

GLADNESS AND GENEROSITY

“ They broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. ”



HOLYHABITS

MISSIONAL DISCIPLESHIP RESOURCES FOR CHURCHES

Edited by
ANDREW ROBERTS
NEIL JOHNSON
and TOM MILTON

GLADNESS AND GENEROSITY

“ They broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. ”



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 685 3
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 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.

Photographs on pages 11, 17, 28, 32, 37, 45, 46 and 62 copyright © Tom Milton and the Birmingham Methodist Circuit; photograph on page 4 copyright © Katie Norman; photograph on page 52 copyright © Marty Woods.

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	26
FORMING THE HABIT	35
Stories to show the habit forming	36
Practices to help form the habit	40
Questions to consider as a church	47
Connecting the habits	48
GOING FURTHER WITH THE HABIT	49
Developing further practices of gladness and generosity	51
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.



PHILADELPHIA

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

The church was born in **Gladness**: **Gladness** for what God had done through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus; **Gladness** at the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost. There was **Gladness** in the home, in the temple and out on the streets.

In presenting his portrait of the Christian community, Luke notes in Acts that they had glad and generous hearts. The church embodied the extravagant **Generosity** that is at the heart of the divine Trinitarian community. It was a prophetic countercultural symbol in a world of avarice and greed.

Gladness and Generosity is a joyous and a challenging Holy Habit. Do enjoy its celebratory aspects and let them be a light to others. It is often in the darkest places that the light of **Gladness** or joy shines most brightly. You might like to explore **Gladness** in such settings.

As you explore the challenges represented by **Generosity**, remember that we are called to be generous with all we are and have, not just our money. Sinfulness and its consequences are marked by selfishness. Grace is expressed in **Generosity** and forgiveness. This takes us to the very heart of the gospel message. It is also a powerful challenge that comes to us from countries like South Africa and Rwanda, where people have chosen to be extraordinarily generous in forgiving. How might such testimonies inspire and change you and your church?

Gladness and Generosity is a Christian way of life. May these resources help you to walk that way ever more faithfully and fully.



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

Reflections

Gladness and Generosity go together in this Holy Habit because they are inextricably linked. A generously forgiving and trusting nature is often – though not necessarily – a cheerful one. The act of giving gives rise to a cheering feeling; most of us feel better after being generous to someone else. But the root of giving that is generous and cheerful is thankfulness, as we realise what God has done for us and respond with **Gladness** and joy.

There is no ‘ought’ about being glad – we don’t choose how we feel about life – but **Gladness** is more than just a happy or cheerful feeling. Consider what it was like for New Testament churches when they heard Paul was coming – perhaps a bit like an Ofsted announcement! Yet, Paul knew the objective joy of our faith that remains whatever mood we may be in. As loving communities, we seek not just to share each other’s burdens but also to share each other’s joys as we respond to the **Generosity** of God.

When the then Archbishop George Carey visited Sudan in 1993, he was encouraged to meet some of the Dinka people. These proud people included many noted for their Christian faith. It was hoped the visit would show support as they faced massacres in the civil war and suffered the effects of climate change. But the Dinkas are a migrant people, and it was by no means certain that they would be found.

The visitors drove out into the scrubland to a likely place and waited to see if the Dinkas would come. They were about to give up when at last there was movement on the horizon. It was clear that the people and their herds were much depleted. They were moving slowly, looking weak and frail; the visitors were filled with sorrow and foreboding. As the Dinkas came closer, the visitors were amazed to hear them singing, and their songs were Christian songs of praise. At last they met, and together shared in the **Gladness** of worship, with the archbishop and his party feeling they were the ones who had drawn strength and blessing from the meeting.

Introduction to the theme

You will need:

- Two boxes or baskets (shoebox size is ideal), with lids or a makeshift cover
- Twelve doughnuts (or giant cookies, cakes, pieces of fruit, etc.)
- Two plates and two knives (think safety! They don't need to be very sharp).

Place one doughnut on a plate in one of the boxes and the rest on a plate in the other. Put both boxes on a table at the front that's visible for all to see.

Open the session by explaining that, in Luke 21:1–4, we read about Jesus in the temple, watching people putting their gifts of money into the collection box. Some are wealthy and then along comes a widow, who puts just a few coins in. Jesus comments that, although she has little, what she gives is everything. She's extraordinarily generous in what she gives, despite not having much herself.

Ask how generous we feel we are (invite a show of hands – very generous, quite generous, not at all generous). Treat this as some light-hearted fun. Note that **Generosity** can be a difficult thing to do in practice.

Ask four volunteers to come and help with a task – two per box. Explain that in the box is something you'd like them to be generous with, and in a moment they can take a look and decide with each other how best to do this. Before they look, encourage them to have a quiet conversation about how they plan to be generous. While this is happening, invite people to share instances when others were generous to them – what was it like?

Ask both pairs to get ready to be generous with the contents of the boxes. Be prepared for them to respond in a variety of ways from eating the doughnuts themselves to sharing with others. Ask them why they chose to do this. Thank them for taking part.

Sum up the time by reminding everyone that being generous looks different for each of us – if both pairs gave all their doughnut(s) away for eating, highlight the fact that it doesn't matter how much we have (whether we consider it a lot or just a little), it's what we do with it that counts!

Close by showing the three-minute video, '20 Random Acts of Kindness', which you can find on YouTube (youtu.be/AFTBBKIX760). Challenge those gathered to list 20 random acts of kindness they could do without money and without being seen.

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.

Gladness

Psalms 42, 43, 100

The psalms are a wonderful collection of poems and songs that soar the heights and plumb the depths of human experience, offering all to God in both praise and lament. In this session, we will look at three contrasting psalms.

The first is Psalm 100, from which Leona von Brethorst wrote the worship song 'I will enter his gates with thanksgiving in my heart'. The psalm:

- is a psalm of celebration which was used as a hymn in public worship and by families and individuals at home
- expresses confidence in God and specifically the goodness of God
- conveys a powerful sense of God caring for 'his people'
- encourages **Gladness in Worship** and **Serving** (the first verb in verse 2 can be translated as worship or serve).

Spend some time in conversation around the following questions or questions that arise in your group about the psalm.

- When and where might it be appropriate to use this psalm? (Note the point about worship and service above.)
- How might it be appropriate to use this psalm (e.g. as a poem, or a song, or via visual art, or in some form on social media)?
- For whom might this psalm be difficult at this time?

Following your consideration of the last question, move on to read Psalms 42 and 43 (which commentators suggest were originally one psalm). These are psalms of longing and lament that contrast with the joy and celebration of Psalm 100. Psalm

42 has also inspired a song, 'As the deer pants for the water' by Martin Nystrom. Notice how Nystrom takes the first two despairing lines of the psalm and then follows these with an expression of very positive worship. Is this helpful or not?

Psalms 42 and 43:

- are believed to express the cries of an individual; possibly someone in exile or suffering from illness which cut them off from the worshipping community
- are very honest accounts of despair
- express a deep thirst-like longing for God from a place of difficulty
- have a repeated refrain in which despair and hope wrestle with each other (42:5, 11 and 43:5)
- remember days of **Gladness** in the past (42:4) and look forward to days of joy in the future (43:4).

Spend some time in conversation. Please note that this could lead to deep and personal conversation, so handle it with care and confidentiality.

- Are there times when we feel like the psalmist, more inclined to despair than worship?
- How could these psalms help us to express our doubts, our despairing thoughts, our tears?
- How might the references to hope in the psalms help us to find a peaceful and assuring **Gladness** in times of difficulty? Can anyone think of someone they know who has shown such **Gladness** in what otherwise would be a place of complete despair? (If you need an example of such a person, please see the story of Joy on p. 50.)

Activity

Invite people to create a card or a picture based on the words and images of these psalms to give to someone or to keep for themselves. Provide people with art and craft materials to do this. (The artwork of Hannah Dunnett or Mary Fleeson could provide helpful examples if needed.)

Alternatively, people could take photographs to capture the essence of any of the psalms or have a go at writing their own psalm to express how they feel at this time.

You might like to conclude the session by reading the psalms again, or singing the songs based upon them, before offering all the thoughts and feelings that have emerged in the session to God in prayer.

ARTS AND MEDIA

There are many films and books containing scenes about **Gladness and Generosity** 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 **Gladness and Generosity**.

Films



Alvin and the Chipmunks

(U, 2007, 1h32m)

A fun film for all the family about a group of singing chipmunks.

- What do the chipmunks' relationships with their record producer and the songwriter who 'adopts' them teach us about cultivating the habit of **Gladness and Generosity**?

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

The story of Michael Oher, a homeless and traumatised boy who became an All-American football player with the help of a caring woman and her family, who welcomed him into their home and lives.

- What do you think motivated Leigh Ann to share her home and family with Michael? What did the family receive from Michael?

- Who might you welcome into your home – maybe not in the way Michael was welcomed, but for a meal or to be part of your home group or in some other way?

Dogville (15, 2003, 2h58m)

Dogville is a fable about what happens when a stranger arrives in a small tightknit community. At first, she is cautiously welcomed, but in the end abused and exploited by her neighbours. Her name is Grace, and the irony is not lost on us. She is, however, a much more powerful figure than the townspeople can imagine, which is their undoing.

Be aware that the film contains explicit images and violence.

- How does Grace express her humanity, and what can we learn from this fable about how **Generosity** makes us more human, more in God's image?



Elf (PG, 2003, 1h37m)

A hilarious Christmas movie for everyone. Buddy the elf, played by Will Ferrell, works at the North Pole for Santa. Upon discovering his true identity as a human, Buddy sets out for New York to meet his father, bringing **Gladness and Generosity** with him which isn't always as welcome as he'd want.

- How can we show **Generosity** to those who are very different to us, without being patronising or imposing our culture?

Marvellous (15, 2014, 1h30m)

A BAFTA-winning, feel-good film by the BBC, based on the life of Neil Baldwin, a man considered to have learning difficulties. Regardless of that fact, Baldwin sets off with an appetite for life, becoming kit-man of his favourite football team, a lay preacher, and getting on the Queen's Christmas card list.

- How does Neil's **Gladness and Generosity** speak to you and challenge you?

Pay it forward (12, 2000, 2h3m)

Trevor is given a school project to find a way of changing the world. He suggests doing three undeserved favours and asking the recipients to then do three undeserved favours to three other

people, thus paying it forward. Based on a 1999 book of the same name by Catherine Ryan Hyde – a young readers' edition is also available.

- How does this film relate to Jesus' challenge in Luke 14:12–14?
- How can it help us cultivate the habit of **Gladness and Generosity**?

Pollyanna (U, 1960, 2h14m)

A young girl, Pollyanna (played by Hayley Mills in this classic movie), moves to live with her embittered aunt in the early 1900s. She introduces her aunt, and the rest of the town, to her 'glad game', and shows her determination to see the best in life. She soon turns around the attitude of the town, who in turn help her to see the good in life when tragedy happens. Based on a book of the same name by Eleanor H. Porter.

- Being described as 'Pollyanna-ish' is often a criticism of someone who is overly positive and doesn't live in the real world. In the film, what does Pollyanna bring that is wholesome and healing to others' lives? Is she unrealistic, or just hopeful about other people? How is she a gift to others?

To order

Online: brfonline.org.uk

Telephone: +44 (0)1865 319700 Mon–Fri 9.15–17.30

Post: complete the order form and send to the address below

Delivery times within the UK are normally 15 working days. Prices are correct at the time of going to press but may change without prior notice.



Title	Price	Qty	Total

POSTAGE AND PACKING CHARGES				Total value of books	
Order value	UK	Europe	Rest of world	Postage and packing	
Under £7.00	£2.00	£5.00	£7.00		
£7.00–£29.99	£3.00	£9.00	£15.00	Donation	
£30.00 and over	FREE	£9.00 + 15% of order value	£15.00 + 20% of order value	Total for this order	

Please complete in BLOCK CAPITALS

Title First name/initials Surname

Address

..... Postcode

Acc. No. Telephone

Email

Method of payment

Cheque (made payable to BRF) MasterCard / Visa

Card no.

Valid from Expires Security code* Last 3 digits on the reverse of the card

Signature* Date/...../.....

*ESSENTIAL IN ORDER TO PROCESS YOUR ORDER

The Bible Reading Fellowship Gift Aid Declaration

giftaid it

Please treat as Gift Aid donations all qualifying gifts of money made

today, in the past four years, and in the future or My donation does not qualify for Gift Aid.

I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax in the current tax year than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations, it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

Please notify BRF if you want to cancel this declaration, change your name or home address, or no longer pay sufficient tax on your income and/or capital gains.

Please send your form to:

BRF, 15 The Chambers, Vineyard, Abingdon OX14 3FE | enquiries@brf.org.uk

To read our terms and conditions, please visit brfonline.org.uk/terms.

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