

Pursuing Abounding Joy—May 2018

Since the age of 15 when her mother was killed, Amy (*not her real name*) has suffered from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression. One day while walking through her neighborhood she noticed that many of the streets were lined with makeshift tributes—teddy bears, deflated balloons and pictures—in memory of loved ones lost by acts of violence. She set out to turn ‘lemons into lemonade’.

Using her own money and on her own time, Amy’s ‘joy’ is being restored by meeting and working with families to create permanent, ‘living’ memorials to honor their loved ones. Alongside family members, she helps replace their makeshift memorials with permanent symbols of love in the form of plants and flowers. These ‘living’ memorials help beautify the neighborhood and alleviate hurt feelings that families experience when city sanitation workers dismantle the makeshift memorials because of city ordinances. Even as she struggles to find her own wholeness and healing, Amy is ***pursuing abounding joy*** by helping others restore their joy and find their paths to healing.

Not everyone has a green thumb or landscaping expertise, but each of us has the ability and the responsibility to identify, create, and pursue a purposeful life—one that is joyful and meaningful. We also have a loving and nurturing God who redeems and restores us. He understands us, knows us by name, and plants within us a peace that surpasses all understanding. There are times in life when we will suffer, when we find ourselves in the dark valleys of life or we struggle to make sense of nonsense. However, even in the midst of pain or uncertainty, we can still experience and pursue abounding joy.

Abounding joy is simply peace or hope. It’s knowing that even if God doesn’t fix a situation, He is ABLE to do so. We know that all things work together for good, even when we may be unable to see the ‘good’ through our tears. We know that weeping endures for a night, but joy comes in the morning—even when our circumstances or environment dims the glow of daylight. Abounding joy abides within us, independent of our circumstances. It’s understanding and believing that our hope, our help, our peace, our power and our joy come from the Lord. Abounding joy is what makes a patient with terminal cancer smile. It’s the song that we have in our hearts when the world around us crumbles. Abounding joy understands that this too shall pass. It’s standing on God’s Word and His promises, in spite of what we see, what the doctor says, or what our circumstances dictate.

As Christians, we should have the joy that Jesus displayed. He had *abounding joy*; it was not half-hearted. He had *abundant joy*, even as He faced Calvary. And, His joy was *abiding* (“that my joy might remain in you”). It remained inside.

God loves us. He cares for us. Let’s pursue that same abounding, abundant, abiding joy of Christ, no matter what.

Peace and power,

Dr. Melvin Marriner

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