



Pilgrim Feast

The Yearly Rhythm of Pilgrim Feast

Theme Overview

Even before they reached the Promised Land, God offered His people a remarkable gift: three unique week-long holidays each year. These “Pilgrim Feasts,” as they were sometimes called, were invitations to step entirely away from normal tasks and burdens. Participants traveled together up to Jerusalem for a matchless time of refreshment, worship, fellowship and feasting. (Lev. 23, Num. 28-29 and Deut. 14:22-26; Deut. 16.)

Imagine the journey. You’ve closed up the business and the house ... packed the tent, bedrolls and favorite foods ... and set off traveling. You walk and talk together with family and close friends, camp side-by-side at night. Laughter and singing abound. As your path rises towards Jerusalem, travelers join together in songs you’ve known since childhood, the Psalms of Ascent. Days in Jerusalem are full of rich fellowship and corporate worship. At night, the hillsides are alive with campfires, singing and the smells of roasting meat. It’s all an experience of rest, worship and enjoyment like nothing else!

Jesus’ parents, Joseph and Mary, embraced this gift at least once every year (Luke 2:41). Jesus did as well, traveling to Jerusalem for Pilgrim Feasts many times during his three years of public ministry (i.e., John 7:14, 8:2, 10:22+). Jesus also invited his disciples away from their regular work for other experiences of refreshment, too – to “come away with me...and rest...” (Mark 6:31-33).

Scripture doesn’t require Christians to receive these gifts. But if God invented them and Jesus practiced them, why not consider making Pilgrim Feasts part of your yearly rhythm?

Elements to Consider in a Pilgrim Feast

The path to a Pilgrim Feast starts with a hearstance: willingness to receive. This isn’t just about time off you’re owed or a vacation you’re planning. It’s not self-care. It’s God care, a sacred gift. He desires to restore your soul – body, mind, relationships and spirit. Our part is to consider how He may invite us to receive this gift.

This approach leaves lots of flexibility as to details. Different personalities, preferences and seasons of life may call for very different plans. But here are some key elements of traditional Pilgrim Feasts that may be worth considering:

- **A Special Place.** Pilgrim Feast started with getting away from one's typical spaces and responsibilities. What kind of places help you feel especially "away" and unburdened?
- **Relationships.** Pilgrim Feasts were rich in fellowship. Which relationships do you especially desire to grow? Family? Old friends? Churchmates? Knowing you can't cultivate all at the same time, consider which might you want to prioritize and how.
- **Time Outdoors.** Most of a Pilgrim Feast was experienced outdoors. Both Scripture and science affirm that marvelous gifts come to us through God's creation – from a deeper sense of God's character (Rom. 1:20) to boosted health and happiness. What experiences in nature help you feel near to God? How might you weave them into your plans?
- **Favorite Foods and Drinks.** God directed His people to use money they'd set aside to buy their favorite foods and drinks to celebrate with feasting (Deut. 14:22-26). What are yours?
- **Physical Activity.** Pilgrim Feasts involved lots of hiking. Whether you prefer marathons or a leisurely stroll, even light exercise makes your body and mind feel better in countless ways. What physical activities might you especially enjoy?
- **Music.** Singing and worship were core to Pilgrim Feasts. How might you weave music into your time away – bring an instrument ... a favorite CD ... a new playlist for the road?

A couple of other considerations for a modern-day Pilgrim Feast:

- **Sleep.** Unlike traditional cultures, many people today live chronically sleep deprived. Yet sleep measurably increases virtually every aspect of our health and happiness. Might it be worth prioritizing good sleep during your time away?
- **Tech Boundaries.** Pilgrim Feasts took people away from ordinary tasks and distractions. That's harder today. Unless you intentionally plan, your phone and other tech will invade your experience. How can you minimize – or avoid altogether – email, social media, news and other stimulants that undermine calm, gratefulness and refreshment?
- **Length.** Recent research suggests that time away equal to the length of a biblical pilgrim feast may provide the ideal restorative experience for most people -- peaking at day 8. So consider aiming for at least one full week, including the weekends on both sides.

Exploratory Exercise

Take some time to consider what it might look like to enjoy a Pilgrim Feast in the year ahead. Dream together with your family and/or friends. Pray about it, asking God, "How would You desire to restore my/our soul(s) through a Pilgrim Feast this year?"

Then ... **JUST DO IT:** Map a basic plan and get it on your calendar, even if you need to fill in details later!



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Discussion Questions

Start of the Month Questions for Discussion

- Were you familiar with the idea of Pilgrim Feast? What thoughts/feelings arise as you consider it?
- How might it change your view of a vacation to believe that God invites you into it as an expression of His desire to “restore your soul”? How might you engage that time differently?
- Is there anything that seems especially exciting about planning your own Pilgrim Feast this year? Anything that feels particularly daunting?
- Looking over the list of “Elements to Consider,” which element(s) strike you as especially life-giving? Do any seem especially challenging?
- If you’re willing to receive this invitation, what will be your first action step towards planning a Pilgrim Feast this year?

End of the Month Questions for Discussion

- What action steps have you taken to plan your Pilgrim Feast this year?
- Any details you can share about what you’re hoping/planning to do?
- As you’ve considered your Pilgrim Feast this month, reflect back on the “Elements to Consider” that you identified as especially life-giving and especially challenging. Have you resolved how you’d want to incorporate them? If so, how?
- What gift(s) do you most hope to receive from the Lord during this time?
- What further steps are needed in order for you to receive this gift this year?