

LOVERS

IN A DANGEROUS TIME



EVERYDAY
HABITS
FOR
FAITH
FORMATION

SUMMIT DRIVE CHURCH

JANUARY//FEBRUARY 2021

PART FIVE: ATTENTIVE



**"TAKE AND EAT;
THIS IS MY BODY."
- MATTHEW 26:26**

PART FIVE: ATTENTIVE

Feasting, Hospitality and Fasting

I admit, it seems a bit strange to think of "feasting" as a practice of spiritual formation, but over and over again the Bible speaks of how God delights to reveal himself at a "Table". Like the promise to Abraham and Sarah of a son (Gen 18) - one who would lead to the very coming of Jesus (see Matt 1:1). Jesus himself feasted often (see Matt 11:19), and, in resonance with Passover, uses the Table as his way of explaining the "new covenant" that he was enacting. He uses this to point ahead to the great feast - the great banquet when the marriage of Jesus and his Bride, the Church, is celebrated at last (see Isaiah 25:6-8 and Rev 19:9).

When Daniel and his friends were exiled in Babylon, the one request they make is permission to keep to their own diet. Why? Because food for them was a part of maintaining their identity; a quiet protest against the cultural reprogramming in the Babylonian king's court. One of the ways we live in defiance to the culture of speed, of inattention, and the invasiveness of technology in our lives is the practice of setting aside special meals, prepared in love with family and friends and neighbours.

Since to be human is to recognize that we are 'embodied' creatures, our physical appetites remind us that we are deeply reliant on the physical world that God made to sustain us. To pray: "Give us today our daily bread" is a confession of our reliance on God's provision.

So every meal is to be received with joy and thanksgiving. But there is a time for special meals that help us slow down and pay particular attention to the food, the ones we share it with, and the God who sustains life. And these meals are life giving.

Fredrick Buechner has said that the best moments any of us have as human beings are "those moments when for a little while we escape the squirrel-cage of being me into the landscape of being 'us'." Jones then notes: "To share a special meal, lovingly prepared and gratefully enjoyed, with people we care about is one of the greatest means we have of becoming 'us'." This sort of meal is, perhaps, the most missional place in our lives.

Here relationships with strangers, on route to becoming friends, and perhaps fellow followers of Jesus, are formed and nurtured.



REFLECT

01 READ ISAIAH 25:6-8

Reflect on the text. What thoughts or feelings does it raise in you? Why?

This beautiful passage points ahead to a day that would come - a day where death itself would be confronted and disarmed; and that would be celebrated with a great feast! The Apostle Paul quotes a portion of Isaiah 25 in 1 Corinthians 15:54, where he is describing the glorious effects of Jesus' death and resurrection: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

At one level then, that time has already come. No wonder Jesus asks us to remember his death with a meal. But it is also 'still to come' in its final fulfillment. As Jesus says, "I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God" (Mk 14:25).

This text anticipates the full and final coming of the Kingdom; the great 'wedding feast of the Lamb' (Rev 19:9).

What does this promise stir in you?

02 READ AND REFLECT

Gordon Smith writes: "Eating was for Jesus a key means by which he proclaimed the coming of God's reign and acted, or enacted, its arrival." It should be no surprise that eating is central to the way Jesus tells us to remember him and that a meal with friends as well as strangers is a means by which God continues to show up and work among us.

Read Hebrews 13:1-2. The writer says to continue to show love for our brothers and sisters in Christ, and to show welcome and hospitality to strangers.

How might the physical practice of opening our homes and tables to 'strangers' - those who are not yet our close friends - require an attitude of generosity and welcome?

How does embracing the Gospel form this attitude of welcome and generosity in us? See **Romans 5:8** and **1 John 4:19**.

What fears or joys does the idea of hospitality generate in you? Why?



**"WHEN JESUS WANTED TO
EXPLAIN TO HIS DISCIPLES
WHAT HIS FORTHCOMING DEATH
WAS ALL ABOUT, HE DIDN'T
GIVE THEM A THEORY, HE GAVE
THEM A MEAL."**

- N.T. WRIGHT

**LOVERS IN A DANGEROUS TIME//
EVERYDAY HABITS
FOR FAITH FORMATION**

PRACTICE//FEASTING

Attentiveness to God and Others

1. Feasting. The act of feasting is for special times - perhaps more regularly practiced as part of our Sabbath celebration, where we gather with friends or those who we don't yet know but whom we've opened our home to. It's about slowness and intentionally paying close attention to God's good gifts and to those around the table. Here are some suggestions, borrowed mostly from Mike Cospier.

1. Tell your guests that it is going to be a feast. No counting calories.

2. Have your guests arrive early - maybe 4:30 in the afternoon, to give kids time to play, and no one in a rush off to bed.

3. Have your guests help with preparing the food. Don't worry about 'hosting' in the sense of having everything "just so". It's about connecting, not showing off.

4. Tell people to turn off their phones. No screens allowed. This is about undivided attention, remember!

5. No talk of work and weather. No boring stuff! This is for sharing your lives. Maybe prime your guests that we're going to celebrate things that excite them, that God is doing, or share what's really on their hearts. For example, when Pastor Colton and his wife were expecting their first child, his dad gathered a group of fathers that Colton had come to respect for a meal. He asked us to prepare and to share what being a good dad was all about. What a great feast!



"WE WERE DELIGHTED TO SHARE WITH YOU NOT ONLY THE GOSPEL OF GOD BUT OUR LIVES AS WELL." - 1 THESSALONIANS 1:8

6. Maybe light a candle when you pray (or sing) table grace - to remind you that "God is present, God is here!"

7. Linger. No one is to be in a rush or worried about how many plates there are in the sink. Maybe even wash up together.

2. Fasting: Like feasting, fasting, too is a defiant practice. It's a way we engage our bodies in protest against all the ways that the world is not yet what it should be. It's not a tool to get us what we want ("If I fast, God will have to give it to me"), but a response to the way things are. When we encounter the brokenness of the world we can be tempted either to 'look away' or to jump in and say: "I can fix this." Fasting helps us to 'pay attention' to the real pain of the world. Rather than look away, in fasting we are saying: "I see the pain of the world and associate with it."

When Nehemiah heard of the walls of Jerusalem being broken down he says: "When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven" (Neh 1:4). Nehemiah does act eventually, but only after he starts from a place of trusting that God is the source of any real change.

Fasting can include going without food - or certain foods - for a time. Many in the early church fasted two days a week, and used the finances they saved to help feed the poor. It can also include other activities such as fasting from media inputs (social media, TV shows, sports), or from shopping. These acts of stopping commerce for a time, or turning off media, can help loosen the grip that they have on us. A defiant practice indeed.

Consider ways that you could fast in this upcoming season. **Lent** is a communal fast practiced in many Christian traditions. Consider taking the 43 days prior to Easter to practice some various forms of fasting.

WORKS CITED // THANKS

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Soli Deo Gloria,
David R. Fields

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