



MAKING MORE DISCIPLES

BIBLE REFLECTIONS

40 READINGS AND REFLECTIONS

The Bible Reading Fellowship

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Edited by
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| Lucy Moore

- 7** About the writers
- 8** Introduction to Holy Habits
- 10** Introduction to Making More Disciples
- 12** Small starts
Genesis 12:1–5
- 14** In it together
1 Kings 19:15, 19–20
- 16** Bless this house
2 Kings 5:1–5
- 18** Shocking generosity
2 Chronicles 6:32–33
- 20** Job done!
Psalms 22:27–31
- 22** In the good times
Psalms 67
- 24** And tonight's winner is...
Isaiah 49:3–6
- 26** Apprentices
Isaiah 61:1–3
- 28** Anyone but them!
Jonah 4:6–11
- 30** Bigger – much bigger
Zechariah 9:9–12

| Andrew Roberts

- 32** The call of Jesus to follow
Matthew 4:18–22
- 34** Salt and light
Matthew 5:13–16
- 36** Merciful discipleship
Matthew 9:9–13



- 38** Keep sowing
Matthew 13:19–23
- 40** A divine commission
Matthew 28:16–20
- 42** A costly calling
Mark 8:34–38
- 44** Jesus blesses little children
Mark 10:13–16
- 46** Wonderful surprises
Luke 5:6–11
- 48** Faithfulness as we follow
Luke 9:57–62
- 50** Struggle and joy
Luke 10:1–6
- 52** Kingdom disciples: T&Cs apply
Luke 14:25–30
- 54** Money as a route to good
Luke 19:1–5, 7–9
- 56** Something fishy
Luke 24:40–45, 48–49
- 58** What's in a name?
John 1:35–42
- 60** Honesty is the best prayer policy
John 1:45–51
- 62** This phrase needs to be born again
John 3:1–8
- 64** Pick your own...
John 4:7, 9–11, 13–14
- 66** Love is all you need
John 13:34–38

- 68** What game are we playing?
John 14:12–17
- 70** Christ has no body but ours
John 17:18–23
- 72** Start making more disciples
Acts 1:6–11
- 74** Knowing your Bible
Acts 2:14–21
- 76** A call to counter-culturalism
Acts 2:36–41
- 78** Prayerful listening
Acts 9:11, 13–19
- 80** Fellowship for all
Acts 10:27–33
- 82** Meeting people in their own place
Acts 16:13–15
- 84** Which idols do we worship?
Acts 17:19–23
- 86** In fellowship – immersed in the culture
1 Corinthians 9:19–23
- 88** Struggling to be strong
2 Timothy 2:1–7
- 90** Hope for a suffering church
Revelation 2:7–10



About the writers

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Andrew Roberts is a husband, father, minister, writer and speaker. He is the author of the book *Holy Habits* (Malcolm Down Publishing, 2016) and co-editor of the BRF Holy Habits resource booklets. Previously he was Director of Training for Fresh Expressions. He loves all sport and, despite that, supports Aston Villa.

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Introduction to Holy Habits

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 (NRSV)

Holy Habits is a way of forming disciples that is emerging anew from an exploration of this precious portion of scripture, Luke's famous portrait of the early church. As such, it is both deeply biblical and an approach that lives when infused with the life-giving breath of the Holy Spirit – the same Holy Spirit who brought life, energy and creativity to the first Christian communities.

Holy Habits is based upon a series of ten practices that are shown to be fruitful in the Acts 2 passage: biblical teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, prayer, sharing resources, serving, eating together, gladness and generosity, worship, and making more disciples. In this series of material, passages relating to the ten habits are explored one habit at a time, sometimes with reference to other habits. In real life, the habits all get mixed up and



complement each other as part of a holistic way of discipleship. You may want to be alert to such connections.

There are many lists in the Bible, and with biblical lists the first and last items often have particular significance. In this list, it is significant that biblical teaching comes first. All of the habits are to be found throughout scripture, and healthy holy habits will be grounded in regular engagement with biblical teaching. This is a foundational habit.

The last habit is also significant. Commentators have remarked that it is no surprise that ‘day by day the Lord added to their number’ when life was lived in the way Luke describes. Many can be nervous of the word ‘evangelism’. Holy Habits offers a way of being evangelistic that may help to assuage some of those nerves.

Holy Habits is a way of life for followers of Jesus individually and collectively. In Acts 2:42–47, Luke offers clues as to how these practices can be fruitful. Note the devotion he mentions at the beginning and the repeated use of the word ‘all’. Holy Habits is a way of life for all ages (including children), cultures and contexts. The habits are to be lived day by day, in the whole of life, Monday to Saturday as well as Sunday. And note how Luke attributes the growth that results to the Lord. These are *holy* habits, which flourish when the Lord is at the centre of all.



Introduction to Making More Disciples

The Holy Habits passage of Acts 2:42–47 ends with a summary sentence that highlights the core theme of the book of Acts, namely the spread of the word of God and the growth in the number of followers of Jesus. Implicit in the passage is the message that a deep and committed Christian community, which lives out the holy habits, is a powerful witness to the reality of the saving love of God. Is it really any surprise that a community that is glad and generous, eats together and gives to any in need with vibrant prayer and worship finds itself growing day by day?

In an age when many are anxious about evangelism, here is a way of being evangelistic that can help to assuage fear. The key thing is to be always mindful of how sharing these habits can be a way of making the love of God known. Implicitly or explicitly, we can invite people to discover the Lord, who is at the heart of all the holy habits.

One helpful insight that has come to the fore in recent years is an emphasis on the place of blessing in living out the commission of Jesus to make disciples (Matthew 28:19). Lucy Moore explores this in her reflections in this booklet. In *Give Me a Drink*, Ian Adams says:

I would love to see the mission of the Christ's people increasingly focus on blessing. Blessing works. I don't fully understand how or why, but I believe that it does! Perhaps in part because in blessing we are stepping consciously into the flow of God's ever creating goodness! Perhaps too because the act of blessing changes us – both blesser and receiver. We begin to perceive ourselves and the world in a different way. And perhaps too because in a world that



can seem so ungracious, whenever the gift of Jesus the Christ is offered, full of grace and truth, we cannot help but be transformed, blessing by blessing.

Ian Adams, *Give Me a Drink* (proost.co.uk, 2015), p. 22

It used to be said that when it came to people becoming followers of Jesus, they needed to believe, then behave, then belong (to the community of disciples, i.e. the church). Today, the wisdom suggests that this thinking should be reversed, with a new start point too. That point is an experience of being blessed, which encourages people to belong to a community where they can learn new behaviours (or holy habits) and then come to a point of committed belief. You might like to ponder this as you journey through this series of reflections.

One other point to note. In describing the new disciples who were being added, Luke says they were *being* saved. The use of the present participle emphasises that salvation is a process of which repentance, initial belief, baptism and the gift of the Spirit are only the start. It is a process of transformation to a life of holiness that continues in community and is consummated in heaven.



| Lucy Moore

Small starts

Genesis 12:1-5

The Lord had said to Abram, ‘Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.’ So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. (NIV)



Reflection

One promise. One person. One household. Abram and his household couldn't see beyond the immediate command to 'go', but nonetheless trusted God enough to walk into the unknown. The story of the people of God starts in a very small way, but with a life-changing expectation that smallness was only the start. Abram's faithful obedience (or was it obedient faithfulness?) was a tiny seed that was going to grow beyond anything Abram himself could have imagined.

I wonder what it was that Abram treasured most about God's promise? Was it the promise of land or being the head of a great nation? Or maybe the promise of celebrity status? Or supernatural power over other people? Or being the source of blessing to enemies, friends, foreigners, strangers, rich, poor, untouchable, young, old, male, female, of this generation and future generations: 'all peoples on earth'?

Many of us face an inner conflict about the imperative to 'make disciples of all nations' (Matthew 28:19). There can be a little voice in us that wants more people to become Christians for selfish reasons – to keep the local church going; to fill the seats; to prove we're an effective leader; to make life easier at work or home. But God's call to Abram was to 'be a blessing'. What difference might it make to our personal mission (at work, at home or in the community) and to our church's mission if we set out in faith simply to 'be a blessing'? Could God's economy – 'the kingdom of heaven' – be an upside-down one in which a blessing for ourselves actually proceeds from our blessing of others? Why not try it intentionally today and observe the effect on those around you and on you?

May my choice to bless someone today be like a kingdom mustard seed.



In it together

1 Kings 19:15, 19–20 (abridged)

The Lord said to [Elijah], ‘Go back...’ So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him. Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. ‘Let me kiss my father and mother goodbye,’ he said, ‘and then I will come with you.’ ‘Go back,’ Elijah replied. ‘What have I done to you?’

(NIV)



Reflection

Elijah is under the impression that the whole mission of God rests on him. He hides in a cave until the whisper of God draws him to the threshold, perhaps symbolising a moment of decision. Elijah pours out his woes to God. In response, maybe we would expect God to conduct some gentle pastoral ministry, but instead he gives Elijah, like Abram before him, a new mission that begins 'Go...;', followed by what we might see as succession planning. Elijah is not in this on his own. There are 7,000 faithful followers; Jehu can be king and Elisha the next prophet. While he is infinitely precious to God, Elijah is not the pivot on which the whole balance of God's work rests. Rather, Elijah needs to look out from his insecurities, enable more co-workers and look to the future. This must have been tough! Maybe that's why Elijah seems brutal towards Elisha, when the latter wants to tie up loose ends before taking up his new vocation.

What resonates with you in this passage? Elijah's feeling of isolation? A conflict between knowing in your head that sharing the work of disciple-making is crucial but not wanting to 'let go' to people who might not be as committed? The relief of remembering it's not all about you? Or even the humility needed (as by Elisha) to follow in the steps of a predecessor who has been an awe-inspiring woman or man of God?

The people of God work together. Lone rangers, though superficially attractive, miss the point. Making more disciples involves apprenticing the next generation of God's servants and working together to be a blessing.

Lord, help me to see which disciples around me have unfulfilled potential to serve you even more.



Bless this house

2 Kings 5:1–5 (abridged)

Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram... He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy. Now bands of raiders from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, 'If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.' Naaman went to his master and told him what the girl from Israel had said. 'By all means, go,' the king of Aram replied. 'I will send a letter to the king of Israel.' So Naaman left, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold and ten sets of clothing.

(NIV)



Reflection

Look at the factors that come into play in today's story: a girl (insignificant in the culture of the day) who is also a slave, having been taken as a prisoner of war (insignificant by two more counts) and is left unnamed (one more count). She may appear to be a mere footnote in the big story for all these reasons. Nonetheless, she is so full of godly attitudes and understanding – we might even say 'full of God's Spirit' – that she can't help but share God's good news of healing. She wishes so much for her God to bless her employer/captor/master that she takes her courage in her hands and shares the good news of what God can do with the person who can pass that news on. She has faith in the power of God to heal and in his compassion to want to heal even those outside the tribe of Israel.

The girl's faith bubbles over into words that lead to action and to healing in the person of Naaman. It is unlikely that she was intending to 'make more disciples' by alerting her employer to the power of the prophet Elisha. She seems concerned only with blessing the master of her household and wanting the best for him. God works with that generosity of spirit and the miracle of healing takes place.

Is there someone in your household who is not experiencing fullness of life at the moment? How might you bring a blessing to them? How might children bring blessing?

God, who not only has the power to bring life in all its fullness but the desire to do so, help us today to be a blessing on people in our own households.



Shocking generosity

2 Chronicles 6:32–33

‘As for the foreigner who does not belong to your people Israel but has come from a distant land because of your great name and your mighty hand and your outstretched arm – when they come and pray towards this temple, then hear from heaven, your dwelling-place. Do whatever the foreigner asks of you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your own people Israel, and may know that this house that I have built bears your Name.’

(NIV)



Reflection

It's the big day. The long-awaited temple has been built. King Solomon is on his knees by the new altar in front of the whole assembly of Israel and is praying a prayer of dedication that covers many eventualities. Solomon is the first to admit that God doesn't need a temple when even 'the highest heavens' cannot contain him (6:18), but he sets out a purpose for the earthly temple as a focus for reconciliation, forgiveness, intercession, judgement, restoration, healing and everyday concerns like bad weather and mildew. He sets out a vision for a place that reflects these attributes of God's kingdom and character.

The king starts his next plea, 'As for the foreigner who does not belong...' How might the assembled people predict the prayer's ending to run? 'As for the foreigner, smite them!' 'Make them quiver in the presence of a power greater than they are!' 'Show them who's boss!' But Solomon has only blessing on his mind and in his heart. He prays simply: 'Hear them.' He longs for this multi-faceted goodness of God to encompass both those already born into the family that follows God and those who aren't yet in God's household of faith. Solomon's vision of the purpose of the temple was as a means of blessing, not just for those who belong but for the whole earth. Perhaps we are put in mind of those like the Magi coming from afar to worship Jesus. Perhaps we are reminded of those far away from Jesus, yet on our own doorsteps. Maybe we are reminded of economic migrants, refugees or asylum seekers.

Lord, make our churches and homes into outward-looking, hospitable assemblies of generosity and grace, that our villages and towns may know your name.



Job done!

Psalm 22:27–31

All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations. All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before him – those who cannot keep themselves alive. Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord. They will proclaim his righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn: He has done it!

(NIV)



Reflection

The psalmist spends the first part of this famous psalm crying out to God in despair, echoed famously by Jesus on the cross. But there is a turning point, when the acknowledgement of the terrifying present situation turns to a plea for rescue, followed by an exhortation to the people to praise God with him, then a crescendo of utter confidence in God's power to work beyond the present moment. The shout of verses 27–31, encompassing all people in all places, from all backgrounds and in every age, is the climax and endpoint of the psalm, perhaps again foreshadowing Jesus' words on the cross, 'It is finished!'

To us today, as just one of those 'future generations', the psalm gives both an obligation and a promise. 'They will proclaim his righteousness,' says the psalmist, who is giving us a job to do, a responsibility to fulfil, a task to achieve. But, at the same time, there is a promise that the good news of Jesus *will* be proclaimed by us. There's no sense of 'They might possibly proclaim his righteousness when they feel a bit braver, when they've got their heads around some good theology or when they've done that course in evangelism they've been meaning to start' – helpful though these may be.

No, because of what Jesus did on the cross, and with simple obedience on our part, our lives *will* proclaim the good news of the kingdom. As the Spirit dwells in us more and more, we will be able to contain that good news less and less. Our next-door neighbour told everyone at her yoga class about Messy Church – it was such good news, she couldn't keep it to herself.

Holy Spirit, fill me up to overflowing so that your good news floods into the lives of those around me today.

HOLYHABITS is an adventure in Christian discipleship. Inspired by Luke's model of church found in Acts 2:42–47, it identifies ten habits and encourages the development of a way of life formed by them.

These Bible reading notes have been created to help churches and individuals explore the habits through prayerful engagement with the Bible and live them out in whole-life, missional discipleship.



Whole-church resource book and group study material also available

- Provides eight weeks of Bible reading notes excluding weekends
- Takes a biblical and devotional look at each Holy Habit
- Encourages a habit of regular Bible reading

Praise for **HOLYHABITS**:

'A great tool that just gets better with use.'

Olive Fleming-Drane and John Drane

BIBLICAL TEACHING
 FELLOWSHIP
 BREAKING BREAD
 PRAYER
 SHARING RESOURCES
 SERVING
 EATING TOGETHER
 GLADNESS AND GENEROSITY
 WORSHIP
MAKING MORE DISCIPLES

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