

## Matthew 4:1-11

### Context

- This story takes place between Jesus' baptism and the beginning of his ministry. At his baptism he was declared to be God's beloved Son (i.e., the Messiah) and given the Spirit (i.e., the power to be the Messiah). During his ministry, he called disciples, healed many people, and gave his famous "sermon on the mount." But between these two events, Jesus fasted for forty days and nights and faced the multiple temptations to question his identity and abandon his calling. Nevertheless, in each case, he resisted the devil's temptations and "returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee" (Lk 4:14). As you read, be on the lookout for the role that fasting plays in this story.

### Hearing: (*Read "Context" and then Matthew 4:1-11. Then pray for God's grace to understand.*)

- Before we dive in, what comes to mind when you think about fasting? What do you think its purpose is? What are some things that you heard in the sermon on Sunday?
- In v 2, Matthew tells us that Jesus was fasting forty days and forty nights. Can you recall any other figures in Israel's history who fasted for this length of time (and if so, the purpose of their fasting?) What seems to be the purpose of Jesus' fast? Have you ever fasted? If so, why?
- In v 4, Jesus resists the temptation to turn stones into bread, reminding the devil that man doesn't live by bread alone, but also on God's Word. This implies that what food is to the body, God's Word is to the soul. When you find yourself trying to live "by bread alone," what does that look like? How might fasting play a role in maintaining the right balance of that relationship?
- Throughout the Scriptures, prayer and fasting often go together. And in Matthew 6, Jesus assumes his followers will practice fasting when they pray. Spend some time reflecting as a group on the relationship between fasting and praying. What is it? What is it not? What are some things you could commit to prayer that fasting may help with?

### Obeying (application):

- Following on from the final question, spend time this week fasting and praying for whatever came to mind. Whether it be one meal, or one day, take that time to bring your body and soul together, to seek God's mercy and grace. And for an added benefit of accountability, link up with one person in your LG to fast and pray at the same time with.