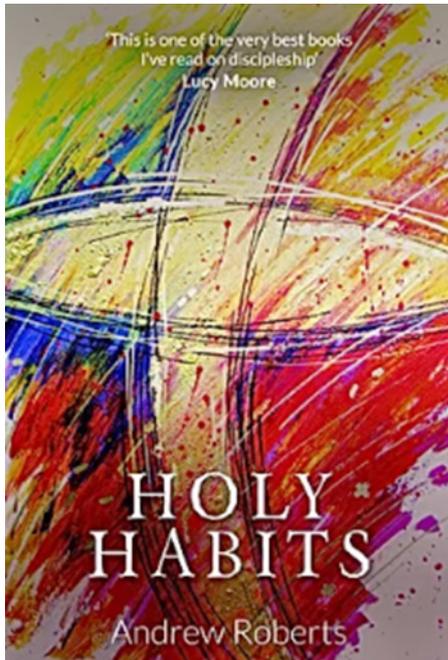


HOLY HABITS - WEEK 5



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

RECAP:

Week 4 – Biblical teaching and eating together

- Can you identify the difference between breaking bread and eating together?
- How do you understand the Bible? How was this challenged or affirmed last week?

TO PREPARE

Begin with the prayer.

Use your notebook to write down answers in point form.

Work your way through the holy habit.

If you can, phone someone else and discuss and share your answers.

It's hard when we can't be physically together but we're trying to get zoom up and running for those who'd like to give it a go.

In the meantime, let's find creative ways to connect.

Enjoy!



HOLY HABITS WEEK 5 – GIVING

TEXT - ACTS 2:42-47

⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴**All who believed were together and had all things in common;** ⁴⁵**they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.** ⁴⁶Day 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, ⁴⁷praising 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

Offerings/planned giving/tithing – however you regard giving to the church, this is a sensitive area and people can become defensive. If you are feeling like this, just ask yourself why and explore that for a while.

SHARING AS COMMUNITY

Josephus, Jewish historian, wrote about the Jewish Essene community based on the Torah. They shared all their possessions – 'Riches they despise, and their community of good is truly admirable'. Andrew Roberts suggests, based on the verb tense in Acts (imperfect), the giving and sharing was not a one-off event but something that happened continually in the life of the community. There are some clues in the Second Testament that Jesus and the disciples had a common purse, with Judas holding it.

John 12:4-6

⁴But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, ⁵'Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii* and the money given to the poor?' ⁶(He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.)

Matthew 6:19-21

'Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6:2

'So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward.

Leviticus 25 about the year of Jubilee, in particular Lev 25:13-17

In this year of jubilee you shall return, every one of you, to your property. ¹⁴When you make a sale to your neighbour or buy from your neighbour, you shall not cheat one another. ¹⁵When you buy from your neighbour, you shall pay only for the number of years since the jubilee; the seller shall charge you only for the remaining crop-years. ¹⁶If the years are more, you shall increase the price, and if the years are fewer, you shall diminish the price; for it is a certain number of harvests that are being sold to you. ¹⁷You shall not cheat one another, but you shall fear your God; for I am the Lord your God.

ACTIVITY

What do we learn from these verses? Remember proof texting – using Scripture to prove a point – leads us to misleading conclusions so make sure you read either side of the verses here and understand the context.

READ HOLY HABITS P165:

Andrew Roberts suggests the Acts reading tells us that the early Christians sold possessions as the need arose and shared the proceeds according to need.

‘When looking at the call narratives, we need to be careful of suggestions that the first followers of Jesus gave away all of their resources in order to live ‘by faith’. The evidence suggests they didn’t but maintained businesses and other sources of income that sustained them and supported Jesus in his mission. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with earning a reasonable salary or running a profitable business. They can be and are valuable sources of regular and sustainable support for Christian mission.

Likewise the ownership of property. The role of the house church was critical in the spread of the gospel. The church grew by spreading from house to house. New communities could be established very quickly in villages, towns and cities. Bradley Blue argues that Acts provides a ‘consistent pattern of the conversion of individuals who are capable of significant benefaction including houses in which the community gathered.’

ACTIVITY

What are your experiences of Andrew’s description?

The nature of God as giving

- Genesis 1 and 2 – giving life through creation, breathing life into Adam
- John 3:16 – God so loved the world, he gave his only Son....
- Acts 2 – the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost

God gives continually, not as a one off event but as part of a relationship with creation and humanity.

ACTIVITY

How do you react to this image of God as eternally giving?

READ HOLY HABITS P167

‘Jesus talks about money more than any other subject but he never does so in a legalistic, percentage-based, prescriptive way. Rather he uses stories and examples to point people to the divine impulse of generous giving. For me the most moving and challenging story about giving is that often called the Widow’s Mite.’

If you think about Zacchaeus, he was prompted to give by Jesus’ affirmation of him – he returned what he had stolen but also 4 times what he had defrauded people. His giving was a response to the love shown by Jesus.

ACTIVITY

Giving does not only involve money, there are other forms of giving eg time, love, listening.

What others? What is hardest for you to give?

READ HOLY HABITS P170:

‘Of all the holy habits presented by Luke and explored in this book, giving is probably the most challenging. Not least because it challenges more directly the selfishness that is at the heart of many powerful economic systems and which is also the root of personal sinfulness....giving when practised and lived out is truly transformative, expressing the very essence of God and making the Kingdom real.’

ACTIVITY

How does this speak into our economic systems?

Consider this also in the light of our current situation.



HOLY HABITS WEEK 5 – SERVICE

TEXT - ACTS 2:42-47

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Activity

Write down all the different ways you have served others, and then all the ways others have served you.

*Ponder the lyrics of 'Brother sister let me serve you':
Brother, sister, let me serve you,
Let me be as Christ to you;
Pray that I may have the grace to
Let you be my servant, too.*

Does this tell you anything about yourself?

In Matthew 20:28, Jesus says he came to serve and not be served.

Andrew Roberts: 'service is a hallmark of discipleship.'

There are no points in being a martyr. If you are the person who does all the serving, what opportunities does that leave others? Take another look at your list of service. Ask yourself 'whose need'? Are you serving because of the need of others or because of your own need? True service for Christian discipleship requires self-awareness.

READ HOLY HABITS P177:

'It is in and through mission that we are changed by our encounters with others, for it is often in them that we meet the 'otherness' of God. But at the same time Christian mission cannot be a transforming process if we leave out the Christ part. The essential ingredient in the formation of Christian disciples is a relationship with the living Christ. The disciples were involved in mission, and they lived in community together with all the challenges this brought, but all that would not have formed them as followers of Jesus were he not with them.

So it is the presence of Jesus that forms us as disciples as we serve and engage in God's mission and it is the presence of Jesus which is the life-giving distinctive in the service we offer.'

ACTIVITY

Points to ponder:

- it is not our ministry but God's ministry
- it is not our mission but God's mission
- God is and has always been at mission in the world; God invites us to join in
- God loves us first and so we love in return
- we join God in mission in the world as a response to this love

Service is always best when it is mutual and reciprocal. Gone are the days when mission meant doing things for others, it's about building relationships with people to show them the love and grace of God, rather than just tell them.

How has your understanding of mission and service changed over the years?

Holy Habits p180:

'Ministry cannot be done to a community by someone who knows what they need, it can only be done with a community by someone who shares their need.'

HOSPITALITY

Holy Habits p181:

‘Christ-like hospitality is radical action because the ‘powerful’ host has all the obligations and the vulnerable guest – the stranger – has almost all the rights...true hospitality is reciprocal; the host’s role is to learn from the guest – rather than attempt to change the guest... the host must allow the guest the right to remain the stranger and accept the possibility of mystery. True hospitality is also reciprocal in the sense that we need to be open to receive it as well as offering it.’

ACTIVITY

Go back to your first list – what are you learning about yourself? Make sure you are thinking about yourself and not others. This is about how you are being formed in faith, not your neighbour!

Can you identify ways you can both serve and allow others to serve you?

Pope Francis: ‘You pray for the hungry. Then you feed them. That is how prayer works.’

Read through these notes about Samuel Wells – how do you respond?

Samuel Wells – ‘For Good: The Church and the Future of Welfare’

Rev Samuel Wells is a UK Anglican minister and vicar of St Martins in the Field Trafalgar Square. He has written extensively on mission and Christian ethics – he uses an asset based approach which he calls the ‘goods’.

Basic points made by Samuel Wells:

- it is the role of the church to be with the poor and marginalised
- we seek the face of Jesus in the face of the poor
- mission has become secularised to obtain grants from govt etc
- being with, not working for is where we need to be as church
- mission should be transformational for the believer
- the role of state is to address the deficits, the role of church is to strengthen the goods (relationship, creativity, partnership, compassion, joy) and hold the state to account

- church models and cultivates goods – cherish people for who they are and be intergenerational

How to ‘be’ with people:

Working for

- my actions make your life better
- established model of engagement
- don’t spend much time with the people for whom we’re working

Being for

- someone else does the action
- more concerned with correct language
- safe distance from people
- doesn’t require relationship

Working with

- forms collaborative networks
- stakeholders come together
- empowers stakeholders
- requires relationship

Being with

- **begin with assets and establish what people are able to do rather than start with deficits**
- **requires relationship**
- **accepts solving issues of others doesn’t help them in long term**
- **accepts things can’t always be fixed**
- **accompanies others as they fix themselves**
- **basis of CPE and pastoral care generally**

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION:

Covenant between God and the people shows God being WITH us, not just delivering the people but being in relationship with them.

Jesus didn’t deliver the people from the Romans but built the goods (assets) by forgiving, forming, equipping, confronting injustice

