would 'fit in'. This was particularly true of those of us who had lived there longest. I wonder how the people felt in the little fishing village of Capernaum, when Jesus arrived to make his home there. Perhaps they had already heard the gossip about how he had escaped from his home town of Nazareth. Everyone there had known him as their village carpenter, so when he stood up in the synagogue and said he was the Messiah, they were so infuriated they tried to kill him.

Perhaps some residents of Capernaum didn't like the idea of having a 'troublemaker' like that as a neighbour. They wouldn't have wanted to upset the Roman soldiers who were stationed in a fort on the outskirts of their village. Everyone thought that the Messiah, when he came, would drive out the Romans, so this crazy imposter might cause serious trouble in the district. So maybe, at first, some people eyed Jesus with hostility.

Yet, to other villagers, he became the best neighbour they ever had. Suppose we put ourselves into the shoes of some of the very different kinds of people who lived close to Jesus in Capernaum; we might discover that many of them were a lot like us.



John 1:41–42 (NIV)

First introductions

The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon... And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him...

Four young fishermen from Capernaum, eager for adventure, took a few days off work to go and hear John the Baptist, the preacher everyone was talking about. ‘Get your lives cleaned up because the Messiah’s coming,’ he thundered at the crowds. James, John and Andrew lapped it all up enthusiastically and, when John pointed to a man in the crowd and said, ‘There’s your Messiah,’ they would have been wild with excitement.

But I suspect Simon felt uncomfortable. He knew only too well that his character matched his name – which meant ‘wobbly reed’. He had always been rash, unreliable and easily led into trouble. Perhaps when his brother Andrew wanted to introduce him to Jesus, he felt he ‘wasn’t good enough’. How astonished he must have been when Jesus looked at him with such kindly eyes, even though he seemed to know everything about him, and said, ‘I’m going to change your name from “Wobbly Reed” to “Rock Man”’ – from Simon to Peter. Maybe Simon suddenly realised that Jesus was able to help him change into the kind of man he had always wanted to be. We are never too old for Jesus to change us.

■ PRAYER

Lord, you know how ‘wobbly’ I feel sometimes – worried about so many things. Give me the kind of rock-like courage you gave Peter. Amen

Mark 1:16, 19–20 (NIV)

Abandoned?

As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew... When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John... He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

I've always wondered how Zebedee felt about being abandoned by his sons, James and John. Did he wonder how he would manage without them – and without his other partners, Simon and Andrew?

When two of my children moved abroad to serve the Lord, I felt lost. Somehow we expect our family members to be there for us when we get a bit older, but sometimes they're genuinely too busy or move too far away – just when we most need their help and support. I found it desperately hard letting go but, looking back now, I can see how their loss developed my faith in God's ability to meet my practical and emotional needs. Zebedee and his wife are so often mentioned later in the story that they obviously came to believe in Jesus too, and his wife even followed Jesus right to the cross (Matthew 27:56). Jesus has a way of disrupting our lives, but only because he longs for us to become ever more dependent on him.

■ PRAYER

Lord, I've lost so many people I used to depend on for help and guidance. Please help me to keep depending on you for every detail of my life. 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 the latest edition of our Bible reflections exploring themes related to being in our more 'mature' years.

A woman in her 80s once compared prayer to 'a country walk with a friend'. She's someone who has deliberately spent time getting to know God and now I hope these reflections will help each of us to get better acquainted with him, while sharing one another's company.

Time spent reflecting on what it means to grow older is time well spent. In *Shaping the Heart* (BRF, 2011), Pamela Evans says, 'Fix your attention on God,' not least because 'he is able to see beyond whatever is currently overwhelming us... Trusting obedience will enable us not only to keep going and to play our part in challenging times now, but also to grow into the people he created us to be – ready and equipped to play even more of a part in due course.'

Pamela is right. Sensing ourselves being shaped by God, made fit for purpose, will mean our perspective is enlarged and our enjoyment of the 'present moment' is transformed.

Best wishes



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.



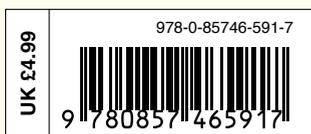
Bible Reflections for Older People is edited by Eley McAinsh.

In this issue...

Popular writer **Jennifer Rees Larcombe** meets Jesus the good neighbour out and about in Capernaum. Poet and one-time vicar **Paul Harris** writes about being hungry for hope, and introduces us to a puppy of the same name. Retired Methodist minister **Albert Jewell** brings all his wisdom to bear in treasuring memory, and Licensed Lay Minister **Ro Willoughby**, who works with people of all ages, reflects on God's invitation to feast with him.



To the Lord your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens,
the earth and everything in it.
Deuteronomy 10:14



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