

## 7 Sacred Habits: Daily Readings and Rhythm of Life

For centuries, church life centred around Sunday worship, the gathering of the whole congregation, in 1 place, at a set time each week. Since March 2020 this has been impossible. Many other ways of gathering and expressing our shared life (cell groups in homes, social events, outreach) have also had to stop, or take different forms. And this shows no sign of changing soon.

Is there another way of being a church, a community of Christian disciples? Can we be one body without a church building? Yes. Christian communities of monks and nuns express their life in terms of a 'rule of life', and design monasteries which give special space to each element of it.

The '7 Sacred Spaces', (a term coined by researcher George Lings) based on these communities, provide us with a framework for Christian living in daily life. Each space in the monastery embodies a certain feature of Christian and community life:

Chapel – for worship together

Cell – for personal prayer

Scriptorium – for study

Garden/Kitchen – for work

Refectory – for hospitality

Chapter house – for discussing and developing community life

Cloister – for availability



Church life has typically focused on the 'chapel' – gathering the community for worship. But a full life of discipleship includes all 7 elements:

- Worship
- Prayer
- Study
- Work/service
- Hospitality
- Availability
- Community/Deciding

Each of the '7 Sacred Spaces' translates into a 'Sacred Habit', an aspect of whole-life discipleship. Some of these habits focus on God (worship, prayer), some on personal spirituality (prayer, study), some on others, some on the

church community. Between them they give shape to whole-life Christian discipleship, expressed as part of a local Christian community, and on our daily front line settings.

### **How to Use This Booklet**

This booklet spends a week on each of the 7 Habits. For each week there is a daily Bible verse or reading, and space to record your thoughts.

Set aside a minimum of 10 minutes a day. Spend at least 5 minutes meditating on the Bible verse. To do this, find somewhere you won't be disturbed, do whatever you need to do to remove distractions (e.g. light a candle, get comfortable, switch off your phone, or even go for a walk), consciously direct yourself towards God, and slowly turn the verse over in your heart and mind.

Then spend the last 5 minutes recording anything you think God has said to you, any question or action which suggests itself. If the verse is a short one, try committing it to memory so you can repeat it throughout the day.

At the end of each week, there are some simple reflection questions. These are a) to help you record how God has spoken to you through the week b) to help you build a Rule or Rhythm of Life, which incorporates the 7 Habits into daily/weekly/monthly living.

Share your weekly summary with at least one other person – what you have learned together, and what you plan to do, and pray for each other. This could be done within a cell group, or just by finding 1 other person in the church who is using this booklet and meeting with them in a café or your front room, or by phone. **Please make sure you do this.**

A Rule/Rhythm of Life is not a solo activity, we are a community of people who follow Jesus, and we need each other to support and encourage us.

At the end of the 7 weeks, spend time with each other working out what the practice of those habits looks like in your everyday life. You may already be doing them all! There is a template at the end of the booklet which you may find useful. Make plans to meet regularly to review this together.

## Habit 1      Worship



*Read the Bible passage provided, and meditate on it for 5 minutes. What strikes you? What speaks to you? There is space after each reading to record your thoughts.*

### **Day 1 Worship God**

1 Chronicles 29:11 Yours, LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendour, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all.

### **Day 2 Worship together**

Revelation 5:11-13: Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they were saying:

“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!”

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying:

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!”

### **Day 3 Worship regularly**

Psalm 119:162-164

I rejoice in Your promise like one who finds great spoil.

I hate and abhor falsehood, but Your law I love.

Seven times a day I praise You for Your righteous judgments

Psalm 34:1 I will extol the Lord at all times, his praise will always be on my lips.

### **Day 4 Worship everywhere**

Genesis 12v8 From there Abram went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD.

*Abram turned an unfamiliar place into a place of worship. We can 'build an altar and call on the name of the Lord' anywhere – put a Christian symbol or bible verse on your workstation, your phone cover, in your car, over your front door, on your dog lead. Where are you going to be today? Call on the name of the Lord when you get there.*

### **Day 5 Worship in all circumstances**

Read Luke 1:46-55.

*You may want to sing your own song of worship and praise to God*

## **Day 6 Worship Wholeheartedly**

Romans 12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.

## **Day 7 Worship is our Purpose and Calling.**

1 Peter 2:2-5, 9-10 As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ... you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

## **Weekly Reflection - Worship**

What has God said to you through these readings?

Is there anything that you will do as a response?

### **'Rule/Rhythm of Life' question**

Jesus worshipped and prayed during daily life, on a weekly basis with others (at synagogue) and through special celebrations which marked key moments in God's deliverance (Passover)

How is worship part of your way of life

- In daily living
- Weekly with others
- Special celebrations

## Habit 2      Prayer



*Read the Bible passage provided, and meditate on it for 5 minutes. What strikes you? What speaks to you? There is space after each reading to record your thoughts.*

### **Day 1 Place**

Matthew 6:6 When you pray, go into your room, close the door, and pray to your Father who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

*Where/when is your 'room'? What distracts you from praying and how do you overcome this?*

### **Day 2 Perseverance**

Luke 11:9-10 Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks the door will be opened.

### **Day 3 Despair**

Psalms 69: 1-3 Save me O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in the miry depths where there is no foothold. I am worn out calling for help.

#### **Day 4 Take it to the Lord in prayer**

2 Kings 19:14 (*when king Hezekiah was being threatened with invasion by the Assyrian king*) Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it. Then he went up to the temple of the Lord and spread it out before the Lord.

#### **Day 5 Prayer and Relationships**

Mark 11:25 When you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.

#### **Day 6 Humility and Power**

James 5:16 Therefore confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective



## **Day 7 Unshakeable Habit**

Daniel 6:10 (when a decree was published that you should only pray to king Darius) Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.

## **Weekly Reflection – Prayer**

What has God said to you through these readings?

Is there anything that you will do as a response?

### **‘Rule/Rhythm of Life’ question**

What is your place, time and pattern of prayer? This can be reviewed and changed, but it’s important to have one.

Identify one person who can ask you ‘how is your prayer life going?’ Then ask them to ask you that question on a regular basis. Even better, arrange to meet them regularly.

## Habit 3 Community and Deciding

Monastic communities have a 'chapter house', where they meet as equals (these places are circular), hear a chapter of their monastic rule read out (hence the name), and make decisions about their community life. Without these, the community would either disintegrate, drift, or fall into disunity.



*Read the Bible passage provided, and meditate on it for 5 minutes. What strikes you? What speaks to you? There is space after each reading to record your thoughts.*

### **Day 1**

Hebrews 10:24-25 Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another

### **Day 2**

Romans 14:19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification (*try saying this repeatedly, emphasising a different word each time*)

### **Day 3**

Proverbs 15:22 Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.

## **Day 4**

Matthew 18:18-19 I tell you the truth, what you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them

*(‘bind’ and ‘loose’ were Jewish terms for ‘decide to forbid’ and ‘decide to allow’, and the ‘you’ is plural. Jesus is giving the church responsibility for making decisions about its own life)*

## **Day 5 No Worship Without Reconciliation**

Matthew 5:23-24 Therefore if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

## **Day 6**

Colossians 3:12 Therefore as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds the all together in perfect unity.

## **Day 7**

Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God

## **Weekly Reflection – Community and Decision Making**

What has God said to you through these readings?

Is there anything that you will do as a response?

### **‘Rule/Rhythm of Life’ question**

It’s very easy to become reactive, or passive, and we then end up at the mercy of whatever/whoever is pushing hardest for our time and energy. Identify a regular time when you can reflect and make decisions about your own life, bring things to God, identify what your priorities are.

Members of the New Testament church met together to

1. Pray and Worship
2. Get into Scripture
3. Encourage each other
4. Resolve conflict.

How is 1-3 expressed in your life on a weekly basis?

Is there any unresolved conflict in your circle of relationships right now?  
What will you do to help resolve it?

## Habit 4      Service/Work



The Benedictine monastic way of life is summed up in 3 words 'ora et labora' – 'work and prayer'. Every day included set times for prayer, and set times for manual work. This work was vital – as well as sustaining the community (growing and cooking food, making clothes, getting firewood), they fed the poor, cared for the sick, taught reading and writing, studied science, reclaimed land, and invented things. The monks and nuns were nurses, teachers, farmers, labourers, inventors, craftsmen, social workers, hoteliers, brewers, weavers and cooks. All this was part of the work of God.

*Read the Bible passage provided, and meditate on it for 5 minutes. What strikes you? What speaks to you? There is space after each reading to record your thoughts.*

### **Day 1   Created to Work**

Gen 2: 15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

Ephesians 2: We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

### **Day 2   Hard Work**

Gen 3:17 To Adam he said 'Because...you ate from the tree about which I commanded you 'you must not eat of it' cursed is the ground because of you. Through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.'

### **Day 3 God-given Abilities**

Exodus 31:1-5 “See I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of craft – to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship.” (Most crafts and trades at the time fell into these 3 categories – metalworker, stoneworker and woodworker. For skill in fabrics see Proverbs 31:10-end)

### **Day 4 Work as Service**

John 13:14 “Now that I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you...now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them”

### **Day 5 Initiative**

Proverbs 6:6-8 Go to the ant you sluggard, consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest



## **Day 6 Persevere**

1 Corinthians 15:58 Therefore my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.

## **Day 7 Using What You've Been Given**

Matthew 25:22-23 "The man with two talents also came. 'Master', he said 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.' His master replied 'Well done good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness.' "

## **Weekly Reflection – Work/Service**

What has God said to you through these readings?

Is there anything that you will do as a response?

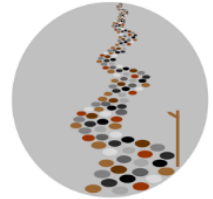
### **‘Rule/Rhythm of Life’ question**

What is your main ‘work’? – regardless of whether you are paid for it or not!

How can you dedicate your work to God on a regular basis?

Is there a ‘talent’ you have (ability, time, opportunity, skill, passion), which is lying dormant? Name it. What will you do to put it to use?

## Habit 5      Availability



The Cloister in the monastery connects all the other spaces. It's a place outside of the planned and scheduled bits of monastic life, to walk with others, to 'bump into' people, to take time rather than passing through on the way from A to B.

*Read the Bible passage provided, and meditate on it for 5 minutes. What strikes you? What speaks to you? There is space after each reading to record your thoughts.*

### **Day 1 Interruptable**

Matthew 9:18-22 While he was saying this, a ruler came and knelt before him and said 'my daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her and she will live.' Jesus got up and went with him, and so did his disciples. Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. She said to herself 'If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed.' Jesus turned and saw here. 'Take heart daughter, he said, 'your faith has healed you' and the woman was healed from that moment.

*What if Jesus had said 'sorry, I'm busy'?*

### **Day 2 Available to God**

Isaiah 6:8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying 'who shall I send? And who will go for us?' And I said 'Here am I. Send me.'

### **Day 3 Available to Jesus**

Luke 10:39-42 Martha had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha" the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

### **Day 4 Available without conditions**

Ruth 1:16 "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people, and your God my God"

### **Day 5 Available to the Spirits prompting**

Acts 10:19-20 While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him 'Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.'

## **Day 6 Noticing people we might otherwise ignore**

Acts 3:3 When the crippled man saw Peter and John about to enter (the temple), he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John.

## **Day 7 Available to share Jesus**

Acts 8:26-35 Now the angel of the Lord said to Philip, 'Go south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza'. So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. (He) was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Philip. 'Go to that chariot and stay near it'. Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. 'Do you understand what you are reading?' Philip asked. 'how can I' he said, 'unless someone explains it to me?' so he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.... Philip began (with the passage he was reading) and told him the good news about Jesus.

## **Weekly Reflection – Availability**

What has God said to you through these readings?

Is there anything that you will do as a response?

### **‘Rule/Rhythm of Life’ question**

How will you create space and time to be available to God and to others?

- Daily
- Weekly

What prayer could you pray regularly to express this?

Is there any activity, or habit, you need to surrender to God to help you to be more available?

## Habit 6      Hospitality

*Read the Bible passage provided, and meditate on it for 5 minutes. What strikes you? What speaks to you? There is space after each reading to record your thoughts.*



### **Day 1 The Mystery Guest**

Matthew 25:37-40 Then the righteous will answer him ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirst and give you something to drink When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ The King will reply ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of theses brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me’.

### **Day 2 The Great Host**

John 14:2 “In my Father’s house are many rooms”

### **Day 3 God’s Guest List**

Luke 5:30 The Pharisees complained ‘why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners’.

#### **Day 4 Hospitality is not a calculation**

Luke 14:13 Jesus said 'when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous'

#### **Day 5**

Romans 12:13 Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality

#### **Day 6 Hospitality of the heart**

Romans 15:7 Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.



## **Day 7 Planned Generosity**

Deuteronomy 26:12 When you have finished setting aside a tenth of all your produce in the third year, the year of the tithe, you shall give it to the Levite, the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied.

## **Weekly Reflection – Hospitality**

What has God said to you through these readings?

Is there anything that you will do as a response?

### **‘Rule/Rhythm of Life’ question**

What does your ministry of hospitality look like in these areas?

- Opening your own home (covid safe, of course!)
- Sharing food with others
- Taking gifts to others
- Looking after the poor

Make a realistic plan for how you could do these things regularly.

## Habit 7 Study



*Read the Bible passage provided, and meditate on it for 5 minutes. What strikes you? What speaks to you? There is space after each reading to record your thoughts.*

### **Day 1 Study Scripture**

Joshua 1:8 Do not let this book of the law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

### **Day 2 Study Creation**

Psalm 19:1-2 The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech, night after night they display knowledge.

### **Day 3 Study Culture**

17:23 As I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.

## **Day 4 Study Tips**

Deuteronomy 6:6-9 These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

## **Day 5 Lifelong Learning**

2 Tim 3:14-15 As for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man and woman of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

## **Day 6 Blessings of Wisdom**

Proverbs 4:5 Get wisdom, get understanding, do not forget my words or swerve from them. Do not forsake wisdom and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you.

## **Day 7 Study in Depth**

James 1:25 The man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he will be blessed in what he does.

Acts 17:11 Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

## **Weekly Reflection – Study**

What has God said to you through these readings?

Is there anything that you will do as a response?

### **‘Rule/Rhythm of Life’ question**

What is your pattern of Bible study?

Daily

weekly

monthly

What do you use to help you study? Do you need more help?

What other things do you want to study? How will you do this?

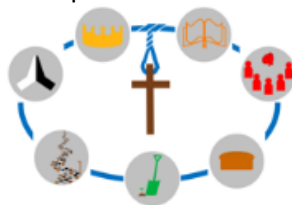
*To study the 7 Sacred Spaces further, there is both a booklet, and a full sized book, by George Lings. You may want to get 2 copies so you can study and reflect on it with someone else.*

## Creating your own Rule/Rhythm of Life

1. With at least 1 other person, review your responses in all 7 areas.
2. Set out your intention for each of the 7 habits. If you are new to this, start with 1 thing for each habit. Identify what help or resources you might need (e.g. a place to pray, a book to study, setting an alarm)
3. Write out your 7 intentions, review and pray over them at the start of each day, review them weekly with at least 1 other person.
4. At the end of 6 weeks, take time with your review partner to re-set your intentions in each of the 7 areas.

Here is a worked example of how that might look.

My intention



### 1. Worship with others

Join with Sunday live worship on Youtube, invite x to come to our house to watch it with us.

### 2. Personal Prayer

Morning prayer time, using Scripture union bible reading notes  
Use 'night prayer' from the 'worship at home' booklet at bedtime

### 3. Study/Learning

Take John Ortberg book to work and read for 10m during lunch hour

### 4. Community/Deciding

Hours 'thinking time' on Sunday afternoon. This week, think how I can bless my extended family and stay in touch with them.

### 5. Good work/service

Prescription collection for neighbour.

### 6. Availability

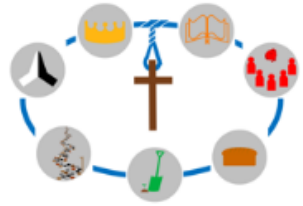
Daily walk/exercise with dog, smile and say hello to people, call on x to see if she needs any shopping done.

### 7. Hospitality

Buy some doughnuts and offer them door to door after 'clap for carers'

*And here's a blank template for you to fill in, if this is helpful*

My intention



1. Worship with others

2. Personal Prayer

3. Study/Learning

4. Community/Deciding

5. Good work/service

6. Availability

7. Hospitality

Notes/Review