

# What We Really Need

March 2020 (1-28 March)



What do you really need?

As we enter **Lent** — the time of reflection in the Christian calendar in the days before Easter — we are going to consider some of the basic needs we all share:

- breathing
- shelter
- thirst
- belonging

Life is so complicated until it isn't — until it's just about the next breath, something to drink, somewhere to stay, or a community to belong to. That gasp of air, that cold glass of water, that roof, that place you can simply *be*. We started this year by exploring the external world with our theme [Making Sense of It All](#) alive to our senses, and then switched gear to consider the inner world of quietness, silence and absence in [A Quiet Life](#). Now as we continue *Lent* we will explore what happens when our inner needs meet the demands of the outside world.

This is the first part of a two theme sequence called [Beginning to Flourish](#). In Part 2 [My Father, The Gardener](#), we will explore what it means to thrive as well as survive. But this month we want to start with the basics — contemplating the fundamental necessities for living.

What do we learn about our God from breathing deeply? Or from catching our breath? How about when we quench our thirst? Or when we feel safe? Or from when we lose that sense of security? As Jesus fasted in the desert wilderness, surely a dry and unforgiving place, these needs would have been on his mind. He was fully divine but yet — incredibly — also fully human. Jesus

speaks with authority in our lives as one who knows what it is to fight for breath, to long for water, to be without a permanent address, to find oneself forsaken, betrayed and abandoned. But he also knows what it is to laugh, to drink in celebration, to share hospitality, and form lasting friendships.

What can we discover about our God and ourselves when we strip things down to the basics and consider our most fundamental needs?

*Each week of the theme runs Sunday-Saturday and has its own subtheme, which contains daily Bible readings and thought triggers. This is the first part of a two part theme sequence 'Beginning To Flourish'; Part 2, starting 29 March, is [My Father, The Gardener](#).*

## A sudden intake of breath (1 March)

Breathing is one of our most vital needs, absolutely essential to life. It powers us through the day and often reveals our emotions. It can be smooth or ragged, deep or shallow, sudden or slow. Breath can be a form of nonverbal communication between people signalling to others how we are doing and what we are thinking. This week we will consider the animating principle of breath that carries us through our days — from hearty laughter to deep sobs, from the gentle sigh of relief to the deep gulps that get us up a massive hill.

1. **Genesis 2: 7**
  2. **Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7**
  3. **Acts 9: 1**
  4. **Psalm 32**
  5. **Romans 5:12-21**
  6. **Exodus 2: 23-25**
  7. **Genesis 21: 1-6**
1. **Breath brings life.** From first to last... we are reliant on our breathing for our living. All our breaths — of anger and happiness, frustration and scepticism, wonder and delight — come from God.
  2. **A sudden intake of breath.** We take our breathing for granted but when surprised or shocked we often start breathing heavily — suddenly mindful of our physical bodies. This passage is an emotional rollercoaster.
  3. **Breathing murder.** Today we think of the laboured breaths of hatred, vengeance and cruelty. Those times when we are running on adrenaline and spoiling for a conflict.
  4. **Sharp breaths of guilt.** Consider the tormented suffering of verse 3. When we suffer physically, emotionally or spiritually our breathing is affected — showing ourselves and others that something isn't right.
  5. **Victory over the final breath.** Our last breath is no longer our last breath thanks to the breath of Jesus...
  6. **God, creator of the universe, takes notice of you.** Just as God heard the groans and sighs of the captive Israelites, he hears your inhales and exhales, your effort and frustration. God, majesty of majesties, is attentive to **you** — not just what you say, but how you are, the non-verbal cues that say as much (or more) about you as your words.
  7. **Infectious laughter.** Our breath carries our laughter to one another — sparking recognition, empathy, and solidarity.

## Sheltering together (8 March)

The desire for shelter cuts deep. We all need somewhere to lay our head. We need protection from the elements, somewhere we can let down our guard, feel safe and sound. Stress about a lack of shelter, or the quality or security of that shelter gets to us like little else does. This is why shelter makes for such a powerful metaphor of God's love for us. Even when every other shelter has let us down, or fallen through, or kicked us out — God still welcomes us.

### 1. Genesis 12: 1-4

1. **A promise of shelter.** Leaving what you have known and stepping out into the promise of somewhere new can be a deeply unsettling and nerve-racking experience.

### 2. Psalm 121

### 3. Psalm 27

2. **God, our ultimate shelter.** The one who will 'watch over your coming and going'.

### 4. John 3: 1-17

3. **For he will hide me in his shelter.** Even when other shelters have let us down we can hide with God.

### 5. Matthew 17: 1-9

4. **Seeking shelter in the dead of night.** Nicodemus, like many of us, finds himself at night seeking shelter with Jesus, bringing his doubts and curiosity.

### 6. Isaiah 58: 4-12

### 7. Ezekiel 17: 22-23

5. **The desire for shelter.** Often our instinct is like Peter in verse 4; we want to conserve, protect, cover-over — when Jesus is actually on the move calling us somewhere else.

6. **Shelter as a shared resource.** Our wellbeing is tied up with the wellbeing of others. Shelter should not be a zero-sum game, where we can only gain at someone else's loss. Rather, it should be a cooperative exercise where the more secure each of us are independently — the more secure we all are corporately.

7. **A shelter for every kind.** Expansive, inclusive, natural, splendid.

## Thirsting after (15 March)

Thirst is one of the most pressing forces in our lives. Needs like breathing, for most of us, are so automatic we rarely think about them unless we are in an emergency. Others like the need for shelter and belonging are crucially important but more abstract and often taken for granted; but our thirst is a need we negotiate every day that can override everything else. It can be hard to relax, concentrate, or even complete basic tasks when our thirst is overwhelming us. Our need to drink is a constant reminder of our bodies and their frailty. We will explore what it is to thirst spiritually and physically and conclude this week by spending the last three days looking at the incredible encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan Woman in John's Gospel.

1. Exodus 17: 1-7
  2. Psalm 42: 1-2
  3. Philippians 2: 5-8
  4. Revelation 22: 17
  5. John 4: 5-19
  6. John 4: 20-29
  7. John 4: 39-42
1. **Water from the rock.** When we are thirsty we can become irritable and lose our sense of perspective, uncomfortably aware of the pressing needs of our bodies.
  2. **As the deer...** Thirst is a powerful metaphor for longing for God; something that you take for granted until suddenly you are desperate.
  3. **Jesus knows what it is to be human.** Jesus speaks to us with authority — the authority of one who has known terrible thirst, deep longing, stinging rejection, the hurt of a lonely trial. When Jesus comes alongside us in our times of thirst he comforts us from a place of experience.
  4. **The water of life.** It's priceless.
  5. **Quenching our thirst.** The scene is set for a life changing encounter.
  6. **Jar left empty... mind full!** Meeting the messiah can change your priorities.
  7. **What starts as a story leads to a personal encounter.** Who are we sharing a cuppa with and telling the story...?

## Really belonging (22 March)

We need to breathe, we need shelter, we need water... but we also need to belong, we need to feel acknowledged, recognised, even celebrated. Many people — who can breathe easily, have plenty to drink, and secure homes — suffer intolerably for not having a sense of belonging.

1. 1 Samuel 16: 1-13
  1. **Being recognised for who you are.** Sometimes you start to feel a sense of belonging when someone recognises you for who you are. It can be life changing when somebody notices and celebrates what makes you — you.
2. Psalm 23: 5-6
  2. **Being flatmates with God.** This is a very popular psalm that we often turn to. But this time around, let's set aside the agriculture metaphor in the first part and instead consider the flat-share dynamic at the end. What does it mean to dwell in the house of the Lord — on an on-going basis?
3. Ephesians 5: 8-14
  3. **Living as children of light.** Cultivating a sense of belonging in goodness, righteousness and truth.
4. John 9: 1-41
  4. **Depends how you see it...** A scripture about learning to see... but it's not so much the blind man who learns to see in this encounter as the others who dismissed him as a beggar or a sinner and never recognised his humanity. The blind man, even before his healing, sees better than the Pharisees who want to draw lines of who is in and who is out.
5. Hebrews 10: 24-25
  5. **The importance of keeping in touch.** How can we spur one another on in our daily lives to help develop a sense of belonging?
  6. **Working together.** 'Teamwork makes the dream work.'
6. Ecclesiastes 4: 9-12
  7. **A stranger welcomed, a friend discovered.** Hospitality is meant to be deep in the warp and weft of the tapestry of life (see also the threefold cord in the Ecclesiastes reading above).
7. Matthew 25: 34-40
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