

Abundance Worth Having

If you were given six months to live, what would you do with your time? You would probably make valuable use of every minute, not to gain material wealth but to spend and enrich your time with family and friends.

Most people dream of a life of abundance with houses, cars, toys, and trips. These material things are valued and make us feel good.

Many feel abundant when they are able to purchase what they want, show off their new purchases, and talk of their latest trips. They strive to do better than the family next door or others at the club.

Sometimes friends are valued based on what they have and do. Jealousy may be part of it, but many people seek the status of being friendly with wealthy people.

Many people work hard to climb that slippery ladder of success. At times some people are fearful of the new day and the challenges. Will we earn what we need, will we get the promotion, or will we get hired? How can we save face? How can we make it look good to our peers?

People often focus on the abundance of things, positions held, associations based on money, board seats, and community respect. Occasionally people will even go into debt for the abundance of things.

Some people tire of the game, and the fun is gone. They have worked and worked and are burnt out. The value is gone, but the debts still continue. They wonder if this abundance, this game, is all there is to life. The fun and excitement are long past.

What is it they were after? Did they succeed? Is this all there is? What do we have to look forward to? Does the game ever end?

Can we ever win the game of money? The more we work, the more we spend, and the more we look around and compare. Someone has made millions and is the new envy of the neighborhood. Someone else bought the newest toy, and we wonder who will be next and if we should buy one also.

If you are tired of this rat race, this money game, this trying to keep up with and ahead of the Joneses, it might be time to redefine "abundance."

The *Oxford American Dictionary and Thesaurus* definition of abundance is:

1. a very great quantity, considered to be more than enough; 2. wealth; affluence; 3. wealth of emotion (abundance of heart); 4. overflow, superfluity, excess, surplus, too much, oversupply, glut

To me, abundance is what you take with you when you die. The principles are as follows:

Abundance is joy and freedom.

Money is only one small part of abundance, but it gets the most attention. Remember, the stuff that money buys rusts, burns, gets stolen, or wears out. The newest and greatest car today is outdated in a few years. The big house is not only expensive to buy but also draining to care for and ties you down.

Look at all your stuff that represents abundance. Is the big house worth it? Is it fun, or is it a drain? Are the three cars worth the cost and effort? Does it feel good to spend \$75,000 on a car? Does the car give you that much value and satisfaction? See what you have that you do not use or enjoy. Should you sell it or give it away? Would your life be better or worse without the stuff?

Joy comes from within. Money creates a temporary false happiness but not joy. Freedom is a state of mind and a way of life. Stuff can overshadow your freedom and occupy your time.

Abundance is stuff.

Now is the time to look at the abundance of stuff. The idea is to use it, love it, or lose it. If you have not used it in a year and do not love it, perhaps it is time to lose it.

Get fifty storage boxes. Start with the clothes closets. Take the items that no longer fit, have not been worn in years, or are out of style, and give them away. There are many people who will use your old clothes. You do not need them, will not use them, and they are cluttering your home and space. For those that you do wear, put the seasonal clothes in boxes marked accordingly. Keep in the closet only what you are currently wearing. Leave room. A crowded, cluttered closet can make you feel crowded and cluttered mentally and emotionally.

Next, the basement. Do you have grown children's possessions still stored in your house? Tell them to come and get them. If they do not claim their stuff within an allotted time, give it away. If they want to keep it but don't have room, perhaps you will allow them to pack and label it for storage in your basement.

For the stuff you feel you must keep but do not anticipate using, box it and record what is in each box. After several years of not opening the box, it will be time to throw it away. It is an ongoing process. Today is the beginning. As time goes on, you will be able to discard more and more. Now we are working with the tip of the iceberg.

Next attack the garage and attic, as well as any outbuilding.

Abundance is time.

Let's assume we have sixteen hours a day and seven days a week. How do we spend that time? Assess how you spend your time in the following areas:

Work

Family activities (dinner, theater, barbecues, etc.)

Being together as a couple

Social fun time

Social obligations—not fun

Community meetings—groups that are enjoyable and fun

Community meetings—groups that are not fun

Educational (learning new things—books, courses, workshops)

Household chores (cleaning, shopping, mowing the lawn, gardening)

Look over the list and notice how your time balances out. Is there enough time for family? Is there enough time for being together? Is there enough time for doing fun things? Is there too much time spent on stuff that is not fun and doesn't add value? Are there things you need to or want to eliminate? Are there groups that no longer hold interest for you? Are there activities that are no longer fun? Are there old relationships that are long gone but on which you still spend time begrudgingly? How much time is spent on "shoulds" that are not enjoyable? Are there things you do to enable others that hurt them and you?

Too often we race from one thing to the next never doing justice to anything. Now that you have reduced what you spend your time on, it is time to add abundance to what is left.

Abundance is family.

For most of us, the family is the most important unit. Face-to-face time and quality time is what counts. Sitting in front of the TV, a short distracted phone call, and a quick meal at a drive-through restaurant do not count.

Relationships take time. It is the time together, the doing and being available for another that creates and promotes love and respect. One cannot speed up or take shortcuts in relationships. It is about making memories of things done and time spent together. It is the joy of being with a loved one.

Abundance is close friends, employees, and clients.

It is the relationships with others you truly like—close friends, club members, business associates, etc.—that enrich your life.

Now is the time to look around and expand your vision. Who else can use your attention, your gifts of time and talent, as well as your expertise? Who can you help? Who can you guide? Who can you mentor? And who can help you?

Abundance is time spent with others in order to truly know them and to give to them, be it for profit, nonprofit, or fun. It is time to pay attention to them, assist them, and allow yourself to be assisted by them. By investing time and talent, you will build relationships of lasting value. You will feel abundant. It is the abundance of knowing you helped, you added value, and you made another's burdens a little lighter for them.

Abundance is giving back.

Make a list of the abundance that has been given to you by others. You may be embarrassed to discover how much you've been given and how little you may have given back. You will see and notice people and actions that were, in fact, gifts that you did not have the presence of mind to recognize or to give back to them. It is okay. In giving to others, we need not get back from them. In receiving we need not necessarily give back to them. In receiving we give, and in giving we receive. The giving is also a gift to us. In giving we feel abundant. In giving we are satisfied. In giving we learn that we are meant to give, and we experience the joy that it brings to us.

As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "It is one of the most beautiful compensations of this life that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself."

Abundance is learning, education, and skills.

Make a list now of what you would like to learn. It may be education classes or hands-on skills you have always wanted. Make it fun. Do not restrict or censor your list. If belly dancing is a secret desire, list it. If being a Chippendale is a

secret desire, list it.

Then pursue these dreams. Find the class. Find the course. Find the tutors. It is time for the abundance of doing, learning, and adding skills. This will benefit not only you but also others. This is something for you, and what benefits you can also benefit others.

Abundance is free time.

Abundance can be found in travel. Make a list of the places where you have always wanted to go and visit at least one a year. Also, do at least one short excursion every month. It can be for an hour, a full day, or overnight.

For some, free time is best enjoyed being at home playing games or involved in a hobby. Others may enjoy a long leisurely walk along a wooded path. We all have our own special ways to use and enjoy the abundance of free time. The key is to make time for what you enjoy that adds value to your life.

Abundance is money.

Money is the medium we use for exchange. That is all that it is. We use money as a means of barter.

Abundance is having enough money. The issue is what is enough money? "Enough" varies, based on the person's perceptions.

There is nothing wrong with money, nice houses, nice cars, and nice toys, but at what price do we need them? How much time must you commit to work in order to buy something? Is that "something" worth the time it takes to get it? If so, then do it. If not, don't do it. Do not allow money and the stuff it buys to occupy your time. Do not be a slave to your money and stuff.

Abundance is what you take with you when you die.

On your deathbed, your biggest regrets will be things not experienced, risks not taken, and time wasted. When you die, you cannot take your stuff with you. (Although some people have actually been buried in their cars.) But, in reality, nothing of material value can go with you. The house, the car, the boat, and the golf clubs have no value to you when you die.

So, what do you take with you? The abundance of peace of mind knowing you lived an honorable life, that you gave of yourself to family and friends, and that

you left your community and the world better places.