

SHARING RESOURCES

“ All the believers
were together and had
everything in common. ”

HOLYHABITS

MISSIONAL DISCIPLESHIP RESOURCES FOR CHURCHES

Edited by
ANDREW ROBERTS
NEIL JOHNSON
and TOM MILTON

SHARING RESOURCES

“ All the believers
were together and had
everything in common.”



The Bible Reading Fellowship

15 The Chambers, Vineyard
Abingdon OX14 3FE
brf.org.uk

The Bible Reading Fellowship (BRF) is a Registered Charity (233280)

ISBN 978 0 85746 682 2
First published 2018
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0
All rights reserved

Text © individual authors 2018
This edition © The Bible Reading Fellowship 2018
Original design by morsebrowndesign.co.uk & penguinboy.net

The authors assert the moral right to be identified as the authors of this work

Acknowledgements

Unless otherwise acknowledged, scripture quotations from The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, Anglicised edition, copyright © 1989, 1995 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations on cover and title page, or marked NIV, are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version (Anglicised edition) copyright © 1979, 1984, 2011 by Biblica. Used by permission of Hodder & Stoughton Publishers, a Hachette UK company. All rights reserved. 'NIV' is a registered trademark of Biblica. UK trademark number 1448790.

Scripture quotations from the Revised English Bible, copyright © 1989 by Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press.

Photograph on page 43 copyright © Thinkstock; photographs on pages 4, 11, 27, 30, 34, 39, 41, 49, 51 and 62 copyright © Tom Milton and the Birmingham Methodist Circuit.

Every effort has been made to trace and contact copyright owners for material used in this resource. We apologise for any inadvertent omissions or errors, and would ask those concerned to contact us so that full acknowledgement can be made in the future.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction | 6 |
| UNDERSTANDING THE HABIT | 9 |
| Worship resources | 10 |
| Group material and activities | 21 |
| FORMING THE HABIT | 31 |
| Stories to show the habit forming | 32 |
| Practices to help form the habit | 35 |
| Questions to consider as a church | 44 |
| Connecting the habits | 45 |
| GOING FURTHER WITH THE HABIT | 47 |
| Developing further practices of sharing resources | 48 |
| Arts and media | 55 |

To order more copies of the Holy Habits resources, or to find out how to download pages for printing or projection on screen, please visit brfonline.org.uk/holy-habits.



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

In Acts 2:44–45 and 4:32–37, Luke presents pictures of the early Christian communities of disciples supporting one another and those in need in the wider community by the generous sharing of their resources. They shared and sold possessions to create a common fund which could be used to support those in need of income or resources. The fund may also have supported the apostles and, later on, the deacons and others. It was a powerfully prophetic, counter-cultural expression of community then. It remains so today. Much of 21st-century Western culture encourages us to live separate, independent lives protecting our individuality, our privacy and our belongings. The same attitude is also becoming more prominent within the politics of nation states.

In Acts 2:44, we hear that the disciples were together and had ‘all things in common’. As you explore this habit of **Sharing Resources**, you may like to reflect on what having all things in common meant to those early Christians, and how we relate that to our lives today personally and collectively in holy living.

This is a particularly challenging habit. It is not about offering others what you can spare. Nor is it about taking from others what you fancy. To share something requires us to change our relationship with that item, perhaps relinquishing our power over it, or taking more account of how we use it. Sharing roles or gifts may mean accepting that a task is not completed to your own exacting standard. Sharing ideas or thoughts may make you vulnerable. True sharing is about working together in an open, honest and thoughtful manner without any hidden agendas. Sharing can be costly and demanding but it is a way to life-giving and transformational experience.

Reflections

I wonder how you would feel if you were sitting in your kitchen, having your first cuppa of the day, and another member of the church let themselves into your home, helped themselves to a cup of sugar, and left again. Or indeed, how comfortable would you feel walking into another church member's home and helping yourself in such a manner? I am sure that we would not begrudge most people a cup of sugar, but I suspect there are very few people we would want to have such free and open access to our private spaces. Similarly, we are very cautious of invading others' privacy.

To have 'all things in common' is about both giving and receiving, and it needs to be mutual. It could mean sharing belongings, skills, ideas, time or roles. **Sharing** may not be the obvious route to take, and it may take courage to initiate it, but from those occasions where we have shared deeply with others, we know that it is often ultimately more rewarding than simply giving.

Sharing Resources involves changing the way we think and the way we operate. As you explore this Holy Habit, think about the different relationships that you have, with individuals, the church, the community and the world. What do you currently have in common and what opportunities are there for sharing and growing that commonality or understanding? You might like to take the 'Share40' challenge outlined later in this booklet. How will your relationships grow and become more exciting by **Sharing** more?



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

When we think of **Sharing Resources**, it would be easy for our minds to jump instantly to money, possessions and tangible assets. However, 'having all things in common' suggests a much deeper **Sharing** of ourselves and of our lives in the service of God and God's creation.

For this reason, two introductions to the theme are included, to help broaden our understanding of what it means to share our resources.

Share and share alike

Why not let the children share in leading worship? Children understand what it means to share: to share toys, to play together, to learn together. They also know the pain of **Sharing**, as is so often seen in the frequent cry of 'That's mine!'

Ask them beforehand to think about what it means to share, and invite them to write a sketch, poem, song or rap to show the congregation what it means to share. Encourage them to think about what they have enjoyed sharing, and things that they have found difficult to share, and to offer these to God in prayer with the congregation.

Sharing responsibility

What do you value in life? What people, places and moments? We all have moments and places where we get a glimpse of the glory of God through creation around us. For some of us it's found in the work we do, for others it's in the people and places we go to in our free time. In many of our lifetimes, the places where we live have been radically changing and this calls us all to reflect on how we share the world that God has shared with us.

In many places in the world, the reality of human-induced climate change is already being felt. Selina, aged 29, from Bangladesh, takes up the tale.

Climate change is causing many changes. Previously I used to grow rice, but now this is becoming really difficult. People are beginning to farm fish because the water in the area is so salty, but sometimes it's so salty the fish die. The salt water makes it difficult to grow rice like we used to. It's damaging to our environment and to the rice fields.

Charities like Christian Aid provide ways for individuals and churches to **Share Resources** and to help communities reduce the effects of the changing climate. They challenge governments and businesses to use the resources they have to invest in a more sustainable future. This is because if we share our resources in ways that recognise the interconnected nature of our world, new opportunities can emerge. Storm shelters in the Philippines provided shelter to communities when hurricanes and typhoons hit. As a result of global investment in renewable technology, it is now affordable to put solar panels on the shelters and ensure those sheltering can easily refrigerate any medicines needed.

Sharing Resources to care for creation is a deeply spiritual calling. It challenges us to open our eyes to the world around us. It lifts our eyes beyond our immediate surroundings to take in the enormity of creation and opens our ears to the voice of the oppressed. By doing so, we are fundamentally challenged and changed. Once we have heard about the reality of a changing climate for people like Selina, we cannot unhear it. We are called to create a more sustainable future.

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.

Sharing in the early church

Acts 4:32—5:16

There is a lot of material in this session, which may be better spread over several meetings.

Background

The call to the adventure of Christian discipleship that we are exploring from the characteristics of the early church described in Acts 2:42–47 is echoed in particular ways in this later passage. In between, Luke has described a sequence of events around the temple. Peter and John heal a man lame from birth. Peter responds to the amazement of the crowd in a bold proclamation of the gospel. The authorities perceive this as provocation and Peter and John are arrested, but many believe. A description follows of the trial and the gathering of believers to which Peter and John report after they are set free. Under threat, they respond in confidence, seeking strength to continue to proclaim the good news of Jesus and to bring healing and other signs and wonders.

Much of the book of Acts is about the church looking outward, travelling on, bringing healing and confronting the status quo – sometimes making friends, at other times facing opposition. However, occasionally the focus changes and we are invited to look inwards; this passage is one such interlude where the reader is encouraged to think about what it means to be one holy community: in the words of the NIV, ‘All the believers were one in heart and mind’ (Acts 4:32). Some will see this passage as historical reality; others will view it as an idealised and theologically profound portrait of what a community of faith could be.

Prayer

As you gather for prayer, encourage the group to look around and be aware of the resources we share together as we meet. There may be comfortable furnishings, hospitality and refreshments, different versions of the Bible, a prayer book or concordance.

There is a cost to some of these things. Perhaps the greater cost is what we risk when we are willing to share of ourselves. Invite the group to think about the less tangible things we share as we meet together (e.g. ideas, experiences, values, stories, silence, understandings, fellowship).

- Are we willing to share our knowledge, to be open about our doubts and uncertainties, to share our understanding of the biblical text and to share stories from our experiences?
- How willing are we to give space to others, to hear what they bring?
- Are we willing to sacrifice our own opinions and the opportunity to speak, in order to encourage others to grow in faith?

Bring these thoughts together in prayer:
Sharing God, Father, Son and Spirit,
We rest in the quiet, thankful for your presence with us as we meet.

(Silence)

Speak to us through your word,
in the voices of others
and in the silence speak into our thoughts.

(Silence)

Bless us with your Spirit,
enter into our hearts and minds
as we share together with one another
that we may know you better
and go away equipped to share your love with others.
Amen

Reading and discussion

Share the text by reading it aloud and then give space for each person to read it to themselves to see if a word or phrase strikes them. Allow sufficient time for this, remembering that some people need time to savour things for a while before being ready to share.

Invite people to contribute their word or phrase, and to say how it made them feel – e.g. curious to know more, cheered, concerned, energised or depressed. Sometimes people find it helpful to unpack their response in some detail. This could take the whole of your allotted time, and may well be a way in which you come to notice God’s promptings. On other occasions, it may take only a few moments, in which case the following questions may be helpful.

- 1 What does the group make of verse 32, ‘one in heart and mind’ (NIV) or ‘of one heart and soul’ (NRSV), and the concept of sharing everything they had? Is this possible, desirable or necessary for a community to be Christ-following? Are there circumstances where this could be helpful or where it could be dangerous?
- 2 Verse 32 is followed by a reminder of the power of the community and the writer is prompted to return to the resurrection of Christ. What might the links be between verses 32 and 33? God’s grace is given before any faith or response – might we prefer verse 33 to come before 32? Might this make a difference to our thinking about question 1?
- 3 How do we, both as individuals and as church communities, relate to verse 34, ‘there was not a needy person among them’?

After the introductory section, there are two specific examples of sharing: encouragement in the case of Barnabas and a warning in the case of Ananias and Sapphira.

- 1 Barnabas, we are told, is a Levite (a group dedicated to Israel’s spiritual wellbeing rather than stewards of the promised land – Deuteronomy 12:12; Joshua 14:3–4). He comes from Cyprus, not from Israel. At Pentecost, when the Jews of the diaspora (the word used to describe the Jews that lived outside Jerusalem) return to Jerusalem and share understanding, he is given a new name by the apostles as someone who is a man of encouragement, or as one whom others are encouraged to imitate. What might have enabled him to share so profusely? Are there individuals or groups whom we see as Barnabas?
- 2 Responding to God’s grace does not always make us as generous and life-giving as Barnabas, so with heavy hearts we turn to the story of Ananias and Sapphira. Notice what Ananias does and doesn’t do: he is generous, he gives some of his wealth, but he doesn’t tell the truth and his gift turns from being life-giving to

being death-dealing. There are all sorts of reasons why Ananias and Sapphira might have held back; it might be helpful to consider some of them to work out when and how we find it easy to be generous and when and how we find the need to hold back. Why might they not have given everything? Have another look at verses 3–4. Do you think Peter is angry, perplexed, sorrowful, disappointed or just furious? Ask yourselves the same question about verse 9.

- 3 What are we to make of the deaths? Are they to be understood as punishment, coincidence or an illustration of how deception and holding back from generosity bring suffering and diminish all those involved?

Application

The Pentecost experience in Acts 2 was one of profound **Sharing**. As ‘Pentecost people’, our sharing in the resurrection life given by the Spirit brings mutual understanding, and is a key part of our discipleship.

- What encouragement for **Sharing Resources**, both spiritual and material, can Barnabas give us?
- How might this be life-giving for ourselves, for our church, for our community?
- What warnings about the fear of **Sharing Resources** and of speaking the truth can Ananias and Sapphira give us?
- How might this speak to us, to our church, to our community?
- How do we feel when people ask for volunteers at church, work or home?
- How might each of us continue to develop the Holy Habit of **Sharing Resources** this week?

Closing prayer

Perhaps you could use some of your conversation from the application section to offer a prayer of blessing for one another, giving thanks for the resources of time, thinking and conversation you have shared as well as your commitment to share with those you will meet in the coming days.

Spend a moment of quiet reflecting on how this session will feed into your prayers.

Further reflection

For a follow-up session, consider the final sentence under ‘Background’ (p. 21). Think about how those in your group see the passage and whether this matters or not.

ARTS AND MEDIA

There are many films and books containing scenes about **Sharing Resources** 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 **Sharing Resources**.

Films

The Blind Side (12A, 2009, 2h9m)

A true story about a homeless and traumatised teenager who has drifted in and out of the school system. He is taken in by a caring woman and her family. As a result, his life turns around, despite setbacks, and he achieves success as a professional American football player.

- How can we share the resources of our homes with others?



Despicable Me (U, 2010, 1h35m)

Comedy in which Gru, a grumpy evil mastermind, hatches a plan to steal a shrink-ray from another evil genius. Gru adopts three orphans in order to gain access to the shrink-ray, but unfortunately (or fortunately) for him, this doesn't go to plan. His three new adopted daughters turn his life upside down and their love for their new dad rapidly shifts his priorities.

- How does sharing his life with the orphans transform Gru's life?
- Can you share your own **Sharing Resources** transformation stories with one another?

Groundhog Day (PG, 1993, 1h41m)

A man finds himself living the same day over and over again on repeat. At first, he uses this discovery for his own personal gain, but in time, he learns there is very little to be gained in this and turns his hand to sharing and making things better for others.

- Are there moments or days you would like to relive so that you could share more?
- If you had to relive the past day, how and with whom would you share more?



Hotel for Dogs (U, 2009, 1h40m)

A story about two teenagers who move into the home of their new guardians, who forbid them to get a pet. However, after finding a stray dog,

the pair decide to start a new project to home stray animals. Others in the community get involved and share their money and soon, despite their own tough situation, the teenagers are running a successful project.

- Sharing the abandoned hotel with dogs brings a new lease of life to a disused building and changes the lives of those involved. How can **Sharing Resources** in your setting bring about transformation and change?

I, Daniel Blake (15, 2016, 1h40m)

A British drama in which a 59-year-old joiner, unable to work due to a recent heart attack, befriends a young single mother as they both struggle with the red tape of the British benefits system. In an Amos-style world, a small Acts-style community fights back.

- How does this film challenge our beliefs and/or prejudices about the benefits system?
- How can we share what we have learnt?

Pay It Forward (12, 2000, 2h3m)

A film about a young boy who receives a kindness and decides to share it by passing on a kindness to someone else. This grows into a movement called 'pay it forward'.

- How can receiving from others (and from God) make us different?

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 Hunger Artist

Franz Kafka (originally published in *Die neue Rundschau*, 1922)

This short story eerily and hauntingly depicts human depravity in its fascination with, and pleasure in, the suffering of fellow human beings. If we don't do anything about injustice and inequity, then we are not only depraved spectators but willing actors in communal social criminality. **Sharing Resources** is a Christian tenet we must grasp urgently if we are to stop being collectively 'entertained' by the suffering of others.

- How should we respond to depictions of suffering?
- How can we resist the temptation to turn off, turn over or walk on by?



Charlotte's Web

E.B. White (Harper & Brothers, 1952)

This book is the story of a friendship between a pig and a spider. The animals in the barn **Share Resources**: Charlotte shares her life-saving web-writing skills and receives a meal from the flies that buzz round the

others; Wilbur shares his food with Templeton, the rat who goes to look for 'new words' for Charlotte. The message of new life and hope with Charlotte's children at the end also fits a death and resurrection theme for Easter. Adapted into a film of the same name (U, 2006, 1h37m).

- Discuss the change that happens on the farm because of the different ways in which the characters share. Can you see any parallels between life on the farm and life in your church and community?

Lila

Marilynne Robinson (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2014)

In this novel (the third instalment of the Gilead trilogy), Lila shows herself to be incredibly generous with her very limited material possessions, but finds sharing her experiences and feelings much more difficult.

- What do we find difficult to share and why?
- How might we get better at sharing those things?



Pumpkin Soup

Helen Cooper (Corgi, 1999)

Three animals, Cat, Duck and Squirrel, live together in the old white cabin, each doing their special job.

- Is this true sharing?
- What happens when the status quo is challenged?
- How could you practise more generously the kind of sharing encouraged by the story?



Squirrel's Busy Day

Lucy Barnard (QED Publishing, 2013)

A book about a squirrel who is too busy to speak to his friends because he is collecting nuts in his little trailer. Then he spills all of his nuts and is stuck! But his friends rally round and help him to get the nuts back in the trailer so he will be secure for winter.

- How easy is it to let others help or share with us?
- How important is it to share our time with others?
- How is asking for help a way of **Sharing Resources?**

Still Alice

Lisa Genova (Wheeler Publishing, 2007)

This novel gives an insight into living with dementia and how easy it is for sufferers to feel excluded.

- What could we do in our churches and in our communities to reduce or prevent this happening?

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



Edited by Andrew Roberts, Neil Johnson and Tom Milton



brf.org.uk