RAISE the NEED

In essence, Gluttony is excess. And like the original sin, it’s about taking something we have no need for because we don’t trust what we’ve already graciously been given. It’s crucial to recognize where this vice has a grip on us because the destructiveness of gluttony is that it separates us from God and others. Though it may seem hidden because we typically associate gluttons only with food, our drive for excess abundantly reveals what we are truly united to (i.e., what we actually sacrifice for and the appetites we are willing to do anything to feed).

The remedy for Gluttony is accepting the abundant life God has provided for us. In America where excess is celebrated, this will most definitely mean self-denial (a cardinal sin of culture) in order to free us for self-giving. Thankfully, Jesus came to so we could be FULL with life. To receive this though, our appetites need to be reordered and restored. This will mean putting our money (and time, resources, energies, affections, etc.) where our mouth is.

UP: We chase after excess looking for security. Ultimately, we don’t trust God’s provision for us. Therefore, the first step in confronting gluttony in our lives is acknowledging God’s loving care and faithfulness for us.
IN: Gluttony is usually hidden, rationalized and explained away. Community is necessary for loving correction, encouragement, and exhorting one another towards the abundant life.
OUT: There is a direct correlation with our excess and the lacking of others. As we trust in God’s provision for our security and worth, we are free to adopt His heart—to sacrifice and give ourselves away for others.

Prepare

Spiritual Disciplines (training in godliness)
Paul instructs Timothy (1 Timothy 4:7) to “discipline himself for godliness.” The word Paul uses (gumnazo) can mean to “train naked.” In the ancient world, those who “exercised” in this way removed even their clothing to focus on working out and training without any hindrance.

What is discipline? According to Dallas Willard, “a discipline is an activity within our power—something we can do—which brings us to a point where we can do what we at present cannot do by direct effort. Discipline is in fact a natural part of the structure of the human soul, and almost nothing of any significance in education, culture or other attainments is achieved without it. Everything from learning a language to weight lifting depends upon it, and its availability in the human makeup is what makes the individual human being responsible for the kind of person they become. The aim of disciplines in the spiritual life—and, specifically, in the following of Christ—is the transformation of the total state of the soul. It is the renewal of the whole person from the inside, involving differences in thought, feeling and character that may never be manifest in outward behavior at all.”

Willard then lists two important categories of spiritual training: The first, “Disciplines of Abstinence,” (such as fasting, solitude, sacrifice, etc.) are designed to help us remove destructive and unhelpful things from our lives through acts that force us to stop, wait, remove, or eliminate. The “Disciplines of Engagement” (e.g., study, prayer, worship, service, celebration) are intended to build the right kinds of attitudes and habits into our daily lives.

Application: Consider participating in a fast as a community. Plan in advance and discuss as a group how you want to practice this together. A key element will be solidarity (“one anotherness”). Also, decide as a community what you will “engage” in. The real power of “No” is not the willpower, but what it frees us to say “Yes” to.
Gather
What did you learn from the practice of the disciplines of Abstinence and Engagement?
• How did it bring the group together?
• How did it bring us closer to God?
• How did it bring us more in touch with our purpose to bless others?

Movie Time:
• To break your fast, have everyone bring a favorite movie candy
• Watch Henri Nouwen’s commentary on Matthew 4 (called, “Being the Beloved”)
• Discuss people’s reactions to the 17-minute video

Learn
Note: You can do this exercise in small groups, assigning each one a passage and set of questions. Then have each group report back and ‘teach the group’, while the leader ‘teaches the gaps.’

Read: Matthew 3:16 - 4:11
• How did the video affect your reading/understanding of Matthew 4?
• What is your biggest temptation?
• How do you think this temptation leads to gluttony (excess)?
• How does Nouwen describe the motives to our excess? And, what’s the remedy?

Support Scripture: Genesis 2:15-18; 3:1-13
• How does the “Original sin” reflect gluttony?
• What do you think was at the root of Adam and Eve’s temptation and rebellion? What is your personal experience with this sin today?

Support Scripture: Matthew 5:10
• Why do you think Jesus calls “the persecuted for righteousness” blessed?
• How is being persecuted for righteousness an opposite and/or remedy of gluttony?
• Discuss this statement: “Just as gluttony sharpens the other deadly sins, persecution sharpens the other life-giving virtues.”

Respond
Augustine said, “My love is my gravity.”

RED / GREEN ARROWS
• Give everyone a 3x5 index card
• Side A: Write down an area of excess that God has lovingly brought your attention to. How do you know this is excessive? Why do you think you’ve united yourself to this (what do you get from it)? How do you think this has isolated yourself from God, your true self, and others?
• Side B: How is God inviting you to receive His love in this area of excess? What might this look like practically? If you were anchored in God’s love, how might this altar your life? How could you experience persecution? And, how could this persecution sharpen your virtue?

Additional Resources
• Article: “Gluttony: It’s bigger than you think,” by Jeff Cook (in Relevant Magazine)
• Essay: “Living a Transformed Life…,” by Dallas Willard
• Essay: “Spiritual Disciplines, and the Restoration of the Soul,” by Dallas Willard
• Book: “In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership,” by Henri Nouwen