

## **Fasting and Feasting**

### **[Deeper Sheet 7.05.09]**

Read Luke 5v33-35 and Luke 22v14-18

In Jesus' day, tax collectors were the lowest of the low, hated among all the people. Not only did they collect tax for Rome, they made a killing doing it while the majority of their countrymen lived in horrifying poverty. In the eyes of almost everyone the tax collectors were despicable, but Luke 5 finds Jesus at a party with them. "How is it," the Pharisees grumbled, "that you eat and drink with these people? And for that matter, why is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but yours go on eating and drinking?"

Fasting had become a regular practice in Jesus' day. The practice grew out of the belief that in order to draw near to a holy God, one needed to be purified or cleansed. Fasting was a way of cleansing both the inside and the outside of the body. Over time, the practice became a staple of religious experience. In Jesus' day, many disciples probably fasted twice a week. The fact that Jesus' disciples didn't fast like everyone else drew attention. In true rabbinic fashion, Jesus answered their question with a question. "Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while he is with them?" In Greek, "the friends of the bridegroom" meant "sons of the bridegroom." The sons of the bridegroom was a title given to a group of people who were responsible for planning the wedding celebration and then modeling what it meant to celebrate. When it came to the party, the sons of the bridegroom set the pace.

At the center of nearly every spiritual practice is the experience of deprivation. Fasting is a way of acknowledging that all our longings are found in God and nothing else. It removes barriers, or "counterfeit longings", so that a person can be fully present with God. Deprivation is a common ingredient in spiritual practice because it works. Yet when the question of fasting is put to Jesus, he responds by using the imagery not of fasting but feasting, not of emptiness but fullness, not of deprivation but extravagance. Fasting is about removing barriers. Feasting is about transforming barriers into vehicles that take us to God.

Feasting, if we're not careful, can quickly turn into gluttony, excess, and greed. Like any practice, feasting requires skill, namely the skill of remembering our mortality. Being reminded of death amplifies the experience of life. We pay attention. We enjoy. We savor. We abide. Feasting is about channeling joy and pleasure into the depths of the heart until we experience a great fullness, or better, gratefulness, about enjoying something as if we'd never get to do it again. Done right, feasting leads to gratitude and the awareness that God loves us deeply and wants us to feel joy. It's possible to practice feasting with anything in our lives that brings us joy.

What has been your experience with fasting?

What do you think counterfeit longings are? What might those be in your life?

What are three or four things that bring you a deep sense of joy?

Why do you think death teaches us so much about life?

Why do you think gratitude open us up to other people while entitlement shuts us down to other people?

Practice feasting this week by transforming something you enjoy into a vehicle that takes you to God. [To learn more about how to practice feasting, check out our Spiritual Practices Reader at [marshill.org/teaching/sp](http://marshill.org/teaching/sp).]