



PRAYER

GROUP STUDIES

LEADER'S GUIDE

Edited by Andrew Roberts

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Edited by
ANDREW ROBERTS



The Bible Reading Fellowship

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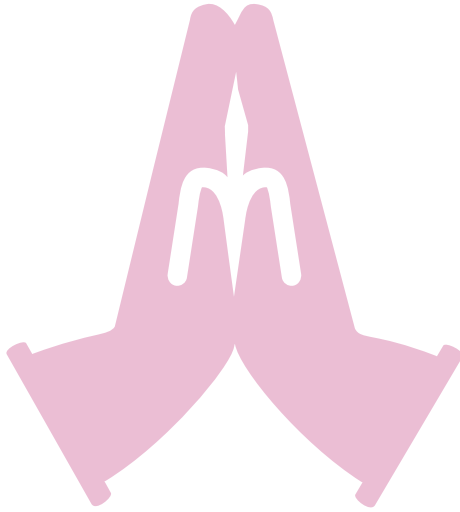
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About the writers

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Introduction

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 life to be lived by disciples of Jesus individually and collectively. As Alison Morgan points out in the subtitle of her book *Following Jesus*, the plural of disciple is church. When Jesus calls us to follow, he gifts us others to journey with us, just as he gifted his first disciples – others who will help to teach us and who will learn from us; others who will pray with us and check how we are; others who will watch over us in love and keep us accountable in our discipleship. In the light of this, these Group Studies and the complementary daily Bible Reflections have been written for both group and personal usage. In this booklet, you will find material to help you as a church or a small group reflect together on the particular holy habit being explored.

The authors (who also wrote the complementary Holy Habits Bible Reflections; see page 62) have formed questions for reflection and discussion. Each author has selected two of the readings from the ten they wrote about and provided six questions on each for discussion. Some have a more personal focus, while others relate more to the church or group as whole. With questions of a more personal nature, you may wish to invite people to discuss these in the confidence of pairs and then make time for anyone to share a response with the whole group if they would like to. This



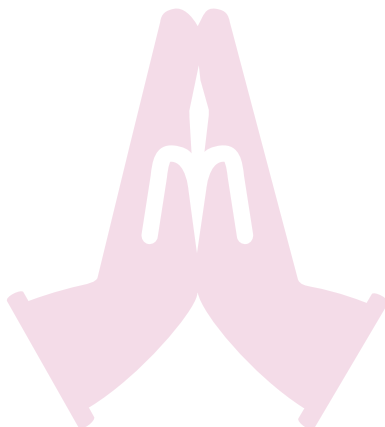
approach can also be a good way of making sure everyone has a chance to share if your group has newcomers or people who are shy or dominant.

You will then find a series of take-home questions about the habit. These have been collated from questions submitted by the authors, which mean they vary in style, tone and focus. As such, you may find some more helpful than others, so feel free to add or amend questions. As you work together, you might like to see what emerges in the responses and see if some of the questions should be revisited regularly (perhaps annually or every six months) as a way of reviewing the life of your small group or church as a discipleship community against the picture Luke offers us in Acts 2. Similarly, individuals could be invited to keep a journal to regularly reflect on their living of the holy habits.

In Acts 2:47, Luke says the believers enjoyed ‘the goodwill of all the people’, so there are also some creative ideas for ways in which your church or group could collectively practise the habit being explored in the local or wider community. These are thought-starter ideas, so be open to other ideas that emerge in your conversations.

You will also find some prayers and creative media ideas for this habit at the back of the book.

In all of this, keep your hearts and minds open to the Holy Spirit and be alert to the wonders of God’s grace and the signs of God’s love that emerge as, individually and collectively, you live this down-to-earth, holy way of life that Luke invites us to imitate.

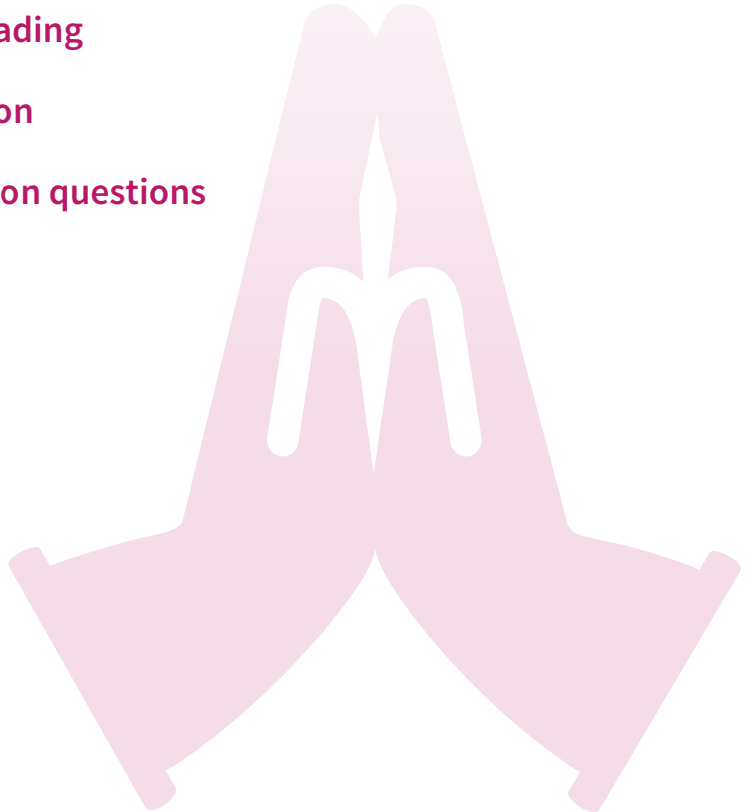




Session outline

One way your group time could be structured:

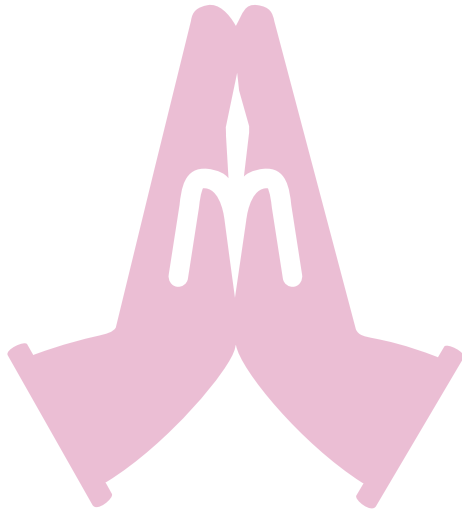
- **Opening prayer**
(for example, the Holy Habits prayer on page 59)
- **Music moment**
(see 'Listen', page 62)
- **Bible reading**
- **Reflection**
- **Discussion questions**





- **Time for stories, testimonies or questions/issues that arise from the discussion**
- **Prayer**
- **Ideas to do as a group**
Spend a few minutes to agree when this will be carried out or to come up with other ideas
- **Take-home questions/creative media ideas**
- **Closing prayer**







| Lyndall Bywater

Week 1

An emotional outpouring

Read 1 Samuel 1:10–17

In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the Lord, weeping bitterly. And she made a vow, saying, ‘Lord Almighty, if you will only look on your servant’s misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head.’ As she kept on praying to the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk. (NIV)



Reflection

There's something rather refreshing about praying with people who aren't used to praying out loud. I am part of a prayer community where some of our visitors regularly include swear words in their prayers. It can be a little jarring, and we don't necessarily encourage it, but it does challenge me to be more honest and heartfelt when I speak to God.

Hannah's story is one of the Bible's most famous accounts of answered prayer. She eventually gave birth to the prophet Samuel, and the rest, as they say, is biblical history. But at this stage in the story, Hannah is still more familiar with unanswered prayer than answered prayer. She has been asking God to bless her with a child for years. If you've ever prayed that long and that hard for anything, you'll know how easy it is for prayer to become dry and routine. Frustration and disappointment harden our hearts, and we can begin to shut ourselves off from the work of God's Spirit. Perhaps one of the greatest miracles in Hannah's story is not that she was still praying for conception after all those years, but that she was still praying with all her emotions engaged. We don't know if she was swearing, but the way she was pouring out her heart to God was almost as inappropriate, in Eli's opinion.

Is there room for emotion in your praying, or has it become a matter of dry words and familiar routines? Hannah's brand of praying may seem risky; it makes us vulnerable and it opens tender places within us, but only when we pour out our deepest feelings can we truly receive God's comfort.



Questions

- 1 Have you ever spent years praying for something without getting an answer? What were you praying for, and what did the process teach you?
- 2 How can we as churches help each other and the wider community to come to terms with the pain and disappointment they may feel when their prayers aren't answered as they'd like?
- 3 Do you tend to express your emotions to God when you pray? If not, what stops you? What would make it easier to 'pour out your heart'?
- 4 When we pray together, what could we do to help people express their feelings to God as well as their thoughts?
- 5 If a non-Christian friend asked you why you choose to worship a God who sometimes fails to answer your prayers, what would you say?
- 6 Could you set up a prayer station where people who use your church building (or your workplace) can stop for a few minutes to pray? You could include some creative activities.





Idea to do as a group

1 Gather a group to walk around your local community, praying as you go. Split into pairs and walk a pre-arranged route around your local area. As you walk, keep your eyes and ears open to notice the things God wants to draw your attention to. As you notice the people and places you pass, pray for them, either in your own mind or out loud so your walking partner can hear.

When you get back to base, gather the whole group and share your reflections on the walk: what did you pray for and what did you each sense God saying to you?



Take-home question

1

When was the last time you found prayer easy and enjoyable? Think about where you were and what you were praying about. Why do you think that time was so special? Similarly, think about the last time you found prayer hard. What were the circumstances, and why do you think it was difficult?

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.

This Bible study group material has been created to help churches explore the habits through prayerful engagement with the Bible and live them out in whole-life, missional discipleship.



Whole-church resource book and Bible reading notes also available

- Provides eight sessions of study material for church groups
- Each session includes a Bible passage, reflection, group questions and community/outreach ideas
- Art and media links and prayers also included

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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