

Student Guide: The Abundant Life – Is It Really a Life of Abundance?

Key Concept – The “abundant life” is not necessarily a life of abundance and the absence of suffering. It is following the Shepherd and understanding that God’s good and gracious will for His people is at work even in the midst of suffering.

Gospel Focus – The greatest good of all time came from the greatest suffering of all time—Jesus on the cross.

Bible Study Review of *The Abundant Life* DVD

The Context of John 10:1-21

Review the story of the man born blind in John 9. Did this man have an “abundant life”?

Read 9:3. Does this change our view of what an abundant life is all about?

Read John 10:19-21. What does this tell us about Jesus’ words in 10:1-18?

The Abundant Life for Sheep

A modern day Palestinian shepherd is quoted as saying, “I know why the Bible compares God’s people to sheep. Sheep are stupid, they smell bad, and they bite!” Sheep cannot possibly have an “abundant life” left to their own wanderings. They would become helplessly and hopelessly lost. They need a shepherd. Their abundant life was following the shepherd. Review from the DVD the four things that made following the shepherd seem less than “abundant.”

The Abundant Life for the Good Shepherd’s Sheep

Recall and discuss briefly how these parallel our lives as the Good Shepherd’s sheep.

How does following the Good Shepherd bring the “abundant life” through these?

For Life Application

Discuss the following:

1. What is the source of suffering?

World’s Answer

Word’s Answer

2. How do we deal with suffering?

World’s Answer

Word’s Answer

3. How do we deal with those suffering?

World’s Answer

Word’s Answer

Bible Study Guide: The Abundant Life DVD (LFL1408DVD)

Homework

1. During the week think of those who may be suffering for a variety of reasons. There may be those dealing with cancer, loss of a loved one, loss of a job, loss of family through divorce, etc. Resolve to do one or more of the following:
 - Make a personal visit.
 - Send a card or note.
 - Pray for them by name and then let them know you are doing so.
 - Add them to your congregation's prayer chain. If you do not have one, organize one.
2. Think of those who may, without even realizing it, be caught up in the world's view of suffering. To help spread the "Word's view," encourage use of the *Abundant Life* DVD in other groups, organizations, Bible studies.

Resources

Lutherans For Life offers a number of articles on end-of-life issues. To find out more go to: www.lutheransforlife.org/life-issues.

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Leader Guide: The Abundant Life – Is It Really a Life of Abundance?

Key Concept – The “abundant life” is not necessarily a life of abundance and the absence of suffering. It is following the Shepherd and understanding that God’s good and gracious will for His people is at work even in the midst of suffering.

Gospel Focus – The greatest good of all time came from the greatest suffering of all time—Jesus on the cross.

[This lesson touches on the “theology of the cross.” The Lutheran understanding of the “theology of the cross” goes much deeper than “Don’t worry—be happy.” It is about our God who “hides” in suffering, who is present and at work in suffering according to His will and purpose. It is not so much about God removing suffering—although He certainly can and does do this. It is about His presence and blessings in sufferings. The blessings of suffering are bestowed by God and—of utmost importance—defined by God. It is His definition of the “abundant life” that is important, not what we might perceive as a “life of abundance.” God will not forsake those His hands have created and redeemed. God is good and wants what is good for the eternal well-being of His people. We have a crucified and risen Shepherd to follow. The goal of this lesson is to help change how we think about suffering in our lives and what constitutes a truly “abundant life.”]

This lesson sets the stage for lesson nine, *The Other End of Life*, where the theology of the cross will be touched on again.]

Bible Study Review of *The Abundant Life* DVD

[Since the DVD often paralleled Psalm 23, you may want to begin by reading that Psalm.]

The Context of John 10:1-21

Review the story of the man born blind in John 9. Did this man have an “abundant life”? [He did not according to our normal human way of thinking as evidenced by the disciples’ question.]

Read 9:3. Does this change our view of what an abundant life is all about?

[Yes, this puts God in control of defining the abundant life according to His will and purpose.]

Read John 10:19-21. What does this tell us about Jesus’ words in 10:1-18?

[It appears that they were spoken to the Pharisees right after the events of chapter nine. He tries to get them to think differently about what it means to be blind and what it means to see. True “sight” comes from faith in the Good Shepherd and following Him.]

The Abundant Life for Sheep

A modern day Palestinian shepherd is quoted as saying, “I know why the Bible compares God’s people to sheep. Sheep are stupid, they smell bad, and they bite!” Sheep cannot possibly have an “abundant life” left to their own wanderings. They would become helplessly and hopelessly lost. They need a shepherd. Their abundant life was following the shepherd. Review from the DVD the four things that made following the shepherd seem less than “abundant.”

[Steep climbs into the mountains, narrow paths along the way, being in the presence of enemies, and dark valleys on the return trip.]

The Abundant Life for the Good Shepherd's Sheep

Recall and discuss briefly how these parallel our lives as the Good Shepherd's sheep.

[Steep climbs – Life going nowhere. One step forward and two back, disappointments, frustrations.

Narrow paths – The difficulty of following the truth of God's Word when our sinful nature and the society in which we live offer so many "easy paths."

Enemies – The many physical, emotional, and spiritual struggles and suffering that Satan uses to discourage us and destroy our faith.

Dark valleys – Those times in our lives when things seem so hopeless that we despair and wonder if God even cares or is around.]

How does following the Good Shepherd bring the "abundant life" through these?

[Steep climbs – The Good Shepherd knows where the "green pastures" are. "Cool it!" He is in control.

Narrow paths – The Good Shepherd knows where the "quiet waters" are. Our souls are restored and refreshed as we recall our baptisms and are encouraged by the truth of His Word.

Enemies – The Good Shepherd feeds us and guards us in their presence through the "special" meal of His body and blood. He points us to the cross where, through suffering, we see the destruction of our greatest enemies—sin, death, and the devil.

Dark Valleys – The Good Shepherd comforts us by His many, many promises that find their certainty in the cross and the empty tomb. He points us ahead to where He leads us—dwelling in the house of the Lord forever.]

For Life Application

Discuss the following:

1. What is the source of suffering?

World's Answer

[Bad luck. The world does not acknowledge any root cause for suffering. Some may "blame God" even though they do not know God. Natural law may compel some who think they are pretty "good" to think, "I don't deserve this," and others, who think they are pretty "bad" to think, "I'm getting what I deserve." Christians can go down this path and relate suffering to God punishing them or to think that as Christians they should fare better than the world.]

Word's Answer

[Sin. God created a perfect, suffering-free world. Sin brought suffering and death. Sin lies at the bottom of all suffering. Sin has made everything "out of whack." The world and our bodies are no longer perfect as God intended.

Sometimes we suffer because of bad choices, because of specific sins. Perhaps ask for some examples here. But sometimes, because of sin in the world, we have no choice in the suffering that comes our way.]

2. How do we deal with suffering?

World's Answer

[Eliminate the sufferer. Increasingly, the world turns to death to solve the problem of suffering. Abortion will solve the problem of an unplanned pregnancy. Destroying human embryos will solve the problem of devastating diseases. Euthanasia and assisted suicide will solve the problems of pain due to terminal or chronic illness. Some will even use John 10:10 to justify this. Remember how from the DVD?]

Word's Answer

[Illuminate the cross. The death and resurrection of Jesus solved the ultimate source of suffering. The greatest suffering brings the greatest good! The punishment for sin has been paid! Those who believe this are assured that their relationship with God is secure. They follow the Good Shepherd wherever He leads. They may have to suffer the consequences of their own sin or of sin in the world, but they are not being punished for their sin. Since the Christian's relationship with God is secure, they can trust he wants what is best for them and will accomplish that even in suffering. Since the Christian's relationship with God is secure, they need not ask, "Why is this happening to me?" but rather, "Where is God at work in what is happening to me?" This does not mean we're supposed to "enjoy" suffering or invite suffering or not try to eliminate suffering. But when suffering comes, we can view it through the cross.]

3. How do we deal with those suffering?

World's Answer

[Hasten death. The world sees death as a friend that provides the compassionate relief of suffering. Being blind to any purpose in suffering, they see only one way out.]

Word's Answer

[Support life. The Word sees death as our enemy defeated by Jesus and exhorts us to be compassionate by carrying "each other's burdens" (Galatians 6:2). The Word reminds us that God's Spirit is present with us and that as long as God gives life, God gives life purpose. The Word points us to the privilege of providing comfort and care and allowing God to "display His works" in His time and according to His will.]

Homework

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