

# INTRODUCTORY GUIDE



# HOLYHABITS

MISSIONAL DISCIPLESHIP RESOURCES FOR CHURCHES

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# WELCOME

Welcome to this Guide to Holy Habits. It has been exciting to see how Christians of all traditions have embraced the Holy Habits vision for a Spirit-filled life of discipleship that is holy, adventurous and missional.

These resources have been developed to support churches seeking to deepen and develop such discipleship through the intentional living of ten habitual practices seen in the life of the earliest church, as portrayed by Luke in Acts 2:42–47.

The biblical scholars C.K. Barrett and James Dunn both believe that this passage is instructive for those seeking to form healthy disciple-making communities. Commenting on it, Barrett says:

Luke wished his readers to see what the life of the Christians was like in the apostolic period in order that they might imitate it... His story is not simply a series of biographies but the story of a community.

C.K. Barrett, *Acts 1–14* (T&T Clark, 2004), p. 160

Dunn, meanwhile, argues:

[Luke's] portrayal may be somewhat idealised. But anyone who is familiar with movements of enthusiastic spiritual renewal will recognise authentic notes: the enthusiasm of the members of the renewal group, with a sense of overflowing joy, desire to come together frequently, eating together and worshipping and including the readiness for unreserved commitment to one another in a shared common life.

James Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Epworth, 1996), p. 34

It is the hope and prayer of those who have developed these resources that those using them will discover that same enthusiastic spiritual renewal as these ancient and yet ever-new Holy Habits are lived afresh in these days.

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.

ACTS 2:42-47





# ETHOS

## The nature of the Holy Habits

It is important to be aware that the Holy Habits are not ends in themselves. They are not just ten fun things to study or do, although we hope you will have fun in exploring and living them. Rather, they are composite parts of a habitual holy way of living; a way of living 'day by day' (Acts 2:46–47), both personally wherever we are called to be, and a way of living when we gather and serve together through the community of disciples we know as church; a way of life that encourages growth in discipleship, the formation of new disciples and a fuller experience for others of the kingdom of God.

## The relationship between the Holy Habits

In real life, the Holy Habits are not lived in isolation. They are interrelated, and often they are intertwined. The resources have been developed to allow the Holy Habits to be explored one at a time, but in practising them it is important to do so in an integrated or cumulative way, with each building on the others. In each booklet, you will find suggestions on how the habits relate to each other.

## The origins of Holy Habits

Holy Habits has grown out of a study of Acts 2:42–47 by Methodist minister Andrew Roberts. This study was first published in the *Epworth Review* theological journal (Volume 36, Number 3, July 2009) and then evolved into his book *Holy Habits* (Malcolm Down Publishing, 2016).

The first set of Holy Habits Resources was developed by the Birmingham Methodist Circuit. Those resources have been adapted by a small group of people from the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church to form the present version. While drawing on the rich discipleship heritage of these two traditions in particular, they are accessible and useful for all those seeking to follow Jesus.

For a list of those involved in developing the resources, please see the Credits list on p. 23 of this guide and at the end of each booklet.



## The values of Holy Habits

Holy Habits have been shaped by an understanding of discipleship based on two principles:

- It is a response to the call of Jesus.
- We learn and grow as disciples (personally and collectively) as we follow the one who calls. The Greek New Testament word for disciple, *mathetes*, literally means one who learns as they follow.

Holy Habits encourages a living out of discipleship that is:

- centred on and inspired by the divine community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit
- nurtured in the community of the church through smaller and larger groups, and one-to-one relationships
- lived out in the whole of life: in work, rest and play
- missional, participating in the mission of God and always seeking the blessing of others
- creative, imaginative and contextual
- for all.

## Preparing for Holy Habits

Luke was very deliberate in the way he wrote. He begins our core passage with four key words: 'They devoted themselves to'. If Holy Habits is to be a fruitful experience, then it will need the same kind of devotion that Luke points to in Acts 2. This is not a quick fix.

Later on in the Introductory Guide, you will find practical ideas on how to journey with these resources. Here, it is important to note the need to approach this adventure with the kind of devotion that has been a hallmark of all movements of enthusiastic spiritual renewal.

As you embark on your journey, you may wish to pray this prayer for the faithful practice of Holy Habits, which starts with a passage from Romans 5:4–5.

Endurance produces character, and character produces hope,  
and hope does not disappoint us...

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

# THE RESOURCES

## The nature of the resources

The Holy Habits resources have been designed to be a gift to those who use them; a gift to be used imaginatively, creatively and contextually, made alive by the breath of the Holy Spirit. They are very much thought-starter ideas, not a script to be slavishly adhered to or a master plan. They cannot and do not say or cover everything there is to say about the Holy Habits. So where you find gaps, please explore the riches of scripture, your tradition and your experience to craft further thinking, ideas and expressions of these habits to help these practices become ever more a part of down-to-earth holy living.

Each Holy Habit booklet has three sections:

### **1 Understanding the habit**

Introductory material for services of worship and groups.

### **2 Forming the habit**

Material to help individuals and churches make these Holy Habits a regular way of life, including:

- a** stories that show how these habits are transformative
- b** suggested practices for individuals and churches to make the habits habitual
- c** review questions for churches.

### **3 Going further with the habit**

Material and ideas to help people go deeper, including:

- a** pieces of theological reflection
- b** further practices to help deepen the habit
- c** suggested films and new media pieces to watch, and books and poems to read
- d** art and photographs to reflect upon.



The materials are in a mix of styles and pitched at different levels; this is intentional. Contributions have come from a wide variety of authors, including children and young people, and in editing them together we have tried to preserve different voices and flavours. The materials are also intended to be a feast of ideas from which you can select some that are appropriate to your context and learning styles.

The suggestions for ‘Forming the habit’ are divided into three sections: sometimes, often and occasionally. While we have given some suggested frequency (daily/weekly, etc.), these guidelines are not meant to be prescriptive – do what works for your context.

**HOLY HABITS** is an initiative to nurture Christian discipleship. It explores Luke’s model of church found in Acts 2:42–47, identifies ten habits and encourages the development of a way of life formed by them. These resources, which include an introductory guide, have been developed to help churches explore the habits in a range of contexts and live them out in whole-life, missional discipleship.

Biblical Teaching  
 Fellowship  
 Breaking Bread  
 Prayer  
 Sharing Resources

Serving  
 Eating Together  
 Gladness and Generosity  
 Worship  
 Making More Disciples



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