

September–December 2026



Bible reflections

for older people

On your marks

Martyn Payne

When God speaks

Sally Welch

Behold my servant

Tony Horsfall

Name above all names

April McIntyre



Bible reflections

for older people



Ministries



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EU Authorised Representative: Easy Access System Europe –
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ISBN 978 1 80039 496 4
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Acknowledgements

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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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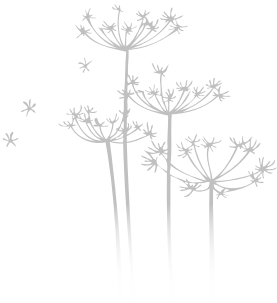
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About the writers



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 BRF Ministries' volunteer prayer advocate, writing prayers for social media, and compiling the BRF Ministries prayer diary.



Sally Welch is a vicar in the diocese of Hereford and is an expert on pilgrimage and labyrinths. She has written numerous books for BRF Ministries and other publishers and was the editor of *New Daylight* for many years. She was a residentiary canon at Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, and was formerly prayer and spirituality advisor for Oxford Diocese.



Tony Horsfall is an author, retreat leader, and mentor based in Bournemouth. He is the author of *Rhythms of Grace*, *Working From a Place of Rest*, and *Attentive to God*. He is married to Jilly, a counsellor, and between them they have four married children and six grandchildren. They share a passion to see people thrive in life and ministry.



April McIntyre grew up on the outskirts of Stoke-on-Trent and now lives in Derbyshire with her husband. She is 'retired' but serves as an Anglican lay minister, with interests in worship and music-making, preaching, spirituality, and silent prayer. Now published locally and nationally, she is a member of the Association of Christian Writers and self-published a book of reflections and poems in 2022.



From the Editor

Welcome!

It was a sad story with a happy ending. Two newborn Nubian goats were discovered in a dustbin in Kent. Still with umbilical cords attached, their plaintive cries reached the ear of a kindly passer-by. With the help of a local vet and milk from a nearby sheep farm, the tiny goats survived. They were named Biffa and Veolia in light of their start in life.

I love those names, and the story made me smile on a particularly bleak news day.

‘What’s in a name?’ asked Shakespeare’s Juliet, famously suggesting that a name is just a random word, with no necessary connection to the person to which it refers. Yet in the Christian tradition, and many other faiths and cultures, our name is incredibly important: deeply personal, powerful, and inextricably connected with our identity. As April McIntyre says in her reflections on her ten favourite names of Jesus:

‘Names are important, especially in scripture, because they give clues about a person’s nature and role. So when, in the gospels, the angel tells Joseph and Mary to name their baby “Jesus”, meaning “the Lord saves”, it is clearly significant.’

From Adam’s naming of all God’s creatures in Genesis, to ‘the new name’ promised in Revelation, names are central to the Christian story. So never doubt the power of your name. It is how God knows you and calls you to himself.

Go well

Eley



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.



On your marks

Martyn Payne

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.

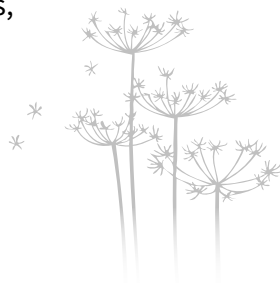
HEBREWS 12:1 (NRSV)

I wonder what experiences or memories you have of taking part in a running race? Maybe it was the egg and spoon at primary school, or competing in the county trials as a teenager, or perhaps you still occasionally go for a jog with a friend.

This scripture above is all about Christian discipleship, which the writer likens to a race, where all encumbrances are set aside, as we look to Jesus who is the beginning and the end of our faith. The imagery is drawn from athletics. There are crowds in the stands cheering us on. These are those who have gone before, running the same race, and who are now in heaven. They include all those who at some time or another have encouraged us on our Christian journey. We are not alone in this race.

And as for any athlete in the arena, to run well, we need to discard unnecessary weights. These weights come in all shapes and sizes and, over the coming ten reflections, we will look at some of these, seeking to lay them aside to help us focus on the race and particularly on the front runner, who is Jesus.

Come, Lord Jesus, help us in our discipleship race to keep our eyes on you and let go of anything that is holding us.



2 Timothy 2:5 (NRSV)

Rules of the race

And in the case of an athlete, no one is crowned without competing according to the rules.

Here is some simple but profound advice from Paul to Timothy, which reminds us that, if we are in a race, there are rules to follow. Those rules are God-given guidelines to keep us on track. They are, of course, the ten commandments and the summary of those commandments as given by Jesus, namely to, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and your neighbour as yourself' (Luke 10:27). However, if we just think of these as rules to follow, it could well make the race more like a duty than a joy and this might indeed weigh us down.

Every successful athlete needs inspiration to keep going. That might come from a good trainer or coach; or the example of someone they love and respect. Christians have the best reason for following the race rules. God loves us and calls us to follow the way of love. That love was supremely expressed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus showed us what following the rules of love looked like in his own life. So let us run the race according to the rules in response to what Jesus has done.

■ PRAYER

Reflect on John 3:16 – 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life' – which is God's supreme word about the love that should inspire our discipleship race.

Philippians 3:7–8 (NRSV)

Letting go

Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

Here is another way to ensure the right mindset on the race of Christian faith. Paul introduces the idea of ‘losing’.

Paul had a promising career as a leading Pharisee of his day; he was an academic success, but his life was turned around in his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus. God’s voice of love was calling him to recognise Jesus as the Messiah. This was the first hard thing to grasp... and his first wrong idea to lose... namely that someone dying on a cross could be the one they had been waiting for.

But it was not only a crucified Messiah that was a challenge for Paul, but also the further revelation that the Jews were not the only people to be called by God. Paul had his thinking turned upside down, and as a result he lost friends, status, influence, and his whole Jewish religious career. For us too, if we’re going to follow Jesus in the race, then there will be things we will have to let go of. I wonder what you might have to lose. As I ask myself that question, I am reminded of some words of the American missionary Jim Elliott, who died for his faith: ‘He is no fool who loses what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose.’

■ PRAYER

Lord, teach me to let go of all that hinders my discipleship race with you. Amen

Philippians 3:13b–14 (NRSV)

Forgetting

One thing I do: forgetting what lies behind... I press on toward the goal, toward the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

Here is one more weight to shed in the Christian race, as we look to Jesus.

‘Forgetting’ is recommended by Paul, and it comes out of his own experience of leaving behind the way of striving to become the best Jew possible in order to please God. There are, of course, positive experiences that happen in our lives which we should not forget, but Paul isn’t talking about those things.

Paul is thinking about the negative and unhelpful things that distract us from moving forward with Jesus. For example, dwelling on past hurts; or replaying the bad things that have happened to us as we remember painful situations where we were badly bruised. Not forgetting the harsh words people have said about us can disable us in the race.

It’s these things that we need to leave behind and strive to forget, as we become caught up instead with ‘now’, and with what God is doing and will be doing in our lives. There is a past to remember for good, but there is also a past that needs to be forgotten, also for our good.

■ PRAYER

*Lord, help us to discern what needs to be forgotten as we race and what needs to be remembered, so we can run well as your disciples.
Amen*

Mark 11:25 (NRSV)

No unforgiveness

‘Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.’

Mark does not include a version of the Lord’s Prayer in his gospel, but there is an echo of it here in these verses, in the conversation Jesus has with Peter. It’s all about forgiveness.

Forgiving others is the most important thing that human beings can do for one another. Where there is unforgiveness, we carry a dead weight that can seriously disrupt our discipleship race.

We all long for forgiveness. We want the hurts we have sustained to be healed and broken relationships to be mended. However, if we can’t forgive others, then we make it impossible to receive the forgiveness that God longs to give us.

It’s almost as if the secret both of believing prayer and being a true disciple is being willing to forgive. To forgive others makes possible our own experience of forgiveness, as we let go of a weight that will otherwise stop us running.

■ PRAYER

Lord, we bring to you hurts we have sustained over the years and we choose to forgive those who have hurt us. Help us in this, so that we might not block the miracle of your forgiveness for ourselves. Amen

2 Corinthians 12:9a (NRSV)

No self-sufficiency

‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.’

We live in a world that exults in self-sufficiency. If you’re able to look after yourself and make it on your own, then you are successful in the world’s eyes. This, however, is not the way of Jesus and this is not how to run the race.

We were created to depend on God. This is what Paul discovered when he experienced the calamities of life, documented so fully in his second letter to the Christians in Corinth. He learned he couldn’t make it on his own; he knew that life is too difficult. In his weakness he needed God’s power.

And this is how we are to run the race of faith, not relying on our own strength, which will only weigh us down, but in the presence of God working within us, whenever we stumble. As we look to God, we discover God’s grace coming to us, particularly through the support of those who care for us. Similarly, we too can help others run the race. The discipleship race isn’t all about me, but about us, racing together, ‘looking unto Jesus’ and depending on God.

■ PRAYER

Reflect on those who have helped you to keep running the race and give thanks for each one of them.

Mark 12:31a (NRSV)

No self-hatred

‘The second [commandment] is this, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”’

There is a hidden weight that many of us carry almost unconsciously on the race of faith and it’s a troubling one for many.

Some of us take the message of our sinfulness so to heart that we no longer see any good in ourselves at all. Of course there are things to be ashamed of, but the second commandment Jesus gives tells us to love ourselves in a positive not a negative way. Loving ourselves means loving what God has made and loving the likeness of God that we bear. It means loving the good that God does in and through us, and rejoicing in God’s love for us.

I think this can be a problem for some of us on the journey of faith. We tend to do ourselves down and we can’t accept praise because we feel we’re not worthy. But God thinks we are special. God has ‘made [us] a little lower than angels and crowned [us] with glory and honour’ (Psalm 8:5).

As we run the race, God says, ‘I want you to love the person I’ve made, and out of that love will flow a love that can bless the world’. So, let us put aside the weight of self-hatred and run the race!

■ PRAYER

Help me, Lord, to be secure in your love for me so that I can spill over with love for others. Amen

Matthew 5:6 (NRSV)

No self-satisfaction

‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.’

As we run the race of faith looking to Jesus, a restless longing should mark our discipleship. Here we are in this world, where all is temporary and everything dies, and where we’re surrounded by what will not last; and this should spur us on to run towards an everlasting city and a place of perfection. The challenge is not to be complacent, but to long for more of God and to seek God with all our heart, wherever we are on our spiritual journey. We should experience a kind of holy discontent.

Jesus gives his blessing to those who hunger for more of what is good, beautiful and lasting. He blesses those who are thirsty for what is true, just and right; those who are restless for what is better and what belongs to eternity. It’s easy to become satisfied with less than the best on our race of faith.

Let us cast aside the weight of self-satisfaction and the complacency which is content to experience ‘just enough’ when God wants to give us abundance, and let us press on towards the finish with a holy energy and expectation.

■ PRAYER

Father God, keep us running towards the better, so we don’t just settle for the good when you offer the best. Amen

Philippians 4:11–13 (NRSV), abridged

No self-pity

I have learned to be content with whatever I have... I have learned the secret... of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

This statement of contentment is amazing. Paul had faced all sorts of hardships and challenges in his missionary work. He had suffered at the hands of not only his enemies but even Christian friends. He'd every reason to become bitter and feel hard done by. He could easily have said: 'Poor me. It's just not fair!' But such self-pity would have been a weight to drag him down on the race of faith.

Instead, Paul says he's learned contentment; he's learned to trust in God, whatever happens, because Christ will always carry him through. This is a really important message when we hear talk of living a triumphant Christian life. Yes, we have victory in Christ, but that means we follow him on a race of faith through difficult times and in dangerous places, where we won't always be sure of the way ahead – maybe not even the next step.

But God is with us, whether it goes well or not; whether we are blessed, or whether we struggle with unanswered prayer. On our race, let's learn with Paul that we can face all things in God's strength, our God, who promises never to leave us.

■ PRAYER

Help us Lord to turn away from self-pity when things go wrong, and instead turn our eyes on Jesus as we run our race. Amen

1 Corinthians 9:25–26 (NRSV)

Staying on track

Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one. So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air...

Paul uses the image of the race several times in his writings, and he could well be the author of the key text which we're exploring from Hebrews 12.

Here in his first letter to the Christians in Corinth, his emphasis is on how we run the race in order to receive the prize. He wants disciples who are focused as they run and not easily sidetracked. The highlighting of self-control reminds us that it's easy to let our own selfish interests and needs distract us in our discipleship. Of course, distractions will come, and that's why we need to be alert and ready to exercise self-control.

So, this means not running aimlessly, and that in turn means drawing on all the training we have done. If we visualise the finish line, it can help us keep going. As we imagine standing on the winner's podium to receive our medal, it can help us not to give up. As we look forward to the elation of finishing and the congratulations of all who are watching, we are inspired to finish the race. In the same way, we need to keep Jesus, heaven, and eternity in mind at all times.

■ PRAYER

*Lord, keep us focused and determined in our race of faith, and guard us from the temptation of being distracted away from the finish line.
Amen*

2 Timothy 4:7–8 (NRSV), abridged

The finish line

I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord... will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Paul writes this to Timothy, under house arrest in Rome, not long before his own death. He knew he was near the end of his race, and he is anticipating the finish line.

He is expecting the crown of righteousness, which will be a gift from the Lord, who has loved him through every step of the race. This gift of being right with God, described as a crown upon our heads, is waiting for all of us who love Jesus and who are looking forward to seeing him again.

The wording here is interesting, because our longing for him isn't just linked to the end; it is also a loving of his appearing as we race. Christ runs alongside us and 'appears' to us just when we need his encouragement. We most often get to see him in those moments when we are at our lowest ebb and need his particular presence.

Those appearances will come to a glorious climax when we see him face to face at the end of the race... when we cross the finish line and fall into his arms.

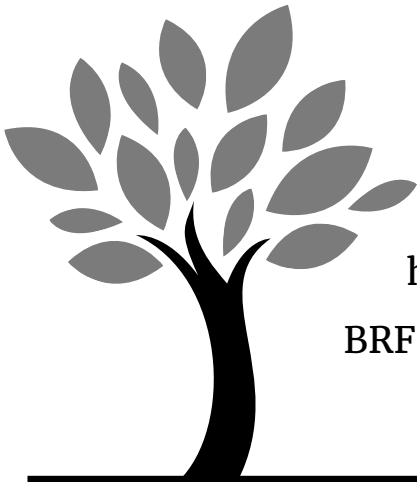
■ PRAYER

Lord, help us keep the faith, as we pray, read your word and meet with your people on the race set before us. Amen



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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 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...

In this issue we enjoy **Martyn Payne's** exploration of the call to run with perseverance the race set before us, while **Sally Welch** draws us into the ways God speaks and how to hear him. **Tony Horsfall** concentrates on a few short verses from the first of Isaiah's servant songs, and **April McIntyre** takes us into Advent with a celebration of ten of the myriad names of Jesus.



'For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness", who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.'

2 Corinthians 4:6-7 (NRSV)

