

Who Are You Becoming?

STUDY 3 - TWO KEY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES: PRAYER & FASTING

In the Ancient Near East in the first century, the disciples were physically present with Jesus. They followed Him around Israel; learning from His teachings and example. Today, as disciples of Jesus, we still pattern our lives on His teachings and example and through the Holy Spirit, God remains present in our everyday lives (*1 Cor 3:16-17*), teaching us (*John 14:26*), bearing fruit (*Galatians 5:22-23*), and transforming us into a new creation (*2 Corinthians 5:16-18*).

Explore & Share

Spiritual disciplines help us make that possible by placing our entire life before God (*Romans 2:1-2*), so we can indeed love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (*Mark 12:30-31*). These disciplines do not make us righteous or extra special Christians but as the Renovare Spiritual Formation Bible states:

Training in the spiritual disciplines is the God-ordained means for forming and transforming the human personality
In our previous two studies we listed a wide range of spiritual disciplines:

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Meditation Prayer Fasting Study Simplicity Solitude Submission Service Confession Worship Guidance Celebration
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Discuss I:

Have a look at the list and discuss in your Connect if any of these spiritual disciplines might be important preliminary ones, and if so, explain why.

After that read *Mark 9: 14-29* in which Jesus heals a boy who had been tormented by a spirit. We read how the disciples were unable to cast the spirit out, but Jesus is then successful and teaches the disciples the following lesson about two of the spiritual disciplines:

Mark 9:29 (New King James Version)

So He said to them, "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting."



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Discuss 2:

Note however, that Jesus does not stop and pray for the demon to be cast out, although appears to be His advice. In your Connect discuss why you think Jesus tells the disciples to pray and fast, although we do not actually see Jesus pray and fast? What do we learn from this episode about the daily habits of Jesus, and the daily habits of His disciples? What impact do you want this insight to have on your own habits for 2024, and especially the spiritual disciplines of prayer and fasting?

Discuss 3:

Fasting is a popular spiritual discipline for Pentecostal believers, and we read in the Gospels about Jesus and fasting (*Matthew 4, Luke 4*). Jesus also teaches about fasting in the Sermon on the Mount (*Matt 6:16-18*), and in the wilderness He rebukes the Devil by quoting *Deuteronomy 8:3*:

Matthew 4:4 (New Living Translation)

But Jesus told him, "No! The Scriptures say,

'People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Bread is important to our daily lives, but so too is God's Word. When we fast, we temporarily de-prioritise bread and food, but we should always prioritise God's Word. What then does fasting teach us? It has been suggested that fasting teaches us the important lesson of how to stay 'sweet' when we do not get what we want. In your Connect discuss what fasting has taught you, and then close by praying that 2024 is a year of fruitful godly habits.

Additional Resources

John Mark Comer (2024). *Practicing the Way of Jesus: Be With Jesus. Become Like Him. Live as He Did.* Form.

Richard Foster (2009). *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, Hodder Faith.

John Ortberg (1997). *The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People*, Harper Collins.

Dallas Willard (2002). *Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*, Harper Collins.