

EATING TOGETHER

“ They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. ”



HOLYHABITS

MISSIONAL DISCIPLESHIP RESOURCES FOR CHURCHES

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CONTENTS

Introduction	6
UNDERSTANDING THE HABIT	9
Worship resources	10
Group material and activities	24
FORMING THE HABIT	33
Stories to show the habit forming	34
Practices to help form the habit	36
Questions to consider as a church	44
Connecting the habits	45
GOING FURTHER WITH THE HABIT	47
Developing further practices of eating together	48
Arts and media	54

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

Welcome to **Eating Together**! The tradition of people **Eating Together** being a sign of God's reign or kingdom goes way back into Judaeo-Christian history. It is a picture painted by the prophets and celebrated in the psalms:

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-matured wines strained clear.

ISAIAH 25:6

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

PSALM 23:5

Jesus was rooted in and lived this tradition. Just as he shared food with all sorts and conditions of people as a sign of the inclusivity of God's kingdom, so too did the early church. The gatherings to **Eat Together** were earthly representations of the heavenly banquet imagery that had been reinforced by Jesus through his teaching as well as his actions. Following in the footsteps of Jesus, the table fellowship of the early Christians was warm and accepting. They refused to discriminate against the marginalised. All were welcome to partake of this basic human and yet deeply sacred activity.

The joy of **Eating Together**, the value of table fellowship for deepening relationships, the missional fruitfulness of shared meals and the opportunities for sharing faith, biblical study, prayer and worship around the meal table have all been rediscovered many times by both new and ancient forms of church. Holy Habits provides another opportunity to explore and live this godly practice.

Reflections

At first glance, the Holy Habit of **Eating Together** seems like an easy one. Many of us enjoy eating together with family and friends and eating together is often a regular feature of church life. But this Holy Habit invites us to do more than simply consume food. It invites us to explore how we **Eat Together** and with whom.

Jesus was often criticised for who he chose to eat with. The feeding of the 5,000 in John's Gospel (John 6:1–14) starts with a boy and his little picnic of five loaves and two fishes and ends with a meal for 5,000 people. This story demonstrates the generous love of God and invites us to share what we have with **Gladness and Generosity**.

- It's easy to eat with friends and family, but what about those we don't know? Do we need to explore **Eating Together** with them?
- How can we share food with those who use our premises and the wider community?
- How often do we eat with our neighbours or those in our street?
- And what about the person for whom eating with others is difficult?
- How can we be inclusive of those who are unable to eat freely for health reasons, those with diabetes, allergies or food intolerances, those with eating disorders?
- Can we share those aspects of **Eating Together** which do not involve food?

As you consider the importance of **Eating Together**, could you be people who **EAT** with **Equality, Affirmation and Togetherness** in true **Fellowship** with all?

Please remember to consider the needs of those with special dietary requirements including diabetes, food allergies or intolerances, eating disorders or other restrictions around food and drink.



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

You will need:

- Two small tables (or one larger one) and two chairs
- Two glasses, one with orange juice and the other with a mix of non-alcoholic ginger beer and water (or something similar – the aim is to make a drink that looks unappetising)
- A nice inviting piece of food such as sweets or a small piece of cake, and a less inviting piece of food such as a partially torn lettuce leaf.

Invite two volunteers forward for a quiz. The quiz can be on the subject of a famous Bible reading, or you could have one of the lessons for the day read first and that can form the subject of the quiz.

You will need around four to six questions (two or three for each contestant). It is important that the contestants get the answer correct. Make the questions relatively easy and help the contestants to ‘ask the audience’ so that they can be confident of the right answer. Reward each right answer with a prize.

For the first round give:

- Beautiful freshly squeezed orange juice to contestant one
- Ginger beer mixed with water to contestant two.

For the second round give:

- The finest chocolate cake (or some other tasty treat) to contestant one
- The lettuce leaf to contestant two.

The aim is to show blatant favouritism. Make a show of the loveliness of the prizes for contestant one, pretend to be uninterested in contestant two. Make it as much fun as you can. Finally, give the contestants a round of applause and send them back to their seats.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:17–22.

Explain that the kind of favouritism seen in the quiz has actually been seen in churches. Paul was cross with the church at Corinth because of their eating practices, which seemed to reward some more than others! Our **Eating Together** should be a powerful sign and demonstration of our togetherness – not our differences (11:33).

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.

Breakfast on the beach

John 21:1–14

Whenever we gather, it is good to share food and drink. This study in particular should involve the sharing of food – as simple as coffee, tea and biscuits, or bring-and-share finger food. Please note this will need planning in advance and, again, be mindful of allergens and other food-related issues.

1 Welcome

Welcome everyone and invite them to introduce themselves by saying their name and finishing the following sentence, ‘One of the best meals I’ve ever had was...’

2 Prayer

Thank God:

- for our ability and freedom to meet
- for God’s promise to be with us as we meet
- for the way God provides for our needs and feeds us – physically, mentally, spiritually, emotionally. May we be open to each other, God’s word and the Holy Spirit as we meet.

3 Introducing the Bible reading

John 21:1–14 – breakfast on the beach

- Introduce the passage. What type of material are we dealing with – for example, letter, history, gospel, law, prophecy?

- What is the context of the passage – what comes before and after? Who’s speaking? Who to? Why?

4 Bible study

- Read the passage from one translation while others follow in their translations.
- Read the same passage from another, quite different, translation.
- Compare and contrast the language and emphasis of the different versions.
- Are there any links, connections or echoes of other Bible stories?

5 Small group work

- If you are able to, divide the study group into three or more smaller groups (three to five people). Each group takes the role of one of the characters in the story (Jesus, Peter, other disciples). In the small groups, discuss the story from your character’s perspective, and be prepared to retell your story from a first-person perspective (I, we, etc.). Feel free to fill in aspects of the story (pay attention to the context, the feelings of the characters). Come back together, and share your character’s story from the first-person perspective – Jesus, Peter, other disciples).
- If the group is small and it is not possible to divide into smaller groups, stay in the one group and as a group take the role of one of the characters in the story. Discuss it from the first-person perspective for five to ten minutes, then move on to the other two characters and do the same.

6 Questions

Look at some or all of these questions, or you may use your own.

- Compare and contrast the following: a snack, a meal, a banquet, a feast.
- In the story of the breakfast on the beach, who is the host?
- Is the breakfast a meal, a banquet or a feast?
- In 2003, the Methodist Church brought out a publication about Communion entitled ‘His presence makes the feast’. From the title, what do we think it is trying to say? If there are members of the group who have read it, they might like to share their thoughts. Some people might like to read it.
- Read Psalm 36:5–9. What does this say about God? Is this a different message from the breakfast on the beach?

ARTS AND MEDIA

There are many films and books containing scenes about **Eating Together** 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 **Eating Together**.

The meal table can be a particularly good place to explore deep or sensitive matters which can be raised by many of these arts and media resources.

Films



Arthur Christmas (U, 2011, 1h37m)

Grandsanta, Santa Claus, Mrs Claus, Steve and Arthur all sit down for a meal after their busy night delivering gifts. Unfortunately, they have let their work get to them and none of them are too keen to share food with each other. Except for Arthur, who recognises how it is more than just food, but family sharing in a relationship.

- What's the most important part of any meal?
- Does this film remind you of any of the meals Jesus shared with people?

Babette's Feast (U, 1987, 1h42m)

A French chef takes refuge from the Revolution on a remote island among people of a strict Protestant sect.

- What does Babette help them to see about who the centre of their community really is?
- 'This is a night of grace...' – how does eating a feast together change people's relationships?

Chocolat (12, 2000, 2h1m)

A young woman and her daughter, who seem oblivious to the rules but alive to charity, challenge the people of a small French town, who are complacent in their Lenten observance. Based on a book of the same name.

- How does the film challenge our practice of welcome and hospitality?
- How can food be a barrier to proclaiming the gospel?
- How can we practise the habits of **Gladness and Generosity** as we develop the habit of **Eating Together**?

- How can we cultivate the principles of **Eating Together** while respecting Lenten observance or other religious fasting and while taking into consideration special dietary needs including diabetes, food allergies or intolerances, eating disorders or other restrictions around food and drink?

Group study book available: *Christ and the Chocolaterie* by Hilary Brand (DLT, 2002).

Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs (U, 2009, 1h30m)

This film talks about why we should appreciate the food we have. The town's greed for bigger and better food, combined with Flint's desire to impress, leads to disaster: the entire world is almost destroyed by greed.

- What does this film say about our desire for food?
- Are there ways we can eat with those in need in our communities?

Ratatouille (U, 2007, 1h51m)

A film which explores the habit of **Eating Together** in sometimes unconventional ways!

As the critic sits down for his meal and tastes the most basic and simple of food, he is transported back to a time of family. The modest food he is given helps him to remember where it all began: with his mother's love. Not only

can food be a real example of love, but sometimes the most modest food can be the most meaningful if we bring our relationships and love with it.

- What's the best meal in the film? Why?
- What ingredients make a good meal (if we're trying to practise the habit of **Eating Together**)?
- At the end of the film, as the critic sits down for his meal, he is transported back to a family meal. How does this speak of the place of relationships and love in **Eating Together**?

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.

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory

Roald Dahl (Puffin Books, 1964)

The desire for chocolate and sweets is integral to the story of this book. Two film versions of this book have been made, in very different styles.

- How does **Eating Together** in Charlie's family differ from the experience and expectations of the other children in the story?

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



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