



Christ
Church
W4

Spiritual Fitness

A Study Guide



Introduction

God cares about us – the whole of us – our physical, social, psychological and spiritual health. Sometimes our health in these areas is interlinked and sometimes it's separate. The bible teaches us that we have a God who cares about our whole selves. I love that when Elijah was in deep depression, God didn't say, "Let's pray about it." God said, "You need some good food and a decent night's sleep." Our wonderful God goes on to address Elijah's soul and, in ministering healing to Elijah, God was mindful of his physical, social, psychological and spiritual health.

Today, perhaps more than ever, we're aware of how we can keep ourselves fit physically, mentally and socially. So in this series we're going to spend time thinking about our spiritual fitness. After all, the church is the gym for the soul; the place where we can best grow spiritually to witness to the world. This series is offered as a reminder of the tools God has given us to help stay spiritually fit – ready for heaven and most alert to what God is doing in our world.

The traditional Christian disciplines are often divided into two columns: disciplines on 'abstinence' and disciplines of 'engagement':

Disciplines of Abstinence	Disciplines of Engagement
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<i>Solitude</i>	Study
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Silence	<i>Worship</i>
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<i>Fasting</i>	Celebration
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Frugality	<i>Service/Generosity</i>
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Chastity	<i>Prayer</i>
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Secrecy	<i>Fellowship</i>
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<i>Sacrifice</i>	<i>Confession</i>
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<i>Sabbath</i>	Submission
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In this series we're going to be looking at the ones in *italics* above. As we explore them, there will be a slight bias on the aspects of these disciplines that call us away from busyness for a time to attend to our souls. Why will there be this emphasis? Because our physical existence in a hectic city means we're often lacking in time and likely to absorb the frenetic culture around us.

If you try to put into practice each week's teaching it will be unrealistic and overwhelming. Rather, see the teachings as tools to put into your toolbox and ask God to show you which ones might be especially helpful for you to use in this season.

In this booklet you'll find some studies that can be used in small groups, but if you're unable to be a part of a small group this term here are some suggestions especially for you!

1. Use the notes in your own quiet time.
2. Pick one of these three books to read and digest:
 - *Spiritual Fitness: Christian Character in a Consumer Society* by Graham Tomlin (our Bishop)
 - *Epiphanies of the Ordinary: Encounters That Change Lives* by Charlie Cleverly
 - *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* by Richard Foster
3. It's good to have two to three relationships with other Christians that can encourage, challenge and support you, etc, even when busy! Why not find a couple of others in a similar position and arrange to meet up once a month to pray together? You may all decide to read the same book so you can discuss it and add some rigor to the prayer time. If you'd like some suggestions of how this can work well, do get in touch.
4. You may want to put the Hungry evenings of worship and prayer in your diary. Or, when you're working from home, why not pop into church on a Friday lunchtime, bring a packed lunch and give God some quiet space in your life.

To Small Group Leaders:

Have a look through the notes and decide whether this term you'd like to:

- Work through the study guide
- All read the same book and discuss a chapter or two when you meet up. If you do this, it might be good to read one of the books recommended above.

Spiritual Fitness: Worship

Welcome

In this series we're taking a look at spiritual fitness. What does it mean to be spiritually fit? What does spiritual fitness look like?

Today we're looking at worship. Although worship is much more than singing, it is also about singing (see Colossians 3.16 and Ephesians 5.18–19).

Go around and have a go at whistling or humming your favourite spiritual song – see how many you can guess.

Word

Read 1 Chron 16.23–31 and John 4.23–24.

- What do these passages tell us about worship?
- Look at Matthew 15.8–9. What is not worship?
- Look at John 4.23–24. What is authentic worship? Why is worshipping in the spirit not contrasted with worshipping in the body and instead put alongside worshipping in truth? Why is truth important? How should truth influence our worship?
- Worship involves our hearts and a right understanding of God's nature – an understanding of how much God is worth. Worship comes from *worth ship*. Worship is about showing or displaying

the worth of God. What does this mean in your own personal worship and in our corporate worship?

- Look at Hebrews 13.15–16. What do we learn about worship here? There are two acts of worship that please God – what are they?
- John Piper gives a good summary of worship:
“The inner essence of worship is to know God truly and then respond from the heart to that knowledge by valuing God, treasuring God, prizing God, enjoying God, being satisfied with God above all earthly things. And then deep, restful, joyful satisfaction in God overflows in demonstrable acts of praise from the lips and demonstrable acts of love in serving others for the sake of Christ.”
- How does worshipping keep us spiritually fit?

Worship

Say evening prayer together or put on some worship music and join in.

Witness

Spend some time praying for people who don't yet know Jesus. Is there anyone you might want to invite to the Alpha course starting soon on Wednesday 18 September at 7.30pm.

Also, as a group, put the Hungry prayer and worship night in your diaries: Tuesday 17 September 7.30pm at St Alban's.

Spiritual Fitness: Solitude

Welcome

Divide into two teams. Give everyone a blank piece of card. Ask them to write five little-known facts about themselves on their card. (For example: I have a pet Iguana, I was born in Iceland, my favourite food is spinach, my grandmother is called Doris and my favourite colour is vermillion.) Collect the cards into two team piles. Draw one card from the opposing team pile. Each team tries to name the person in as few clues as possible. Five points if they get it on the first clue, then 4, 3, 2, 1, 0. The team with the most points wins. (Note: put the most obscure facts first, it will increase the level of competition and general head scratching!)

Word

Read Isaiah 40.29–31 and Mark 1.35–39.

- What has stood out to you from these verses and any of the sermons on Sunday? What will you take away from them?
- Look at Psalm 46.10 and Lamentations 3.25–28. How highly would you say the bible supports solitude?
- Jesus lived a very full and active life – take a look at how Jesus incorporates solitude into his busy people filled days:

- Jesus often withdrew to lonely places (Luke 5.16)
 - Took time alone before performing miracles (Mark 1.35)
 - Took time alone when in grief (Matthew 14.13)
 - Took time out before choosing the 12 apostles (Luke 6.12–13)
 - Took time out when in distress (Luke 22.39–44)
 - Took times of solitude out with his friends (Mark 6.31–32)
- Why is solitude considered a spiritual discipline?
 - What are the reasons people may avoid solitude? Does it sound appealing or scary to you? Why?
 - Have you ever had a period of extended, intentional solitude? What was it like and what were the long-term effects on your spiritual life?
 - It may feel like time alone is impossible in your circumstances, but could you take another look and find some creative solutions? As a group, what could you do to encourage one another – what about a retreat together, help with someone's childcare or agree as a group to spend, say 9–10pm, one evening in your own homes but completely alone and avoiding all social media and other distractions. At 10pm you could share briefly over email or WhatsApp how it has gone.

Worship and Witness

This act of worship is designed to be completed in silence. The group leader will need to prepare in advance, and everyone will need to see this outline so they know what to do.

Group leader:

In advance you will need to prepare: a candle, a stone for each member of your group, an envelope with a piece of scripture (an encouraging text or a text that speaks about God's character) inside for each member of your group, a piece of paper and a pen for each member of your group.

Introducing the session: Light a candle as a focal point. Hand out a stone, envelope, piece of paper and pen to everyone. Explain that you will follow through the below in silence, but no one should feel rushed or worry about what anyone else is doing.

Hold onto your pebble for a while. Feel the cold hard stone warm in your hands. Offer yourself afresh to God. Ask the Holy Spirit to come and warm your heart towards God. Take some time to confess to God any coldness in your heart – any action/activity/thought that has distanced you from God. Ask God to forgive you. As a sign that God takes away anything that separates us from him, place your stone/pebble by the candle.

Take the envelope you've been given. Open it and meditate on the scripture for a while. Read it a few times and ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you.

Take the piece of paper and pen you've been given. On one side write words/draw pictures of any cares or concerns you want to bring to God. On the other side write the names of two people you're praying for at the moment. Place your piece of paper in the envelope and place it by the stones – again as sign of handing your prayers to God.

Group Leader:

Silence can be awkward – try your best not to rush. When it seems about right, break the silence to end the time of worship and pray a blessing on everyone:

*I pray this evening that God will grace you with a peaceful evening and a restful night. May God's presence go with you and may you rise refreshed for all tomorrow holds.
Amen*

Spiritual Fitness: Sabbath

Welcome

Find out what Sabbath is like for everyone in the group.
How do people get rest and deep refreshment?

Word

Read Hebrews 4.1–16.

- What is new in this passage? What might be confusing?
- Look at verses 1 and 11. What is the author's main concern?
- How many times does it talk about 'entering rest'? What is it that prevents someone from entering rest?
- What different 'rests' are spoken of in the passage?
- In Hebrews chapters 3 and 4, the author quotes parts of Psalm 95. Look at Psalm 95 and look at what is said about it in chapter 3.
 - What Old Testament incident was Psalm 95 referring to?
 - What characterised the unbelief of the wilderness generation?
 - By contrast, who offered a believing perspective, and what was it?
 - Why does the author of Hebrews use Psalm 95?

The Psalm is quoted in Hebrews 3.7–11. Its negative application is spoken about in Hebrews 3.12–19 and its positive application is spoken about in Hebrews 4.1–11.

- What are some of the possible reasons God rested after the creation of the world? What activities in your life tend to narrow your ability to see God's abundance and order in your life?
- Why is Sabbath rest so important?
- How does Sabbath rest keep us spiritually fit?

Worship

Tonight, listen to some worship music and rest in God through just listening and being present.

Witness

In what ways can Sabbath rest help us to witness to those around us? Pray for people's work places and life spaces – that we'd take our rest in God into those places.

Spiritual Fitness: Fasting

Welcome

Find out how everyone is doing. Catch up on each other's life places and worlds. Having heard each person's news, quickly pray out loud all at once for the person on the left.

Below are some notes and questions from CPAS that you can use to chat through together as a group.

Please note that fasting is not for those who suffer from eating disorders, poor health, feeding children or any other medical or psychological reason where a doctor would advise against it!

Definition

To abstain from eating all or certain foods or meals, especially for religious observance. An act or a period of fasting. (Collins Dictionary)

Common excuses for not fasting

- It's not part of my tradition, denomination or stream
- It doesn't feel natural
- I couldn't do it with my lifestyle
- I'm not sure I believe in it

Remember the biblical command (Jesus) is 'when you pray' and 'when you fast'.

What does the Bible say about fasting?

There are over 70 references to fasting in the Bible. In the Old Testament we find it practiced individually and corporately. In the New Testament we see it spoken

about from Jesus, Paul and the local church. Fasting is sometimes initiated by God (Lev 23.20–31) and sometimes God invites people to turn back to him by fasting (Joel 2.12).

Fasting is...

- Humbling oneself before God: Psalm 35.13
- Feeding oneself on the word of God: Jeremiah 36.6
- Disciplining oneself – subduing the body: 1 Corinthians 9.27
- Reflection – preparation before God: Nehemiah 1.4
- Dependence on God not on our own strength: 1 Chronicles 20.1–12
- Priority on spiritual not material: Matthew 6.33
- Ability to distinguish between wrong kinds of fasting: Isaiah 58.1–7
- Concentration on God – pleasing him and not ourselves: Zechariah 7.5

Look at Isaiah 58

Verses 3–14 show a wrong understanding of fasting: wrong relationships, wrong behaviour, wrong attitudes. But twelve benefits are also revealed:

- Revelation; healing and wholeness; righteousness; presence of God's glory v.8
- Answered prayers v.9
- Continued guidance; contentment; refreshing; strength v.11
- Work that endures – every flowing spring
- Raising up of future generations; restoration v.12

Principles of fasting

- Fasting must always be accompanied by prayer, e.g. Moses, Anna, Nehemiah, Jesus, Esther and the Jews, Samuel and the people of Israel.
- Fasting must be accompanied by reading the word of God, e.g. Daniel 9.3–23, Luke 4.1–13.
Graham Scroggie says: *“Do not spend time in prayer first, before spending time in the Word. The order is important: first the Word, then prayer. For the Word is the means by which prayer is conceived and the vehicle by which it is expressed – and not the other way around... In experiences of fasting, we are not so much abstaining from food as we are feasting on the word of God.”*
- Fasting is a gesture of self- humbling – allow time for the Holy Spirit to cleanse our souls.
- Fasting should change our attitude towards others.

Types of fasting

- *The absolute fast:* No food or water. Cannot be done for more than three days. It is done for emergency situations e.g. Esther 4.16, Ezra 10.6 and Acts 9.9
- *The partial fast:* This is a simple diet, perhaps only liquids and one simple meal of vegetables. Daniel probably did this fast in Daniel 10.2–3. This is a good place to start.
- *The normal or the extended fast:* This is to fast with only water, and it can be done for one day up to 40 days. To fast like this for a day should be a regular part of our ministry to the Lord, especially when facing new or difficult situations. The normal fast is

one of our weapons of spiritual warfare, and is healthy for the body, soul and spirit.

- *The supernatural fast*: Moses is the ultimate example of the supernatural fast. He fasted from both bread and water for 40 days. This type of fast can only be done supernaturally and will only happen if the Spirit of the Lord is in control.

Questions

1. What is my attitude to fasting?
2. What is the purpose of fasting?
3. Look at 2 Chron 20.1–4, 1 Sam 7.3–8, Joel 2.15–17, Acts 13.3–4, 14.21–23. What do you learn?
4. What should our response be as a Church?
5. How does fasting make us spiritually fit?

Worship and Witness

Worship and pray together both for the world and for yourselves.

Spiritual Fitness: Confession

Welcome

What has given you the biggest smile in the past six months?

This session is all about confession. This turns our thoughts to things that haven't gone so well – to the times when we've got things wrong.

As we do this, be mindful of the fact that true, deep confession enables lots of wonderful things to happen: firstly, we get to experience afresh God's love and forgiveness; secondly, this helps us to be more gracious and forgiving to others; thirdly, this all leads to greater joy in our lives. So, confession can become a beautiful gift to us that frees us for joy and ultimately puts smiles on our faces.

Word

Read 1 Samuel 7.2–14.

- What are your experiences of individual and corporate confession?
- In what ways is Christian confession different or similar to the examples that have been shared?
- From this passage and any talks you listened to on Sunday, what has stood out to you as a learning point?

- What does the ark represent?
- Why do you suppose the ark is not returning to Shiloh where it had previously resided for hundreds of years?
- What might be considered very strange about who has been entrusted with the ark and by whom?
- What does it mean that 'all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord?'
- How do Samuel's instructions reflect what is always the very first step towards spiritual revival? (See also Joel 2.)
- What specific sin must be dealt with and what is the conditional promise God makes?
- How does Samuel continue to sustain the revival that has begun?
- Why does Samuel pour out water and offer a burnt offering? In what ways can we show our repentance today?
- How can 'confession' keep us spiritually fit?

Worship

Allow some quiet music and space for people to make confessions to God, but then ensure that you spend some time in praise and acknowledging God's acceptance of us and his forgiveness of us.

Health and safety warning: You could write your confessions on pieces of paper and burn them, but be sure to do this in a bucket outside!

Witness

Spend some time praying for the world and for your places of work and relationships with those who don't yet know Jesus.

Spiritual Fitness: Prayer

Welcome

Ask everyone to write on a piece of paper three things about themselves that may not be known to the others in the group: two should be true and one should not. Take turns to read out the three 'facts' about yourselves. The rest of the group votes on which are true and which are false. There are always surprises!

Word

Read 1 Thess 5.16–25.

- What are all the characteristics Paul lays out for what a good community looks like? Spend some time discussing each one and how we can live them out in our community.
- Why is patience with the timid, weak or idle so difficult? What are some of the hinderances to patience? How can we be helped to be more patient?
- Verse 15 tells us not to repay evil for evil. Why does 'killing people with kindness' work well for us all?
- Verses 16 and 17 talk to us about prayer. What do they teach?
- Given that Paul was writing to persecuted Christians, what is he saying to them when he calls them to

rejoice? If rejoicing is an obedient conscious attitude of contentment in who God is, what should that look like?

- 'Praying always' is something we grow into as we keep making conscious efforts to invite God into each moment. I recommend reading chapter 1 of Richard Fosters book on *Prayer* to get a better understanding of how we might pray all the time.
- In what ways might we put out the Spirit's fire? How can we avoid this in our own lives?
- What do we learn from Paul's asking for prayer and of the type of request he asks?

Worship

Why not use compline and say evening prayer together (or find morning prayer if you're meeting at an earlier time)? In the prayer time, encourage some space for people to pray aloud. www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/daily-prayer/night-prayer-compline

Witness

Keep on praying for those few people you're trying to pray for this term. Help each other to remember them and to pray for God to work in their lives.

Spiritual Fitness: Fellowship

"In Mark 2.23 we read how, 'One Sabbath Jesus was going through the cornfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some ears of corn.' In other words, they just went for a lazy walk together, during which the disciples aroused the ire of the Pharisees by plucking grain on the Sabbath. They seem to wander from house to house, and it almost seems a nuisance when the crowds get so big 'they were not even able to eat' (3.20). Jesus takes them across the lake, during which a storm brews up (4.35). He crosses back over to the land of the Gerasene's (5.1). These journeys do not appear to have any particular purpose apart from spending time with the disciples. Not all of Jesus' ministry was focused, purposeful and intense.

Finding time is one of the most difficult things in our busy lives. Yet building in this unhurried time spent walking, travelling, watching, talking is one of the most delightful as well as formative things we can do. Those times enabled the disciples to watch Jesus and imitate him. Did they pluck the ears of corn because that was exactly what Jesus was doing? Why else would they have done something so provocative unless he had done so first? Church that intends to become a centre for real spiritual change will always have an element of this gentle, unordered, though deliberately chosen policy of relaxed time together." Graham Tomlin, *Spiritual Fitness*, p.146

This week do something different to spend some relaxed time together!

Spiritual Fitness: Generosity

Welcome

Tell stories of how generosity has touched your life – maybe a time someone gave you a lovely gift, someone who spent time patiently teaching you something new, a particular instance of forgiveness or grace shown to you etc.

Word

Read 1 Timothy 6.17–21.

- Make a list of all the commands in this short bit of scripture. What are the 'dos' and the 'don'ts'?
- It's easy to think this doesn't apply to me ('I'm not rich'), but the truth is that if we have running water, a mobile phone and somewhere to sleep we're richer than a vast number of people who live on this planet. So, we need to not compare ourselves with our neighbour but simply look at this passage and ask God to speak to us this evening.
- Does this passage say that it is bad to be rich?
- How would you summarise what this passage is teaching?
- How can we check where our hope actually lies? What could we test to see if our hope is in God rather than in stuff?

- How are we to be rich? Are you accountable to anyone in this area?
- Look over the stewardship article in the *Beacon* magazine. How are we doing as a church? How could we do even better as individuals and as a church family?
- How is generosity part of our spiritual fitness?

Worship

Pray for grace over each other to fulfil the commands given to us in this passage.

Witness

What could we put in place that will help us to be generous? We don't go and brag about our good deeds, but how might we gently share that our hope is not in wealth but in God?

Spiritual Fitness: Sacrifice

Welcome

Spend some time catching up over food or play a game together.

It's the end of the series, so it's good to take some time to look at what we've been doing and to ask:

- How can you keep your spiritual fitness going this year?
- What one or two things will you aim to put into the rhythm of your life?
- How as a group can you help keep each other accountable?

Word

Read Matthew 16.21–28.

- What stands out from this passage?
- What aspects of this passage are unique to Jesus (the Son of God) and what is for all of his followers?
- Why did Jesus have to suffer? Why was that the plan?
- What do you make of Peter's reaction? Why does Jesus respond to him like that?
- Do you ever hold on to your own ideas and insist on your own way when you don't understand

something, instead of conforming to the Lord's ways and thoughts? Have you ever contradicted the Lord? What happens when we do that?

- Denying ourselves and taking up our crosses is part of our spiritual discipline; it's a big part of the answer to this question: What does Jesus expect of us if we want to be His follower?
 - *That we deny ourselves*: The natural, rebellious, sinful, unredeemed self, because we have nothing in our humanness to commend ourselves before God.
 - *Take up one's cross*: Willing to pay any price for the sake of Christ. Being willing to endure shame, embarrassment, rejection, persecution and even martyrdom for the sake of Christ. The cross represents suffering that is ours because of our relationship to Christ. Jesus does not call us to be disciples to make our lives easy and prosperous, but holy and productive.
 - *To follow Him*: Discipleship is loyal obedience and submission to the lordship of Christ.
- What is the paradox in Matthew 16:25, 26? What does Jesus mean?
 - *Whoever wants to save his life will lose it*. Whoever lives only to save his earthly, physical life, his ease and comfort and acceptance by the world, will lose his opportunity for eternal

life. To gain every possible possession in the world but to be without Christ is to be spiritually lost forever.

- *Whoever loses his life will find it.* To abandon everything in this world for the sake of Christ is to be rich forever.

Worship

Spend some time praising our God who sacrificed for us so that we might have life in all its fulness. When we're in love with Jesus, it's easier to deny ourselves and make sacrifices for what will ultimately bring us the greatest freedom and joy. Spend some time in worship this evening thanking God for the cross. You might want to start with Matt Redman's song, 'Once Again'.

You could spend some time praying for God's people to lead the way in sacrificing for the sake of God's glory.

Witness

As we deny ourselves and serve God first, we will stand out. Pray that God will grace us to be good witnesses to him in the precious world he created.

Notes

Notes



Missed A Service?

Why not catch up using our Podcast? We record the talk from each of our Wednesday and Sunday services.

You can access them through iTunes (search Christ Church W4), our website under 'Talks', and ChurchSuite under 'My Podcasts'.