

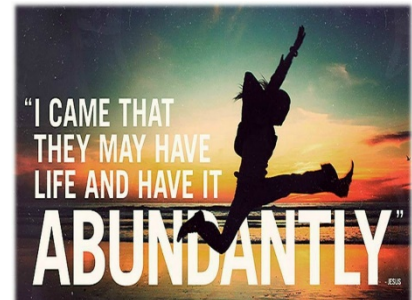
During the first 5 Sundays in Lent I am going to provide a reflection a week from the Livability Bible Studies 'Together for Good' which aim to increase well-being for individuals and communities. You can use them for your own personal Lent reflections, or as the basis for group discussions in House Groups.

Exploring Joy/Contentment

The word "happiness" is used widely in our culture to describe a huge variety of experiences, from how we feel when enjoying a coffee or ice-cream, to the joy of rediscovering a long-lost relative, right through to finding ultimate meaning in faith. Many of us can feel uncomfortable with the word "happiness." For some it can feel superficial, or a contrast to the life of faith, which invites sacrificial service (especially during Lent), which is why I used the words joy or contentment – more long-term happiness in spite of pain and suffering. In fact, the Bible has a lot to say about happiness, although the words it uses and the meanings they carry are not necessarily the same as ours today.

The first Bible Study is **John 10:1-10 Abundant Life**
'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.'

- What is abundant life? What does it look like to you personally?
- What do Jesus' life and actions tell us about abundant life?



The Greek word for life here, *zoe*, refers to something deeper, broader and more substantial than other Greek terms for life. Jesus emphasises it further by linking it with eternal life. Eternal life is the life that God lives, in which quality is more significant than quantity – it's so dynamic that it can't be destroyed – it goes on forever! Our second word is "abundant." The Greek word means "over and above, more than necessary, surpassing". Today we might say, "over the top", meaning that there's so much more that it seems excessive. We can often think that abundant life is a purely spiritual idea, but in fact it embraces all aspects of our lives, physical, mental, emotional, relational, social, communal and spiritual.

Exercise – group or individual

Write down what makes you happy. Do themes emerge? What sorts of things are missing?

"Happiness" can be divided into three main categories:

- **Pleasure** – mostly derived from material things, from ice cream to smart phones, cars and clothes. We all find these things enjoyable, but they last for only a short time – pleasure is transient.
- **Engagement** – participating in activities that demand more from us e.g. jobs, hobbies or relationships. The satisfaction we experience through these things is more lasting than pleasure.
- **Meaning** – attachment to something or someone lying beyond me and mine. The focus moves from "What do I want?" towards "What is my life for – why am I on planet earth?"

In the Gospels we find a Jesus who seemed to enjoy life to the full. He took the whole person seriously, with all its joys and sorrows, and not just the spiritual aspects. He was interested in bodily health, relational connections and community living, as well as spiritual meaning and purpose.

To think about / discuss:

- Think of your life as a whole – does it encompass pleasure, engagement and meaning?
- Which of these three categories most describes our church community?
- Is there any imbalance?
- What might we increase or diminish to bring more abundant life?

Closing Prayer

Lord, thank you for all the gifts you have given us. The world with its beauty and resources. Humanity, with its diversity and life. Our families, our community, with its warmth and hope. Thank you for our lives, with all the potential they have. Amen