



---

# April

## The Abundant Life

*I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.*  
—John 10:10b

The emphasis this month is abundant living, which is promised by Jesus in the Gospel of John. This month, meditate on what abundant living means, and how we can embrace the abundant life that we have been promised.

### ► Leader's Note

TV Turn-Off Week falls in the month of April. The emphasis on abundant living this month could also be incorporated into discussions about TV Turn-Off Week, encouraging people to explore life's abundant possibilities, especially those outside the home—and away from the TV!

## The Abundant Life: Week 1

# Abundance in Body

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. —Romans 12:1*

### Opening Thoughts

Our bodies are created and cared for by God. This week, we will think about how we can have more abundant life through the better care of our bodies.

### Discussion Questions

- What does it mean to have abundant life through your body?
- We all have habits and patterns that prevent us from living into the abundance that God gives us in our bodies. What are some of those things for you?
- How can you celebrate your body, and the abundance of life available in your body?
- How can you encourage your friends and family to celebrate abundance in body? How can they encourage you?

### Closing Meditation

Lord, help us to be mindful of the bodies that you have created for us. Help us to take better care of our bodies, and help us to celebrate our ability to move and to enjoy good food and breath fresh air. Finally, help us to encourage one another to love and celebrate the abundant life that you give us through our bodies. In your holy Name, Amen.

## The Abundant Life: Week 2

# Abundance in Mind

*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what good and acceptable and perfect. —Romans 12:2*

### Opening Thoughts

In the passage above from Romans, Paul tells us to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” In particular, this statement can give us hope, because it means that the habits that we have formed our lives, that we may be “stuck” in, are, in fact, free to change.

### Discussion Questions

- What does it mean to you to have abundant life with regards to your mind?
- What gets in the way of abundant life of the mind?
- How can you encourage others in your family, workplace, congregation to celebrate the abundant life of their minds? How might you be encouraged by them?

### Closing Meditation

Lord, help us to encourage one another to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Give us insight and endurance as we explore the habits of our minds, and as we make changes in our lives so that we might have more abundant life in and through you. In your holy Name, Amen.

## The Abundant Life: Week 3

### Abundance in Spirit

*Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.* —Philippians 4:8–9

#### Opening Thoughts

In this passage from his letter to the Philippians, Paul is imploring us to direct our spirits toward those things that are worthy of attention—the things that are of God. How can you and your community practice what Paul preaches?

#### Discussion Questions

- What does an abundant spiritual life mean to you?
- Name a time in your life when you felt abundance in spirit. Name a time when you did not feel abundance in your spiritual life.
- What can you do to live into an abundant spiritual life? Do you have habits that are getting in the way of living a spiritual life of abundance?
- None of us can live an abundant spiritual life alone. How can you help your community live a more abundant spiritual life?

#### Closing Meditation

Lord, help us to be mindful of your spirit throughout this week. Help us to spend our time and our energy putting into practice those things that are pure, admirable, lovely, excellent and praiseworthy. Help us to come together as a community, living an abundant spiritual life together. In your holy Name, Amen.

## The Abundant Life: Week 4

### Abundance in Life

*Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from your birth, carried from the womb, even to your old age I am he, even when you turn grey I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save.* —Isaiah 46:3–4

#### Opening Thoughts

In this passage from Isaiah we are told that God knows us even before we are born, and God carries us and sustains us. In the previous three weeks, you have been asked to think about abundant life of body, mind and spirit separately. This week, you will be asked to think about the complete life in abundance, which includes body, mind and spirit.

#### Discussion Questions

- What do you think abundant life is? What does it include?
- In what ways do you embrace life in abundance? In what ways do you not?
- What can you do to better celebrate the life that you are given—in body, mind and spirit?
- The abundant life is not one that can be lived alone. How can your community more fully celebrate life in abundance?

#### Closing Meditation

Lord, we know that we are the work of your own hands. Help us to care for ourselves and our communities, to be stewards of your handiwork in us, and to live into the life abundant that you promise each of us. In your holy Name, Amen.



# May

## Diversity

*For he [Christ] is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God. —Ephesians 2:14, 17–19*

Throughout scripture, we witness a God of peace and of many nations. This month you will be asked to explore the challenges and benefits of diversity. How might diversity affect faithful living?

### ► Leader's Note

Diversity can be a difficult and challenging subject for many congregations. This term is often loaded with politically-charged language. We may be discouraged from using it, or we may overuse it without clear understanding of what the word means. Because of this challenge, it is all the more important to focus on this word "diversity" and what it means in our congregations.



## Diversity: Week 1

# What is Diversity?

*There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.*  
—Galatians 3:28

### Opening Thoughts

Diversity has become a buzzword in many settings, but what does it really mean? What does diversity mean for people of faith and for our relationship to God? Paul clearly understood that Jesus came for many kinds of people. This week, you will be asked to consider how diversity should function in the Church.

### Discussion Questions

- What does the word “diversity” mean to you?
- What are some examples of things that can be diverse?
- How can people be diverse? In what ways are you part of a diverse population?
- Why does diversity matter, especially for people of faith?
- Is diversity in the Church a goal to be pursued? Why or why not?

### Closing Meditation

Lord, help us all to recognize the diversity within your creation. We thank you for all of your good gifts, and help us to notice the beauty that comes with uniqueness and diversity. Help us to celebrate the differences that make us each unique. In your holy Name, Amen.

## Diversity: Week 2

# Being Different

*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renew of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.* —Romans 12:2

### Opening Thoughts

People are diverse in many ways: age, gender, race, religion, lifestyle, social and economic class, and physical ability, just to name a few. In the Psalms, we are reminded that each of us is fearfully and wonderfully made, and we are each made differently. The differences are all a part of God’s wonderful creation.

### Discussion Questions

- Think of your circle of friends. Are they mostly similar to you, or are there differences?
- Have you ever been singled out for being different? How did you feel?
- How do you respond to someone who is different, especially when they seem to feel alienated from the larger group?
- What are the challenges of getting to know someone who is different from you? What are the benefits?

### Closing Meditation

Lord, help us to be mindful of the differences in your creation, especially when we are trying to get to know someone new. Help us to pay attention to those around us. Thank you for our friends, and thank you for the stranger in our midst. In your holy Name, Amen.

## Diversity: Week 3

### First Impressions

*When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.' So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, 'He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.'*

—Luke 19:5–7

#### Opening Thoughts

First impressions are important, but they are not always accurate. Many times, we pre-judge people before we get the chance to know them. Think about what might have happened if Jesus had judged Zacchaeus unworthy, just as everyone else had. Jesus had the generosity of spirit to give Zacchaeus more than a first impression.

#### Discussion Questions

- Though it's difficult to admit, how often do you judge people based on their appearance? (Skin color, how they dress, what kind of car they drive)
- Have you ever had a first impression about someone that turned out to be totally wrong? How did that make you feel?
- Has someone ever had a first impression of you that was wrong? How did you set the situation right, if you did?

#### Closing Meditation

Lord, help us look beyond superficial traits and first impressions to see people for who they really are. Help us to see the beauty and the goodness in all of your creation, and help us to honor every person as your beloved child. In your holy Name, Amen.

## Diversity: Week 4

### Words Matter

*Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot were to say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' the whole would not make it any less a part of the body.*

—1 Corinthians 12:14–15

#### Opening Thoughts

Many people resist the idea of "politically correct" language, but our words matter greatly. Words have the power to inflict harm as well as the power to heal. In the passage from Corinthians above Paul reminds us that despite our difference (indeed, because of our differences), we are all a part of one body in Christ.

#### Discussion Questions

- Have you ever been made fun of or called a name based on a physical characteristic? How did it make you feel?
- How do you refer to people who are sick? For example, would you say "a diabetic" or "a person with diabetes?" Do you think this could be an important distinction—especially for that person?
- We are often guilty of talking about people behind their backs. How can we be more mindful of showing love to our neighbors by speaking to them (and about them) with kind words?

#### Closing Meditation

God, help us to use uplifting and affirming language in our encounters with people of all colors, shapes and sizes. Help us to be mindful of the ways that we hurt as well as the ways that we can heal. In your holy Name, Amen.