

**Living Abundantly**  
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The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm is one of the most often recited passages of the Christian Bible. It paints a picture of security, of peace and plenty, of knowing one has enough even during the most trying times – even the very “valley of death,” as many translations put it. The abundance it evokes is something we all long for.

But how do we have that, when we never seem to have enough? Our lives today are often full of pressure. We are overwhelmed, overworked and overstressed. Does it have to be this way? How can we claim for ourselves the more abundant life we long for?

Last Monday, I woke up with this feeling that there was no way, ever, I was ever going to get it all done. Has this ever happened to you? I was looking at conducting five services in the space of two weeks, and it just wasn't going to be possible. And on top of that there is all the other important stuff: meetings and planning and pastoral calls and... I had tried to get ahead enough to be prepared, but there was still TOO MUCH STUFF TO DO! Do you ever have that overwhelmed, panicky feeling? I hate it.

There was just no way I had time to take my regular Monday off. I can rest when I get caught up, I told myself.

But. When I first came here, I made a promise to take care of myself. And I take it seriously, because how on earth can I preach to all of you to take care of yourselves – which I do, all the time! – and not do it myself? So I FORCED MYSELF to take Monday off.

Monday was not a fun day. I had too much underlying anxiety to really have a fun day, though I did things I enjoy, like reading and playing Face Book games. Yes, I play them. Things that kept my mind off the stress and kept me in a zone of a kind. I did not let myself look at my email (I went back and double checked that I hadn't sent any email on Monday, 'cause I wouldn't want to lie to ya!), and I tried to let thoughts of my to-do-list just drift on by without engaging them.

It took a lot of focused intention.

But Tuesday morning, a curious thing happened. I suddenly realized I had plenty of time. Not time to waste, but as I lined up my upcoming two weeks, I could see I had enough time to get everything done I needed to, and not only to *do* my work, but ENJOY it. I had gone from a severe deficit of time, to an abundance.

I have come to the conclusion that abundance has little to do with the actual quantity of something you have, whether it is time, or money, or love, or what have you.

It is looking at life differently.

But I also think it is more than just looking at the glass half-full instead of the glass half-empty. Because on Tuesday morning, I didn't suddenly look at the time I had and decide, well, it will be enough, or, just focus on the time you had instead of the time you wish you had. No, it was more like a feeling of *plenty*. Of a glass full-to-overflowing. When abundance strikes, it brings with it an element of joy.

Of course, I am not the first person to notice this. The Greek philosopher Epicurus, who lived around 300 BCE, said **“Not what we have but what we enjoy constitutes our abundance.”**

The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, from the wisdom writings of the Hebrew people, is full of the language of abundance: Restores my soul. Fills my heart with songs. My cup overflows. Even walking through a dark and dreary land, nothing can shake me.

It is less about the circumstances than it is about how we are feeling about things.

Lori Deschene, the founder of Tiny Buddha, wrote about this in her recent **Tiny Wisdom** column, **“The Real Meaning of Abundance”**

The other day, I read about a research study that revealed the majority of participants would rather earn more money than their peers than earn more over a period of years. In other words, they'd sacrifice wealth for an increased sense of pride and status.

I suspect this is why we chase abundance: we assume that money can buy feelings—that it will make us feel accomplished, respected, happy, or free. We assume that if we aren't happy, the solution is more. Or if we are happy, more will prolong it.

But the pursuit of more can be a trap. It can rob a fun experience of joy, turning it into a means to an end. It can motivate us to compare and compete instead of recognizing and honoring our actual needs. And it can compel us to constantly await excess in the future instead of enjoying enough in the present.

This isn't to say we shouldn't strive for our goals. It's just that none of it will affect us as we hope it will if we don't learn to appreciate what we have when we have it. *That's real abundance: when we can recognize our riches, regardless of our wealth, and allow ourselves to enjoy them.*

Her words remind me of an old Buddhist teaching that says, “Happiness [Abundance] cannot be found through great effort and willpower, But it is already there/here, in relaxation and letting go.”

Letting go of the idea that we can't enjoy life until we have \_\_\_\_\_ [fill in the blank]. Letting ourselves actually smell a rose here and there, mindfully being in the present. Tapping in to the sure knowledge that all we need, and more, is right here, right now, in this very moment.

Can we access this feeling of abundance in every circumstance of life? Of course not, not all the time. But life does have a way of surprising us, and a life that contains abundance is available in some of the most unlikely circumstances. We can be open to new sources of abundance, even as our circumstances change.

One of the most potent ways to open our hearts to the abundance of life is to spend more time in community. I remember the people who attended the Women's March on Washington, how they came back with their cups filled to overflowing from the abundance of love, peace, and hope they had been immersed in during that experience.

In an intriguing article called **“Americans Are Stressed About the Future. Here’s Why That’s Promising,”** Sarah van Gelder talks about this power of community to re-connect with abundance and joy in the face of horrible adversity. She says,

I’ve come to believe that this work of reimagining [the world] is humble, small, often taps feminine energy, is fundamentally indigenous—and local. One way to learn what that means is to ask people who are rebuilding after a major collapse, like those now living in Puerto Rico. So I called up my colleague at PeoplesHub, Melissa Rosario, who lives in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Melissa had been building Colectiva Feminista en Construcción, an urban center of cooperative economics, ecologically light living, and “embodied pedagogy” (healing, starting with the body). In the aftermath of the hurricanes, her work has taken on a new immediacy, she told me. Along with friends in the Puerto Rican diaspora—in Detroit, New York, and elsewhere on the U.S. mainland—she has been assembling healing supplies: herbal tinctures and syrups for respiratory and immune system health, salves for treating wounds, graphics showing acupressure points, instructions in breathing exercises and other techniques for working through trauma, emotional overwhelm, depression, and insomnia.

‘We want to restore to people the sense that their body can tell them what’s wrong, that they know best what they need,’ Melissa told me.

One of the first places where she brought the medicine kits was to a group of moms, grandmothers, and children from a nearby neighborhood, who, along with a feminist collective, were using an abandoned building as a gathering place. A party was in full swing when Melissa arrived: Children were making masks for Halloween, while others were dancing to music playing from battery-powered speakers.

Melissa told me that her work, and the work of other progressives, is now more immediate, more grounded in people’s needs instead of in abstractions.

Also, because internet connections and electricity are scarce, people are spending less time on their devices.

“It’s wiping away the distractions, the veils,” she said. “I feel much more clear and aligned and just present. If you’re aware, there are more possibilities. It’s thrilling, hopeful, and also exhausting!”

Building together locally is a no-regrets strategy. It releases joy at a time when so many are stressed—just the company of others, engaged in a common purpose, satisfies a deep soul yearning.

When a deep soul yearning is satisfied – no matter what else is going on in our lives – we taste abundant joy, thrilling and hopeful.

Abundance does not depend upon what we have. It is all about how we *feel*. It is a feeling of fullness, of alls-right-with-the-world, of having all we need and then some; of pure enjoyment of the moment when the inner critic ceases. It’s a sudden awareness of life’s blessings, a realization that right at this moment we have what we need.

Abundance is not a state we can live in continuously. It must be claimed and reclaimed, as we do those things in our lives that allow us to relax and allow abundance to re-emerge into our consciousness. Rest, self-care, meditation, spending time with loved ones and enjoyable activities, reminding ourselves that all we need is here...whatever helps to shift us back into the recognition of that cornucopia of goodness offered by the Universe.

Abundance bursts through at some of the most unexpected times, filling our hearts with the sure knowledge that we have tapped into a bubbling spring of joy, that fills our hearts to overflowing with the sheer goodness of life. That life that enfolds us, and helps and heals and holds us, is our inheritance and our birthright, and cannot be taken from us, no matter what else we may lose.

My prayer is that we may more often, and without reservation, discover and re-discover that living spring of joy and goodness, that sudden knowledge of the abundance of life, bubbling up from within, until we are full to overflowing!

And so may it be.