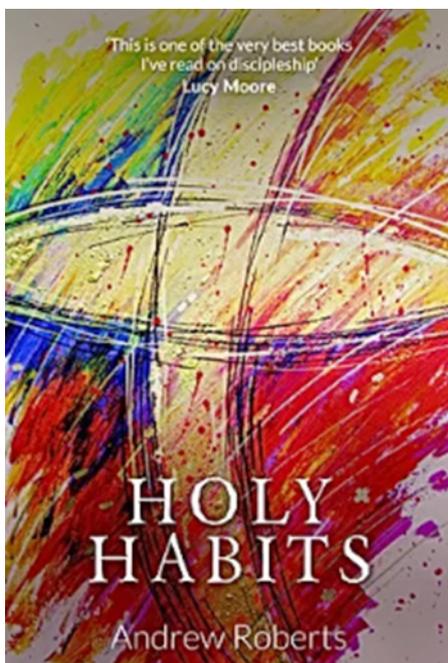


# HOLY HABITS - INTRO & WEEK 1

## SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES TO NURTURE CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP



### TO PREPARE:

- grab a notebook which you can refer to each session and a pen
- your Bible
- your Holy Habits book if you have one
- a cup of tea
- there is no need to do the whole thing in one go – pace yourself

Begin each session with the Holy Habits prayer.

### The Holy Habits Prayer

Gracious and ever-loving God, we offer our lives to you.

Help us always to be open to your Spirit in our thoughts and feelings and actions. Support us as we seek to learn more about those habits of the Christian life which, as we practise them,

will form in us the character of Jesus by establishing us in the way of faith, hope and love. Amen

**Richard Rohr**

As we enter this study, read the wise words of Richard Rohr who said:

God calls us to “not conform to the pattern of the world but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds” through relationship with those who see differently than we do (Romans 12:2).

No two people are going to agree on everything, and they shouldn't. But it is in the discussion around the 'not agreeing' where learning can take place – but only if we show each other grace.

Our text for this study is the following 5 verses from Acts. Have a read through and then read the definition of 'habit'.

### Acts 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

## ACTIVITY

Before you read the definition below, can you write your own definition of a habit, perhaps relating it to faith if you can.

## WHAT'S A HABIT?

- an acquired behaviour pattern regularly followed until it has become almost involuntary
- customary practice or use
- a particular practice, custom, or usage
- a dominant or regular disposition or tendency; prevailing character or quality
- addiction, especially to narcotics

## DESERT MOTHERS AND FATHERS OF OUR CHRISTIAN FAITH

These were people with a deep sense that they needed to take themselves out of everyday life in order to connect with God and live a life of Christian prayer forming spiritual habits or disciplines as a central part of this life. The desert mothers and fathers were:

- ordinary Christians living alone in the deserts of Egypt, Palestine and Syria
- renounced the world in order to follow God's call
- adopted a pattern of life of celibacy, labour, fasting, prayer, and poverty
- believed rejecting possessions and adopting self-discipline would lead to unity with God
- their spiritual practice formed the basis of Western monasticism and influenced both Western and Eastern Christianity
- their writings emphasised the primacy of love and purity of heart
- key themes are charity, fortitude, lust, patience, prayer, self-control and visions
- influenced the rule of St. Benedict
- rule of St Benedict involved living in monastic community whilst living obediently to the pattern of prayer, worship, manual labour and sleep – Benedict had begun as a hermit but recognised spiritual dangers of living so isolated and the need for community to support each other and be accountable to each other

## WHAT ARE THE HOLY HABITS?

Holy Habits emerged from MA biblical and empirical research undertaken by Andrew Roberts at Durham University while he was working for the Fresh Expressions agency in the UK. One of Andrew's MA modules was on Acts and involved writing an essay in response to this question: 'To what extent do we see the picture that Luke presents in Acts 2:42–47 reappearing in fresh expressions of church today?'

Andrew explains the appeal of the Holy Habits approach to discipleship:

*'For the last five, six, maybe more, years, discipleship has risen to the fore of the thinking of not just the major or historic denominations, but also some of the newer churches. Across the board, churches are rediscovering the importance of this calling, so the Holy Habits resources are responding to a discerned need, rather than being the product of a strategy or a committee, and I think that's a key to fruitful resources in general.'*

## ACTIVITY

Go back to the text from Acts at the start. Can you identify the 10 Holy Habits: biblical teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayer, giving, service, eating together, gladness and generosity, worship, making more disciples. It might help to underline or highlight.

Before you read the definition below, have a go at defining a 'spiritual discipline'.

## WHAT IS A SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE?

- much misunderstood term which can lead to an arrogant judgementalism of other people rather than focusing on self-improvement and moving closer to God
- describes becoming spiritually fit and healthy
- the term doesn't appear in Scripture but the concept does
- describes the concept of training oneself to become closer to God, to move closer to the mystery of God and enter that dark unknown with a sense of trust and awe, wonderment and a posture of seeking rather than knowing all

## 1 TIMOTHY 4:7

‘Have nothing to do with profane myths and old wives’ tales. Train yourself in godliness, for, while physical training is of some value, godliness is valuable in every way, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance.’

It’s also connected also to the passing on of wisdom or faith to the generations:

## PSALM 78:1-8

Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth.

I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old,

things that we have heard and known, that our ancestors have told us.

We will not hide them from their children; we will tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.

He established a decree in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our ancestors to teach to their children;

that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and rise up and tell them to their children,

so that they should set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments;

and that they should not be like their ancestors, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God.

## PSALM 145:4

One generation shall laud your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts.

## ACTIVITY

What is your experience of the passing on of wisdom and faith to different generations?

Is the passing of wisdom one way or does it pass in different directions through generations?

## WHAT IS CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP?

- primarily about hope in and through God, and the grace of God
- *living* the way of Jesus, not just knowing the way
- lived out through service in church community, home, workplace and wider community – in no particular order
- not about being on every church roster, although service within church is part of the story
- God calls us, we don’t do the calling – God saves, we don’t do the saving
- Andrew Roberts:  
‘The adventure of Christian discipleship begins with the call of Jesus to follow.  
As disciples we may be more or less clear or confused as to who Jesus is and what following him means..... The call may come loudly or quietly, instantaneously or gradually, but the initiative is with Jesus...when we respond to that invitation we don’t know where the journey will take us.’
- ‘Endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us..’

So the Holy Habits are a way to reimagine ancient traditions and this study will serve to remind us of some and to introduce us to others, perhaps even begin to see things differently, or with new eyes. They won’t be new to some of you but they will to others.

Be open to possibilities – remember you are not going to agree with everything you read and that is not the point. Learning comes when open ourselves up to where we agree and disagree and work out the why.

Spiritual disciples or holy habits are about bringing our focus as individual Christians back to God. But because we are in community with others, whatever we do as individuals will have ripple effects out into that community and all of us benefit.

## ACTIVITY

Read the following core values that have been developed for the Holy Habits – what do you think? Has our current situation altered the way we might look at these?

## HOLYHABITS CORE VALUES

- **DISCIPLESHIP**

Holy Habits is a way of forming whole-life, missional disciples that draws on Luke's model of the early church in Acts 2:42–47.

- **FOR ALL**

Holy Habits is way of life for all: all cultures, languages and in particular all ages.

- **WHOLE LIFE**

We practise holy habits when we gather together and encourage one another in the living of them in the whole of life; at home, at work, in engaging with the big issues of the day.

- **MISSIONAL**

Luke notes how the first believers enjoyed the 'goodwill of all the people' (Acts 2:47). This is way of life designed to serve and bless others.

- **HOLY**

This is way of life that honours the Lord, is guided by the Spirit and seeks to live the type of holiness that Jesus embodied: down to earth, involved, loving, giving.

We have ceased to dream of eternity  
And in our efforts to build a new earth,  
We have allowed our vision  
Of the new Heaven to dim.

Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly,  
To venture on wilder seas  
Where storms will show Your mastery;  
Where losing sight of land,  
We shall find the stars.

We ask you to push back  
The horizons of our hopes;  
And to push back the future  
In strength, courage, hope, and love.

## PRAYER

Finish with the prayer which is attributed to Sir Francis Drake. Whether or not he wrote it, he certainly made it his own:

Disturb us, Lord, when  
We are too pleased with ourselves,  
When our dreams have come true  
Because we dreamed too little,  
When we arrived safely  
Because we sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, Lord, when  
With the abundance of things we possess  
We have lost our thirst  
For the waters of life;  
Having fallen in love with life,



# HOLY HABITS – PRAYER

## TO PREPARE

For this Holy Habit, we will use materials written by Rev Sandy Brodine and available as separate documents on the church website:

- Prayer practices
- Praying with images
- Lectio divina
- Examen

And using a prayer labyrinth sheet written by Megan Coote for those who are without internet access and so unable to link into the church community at this time of physical distancing.

Just a reminder of our text from Acts:

## ACTS 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. As we came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

## ACTIVITY - WHAT IS PRAYER?

Write down the word PRAYER and list everything it means to you – this is your list and you may not agree with others.

## From Holy Habits p154:

'Prayer in all its fullness and richness re-orientates and establishes us in right relationships with God, those we love and the world God cares for. It is a holy and transformative habit and way of being. It is also an antidote to the selfishness that is sin.'

How do you feel about Andrew's words here? What do you agree with and what challenges you?

## From Holy Habits p155:

'The prayers referred to in Acts 2:42 are above all those offered together with the Jewish congregation. This by no means precludes the possibility that the Christians also had their own prayers and set time of devotion.'

Again, how do you feel about these words?

Perhaps these readings do not align with your own thoughts – write down where you both agree and disagree and revisit your original list.

## STYLES OF PRAYER

Now is the chance to try some different types of prayer you may not have experienced before. Do read Sandy Brodine's documents for more details.

Prayer is a way for us to connect with God and to focus upon the needs of others.

It is the 'antidote to selfishness' as Andrew puts it.

## Yahweh or breath prayer

It is impossible to say Yahweh without breathing in and then breathing out. We know that controlling our breathing is actually a way to stay in control of our whole selves and to limit the effects of stress and anxiety.

Begin by breathing in and say *Yah* on the in breath

Then breath out and say *weh* on the out breath

Do this slowly and rhythmically and feel the effects on your mind and body.

How do you feel? When might this prayer be helpful?

## Prayer labyrinth

Labyrinths began to be constructed in monasteries and cathedrals during the time of the Crusades when travelling on pilgrimages became very dangerous. The labyrinths were built so that pilgrims could walk and pray in safety. Sandy has suggested a number of places locally where you can find prayer labyrinths to walk but sometimes walking is simply not possible for everyone.

Using Megan's sheet, and centering yourself with the breath prayer above, slowly move your finger around the labyrinth.

Move into the centre and then slowly out to the edge again.

How did you feel about this style of prayer?

Some people find it soothing, others find it frustrating when they lose where they were and 'get lost'. Which are you?

Can you imagine yourself using this style of prayer or walking a labyrinth?

## Using art or objects for prayer

Icons have been used for centuries to aid prayer and focus the mind on God. You may not have an icon at home – they can be found easily through a quick online search - but can you find a photo, piece of art or an object? It can be anything at all from inside your home or the garden, even a pebble.

Focus your attention upon the object or picture. Glide your gaze across the whole and then focus upon one part – don't force where you look, just allow your gaze to fall where it will.

Focus and allow prayers to come, to flow in and out of your mind.

Again, how did you feel about this style of prayer?

If you used an icon, they need some interpretation and almost translation to understand the meaning behind the gestures, the expressions, who is depicted in the icon.

Can you see yourself using this form of prayer?

## Word art prayer

Write PRAY in the middle of the page and then around the outside write or draw or even use code for all those whom you know need prayer right now – it could be people or situations, yourself, anything. When you think you've exhausted the list connect all the prayers up to the middle PRAY word with lines. Now move around the page, bring to mind the person or situation written or drawn, and spend time slowly remembering each one.

This might be a good way to begin your day, by identifying all those you wish to pray for during the busy-ness. Or you might turn it around and use it at the end of the day to ponder how thankful you are and for what you are thankful before you go to sleep.

Do you feel this might be useful?

## Lectio divina

This is the ancient practice of dwelling upon a piece of text and allowing it to speak to us. To really understand this you will need to do this exercise twice with a gap in the middle. Begin by reading through the Acts 2:42-47 reading slowly twice – don't rush. Then allow words or phrases to jump out at you – what is speaking to you. It might be one word, it might be a whole verse. Now focus your thoughts entirely upon that word and allow the prayers to come.

This will take practice but each time you look at the same text, you will be drawn to different words or phrases. So come back and do this exercise several times with this same text from Acts.

Another way to do this is to allow your Bible to open and just put your finger on the page. Wherever your finger lands start reading for a section or a few verses. Read through slowly twice and then silently ponder the word that draws you in.

Can you see yourself using this style of prayer?

Can you understand more about yourself through your answers?

Prayer is about focusing us on God, not on ourselves but on others. It is an antidote to selfishness where we forget our own wants and ponder the situations other people face.

Have a 'play' with Sandy's resources. Try out new styles of prayer and see what might work for you. Remember the words of Richard Rohr:

God calls us to "not conform to the pattern of the world but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds" through relationship with those who see differently than we do (Romans 12:2).