Living Joy! Reflection – Week 2

Rule #1: Give Thanks!
By Janet Jones
(All quotes and page numbers are from the book unless otherwise noted.)

Four Quotes to Ponder:

Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.
—1 Thessalonians 5:18

“The person who is filled with gratitude toward God, whose life is permeated by this primary attitude of gratitude, is also the only person who is truly awake.” —Dieterich von Hildebrand

“If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough.”
- Meister Eckhart

“If you don’t have gratitude, God is wasting his blessings on you.” (Living Joy, p. 32)

Let’s Get Started:

Gratitude is a powerful gateway to discovering and uncovering JOY! I imagine God smiling when we notice even the tiniest of things, consider it a gift from God, and then say thank you. We are all the recipients of the many blessings God has graced us with. Life itself and each beat of our heart is enough to inspire us to say thank you! Everything we have, and every experience, can be considered a gift from God. Yes – some gifts may be more like a cross, but even amidst our crosses there are blessings. As Chris points out, gratitude: “Makes it possible for you to enjoy the blessings you have.” (pg. 21). And the more we can be grateful and develop an attitude of gratitude, the better physically we feel. Chris explains that gratitude releases oxytocin and dopamine – our natural feel good chemicals in our brain (pg. 21). And if we are filled with gratitude – then bitterness, self-pity, and other negative emotions cannot find room in our hearts.

Having an attitude of gratitude does not come naturally. Chris points out that we have an innate survival mode that kicks in naturally whenever we feel threatened. As he explains, if we did not and the cavemen had stopped to smell the roses, while they were under attack from a wild beast – humanity would not have survived! (pg. 23). It is hard for us to give thanks in ALL circumstances and we tend to dwell on the injustices we suffer more than our blessings. But something to consider that Chris states: “…ingratitude is poison that robs you of the life you were made for.” (p. 22).
Chris gives three powerful examples of folks who looked past their circumstances and were still able to see the beauty of God and be thankful: St. Paul, Anne Frank, and the people of Haiti. (pgs. 24-32). What all three have in common is that they were/are able to find beauty and goodness despite their circumstances and give thanks to God. This takes the grace to accept the reality of the situation, adapt to the current situation, and change our perspective to look beyond ourselves and towards God.

For St. Paul, he was in prison when he wrote his letter to the Philippians: “I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content” (Phil 4:11) and “Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:6–7). Paul adapted his ministry from one of being physically present to writing letters to the various churches. He also provided us powerful Scripture verses to use when we need a “joy boost”.

Anne Frank was locked in an attic with families and friends during the Nazi regime – waiting to be discovered, arrested, and sent to a concentration camp and certain death. Yet her famous quote, “I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are truly good at heart,” lives on. She found beauty in the attic and relationships with those in hiding with her.

The people of Haiti, despite the natural disasters they have experienced and living in abject poverty, refuse to be defeated and thank God for every blessing! Chris states they are the happiest people he knows and are always smiling!

For me, the pandemic has tested my attitude of gratitude. As the world turned inside out and upside down within a few short days, my only sense of surviving this was to hold onto God. I felt I was being invited to look for God’s beauty – to look for God’s blessings – and to even thank Him ahead of time for the gifts that would be revealed throughout this time of trial! Yes, life is very different and everything’s changed, but God’s love has not changed. I opened myself to look in different and new places to discover His beauty. I was not disappointed! While I am not entirely grateful for the pandemic, I am grateful for God’s continued presence and His revealed beauty during this time. Chris’s words ring true: “Gratitude might not change your circumstances, but it does change you. It gives you the capacity to have a gleam in your eye even if your world is going up in flames. (p. 32).

I have these words from St. Paul on a coffee cup: “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Phil 4:8). And when you think of them, give thanks to God and JOY will fill your heart!

Questions to ponder:
1. How much time do you spend throughout your day in gratitude compared to complaining?
2. Consider this: if tomorrow everything was gone that you did not give thanks for today, what would you have left? Who would you have left?
3. How well were you/are you able to adapt to the “prisons” created during the pandemic or any other time of trial, such as illness, sudden tragedy, etc.?
4. Look at the homework – is there one that you might find easier to do? Harder to do?

Homework from Chris (pgs. 34-41):
1. Every morning as your brain and body awake, start counting your blessings. Just start listing stuff and giving thanks as your morning routine begins.
2. Let trials “trigger” your gratitude: “Every time you’re annoyed, I want to challenge you to give thanks and praise to God.”
3. Say “thank you” often throughout your day. Chris shares that the Jewish people have prayers of blessing thanks for everything. The prayer always starts out with “Blessed are you, Lord.” Throughout your day pray: Blessed are you, Lord, for (whatever you want to thank God for.)

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.