Living Joy! Reflection – Week 4

Rule #3: Love Your Self
(All quotes and page numbers are from the book unless otherwise noted.)

Quotes to Ponder:
You shall love your neighbor as yourself. — Mark 12:31

“God loves each of us as if there was only one of us.” — Saint Augustine

“Each of us is more than the worst thing we’ve ever done.” — Bryan Stevenson, Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption

Let’s Get Started:
When my husband, Ed, and I started dating 44 years ago, there was a Billy Joel song that we used to sing to each other – “Just the Way You Are.” It was very hard for me at first to imagine that my boyfriend would find me lovable just the way I was. There were so many qualities that I found very unlovable in myself. And yet, over time, as I learned to trust his love, it gave me the confidence to be who I was created to be.

Well, imagine God singing that song to you! The amazing truth of God, our Father, is that He does love us just the way we are and without any reservations. Just as my husband’s love has transformed me over the years, imagine the transformation that can take place if we let God love us – if we let God show us how lovable we are!

Chris points out that when Jesus commanded us to love our neighbor as ourselves, he was assuming that we already loved ourselves (p 67). Accepting that we are lovable and that we are to love ourselves is essential for finding our JOY. Chris states: “To get good at receiving love and the joy that brings, you have to (1) see yourself as lovable, and then (2) get good at loving yourself in concrete ways every day” (p 68). Let’s break these two concepts open.

#1 “See Yourself as Lovable”: The lie we have all heard at some point in our life is that we are not lovable. Unfortunately, it is a lie that we too easily believe. Our world will tell us that we are too “something” – thin, fat, tall, short, poor, young, old etc. – or we are not enough of “something” – smart, rich, successful, powerful, etc. The biggest lie of all is: “How can God love you? You have done ‘this’ or ‘that’. He certainly could not love a sinner like you.” Chris shares the story of Saint Peter’s initial encounter with Jesus. (Read Luke 5: 1-11.) Peter felt the same way. In his shame, he wanted Jesus to depart. Yet, Jesus loved Peter and saw him for who he was meant to be. Over time, as Jesus continually showed Peter he was lovable, Peter was transformed into the leader of our church. If you have trouble seeing yourself as lovable, let Chris’s words sink in: “You’ve suffered setbacks, but those are pages in your life, not the whole story. You have wounds and weaknesses, but those don’t define you. You have sins, but they don’t spell your name. When God looks at you, he sees something he found worth dying for. You need to see that in yourself too.” (p. 74)
# 2: Get Good at Loving Yourself in Concrete Ways Every Day: Depending on where you are in the cycle of life – you may think that taking time out for yourself and away from the demands of your family, school, job, spouse, housecleaning, etc. is selfish. But as Chris points out, “when you don’t care for yourself, all you leave your loved ones is the most burnt-out version of yourself.” (p. 76) Chris points out how we perceive God: “We think that God is only concerned with “spiritual” things and that our basic needs like rest, cleanliness, and food, or even the little things that inspire us and make us happy, are somehow beneath him.” (p. 76) That is a lie! The mystery of the Incarnation reveals to us a God who experienced ALL we humans experience (except sin). God became man and Jesus, fully human, entered into the very routine and mundaneness of our lives and blessed it. Jesus asked a woman for water. Jesus got tired and slept in the boat – much to the horror of his fearful disciples. Jesus took 5 loaves and 2 fish and fed 5,000 men. Jesus stooped to wash his disciples’ feet. “We have a God who loves to take care of our basic human needs.” (p. 76)

Words cannot express the depth of God’s love for each one of us. We are invited to see ourselves as God sees us and care for ourselves as God cares for us. The gift of overflowing JOY comes as God’s love is poured into us. We are compelled to share this wonderful news with all we meet – especially those who are believing the lie that they are unlovable!

Questions to ponder:
1. What makes you feel rested? Alive? Like you? What hobbies do you enjoy?
2. How hard has it been for you to accept the unconditional love of God?
3. Who do you know that needs to hear that they are loved? How can you share this good news with them?

How-to’s from Chris (pgs. 77-81):
1. Speak truth to yourself! Preach to yourself- put a post-it somewhere you will see it- “I am loved- I am lovable!”
2. Reject your crazy ideals! Be realistic about what you can and cannot do. Let yourself off the hook because you are not made to be super-human. Take time to ask God to reveal to you your own giftedness.
3. Make self-care a priority and treat yourself. **Click here to take a self-care assessment.** What areas of self-care do you practice and what areas can you improve in?

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.