



ENTER God's presence

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

-Psalm 42:1-2a

Heavenly Father, you have given us so many good things yet often we are distracted by things that are not from you and are not good for us. Grow within us a greater hunger for your word as we gather together around it today. Teach us your ways O Lord, that we may always walk in your truth. Amen.



SHARE life together

1. Share your highs and lows with each other?
2. Share how you went with your living purposefully from last time?
3. Share a time when you have had to go hungry?
4. Have you ever tried a spiritual fast before? How did you find the experience?

They are found on our computers. Used by mechanics, health professionals, teachers, coaches and employers. Diagnostic tools. Their purpose is to determine a fault, exclude an illness, gain insight, highlight vulnerabilities, explain causes, aid in self-understanding, monitor situations, restore to original condition, promote well-being and improve life. They are gifts in our journey. In our spiritual walk, we also have a diagnostic tool that highlights emptiness, exposes vulnerabilities, determines faults, gives insight into those deep places of the soul that are needing to be filled. Today God gives us a gift that satisfies and fills all the misfiring, broken, fault-filled, vulnerable places of our lives and leads us to a place of great fulfilment. We'll explore and experience that today as we discover the truth of Addition by Subtraction: less appetite, more fulfilment.

Week beginning:
Sunday 21st February 2021

Worship series:
**Addition via Subtraction:
Deliberate Discipleship**



VERSE for the week
Blessed are those who hunger
and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

Matthew 5:6



REMEMBER this week

Temptation is a tool developed and deployed by the devil but used by God to return us to the truth and certainty of who we are - a precious child whom the Father delights in and in whose presence we have nothing to prove, nothing to hide and nothing to fear.



LISTEN attentively

Read Matthew 4:1-11

- 5. What key words/thoughts/ideas/questions arise for you as you hear this text?**
- 6. What do you hear this scripture saying to you right now?**
- 7. How is temptation different from sin? Have you ever found yourself confusing the two terms?**

Temptation is definitely something we are called to resist as followers of Jesus, but it is also something that we should expect. Even Jesus experiences extreme temptation just before he began his public ministry. Temptation itself, can be somewhat of a diagnostic tool of our spiritual health. Like we might go for an x-ray to diagnose a broken bone or have an MRI or CT scan to diagnose tumors or other conditions inside the body, temptation can act as a tool to identify the parts of our lives as disciples of Jesus where things are going wrong. This week we look at the role of 'fasting' and how it can help us to address some of those areas where things might be out of alignment in our lives.

Interestingly, many significant characters from the Bible; Moses, King David, Elijah the prophet, Esther the Queen, Paul the Apostle, John the Baptist and his disciples, and of course Jesus are all reported to have fasted. To 'fast' was to go without food for a period of time and to devote that extra time, usually dedicated to eating, to prayer and reading of scripture. You might say it was a way to replace physical hunger with a spiritual hunger. Our spiritual health is often something we tend to ignore. Just like a regular diet attempts to correct some of our bad eating habits, so a spiritual diet or fast, can help us to identify unhealthy appetites and to correct some of the bad spiritual habits or practices we might have unwittingly adopted.

- 8. Have you ever experienced 'spiritual drift'? The slow day by day eroding of your connection with God and your devotional practices which happens unnoticed until suddenly you realise you have drifted quite a long way away from God? What things caused that drift for you?**
- 9. We all know a healthy diet has long term benefits, and too much junk or snack food can lead to long term health problems. Why do you think so many people then still elect to reach for a chocolate bar or bag of chips when they feel hungry? How is this behaviour reflected in your spiritual life?**

Jesus had been wandering, without food for forty days and nights, in the wilderness. Just before he returned to begin ministering to the masses, Satan arrived to tempt Jesus. He did this by attacking three fundamental human needs. Firstly physiological needs, like food and shelter, then the need for security in relationships and finally the human need for significance or purpose. At each opportunity Jesus had the chance to take what Satan offered, but at every opportunity Jesus saw that he already had his basic human needs met in full by God the Father. The thing about temptation is that it is only tempting if we believe that we can get something from it which we don't currently have. Jesus knew his body could sustain itself a little longer without bread, he hungered more for the word and will of God. Jesus did not need to 'test' his security in the Father's care and protection by jumping off the temple roof because God had already affirmed Jesus' status and his beloved son at his baptism in the Jordan River. Jesus did not need to be given power and glory by Satan, Jesus already knew that God's plan and will for him was to place all things under his feet. He had a significant purpose and it was the one God the Father had already given him.

- 10. Which of these kinds of human need to you find hardest to trust God with? Why?**
- 11. Share with your group how you see God fulfilling your basic human needs of food, clothing and shelter, security and connection in relationships, and significance, meaning, and purpose.**



GROW deeper

Read Matthew 5:1-12

Temptation in and of itself is not a bad thing. Even Jesus was tempted. What matters is the way we react to it. Do we allow the voice and promises of the world to drown out the promises of God?

As Jesus begins to teach his disciples who he has called away from their old lives as fishermen and tax collectors, he explains that the traits or characteristics that are often viewed by the world as weak or lesser, are in fact the characteristics which bring blessing with them. In verse 5 of this passage Jesus specifically says, 'blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled (satisfied). The key to this is recognising that, in Jesus, God has already given us everything that we need. The righteousness of Christ which becomes ours through faith in him, is all we really need. Our problem is that like someone who lives on a diet of fast food, a healthy salad just doesn't seem to satisfy their hunger. In the same way, the righteousness of Jesus, which our souls long for is often the last thing we crave. Instead we satisfy our needs with mountains of useless material possessions, broken and destructive human relationships and the esteem and opinions of others. We need to intentionally identify our unrighteous hunger and appetites and with the help of God, through his Word and Spirit, replace those appetites with a hunger for the things of God.

- 12. How much do you think the world at large, values the attributes of righteousness and integrity? Do you think society's value of these things is currently growing or declining?**
- 13. What appetites or desires can you identify in your life at the moment that you are meeting with something other than Jesus?**



LIVE purposefully

Spiritual fasting has been a practice of God's people at least since Moses, probably even earlier. Jesus also spoke of fasting in Matthew 6 saying, "when you fast" not "if you fast". It seems that there was some kind of assumption that God's people would fast from time to time. If you have never tried it before, consider the things in your life that you may have attempted to use to meet some of your needs which may be distracting you from your relationship with God. Consider laying them aside for the rest of Lent (until Easter). Pay attention to your feelings as you consider the next few weeks without that thing in your life. Are you calm, excited, or terrified by the prospect? Your reaction might help you to identify if this thing has replaced an element of your relationship and reliance on God. Make a deliberate decision to lay that thing aside and ask God to help restore your hunger for his word and righteousness throughout your fast. Pay attention as you surrender the things that you think are feeding you and begin to be increasingly fed by the presence and power of God in your life.

- 14. How are you responding to the idea of fasting from something? What is that reaction saying to you?**
- 15. Sometimes accountability on a fast can be a helpful thing. Who is someone you might ask to go on a fast with you?**
- 16. If you're comfortable, share with your group what you feel God is calling you to lay down so that he can replace it with more of himself.**



PRAY intentionally

- Praise God for the generosity in providing all our needs.
- Thank Jesus for his faithfulness and hunger for the Father's word and will.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to help you grow a greater hunger for the things of God.



BLESS one another

You might like to address one person in your group and make the sign of the cross in the air as you say...

[Name], God delights in you. Amen.