Living Joy! Reflection

Rule #9: Frame Your Mind with Faith
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:
“Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.” (Colossians 3:2)

“Be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Rom 12:2)

“Rejoice in your hope.” (Romans 12:12)

Let’s Get Started:
It surprised me that this rule was not number one. To fully experience the JOY from the Father, we must reframe our thinking and look at ourselves and the world around us through the lens of faith. Chris explains why Rule 9 comes last:

“For this reason, Rule 9 is the rule for a joyful life that lasts when all others fade. It’s a light when all other lights go out. And when you can’t control the other rules for a joyful life (which you won’t always be able to, especially as you approach your own death someday), it only makes Rule 9 stronger in your heart.” (pg. 168)

As Chris explains, the premise behind the phrase “frame of mind” is not what you are thinking but where you are thinking from. “It’s the headspace wherein your thoughts happen.” (pg. 153) It’s also good to note that when we talk about faith, we are not just talking about how you practice your faith but using your faith to see everything through.

For example, Chris tells the heroic story of a John Simone who he met in Haiti. John was in an accident that paralyzed him from the neck down. The village did not help him because he was a gangster. When missionaries came to his aid, his bedsores were so bad his ribcage and spine were exposed, and he was lying in his own feces. His son fed him the scraps of food he could find. The missionaries treated him, gave him a room, and brought him back into relationship with God. Chris was surprised when he went into John’s room and found the biggest smile. When Chris asked how he keeps his spirits up, John replied, “I think of other things.” Over his bed are a picture of Jesus and Mary. “John was able to see his life through it.” (pg. 160-163)

Can we see our lives through the tremendous love story we live? Is our God the God of fear and rules who is keeping track of our every wrong? Or is he the God of love? Is he the God who loved us and created us? And when we mess up, time and time again, he never stops loving us? He loved us so much He sent His Son into the world to redeem us. We proclaim that by His cross and resurrection, we are set free. Do
we live that? Is that how we look at the world? Is that how I look at my neighbor - with the same eyes of love God has for me?

The powerful thing about looking at the world through the eyes of faith is that we know we are not a cosmic mistake. We were created by God out of His love so that we can love him. While our lives may be hard, not turn out as we expect, and/or we may sin in a multitude of ways, nothing can separate us from the love of God. He loves us for who we are, not what we can do. He welcomes us back no matter what we have done with outstretched arms. He was willing to die for us.

Our lives, then, have a purpose. It’s to grow in relationship with the God who is love and to serve him by loving our neighbor. We have the assurance that our God is not a distant God but one that is with us every step of the way. Bad things will still happen, but we do not face them alone. God walks before us and with us. We also have hope. It’s not a shallow hope that everything will turn out well; it’s a deep hope based on Christ’s resurrection. That gives us the ultimate hope that this life is not it. I have often said, as great as this life can be, if this is all there is, I am greatly disappointed. There is too much injustice and inequality in this world. We are meant to spend eternity with God and all the other saints. That’s why funerals can be a JOY-filled celebration amidst the sorrow. Hope is a close companion of JOY. We are all part of God’s amazing love story. Chris makes this powerful statement:

“Being freed from sin is just a small part of what redemption is all about. A truly redeemed soul is redeemed from everything, redeemed by the joy and the hope of the Gospel. The waves of life might crash down, but we’ve learned to surf. That’s what the light of Christian faith does for us in the here and now. And keeping your mind on the stuff of eternity while you stroll through the valley of the shadow of death isn’t just the rule for when all else fails. It’s also the rule that helps you live out and enjoy the others most fully!” (pg. 169)

The How-to’s for this Rule give practical advice as to how to refocus our minds. Basically, place Jesus at the center of your life, try to grow in knowledge of him, but most importantly, accept his gift of love and allow Him to show you who you are! Everything else will fall into place and JOY will follow.

Questions to ponder:
1. What is your image of God? Judge versus loving? How has that changed over your lifetime?
2. Think of a time where faith has reframed your way of looking at an event or something that has happened in your life.
3. Looking back on your life, can you see it as part of God’s love story? In what way?

How-to’s from Chris (pgs. 170-177):
1. Reject toxic faith. Receive Love! God’s love is a gift, freely given. We cannot earn it. Practice resting in his love for you.
2. Make a decision for Love. Make an act of will to have Jesus be the center of your life:

A Prayer to Receive Jesus into Your Life in a New and Deeper Way

  Lord Jesus, You are the love that I was born to find.
  You are here, offering ME your heart.
  And asking for mine in return.
  You have given me the freedom to say no.
  I use my freedom to say yes.
  I surrender all I am to you.
  I renounce Satan. Sin.
  The spirit of despair.
  And the lie that I am unlovable.
  I forgive others, and I forgive myself of my worse sin.
  And I ask you to forgive me and to forgive those who have hurt me.
  You are Lord of the Universe. Be Lord of my heart.
  I say yes to you.

3. Practice your faith: daily prayer; celebrate the sacraments; be part of a community of Christians; serve the poor; hang holy things on your walls or have spiritual items in your home that remind you of the deep love Jesus has for you!

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.