

ABUNDANT LIFE

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” John 10:10 (NIV)

If I've learned anything about hard seasons, it's that they can make you feel like life has been completely drained out of you. And boy is this is a hard season!

There's a pace in life that feels unfamiliar. There's a process that feels like it's filled with pain and uncertainty. And hard seasons can make us crave hurried endings. I have felt myself just wanting this to all be over....now! Or at least the parts of it that I dislike and struggle with the most! Often, these seasons can leave us questioning the goodness of God. But God's goodness cannot be defined by our good or bad seasons.

John 10 is a passage filled with a picture and promise of who God is to us in the good times and the bad. The picture is one of a Shepherd watching over His sheep; the promise is that He is a protector and promoter of abundant life.

Our key verse for today, John 10:10, reminds us there's an enemy fighting to take life from us. And he wants to destroy the abundance God offers us in the midst of hard seasons. That's why, as I said in my talk a few weeks ago, it's so important that we learn to know and recognise the Good Shepherd's voice by dwelling in His word and spending time with Him.

In the King James translation of this verse, the word “abundant” is used instead of the word “full.” And the Greek word for “abundance” is *perissos*, which means “surplus.” In other words, in hard times or good times, we always have access to an extra dose, a surplus – not only just enough but more than enough - of the abundant life Jesus offers us through His death and resurrection. God doesn't give us the ability to snap our fingers and make life better. But He does give us “*power from the cross which brings a space and a place of peace and contentment to our souls through the hard seasons.*” When I read those words in a devotion last week, I could feel my spirit leap and rejoice because that is what I am desiring in this time. A peace and contentment that isn't determined by circumstances. I wonder, are you?

So let's be asking God to show us how to live well in this hard season. As we continue to experience the loss of life as we knew it, what abundance is God giving us to fill the void? Is He removing crutches that we don't need anymore, in order to help us to rely more on Him? As we ask for God's wisdom, I believe He will show us how to walk through this season well.

How might we do that? Let's invest in relationships with others that speak life into us and let's speak words of life and hope into others as we get alongside and encourage them too. And most importantly, *let's speak words of life over ourselves!* I have sometimes found myself dwelling in negative thoughts as this lockdown bites and whilst we need to be real with God about our pain and our struggles, like the Psalmists do, let us also set our hearts on recognising who God is and His faithfulness to us. That's not easy when we don't feel it, but when we do it, we find life!

In every season, there's a fulfilling life waiting for us through the presence and promise of God, the Good Shepherd. Hard seasons sometimes make it difficult to take firm steps toward God. And we won't get every step right — we *will* fall and fail. And when we do, we have a loving and compassionate God who enables us to get up and keep going. Our thoughts might lead us away from living the promise, *but*, the promise of John 10:10 is always there to pull us back into abundant life. It's always waiting for us, all we need to do is take hold of it! **Amen**

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