

# BIBLICAL TEACHING

“ They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ”

# HOLYHABITS

MISSIONAL DISCIPLESHIP RESOURCES FOR CHURCHES

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well as individuals?

people who are lonely like Zacchaeus?  
you or your group can do to help?



## Remember the context

This Holy Habit is set in the context of ten Holy Habits, and the ongoing life of your church and community.

**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

## A prayer for the faithful practice of Holy Habits

This prayer 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

# INTRODUCTION

Holy Habits is about practising doing holy things until they become instinctive. In this booklet, we explore the habit of the early Christians in which ‘they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching’.

The opening chapters of Acts present a continuum of ministry from Jesus through the apostles. Jesus had a teaching ministry which was rooted in the Hebrew scriptures (the Old Testament of the Christian Bible). This is continued through those who were first identified as his disciples – the apostles in Luke’s narrative. James Dunn argues that:

The apostles are the medium and the guarantors of the teaching focused on fresh interpretations of the scriptures and beginning to order the memories of Jesus’ teaching and ministry into forms suitable for instruction, worship and proclamation.

James D.G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Epworth, 1996), p. 35

So the teaching is **Biblical Teaching**, drawing on the Hebrew scriptures, out of which Jesus taught, and Jesus’ own teaching, much of which went on to be recorded in the New Testament. For us, **Biblical Teaching** includes also the letters and Revelation, which were written after the events in Acts 2.

With this habit, it is particularly important to both explore it and live it. The four words ‘they devoted themselves to’ are important. In exploring this Holy Habit, it is hoped that you will not just discover more of what the Bible says, but renew your devotion to applying **Biblical Teaching** so as to grow in grace and holiness and thereby help to transform the world to reflect the kingdom values we discover in the scriptures.

We can explore **Biblical Teaching** on our own, and even better together. We need to engage imaginatively, critically, prayerfully and contextually. Your exploration of this Holy Habit can provide the opportunity to engage with **Biblical Teaching** in different ways and then to live out the insights you gain.

## Reflections

We develop a Holy Habit of ‘devoting ourselves to the apostles’ teaching’ by paying loving attention to the whole of the Bible, wrestling even with the parts we do not like or find difficult. We listen, read, reflect and respond. We pray and put it into action. We deliberately practise doing all that until it becomes completely instinctive.

This habit is called **Biblical Teaching**, but that does not mean that there is only one way to understand a particular passage, or to apply it to our lives. In the Gospels, Jesus makes points and states morals. However, he also speaks enigmatically or in parables, telling stories that go beyond making a particular point; they stimulate our imaginations, confound our expectations and lead us to see in new ways God’s love and grace working in the world and in our lives.

Biblical scholarship is helpful, but the Holy Habit starts with ordinary people who tell their story and look to connect it with the stories in the Bible; or who read the Bible and look to connect it with their own experience. When practised together, the Holy Habit of **Biblical Teaching** is perhaps best described as ‘the people of God, gathering around the word of God, sharing their insights into the gospel in order to discover the Holy Spirit’s insights among the people’. So we move from reading or listening to passages of the Bible to hearing God speaking to us in and through them.

As you discover more of what the Bible says and how it can guide your living, we pray that you will develop a passion for **Biblical Teaching** that will change your life, and the world through you.



Resources particularly suitable for children and families



Resources particularly suitable for young people

CH4 Church Hymnary 4 (also known as Hymns of Glory Songs of Praise)

RS Rejoice and Sing

SoF Songs of Fellowship 6

StF Singing the Faith

## Introduction to the theme

For this Holy Habit, two introductions to the theme are suggested. These could be used in two consecutive services, or at different points during a single service.

### The importance of biblical teaching – Colossians 3:12–17

Have a selection of dressing-up clothes and invite volunteers to come and try something on. If people are willing, invite them to walk up and down the catwalk (aisle). Play some music to accompany them.

Talk together about what clothes are needed for different occasions or activities (e.g. work, sport, going out).

Talk about how Paul calls the Colossians to clothe themselves with garments of holiness – compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, love, peace and thankfulness (Colossians 3:12–17). Invite the congregation to talk about what that might look like.

Remind them that developing, nurturing and embedding the Holy Habits will clothe us in the garments of holiness.

See how many of the Holy Habits the congregation can recall. Can anyone recall from memory Acts 2:42–47?

Talk to the congregation about the Holy Habit of **Biblical Teaching** and what that means. (You may find it helpful to refer to the Introduction.)

Read Colossians 3:16–17 and break it into three parts:

- Explain how letting ‘the word of Christ dwell in you richly’ is achieved by studying and living God’s word.
- Talk about the importance of learning from God’s word together: ‘teach and admonish one another in all wisdom’.
- Think about different ways of learning from God’s word, through music, dance, drama and art: ‘with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God’.

To close, pray the Holy Habits prayer (see p. 5), or you could sing ‘With psalms and hymns and spiritual songs’ by Steve Morgan-Gurr.

## Exploring the books of the Bible – the whole Bible

How well does your Christian community know its Bible? We are in a generation now where many who come to faith will not have a traditional Sunday school grounding. This is a fun way to introduce the idea of the Bible as a ‘library’ rather than one homogenous book. It can be adapted in many ways for different contexts.

Prepare 66 strips of coloured paper – representing the spines of books on the shelf – and write or print on each one the name of one book of the Bible. Each category of book (poetry, history, wisdom, etc.) should be on a different colour. Either hide the ‘books’ around the worship/meeting space in advance, or give them out to people as they arrive.

You may wish to bring in a range of different books to show people and let them choose one each or one per small group to have a look at, e.g. cookery book, knitting patterns, car manual, DIY instructions, storybook/novel, poetry, hymn book, art book, history book, textbook, atlas, diary.

Go round and ask:

- What kind of book do you have?
- What is it for?
- Who is it for?
- Who wrote it?

Explain that the Bible (literal meaning: ‘library’) is a collection of lots of different types of writing that help us in different ways. In this activity, we are going to form the Bible library.

Invite people to search for the hidden strips or begin to collect those given out as people arrived. As the ‘books’ are found or collected, the aim is to build up your library and eventually to make a Bible with all 66 books in place – so you will need to keep moving fairly fast. People can put the books of the same colour together, or decide as they go along where they will go in the ‘library’. As the groups build, invite people to observe what those of the same colour have in common. If there is sufficient knowledge (or using a Bible), organise the books into Bible order.

During the collation, you can share the following information about the Bible. You might want to reflect on this again at the end of the exercise.

- We usually meet the Bible bound as one book, but it was written by many different authors over a period of years.
- In some cases, we are confident about who wrote the individual books, in other cases we are less certain.
- In this one book, we find anthologies, stories, history and law (if all ages are present, you may need to use other terms). A good way to think of this is to imagine the shelves in a library. If we wanted to read about someone's life, we might turn to biographies; for a more personal insight, we might find some of their letters; to understand what is accepted, we might need to look up the legal situation under 'law'.
- In a library, information is not stored in the order it was written in and the Bible is the same.

Once all the strips have come forward and are laid in place, invite people to share their reflections on the exercise. Does it help knowing that there are different types of books and writing in the Bible, written by different people at different times? What questions does this raise for you?

Conclude with a reflection or conversation about the rich resources we have in the Bible and about how we continue to learn from it and be inspired by it and are challenged to interpret what it means for our living today.

Round off in prayer, giving thanks for those who wrote the books we have in the Bible and for those who help us to understand them. Pray too for the help of the Holy Spirit to both understand and live out the teachings of the Bible in everyday life and action.

# GROUP MATERIAL AND ACTIVITIES

Some of these small group materials are traditional Bible studies, some are more diverse session plans and others are short activities, reflections and discussions. Please choose materials appropriate to whatever group you are working with.

## Learning together in community

### Acts 8:26–40

It is easy to think that Bible studies should only be led by someone with academic training in theology, but while they might have particular gifts and insights to offer, all those who gather around the Bible have a part to play in opening up its teaching. We all bring our own experiences of life, and our own questions about what the text means for us. A group from the Birmingham Methodist Circuit with no academic theological training, just a passion for the Bible, prepared the original version of this study, both to share their insights and to encourage other groups to do likewise.

Spend a few moments either as a group or individually thinking about how and when you read the Bible, what you find most helpful and why. What helps you to live out the Holy Habits?

Read Acts 8:26–40.

The story focuses on two characters: Philip and the Ethiopian official. Who are they? What do you make of them? Look at what is said about each character and note what they have in common and how they differ. This is not a natural teacher-and-student relationship. How would each character have felt talking with the other one?

In verse 27, we hear that the Ethiopian is returning from worship yet later, in verse 31, he declares that he does not understand the scripture he is reading. ‘How can I, unless someone guides me?’ (Acts 8:31).

- Do you always understand what is written in the Bible? What would help?
- If you find something that you don’t understand, what do you do? Where do you take your questions?

Verse 31 says that the Ethiopian invited Philip to join him in the carriage. The Ethiopian took a risk, but so did Philip. Through taking the risk they both gained much.

- Who would you expect to teach you about the Bible?
- Do you ever consider your own interpretation less valid than others?
- Has there been a time when someone who you would not expect to teach you opened your eyes to what a Bible passage meant?
- Do we invite people into our churches, youth or home groups and expect to learn from them?

There are many different ways to read the Bible. God can speak to anyone through the Bible and therefore we can all learn from one another irrespective of our education, age or experience. Different groups may read the Bible in different ways: young or old, black or white, male or female. Why not encourage someone who comes from a different perspective to explain what specific passages mean to them and how those passages shape their living?

The Ethiopian hears Philip's interpretation and immediately feels compelled to be baptised himself.

- Has a passage in the Bible, or a new understanding of a biblical passage, ever touched you and made you respond in a way that you would never have expected to respond?

The Holy Spirit led Philip and gave him the courage to take a risk.

- When has the Holy Spirit guided us, or given us courage?
- Have we felt the Spirit's presence in a special way when reading the Bible?
- How does the Holy Spirit help us to live out **Biblical Teaching**?

# ARTS AND MEDIA

There are many films and books containing scenes about **Biblical Teaching** which could be used as an illustration in worship. However, it is suggested that the following films and books are watched or read in their entirety and followed by a discussion to go deeper into the topic of **Biblical Teaching**.

## Films

**God on Trial** (12, 2008, 1h26m)

A group of Jews awaiting death in a concentration camp put God on trial to determine whether he has gone against his covenant with humanity.

- Which life experiences challenge our engagement with **Biblical Teaching**?
- Which parts of **Biblical Teaching** help us to deal with these challenges?

 **The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe** (PG, 2005, 2h23m)

Four children travel through a magical wardrobe to Narnia, where they discover their destiny to free the land from the evil White Witch, with the help of a mystical lion.

- **Biblical Teaching** is about living God's way, about living the Holy Habits. What do each of the

children learn about how they live and what they do?

- How might this relate to your living out of the Holy Habits?

 **The Matrix** (15, 1999, 2h16m)

In this, the first of a series of three films, we follow the tale of Thomas Anderson, a computer hacker going under the name Neo, who discovers that the world is actually a simulated reality called the 'Matrix'. He is invited to leave the Matrix and enter the fight against the machines which have enslaved humanity for energy. It is prophesied that the 'One' will come and will overpower the machines.

- The parallels between this story and the Bible are striking, although radically different, and it is worth watching through that lens.

## Noah (12A, 2014, 2h18m)

A retelling of the biblical story of Noah.

- Compare the film with the story of Noah in the Bible (Genesis 6–10). How faithful is the film to the original text?
- Are there parts of the Bible you would prefer to ignore because you find them difficult or confusing? Is there anything you wish could be added?

## Philomena (12A, 2013, 1h38m)

This film is based on a true story, told in a book of the same name by Martin Sixsmith. A political journalist becomes invested in the story of a Catholic woman's search for her son, who was taken away from her after she became pregnant and was sent to a convent.

- How is **Biblical Teaching** used (or misused) to justify the actions of the different protagonists in the film?

## The Prince of Egypt

(U, 1998, 1h39m)

This animated retelling of the story of Exodus follows the life of Moses, who, upon discovering his Hebrew slave roots, starts on a journey for God which leads him to rescue his people from bondage.

- Compare the film with the story of Moses in the Bible (Exodus). How faithful is the film to the original text?
- Are there parts of the Bible you would prefer to ignore because you find them difficult or confusing? Is there anything you wish could be added?

## Veggie Tales

This series of children's animated films features fruit and vegetable characters. In each episode, a different Bible story is retold in a humorous way. These stories are great for primary-school-aged children.

- How could you use films – these or others – as a way of introducing children to **Biblical Teaching**?

## Books: fiction

Are there people in your church or local community who would like to discuss some of these books at a book club? Guidance on how to form these is widely available online, and you could also ask denominational training officers for help.

## A Lineage of Grace: Five stories of unlikely women who changed eternity

**Francine Rivers** (Tyndale House Publishers, 2009)

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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