REFLECTIONS OF HOPE
FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH DEMENTIA
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I think spiritual needs do not go away. When I have fatigue I can put on my spiritual music and that inspires me and I can go into that spot through meditation or visualisation. I have kept my spiritual life going, but I do like my religious family too, which I have lost.

Agnes Houston

Agnes is one of a growing number of people with dementia who have spoken about the importance of spirituality and the difference that having a faith can make when living with the condition.

This book, based around the 23rd Psalm, comprises a series of Christian reflections that can offer both people with dementia and those caring for individuals a source of encouragement and hope. Rather than providing a theological exploration of the psalm we have sought to capture its underlying message. The overwhelming sense throughout is that Jesus knows each of us by name and is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. Whether you are living with dementia, experiencing memory problems, caring for a family member or facing other personal challenges, this psalm is a reminder that nothing, but nothing, can separate us from the love of God.
THOUGHTS ABOUT USING THE RESOURCE

Dementia is a long-term neurological condition that can impact on communication, memory and perception. Because we know that dementia can affect people in many different ways and the nature of the condition is such that it can fluctuate and change on a day to day basis, we have made the book accessible on a number of levels:

- You can focus on looking at the pictures and reflecting and talking about the images and the lines of the psalm they illustrate and in doing so meditate on God’s Word.
- It is possible to read the short narratives inspired by the psalm and use these as the basis of reminiscence.
- You can also meditate on the passages in relation to what the psalm tells us about dementia and draw strength from these or use these for discussion.

We have also included a number of short exercises and activities to share with family and friends, promoting the importance of relationship and shared experience and understanding. We have sought to include a range of ideas reflecting a breadth of skills and abilities and taking into consideration the needs of individuals at very different points in their journey through dementia.

Finally, there is a prayer or a short meditation, a reflection that when we draw near to God He draws near to us.

Underpinning all of these are the RESTOR8 principles which can be found in the Appendix.

Above all, our prayer is that no matter what your journey, this book will be a source of hope and encouragement.
Psalm 23

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.
REFLECTION 1

The LORD is my shepherd,
I shall not be in want
SHEEP AND SHEPHERDS: A REFLECTION

We live in a tiny village in Yorkshire and because we are right in the hills, when it snows, boy does it snow. One of the most moving things at this time is to see the farm workers risking life and limb to find and care for their sheep. They are out in all weathers, no matter how hard the blizzards or how deep the snow drifts. I find it so touching because it reminds me of the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. We’ve lost the meaning of what it is to be a shepherd in these present times. Shepherds were the heroes in days of old – defending their flocks from wolves and other prey – to the point where they would lay down their lives for their sheep.

David, the author of this psalm, was a shepherd and so when he says, ‘the LORD is my shepherd’ he knows what he is talking about. In these few lines I think he is really saying that he puts his life completely in the hands of the Lord. This requires immense trust. We might feel frightened by what is happening around us but when we trust in God, our great Shepherd, we can simply let go, safe in the knowledge that we shall not be in want. This is God’s promise to us.
WHAT DOES THE PSALM TELL US ABOUT LIVING WITH DEMENTIA?

Living with dementia can feel frightening at times. It’s a bit like stepping out into the great unknown and worrying whether someone will be there to catch you. People living with or caring for people with dementia have shared that one of the most difficult things about their experiences is the unpredictability of everything. Before dementia there was a sense of control over events, that everything was known. After dementia things can feel as though they are spinning out of control, into the unknown.

This psalm tells us that it is OK to feel this way. Sometimes all you can do is to focus on the now and to put your trust in God who is our Shepherd, with His promise that He will lead and guide us and provide all that we require. This trust may take time to develop but if you begin by trusting God with the small things you will find that it becomes easier to trust Him with the larger things in life.

THINGS TO DO/SHARE

God knows each of His sheep by name, He knows their needs intimately as the ‘Good Shepherd’. We are all special in God’s eyes. We can understand uniqueness as ‘difference’ but it is more than this. It is also about the special value and worth God puts on each one of us.
Activity one: supported and cared for
Look through magazines and photograph albums and identify pictures that you associate with support and being supported. Make these into a bookmark or a collage as a reminder of your support networks when times are hard.

Activity two: what makes me unique?
The name I like to be known by

Where I was born – significant places I have lived: special places I have loved

Family structure: parents, brothers and sisters, children and significant others

School days: favourite subjects, events

Important events/moments: births, deaths, marriages, family events

My job: first job, training for a profession and any significant experience in working life, awards, etc

Personality type: open and chatty or quiet and reserved, what motivates and influences my mood

Who I get on with: interest groups, friends and networks

What I believe and hold dear: life influences, significant people
Likes/dislikes: food, past times

Activities I enjoy

Key life events that have influenced me

Activity three: all about love
God understands our every need – He is our Provider and the Creator of the world made for us to enjoy in relationship with Him. We can go to Him in times of trouble.

Goodness and love overcome our fears.

Think of the word ‘love’ and write down all the words you associate with it. Think of all the things that you do to show love and the times when you have felt loved.
A MEDITATION AND A PRAYER

Dear Lord – living with dementia feels so difficult, so frightening at times. I feel as though I am stepping into the unknown. Lord, I ask that You will be my Shepherd, that You will guide me through this time and that I will learn to put my trust, my faith in You. I thank You for all the times that You have been there in the past. The times when You have supported me, when You have defended me. I ask You now that You would watch over me, as the Shepherd who protects His flock. Amen.