In this heartwarming film based on Janette Oke's best-selling book, *Love's Abiding Joy*, we follow the story of Missie and Willie LaHaye as they welcome Missie's father, Clark, for a visit to the homestead. But, their joyful time together is cut short when tragedy strikes. What then ensues for Missie and Willie is a personal journey through grief and loss. Though their emotions vary, the young couple learns that God's love is steadfast in the storm, and with faith in God, and their love for each other, they can rediscover abiding joy.

The Discussion Guide draws out the themes in the film, and provides an opportunity to discuss how God is with us in the midst of tragedy and heartache, touching on the important topic of grief and the journey that follows—one that may involve negative emotions and questions about faith. These and other topics are complete with thought-provoking questions, related scriptures, and helpful lessons.

To supplement the lessons, clips from the movie have been offered as a visual aid. These clips are available for download at www.foxfaith.com or may be shown through a specially made DVD that you can request at the same website. These clips and the guide, used in Sunday school classes, other small groups, or by parents, will provide you with an opportunity to initiate discussion.

For more information and additional Church Resource material, go to www.foxfaith.com.
About the Film

As a pastor or Bible study leader, you’re very careful about the media you recommend to your congregation or discussion groups. Fortunately, Love’s Abiding Joy is a film you can discuss without reservation. Uplifting, family-friendly, and heartwarming, Love’s Abiding Joy was created by people who care about preserving innocence in our entertainment as much as you do.

Love’s Abiding Joy is the fourth in the series of films based on Janette Oke’s best-selling books that tell of a young woman’s journey of faith and love. The film follows the story of Missie and Willie LaHaye as they experience the challenges that life brings—challenges that test their faith and love for each other in the midst of tragedy. This heartfelt love story builds on the previous films, Love Comes Softly, Love’s Enduring Promise, and Love’s Long Journey. Written and directed by Michael Landon, Jr., Author Janette Oke is a pioneer in inspirational fiction and a leader in that category. With more than 30 million copies of her latest book in print, fans can continue to follow the wholesome, inspiring love story in Love’s Abiding Joy. Previous titles have been on the Christian Booksellers Association top 10 adult titles charts for over 30 consecutive weeks.

Because of God’s timing, Missie’s father, Clark, is present when the baby dies. With words of comfort and wisdom, he recommends that she spend some time alone with Willie to allow an opportunity for them to reconnect. Missie takes her father’s words to heart, and when the moment feels right, she makes an effort to regain the relationship they have abandoned.

In the quiet, beneath the trees, Willie and Missie find each other again. As their hands touch, and Willie holds hers, their eyes say the unspoken words they’ve desperately wanted to hear. Reassured that their love is steadfast, despite the heartache that remains, the young couple courageously faces the gravesite together. There, in humble prayer, they begin to accept the loss of their daughter.

The painful feelings of loss remain, but Willie and Missie are moving forward in their mourning. The lines of communication—verbal and nonverbal—are again open and loving. Oftentimes, this kind of tragedy can bring danger to a relationship. Couples become distant, trapped in their pain, and determined to face the situation without emotional support from their spouse. Consequently, a wedge of bitterness can come between them—one that whispers the lie that there is no future together.

This is when God’s love, faith in His promises, and support from family and friends can make the difference between a successful relationship, and one that falls apart. As Christians, we need to come alongside and encourage those who are experiencing grief. Our encouragement can come in many forms—providing a meal, sending notes of concern, offering assurances of prayer, listening to their story again and again, holding them as they cry, and having patience when their grief lingers. With our help, and God’s steadfast love, those suffering a tragic circumstance can rise from the storm even stronger and closer than before.
ABIDING JOY

Clip: Graveside Visit
At the advice of her father, Missie pays a visit to Willie at the sheriff’s office. His greeting is stilted and there is an air of discomfort between them. Since the death of their daughter, they have withdrawn from each other, and they have been dealing with their grief separately. Now, as they picnic together, they move toward their remembered love for each other and begin to accept their loss.

Questions:
• Since the loss of Kathy, Willie and Missie have become non-communicative. What nonverbal expressions occur during their picnic together? What was said even though no words were spoken?

• The LaHayes visit the gravesite. What does Willie say during the prayer together that shows that they are accepting Kathy’s death? How will acceptance affect their relationship and future? Read Romans 8:28.

• Losing a child is particularly hard on a marriage. How has the LaHaye’s faith been instrumental in their getting through this tragedy? Read the following verses that offer reassurance in times of trouble: Psalm 34:18-19, Isaiah 65:24 & 26:3-4, Matthew 11:28-29 and Isaiah 40:31.

• Eventually, all of us experience loss of some kind. Think how you or a loved one coped with a similar situation. How long was it before you, or they, could accept the loss? What did friends or family members do that made a difference? Read Ecclesiastes 4:9 & Romans 12:15-16.

Lesson to Learn:
When Kathy died, her death affected the relationship between Missie and Willie. In areas where they were once close, they are now stilted and superficial. Not only has the young couple lost their child, but their loving bond is missing as well.

About the Discussion Guide

Love’s Abiding Joy is a film for the entire family. It provides an opportunity to discuss how God is with us in the midst of tragedy and the heartache that follows. Understanding the personal journey through grief—one that may involve negative emotions and questions about faith—is the reason these and other topics are addressed in the movie and why we’ve created this Discussion Guide. With this booklet, you can utilize the messages in Love’s Abiding Joy as a group discussion tool.

The lessons are supplemented with movie clips you’ve either received or downloaded online. These clips were specifically selected to help you set the tone and furnish the context for your discussion or Bible study. There are also suggested scriptures for your group to study in-depth, and we’ve provided several discussion provoking questions based on the different scenes. This guide is an easy-to-use way to kick-start interesting discussions within your small group, and it works without any of your group having seen the film. However, it is recommended that you announce your intentions of using the film clips ahead of time. For example, the week before you intend to have a clip-oriented discussion, you might show the film trailer (included with the clips) to your group or congregation and let them know that you will incorporate it into your discussion the following week (or the next time you meet). This will allow your members the opportunity to view the film themselves (rent or purchase) if they so desire.
Discussions:
In an effort to help you reinforce the themes and messages of Love’s Abiding Joy, we have chosen clips from the film that you can show to your group. These clips can be downloaded online at www.foxfaith.com or shown through a specially made DVD that you can request at the same website. These DVD clips are followed up with questions and scripture found in the Discussion Guide. The questions should draw your group members into a conversation about what they have just seen. It is not necessary to tackle these topics in a row or all in one session. If you would prefer just to cover one or two, feel free. It is all up to you.

First of all, introduce the discussion by saying something like this: “We’re going to talk about several topics that relate to grief and how God is with us in the midst of tragedy, even when we may question our faith and feel distant from His love. We have some scenes from the movie Love’s Abiding Joy that we are going to watch and then analyze to see what we can learn from them.”

Next, give a brief overview of the film. Then, play the clip you have selected. Once the clip plays, then open the floor for discussion, using the questions and scriptures that are provided, or use some of your own. To finish, you can close each session by giving the brief “Lesson to Learn” provided at the end of the topic.

NOTE: Since some of your group members have likely not seen the film, it is a good idea to provide them with the context of the clip before watching it. This can be found in the italicized text that precedes the questions and scripture references for that particular clip.

Please keep in mind that you do not have to get through all the clips in order to have a successful discussion. Also, you do not need to sacrifice a good conversation to finish the scenes. As we mentioned above, discussion times go best when you allow freedom, but still provide the framework that will point to lessons in God’s word.

GOD’S STEADFAST LOVE

Clip: Comfort in Sorrow
Clip: Wise Counsel

From the beginning, faith in God has been the cornerstone of Willie and Missie LaHaye’s marriage. Even now, as they endure the hardship of a drought and cattle plague, the young couple’s belief in God’s providence is unshaken. However, when their infant daughter, Kathy, dies in her sleep, they are rocked by grief and despair. But, the timely visit by Missie’s father provides comfort, counsel, and abiding love in the midst of tragedy.

Lesson to Learn:
Difficult times can happen when we least expect them. Drought, floods, hurricanes, and other natural disasters can change our good fortune into financial ruin overnight. Pioneers like Henry and Melinda Kline were not strangers to the bad hand that life can deal. With their herd affected by the cattle plague, and the drought reducing grazing land, their incomes dwindle dramatically, leaving them open to calculated legal “thievery” by others. The Klines could either pay their debt on money loaned to them by Judge Sam Dorose or lose their land and all their belongings.

Melinda’s story touches Missie’s heart as she realizes the events that are about to unfold. Not only will the Klines face the loss of their home, but Willie, as sheriff, will have to carry out his responsibilities and remove them from their property. Missie has compassion on Melinda’s family, and she puts her faith into action to help keep them from losing their home. In doing so, she also prevents her husband from being put in the difficult situation of inflicting pain on another family.

This action isn’t without its cost, however. In order to raise the money to pay the debt, Missie must part with possessions that are dear to her. The ultimate sacrifice, on her part, is to give up the locket that was given to her as a child. This fine piece of jewelry holds deep personal meaning for her. Still, she is willing to be obedient to God’s command to love others as ourselves. Missie’s loving actions also turn her attention off of her own pain and allow the healing process to begin.

Because Missie has recently experienced her own personal pain with the death of her child, she is more aware of the suffering of others. Her empathy gives her the ability to "walk in their shoes," to grieve with them and share their pain. Whether or not we have known troubled times firsthand, God asks us to think about others in such a way that their suffering becomes our own.

We only have to look in our own community to see families who need our attention and care. Beyond our shores, men, women, and children in other countries die because of starvation and lack of medical care. If we don’t help those who suffer and are in need, it hurts the heart of God, whether that need is in our hometown or far away. Why not reach out today, and like Missie, put your faith into action.
LOVING BEYOND OUR GRIEF

Clip: In Debt
Clip: Personal Treasures

The LaHaye’s former ranch hand, Henry, now has his own homestead in the valley. However, he and his wife, Melinda have fallen on hard times. Because of this, the offer of monetary assistance from Judge Sam Dorose seems like a good option. But, the judge is calculating and unsympathetic when a payment is late. He plans to have the newly appointed town sheriff, Willie LaHaye, oust the couple from their land. Then, Dorose will add their acreage and cattle to his growing empire. In the second scene, Missie takes extraordinary measures to ensure that those painful events never occur.

Questions:

- After Missie listens to Melinda about her plight, she takes action to solve their dilemma, gathering her own personal treasures to sell. What is her motivation? Read I John 3:16-17 & John 13:34-35. Is it possible that by “laying her life down” she was able to regain her own? Discuss your thoughts.

- The silver frame, the mirror and brush set, plus the pocket watch were treasures that Missie considered carefully before giving them up. But, she wanted to hold on to the locket. Why? Discuss the difficulty of Missie’s choice when she made the decision to sell the locket. Now, read Luke 6:38 for a promise God offers us when we give.

- Do you have something very special that you wouldn’t want to part with under any circumstances? What is it that makes it precious to you? What feelings would you have if you were asked to give it up?

- The young pioneer deeply grieves for her child. How has Missie’s recent loss given her a greater sensitivity to the pain of others? Think of an instance in your life when an experience has given you more empathy for another person? Discuss. The scriptures assure us that God understands our pain and shelters us in His love. Read Psalm 56:8,11 & Psalm 27:5

- Long before their unexpected tragedy, Missie’s father, Clark, arranged to visit his daughter and family. He mentions upon his arrival how “things just fell into place.” How do you see God’s providence in the timeliness of Clark’s visit to see Missie and her family? Think about an example of when you have seen God’s hand in a timely circumstance or “coincidence.” Discuss.

- Missie is grief-stricken over the loss of her child. Because of this, she withdraws from everyone. Clark is steadfast in his comfort for Missie. Compare Clark’s steadfast comfort with God’s love for us, even when we distance ourselves from Him. Read Psalm 23:4, Isaiah 43:2, Psalm 138:3 & Romans 8:38-39 for promises of reassurance when we struggle through heartache.

- If you, or someone you know, has experienced the loss of a loved one, what emotions followed? How can a death affect a person’s relationship with God? With others? What questions might a person ask God at a time of loss?

- Missie’s dad warns her of the consequences of not moving forward after a period of mourning. What negative emotions does he say can lodge in her heart? What are the consequences of those emotions? Read these scriptures that offer wisdom and comfort when our heart grieves: Ecclesiastes 3:1-4, Psalm 61:1, Philippians 4:6-7, & Psalm 9:9-10.

Lesson to Learn:

Missie and Willie LaHaye’s faith is rocked when their daughter, Kathy, is taken from them unexpectedly. Missie once said, “Let’s let our faith rest in Him,” in regards to the size of their herd and their dependence on her teaching income. Now, in her grief, she questions her faith.

Grief is a natural emotion that follows loss. As we grieve, we move through different stages of emotion that may include shock, guilt, anger, withdrawal, and sad acceptance. Missie experienced deep, gut-wrenching feelings on her journey toward healing. Her father, Clark, recognized that the challenges facing Missie were immense.
He could see that she was in danger of letting her negative emotions fill the hole left in her hurting heart. Where love once thrived, bitterness and depression threaten to take root.

Clark's steadfast love and comfort is instrumental in helping Missie during her mourning. Even though she withdraws from everyone, he is persistent in comforting her. Though she tries to push him away, he is resolute in his love for her. In the same way, God is unflinching in His love toward us. David tells us in his Psalms that God has unfailing Love and has never forsaken those who seek him. (Psalm 9:10, 13:5) Paul tells us that in all things God is working for our good. (Romans 8:28) We may not always understand the journey God takes us on, but we can always have confidence that the one who loves us the most is also the one and only almighty God, and he promises that, if we trust him and his abiding love, we will never be put to shame.

**WHEN BITTERNESS TAKES ROOT**

**Clip:** Devastated!

**Clip:** Greed

Judge Sam Dorose is respected in his community. He has forged a life that affords him the luxury of sending his daughter, Colette, to a private finishing school back east, plus the ability to provide books for the local school. But, he has come by his wealth at the expense of others, his actions driven by a childhood experience. In the first scene, we see Joe Paxton who is a victim of the Judge's greed. In the second scene, Dorose defends his actions.

**Questions:**

- When Judge Sam Dorose talks with Willie, what reason does he give for legally taking property and assets from his debtors? How do the judge's actions align—or not align—with the scriptures? Read 1 Timothy 6:17-19, Proverbs 28:27 & Psalm 112:5.

- The judge is determined to build his empire and add assets to his portfolio. How do his actions affect Joe Paxton? Is Judge Dorose ultimately accountable for Paxton's decline into drunkenness and misbehavior? Discuss.

- Dorose tells Willie about a childhood experience. What happened to him as a young boy that has contributed to who he is today? What emotions and feelings has he held in his heart that have made him bitter and uncaring? Is he a victim of his childhood, or does he have a choice in how he behaves as an adult? Read Philippians 4:8, Psalm 25:4-5, Isaiah 43:18, & Philippians 3:13-14. Discuss.

**Lesson to Learn:**

The American dream is to live well financially and to attain the ability to provide for ourselves and those we love. These were the same goals that the pioneers in Love's Abiding Joy had for their lives as well. However, just as they do today, setbacks occurred in the households of the Klines, the LaHayes, and the Paxtons.

Joe Paxton experienced financial ruin when the cattle plague, combined with the drought, hit the prairie. Because of debts owed on their homestead, Judge Sam Dorose forced Joe and his family from their land. As Joe's dreams fade and his family is forced to move back east without him, he grows angry because of his loss. Instead of relying on God and turning to the scriptures, he turns to alcohol for relief from his pain. That consolation is short-lived and only fuels his growing rage toward Dorose. In the street scene, Willie sees Joe's grief and brings his own faith into play by reaching out with tenderness and understanding rather than a pistol. Tragedy was averted where death and mayhem could have been the result.

Certainly, Joe Paxton's story could have been different if he had been given an extension on his loan. But, Sam Dorose was greedy and intent on building his empire. His words, “the gap between me and poverty will never be enough,” relate back to his childhood experience when his father failed to provide for the family. Even now, his anger burns toward his father for the poor judgment that caused their hunger and need in the past. He is resentful and unforgiving toward the individual who took his father's property and self-esteem; he mourns the loss of a carefree childhood.

Sam Dorose has chosen to be bitter and inflict the same wounds on others that were inflicted on him. Instead of letting go of the past, as the scriptures tell us to do, he continues to dwell on his memories in order to fuel the fire of his anger. As a result, he has become most like the man he despised from his youth—the person who outwitted his father. It is no surprise that Dorose can't love others, since deep down inside he doesn't love who he has become. What a different legacy the judge could have had if he would follow Christ's teachings to “love one another as I have loved you.” (John 15:12)

The Bible is filled with words like these that give us direction for our life's path. God, in His wisdom, knows that life may not always be “fair.” We are going to experience setbacks, disappointments, and tragedy as we walk on this journey. But, He has given us a guidebook to uplift us and lead us through difficult times. As people of faith, we can choose to rely on God's promises, seek solace in prayer, and follow Jesus Christ's example and commandments for living. When we do, we find peace, our purpose, and abiding joy, no matter what life may bring our way.