

HOLY
HABITS
for
FOLLOWING JESUS

Autumn 2011

The Parish of
St Michael and St Mary Magdalene, Easthampstead

www.stmichaelsesthampstead.org.uk

Purpose

To renew our Christian discipleship and develop 'holy habits' through which we might follow Christ more closely.

Programme

- 4 Sept – Discipline / discipleship
- 11 Sept – Reading the Bible
- 18 Sept – Prayer
- 25 Sept – Giving
- 2 Oct – Worship
- 9 Oct – Thanksgiving
- 16 Oct – Ministry
- 23 Oct – Discipline / discipleship

Practice

Each Sunday the readings and sermon will address a particular area. You are encouraged to consider those readings and sermon during the following week and to use the resources in this booklet to examine your own discipleship in the light of them. In addition the booklet contains more resources for your reflection and normally some questions for self-examination. You are encouraged to pencil in your response each week and then to revisit it at the end of the programme to ink in what you have decided will be part of your 'Rule of Life' after further reflection.

People

All your responses will be personal to you. The teaching of Jesus is that, for example, our prayer life and our giving are to be secret and not the subject of boasting. However, you may find it helpful to seek the advice of others in developing your 'holy habits'. A Christian friend or a fellow member of your housegroup might be appropriate. Also the clergy will be only too happy to discuss any of these issues with you. Our numbers are below. Also we are going to be offering a 'Pastoral Office' where one of us will be available in the Interview Room in the Parish Centre on a Tuesday between 6.00pm and 7.15pm where you can get some 'expert' advice.

Fr Guy Cole
(423253)

Revd Peter Bestley
(426741)

Revd La Stacey
(428518)

Revd Kate Sladen
(443245)

4 Sept – Discipline / discipleship

Regula:

- rule,
- something done regularly,
- a rhythm for living in which we can grow more intimately connected to God.

Scripture for reflection

“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” *John 10:10*

“Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.” *1 Tim 6:12*

“Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.” *Proverbs 4:23*

“For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed (*to be shaped into a different, durable, likeness*) to the image of his Son.” *Romans 8:29*

Questions for self-examination

Do I want to follow Jesus more closely?

What holds me back in my discipleship?

Do I need to review my ‘holy habits’?

11 Sept – Reading the Bible

“It is a mistake to look to the Bible to close a discussion; the Bible seeks to open one” (*William Sloane Coffin*)

Scripture for reflection

“All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.” *2 Timothy 3:16*

“Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night. They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield fruit in season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper.” *Psalms 1:1-3*

“My child, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them escape from your sight; keep them within your heart. For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh.” *Proverbs 4:20-22*

“But he answered ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” *Matthew 4:4*

Questions for self-examination

Read a gospel all the way through in one go. Notice the difference in reading it this way. Note down any thoughts.

Would I benefit from the assistance and encouragement of some Bible reading notes?

Could I read three Christian books during the year? What should these be? (Eg Stephen Cottrell’s *Do nothing to change your life: Discovering what happens when you stop*.) The clergy will be happy to advise on what you might find helpful.

18 Sept – Prayer

Prayer itself is an art that only the Holy Spirit can teach us. Pray for prayer. Pray until you can really pray. *(C.H.Spurgeon)*

Scripture for reflection

“If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and heal their land.” *2 Chronicles 7:14*

“But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” *Matthew 6:6*

Ideas for developing your prayer life

Find time for 10 minutes of silent prayer each day. Ask God to speak to you. You might find it helpful to find a picture to reflect on, to get outside in the countryside or light a candle. Offer that time to God each day for a week and see what happens.

Start a notebook to note down things that prompt you to pray and anything that you feel God might be saying to you as you seek to listen to Him.

Experiment with using a very simple prayer of repetition (eg ‘Lord have mercy’) when you are doing some activity that does not require much of your attention (eg walking the dog, pushing the buggy, doing the washing up).

Find (or write your own) very simple pattern of prayer to be used every morning or evening – eg some sentences of Scripture to focus your thoughts, and to lead you into praise using a psalm; a longer reading from the Bible; some time for self-examination; for thanksgiving; and for bring the concerns of the day to God.

The clergy will be very happy to offer advice on any of these ideas or suggest other ones.

25 Sept – Giving

“The question is not how much of my money I give to God, but rather how much of God’s money I keep.” *(R.G.LeTourneau)*

Scripture for reflection

“When you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” *Matthew 6:3-4*

“Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.” *2 Corinthians 9:7-8*

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus” *Philippians 2:5*

Questions for self-examination

Choose to give back a proportion of your time and money as a gift to be given away freely, as an act of dependence, trust and generosity and as a sign that our treasure is truly in heaven not on earth.

The Old Testament talks about a tithe which is 10% (of income not what is left over when we paid for the essentials!). The Church of England encourages us to think about 5% to the church and then supporting charities. For many of us these figures are a real challenge. What percentage of your income is your giving at the moment? What would you like it to be? Could you move towards that over a few years?

2 Oct – Worship

Scripture for reflection

“Is this not the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and to not hide yourself from your own kin?” *Isaiah 58:6-7*

“Praise the Lord for he is good; sing to his name for he is gracious.” *Psalms 135:3*

“Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” *Colossians 3:17*

Questions for self-examination

Is your worship accompanied by your sharing in God’s concern for the poor and the oppressed?

Where in all the demands on my time is my worship of God and my sharing in the Eucharist? Could I commit to attending the Eucharist weekly? Twice a month? (Using the 8.00am Sunday or the midweek Eucharists – Tue 7.30pm or Thur 10.30am – when I cannot be there on at the 9.30am service.)

Identify what moves you to worship and find ways of making the activities of daily life into times of worship. Eg gardening becomes a God-focussed activity.

9 Oct – Thanksgiving

Earth's crammed with Heaven,
And every common bush afire with God,
But only he who sees takes off his shoes –
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.

(Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Aurora Leigh)

Scripture for reflection

“You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, so that my soul may praise you and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever.” *Psalms 30:11-12*

“For you shall go out with joy, and be led back in peace; and the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.” *Isaiah 55:12*

Questions for self-examination

At the start of the day, try a simple prayer of thanks and praise for all the good things that you receive from God throughout the day. At each mealtime, pause briefly in thanksgiving for the gift to be received.

Try to consider the impact on the environment of the things you consume each day and be restrained and careful in their use.

16 Oct – Ministry

What you are is God's gift to you;

What you do with yourself is your gift to God.

(Danish proverb)

Scripture for reflection

“Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.” *1 Peter 4:10*

“Since we find ourselves fashioned into all these excellently formed and marvellously functioning parts in Christ's body, let's just go ahead and be what we were made to be.” *Romans 12:5 (Message version)*

“But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.” *Ephesians 4:15*

Questions for self-examination

What gifts do you have to offer in God's service?

How can you use them to serve Him in the church and in the world?

23 Oct – Discipline / discipleship

Scripture for reflection

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” *Romans 12:1*

“Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.” *2 Corinthians 4:15*

Questions for self-examination

What will be the centre of my life?

What will be the character of my life?

What will be the contribution of my life?

What will be the communication of my life?

What will be the community of my life?

Review this booklet and from it produce your own simple “Rule of life”.

Plan or do any of the actions which are necessary for you to put that Rule into practice.

Put a date in your diary for a few months time when you can review and refresh your following of that Rule.

Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee.
Take my moments and my days; let them flow in ceaseless praise.
Take my hands, and let them move at the impulse of Thy love.
Take my feet, and let them be swift and beautiful for Thee.
Take my voice, and let me sing always, only, for my King.
Take my lips, and let them be filled with messages from Thee.
Take my silver and my gold; not a mite would I withhold.
Take my intellect, and use every power as Thou shalt choose.
Take my will, and make it Thine; it shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart, it is Thine own; it shall be Thy royal throne.
Take my love, my Lord, I pour at Thy feet its treasure store.
Take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for Thee.

(Frances Havergal)

O Jesus, I have promised
to serve thee to the end:
be thou ever near me,
my Master and my friend;
I shall not fear the battle
if thou art by my side,
nor wander from the pathway
if thou wilt be my guide.

O let me feel thee near me!
The world is ever near;
I see the sights that dazzle,
the tempting sounds I hear;
my foes are ever near me,
around me and within;
but Jesus, draw thou nearer,
and shield my soul from sin.

O let me hear thee speaking
in accents clear and still,
above the storms of passion,
the murmurs of self-will;
O speak to reassure me,
to hasten or control;
O speak, and make me listen,
thou guardian of my soul.

O let me see thy features,
the look that once could make
so many a true disciple
leave all things for thy sake:
the look that beamed on Peter
when he thy name denied;
the look that draws thy lovers
close to thy piercèd side.

O Jesus, thou hast promised
to all who follow thee,
that where thou art in glory
there shall thy servant be;
and, Jesus I have promised
to serve thee to the end;
O give me grace to follow,
my Master and my friend.

O let me see thy footmarks,
and in them plant mine own;
My hope to follow duly
is in thy strength alone.
O guide me, call me, draw me,
uphold me to the end;
and then in heaven receive me,
my Savior and my Friend.

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,
be all else but naught to me, save that thou art;
be thou my best thought in the day and the night,
both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,
be thou ever with me, and I with thee Lord;
be thou my great Father, and I thy true son;
be thou in me dwelling, and I with thee one.

Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;
be thou my whole armor, be thou my true might;
be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong tower:
O raise thou me heavenward, great Power of my power.

Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise:
be thou mine inheritance now and always;
be thou and thou only the first in my heart;
O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure thou art.

High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright sun,
O grant me its joys after victory is won;
great Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.