

## A Fasting on Criticalness (by Catherine Marshall)

In this selection on fasting from criticalness, notice how vivid she makes the relationship with God. It seems clear that she and the Lord have a lively dialogue going, one that often involves some resistance on her part. A resistance that reminds us of the relationships Abraham and Moses had with the Almighty.

### A CLOSER WALK (by Catherine Marshall)

#### *A Fasting on Criticalness*

The Lord continues to deal with me about my critical spirit, convicting me that I have been wrong to judge any person or situation:

Do not judge or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the same measure you use, it will be measured to you (Matthew 7:1-2; NIV)

One morning last week He gave me an assignment: *for one day I was to go on a 'fast' from criticism. I was not to criticise anybody about anything.*

Into my mind crowded all the usual objections. 'But then what happens to value judgements? You Yourself Lord, spoke of "righteous judgement." How could society operate without standards and limits?'

All such resistance was brushed aside. 'Just obey me without questioning: an absolute fast on any critical statements for this day.'

As I pondered this assignment, there was even a humorous side to this kind of fast. What did the Lord want to show me?

#### *The experiment*

For the first half of the day, I simply felt a void, almost as if I had been wiped out as a person. This was especially true at lunch with my husband Len, my mother, son Jeff, and my secretary Jeanne Sevigny present. Several topics came up (school prayer, abortion, the ERA amendment) about which I had definite opinions. I listened to the others and kept silent. Barbed comments on the tip of my tongue about certain world leaders were suppressed. In our talkative family no one seemed to notice.

Bemused, I noticed that my comments were not missed. The federal government, the judicial system, and the institutional church could apparently get along fine without my penetrating observations. But I still didn't see what this fast on criticalness was accomplishing - until mid-afternoon.

For several years I had been praying for one talented young man whose life had gotten sidetracked. Perhaps my prayers for him had been to negative. That afternoon, a specific, positive vision for his life was dropped in to my mind with God's unmistakable hallmark on it – joy.

Idea began to flow in a way I had not experienced in many years. Now it was apparent what the Lord wanted me to see. My critical nature had not corrected one of the multitudinous things I found fault with. What it **had** done was to stifle my creativity - in prayers, in relationships, perhaps even in writing – ideas that He wanted to give me.

Last Sunday night in a Bible study group, I told of my Day's Fast experiment. The response was startling. Many admitted that criticalness was the chief problem in their offices, or in their marriages, or with their teenage children.

### **The result**

My own character flaw here is not going to be corrected overnight. But in thinking this problem through the last few days, I find the most solid scriptural basis possible for dealing with it. (The Greek word translated 'judge' in King James, becomes 'criticise' in Moffatt.) All through the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus set Himself squarely against our seeing other people and life situations through this negative lens.

What He is showing me so far can be summed up as follows:

1. A critical spirit focuses us on ourselves and makes us unhappy.  
We lose perspective and humour.
2. A critical spirit blocks the creative thoughts long to give us.
3. A critical spirit can prevent good relationships between individuals and often produces retaliatory criticalness.
4. Criticalness blocks the work of the Spirit of God: love, good will, mercy.
5. When ever we see something genuinely wrong in another person's behaviour.  
Rather than criticise him or her directly, or - far worse - gripe about him behind his back, we should ask the Spirit of God to make the correction needed.

Convicted of the true destructiveness of a critical mind-set, on my knees I am repeating this prayer: 'Lord, I repent of this sin of judgement. I am deeply sorry for having committed so great an offence against You and against myself so continually. I claim Your promise of forgiveness and seek a new beginning.'

### **REFLECTIONS** (by Richard Foster)

The central idea in fasting is the voluntary denial of an otherwise normal function for the sake of intense spiritual activity. Now, when we understand fasting from this perspective we see its reasonableness as well as its broader dimensions. The Catherine Marshall reading helps us see these broader dimensions by teaching us about a way of fasting that is not from food but from a critical spirit. Then as she chronicles her day we see the intense spiritual activity she enters, especially as it relates to the young man for whom she was praying.

One of the first things we learn in experiences of fasting is how it reveals what controls us. You see, we cover up with food and other good things what is inside of us, but in experiences of fasting these come to the surface. Did you notice how true this was in Catherine Marshall's experiment? She learned how dependent she was on criticism even to feel like a whole person, and how utterly bankrupt her critical insights were at creating positive change in anyone or anything. She saw what was controlling her and this released her to begin moving in a new direction, a direction free from a critical spirit. The same will be true for you and for me.