Living Joy! Reflection

Rule #8: Serve
By Janet Jones and based on Living Joy: 9 Rules to Help You Rediscover and Live Joy Every Day by Chris Stefanick. Emmaus Road Publishing. 2020. (All quotes and page numbers are from the book unless otherwise noted.)

Quotes to Ponder:
Jesus said: “For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10: 45)

“Why do you … labor for that which does not satisfy?” (Isaiah 55:2)

Jesus…though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave… (Philippians 2: 6-7)

Let’s Get Started:
Do you know how to get from zero JOY to a deep abiding JOY in record time? Perform a random act of kindness for someone. It is that simple. Serve others. Chris says it in the opening line for Rule 8: “To experience true JOY, your heart has to shift from self-centered to other-centered.” (pg. 133) Our lives must be about how I can bless someone else. How can I serve God using the gifts and talents He has given me? Jesus is our example. I have heard it said that looking at Jesus on the cross, you see a JOY-filled man. First, because Jesus was following the will of his Father. That brought him JOY. He was also displaying for the world a self-sacrificing love that would go to any extreme to make right the damage humanity caused because of sin. That brought him JOY. “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15: 13). We are called to follow Jesus’s example and follow the way of the cross. We are also commanded to love our neighbor which can be difficult at times. The beautiful paradox of this rule is that as we lose ourselves in service to others, we also find ourselves. And with that JOY follows.

But dying to self is not easy and here is where our world can really get in the way. Marketing, self-help books, and so-called experts will try to tell us that the latest gadget, the latest skin care product, the latest diet, will bring us happiness. We are constantly bombarded with advertising that is the answer to all our problems. Our world believes that money, power, and possessions is all you need to be us happy. I abhor the car commercial that sings: “You can have it all.” No, we cannot- nor should we want it “all” if “all” is more money, power and possessions. Because in the end these things do not last. Studies show that rich people are not any happier. (pg. 137).

I was in corporate America during my second career. I made a very decent wage working in a computer technology company. But I was not happy. I would say that many of my co-workers were not happy,
either. They put in long hours with little to show for it, except stress. Thankfully, God answered a prayer when I asked Him if this is all He wanted me to do in my life. Events unfolded after being laid off that led me to being here on staff at Ascension. Here I have found my JOY in serving the wonderful people of this parish.

As Chris puts it we need to “check our desires” (pg. 135). The “all” we are looking for, the answer to true JOY, is found only in following Jesus. Sadly, though, many people miss this truth. Chris explains:

“Most people aren’t quiet enough to reflect on what longings are guiding their lives, and if they’re the right longings or not. You need to be different than “most people.” Be aware of your longing, and then let your intellect tell your longing where to go. You need to be aware of your longing and take action to direct it, or in your quest for joy, you’ll end up miserable. Service corrects and directs our desires.” (pg. 139)

Chris shares two powerful stories of service (pg. 140-141). Blessed Chiara Badano, an 18-year-old who was dying of cancer, refused to rest. She continually walked the hospital halls to talk to other patients and offer consolation. When told to stay in bed and rest, she replied, “I’ll have time to rest later.” Blessed Chiara was devoted to serving others. Mother Teresa tells the story of giving a very poor family a bowl of rice. The family set some rice aside and started eating what was left. When encouraged to eat the set aside rice, the family responded we want to share this with our neighbors. They do not have anything either. Even those with very little have something to share! In both cases the people involved could have had “it is all about me” attitude. Instead, they were other-centered which brought them JOY!

I have heard this said over and over from people in the parish who serve others in our various ministries. “I get much more out of this from the people I serve then what I give.” Who can you serve today?

Questions to ponder:

1. Think about a time where you performed a random act of kindness or served someone. What was it like? What did you receive?
2. Jesus washed the feet of his disciples as an example of service. Was there a time that serving someone was difficult?
3. Sometimes we need people to help us. What is your reaction to being served?

How-to’s from Chris (pgs. 144-151):

1. Claim it. Say it out loud - today I will serve.
2. Do not just sit there, do something: serve the poor and/or perform little acts of service.
3. Give money away; be an answer to prayer.
Join me in praying this prayer for JOY:

Heavenly Father, I will praise you, LORD, with all my heart;  
i will declare all your wondrous deeds.  
I will delight and rejoice in you; I will sing hymns to your name, Most High.  
You will show me the path to life, abounding joy in your presence,  
the delights at your right hand forever. I trust in your faithfulness.  
Grant my heart joy in your help, that I may sing of the LORD,  
"How good our God has been to me!"  
Father, help me to remain in your love.  
So that your joy may be in me and my joy may be complete.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.