



FELLOWSHIP

GROUP STUDIES

LEADER'S GUIDE

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Edited by
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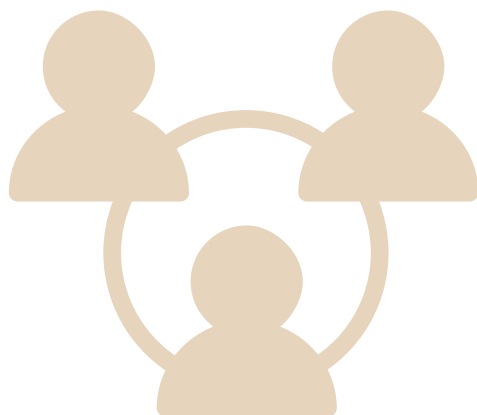
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About the writers

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Helen Julian CSF is an Anglican Franciscan sister and a priest, currently serving her community as Minister General. She has written three books for BRF and contributes to BRF's *New Daylight* Bible reading notes.

Simon Reed is an Anglican minister with two churches in Ealing, West London. He is also one of the three Guardians of the Community of Aidan and Hilda, an international and cross-denominational network of Christians who draw inspiration from Celtic spirituality for the renewal of today's church. He has written two books for BRF, *Creating Community* (2013) and *Followers of the Way* (2017).

Matthew Prior works on developing adult discipleship across the Diocese of Guildford, where he is also rooted in a local parish church. He has recently completed a doctorate exploring how Christians can make sense of living in increasingly technological societies.



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 61)
- **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**







| Nigel Wright

Week 1

Covenant commitment

Read Ruth 1:14–17

Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her. ‘Look,’ said Naomi, ‘your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.’ But Ruth replied, ‘Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.’ (NIV)



Reflection

Belonging to God's people means being part of a covenant community. From our beginnings with Abraham, we have understood ourselves to be in a covenant, a committed and bonded relationship, with the God who has chosen us for a saving purpose. God has promised to be our God and that we will be God's own people. To be sure, this can be understood in a wrong way, as an assertion of superiority over others. Rightly viewed, it makes us servants of God's purposes, and so of the world.

Being in covenant with God carries with it the clear implication that we are also in a covenant relationship with each other, indeed with all who are counted as part of the fellowship of believers. We are bonded to each other and for God's sake are responsible for maintaining this bond of peace between us. Ruth was a Moabite rather than an Israelite, but she has the honour of a biblical book named after her, precisely because of the words we read here. She joined herself in faithfulness and loyalty to her mother-in-law, so embracing the God of Israel without reservation. In so doing, she earned a future and a hope and everlasting renown in the eyes of Israel.

The church is a covenant community. It is more than a convenience, a kind of service station on the motorway of life. It is a family, a community that shapes our identity, a divine initiative at the centre of God's purpose. It invites us to give it the kind of indissoluble commitment shown us by Ruth.

How do you express covenant commitment in your local church and the universal church?



Questions

- 1** What is significant about the fact that Ruth was a Moabite?
- 2** What do you think motivated Ruth to stay with her mother-in-law and what does this reveal about her?
- 3** Do you think Ruth's decision was an easy one to make or would it have cost her something? What might it have cost her?
- 4** Can you recall any other biblical verses that echo Ruth's words 'Your people will be my people and your God my God'? (Try, for instance, Jeremiah 32:38 and Revelation 21:3.) Do you attach any importance to this?
- 5** Was Ruth's commitment to be temporary or permanent? How can we apply all her qualities to ourselves?
- 6** In effect, Ruth was embracing a new identity. As you journey towards becoming fully Christian, what are the crucial factors to reckon with in becoming a new person?





Ideas to do as a group

1 When you next attend a church service, speak with at least two people whom you do not know very well or at all.

2 Attend a service at a different church. What sort of welcome do you or don't you receive? What can you learn from this?



Take-home questions

1

How well do we really want to know one another? Are there necessary or helpful limits?

2

The Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez said, 'You say you care about the poor, then tell me, what are their names?' How well do we know those we claim to be concerned about?

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

Writers in this issue:

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