Living Joy! Reflection

Rule #6: Make Friends
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:
- You are my friends. (John 15:14)
- There are friends who bring ruin, but there are true friends more loyal than a brother. (Proverbs 18:24)
- For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. (Matthew 18:20)
- What a friend we have in Jesus! (line from a hymn written by Joseph Medicott Scriven or a contemporary song by Matt Maher)

Let’s Get Started:
I have been blessed to have people throughout my life that I have called friends. Some have been friends just for a season and a few have been friends my whole life. Each person has brought gifts to our relationship that have helped me to grow as a human being. I also feel blessed to have a husband who is also my friend. But perhaps the greatest friend in my life is Jesus. My life would be so empty without the people I have met along the way.

God created us to be social people. Having friendships – good healthy relationships – are crucial for our physical and spiritual well-being. Chris cites a study done by Harvard looking at what factors play into people thriving in their older years. The study found that friendships were the key. “People with good, healthy relationships ended up being happy and healthy into old age.” (pg. 105) Loneliness has a devastating effect. The pandemic has certainly revealed that. Another study Chris cites states: “The increased mortality associated with loneliness is equal to the increased mortality we see with smoking 15 cigarettes a day … [and is] greater than the mortality associated with obesity.” (pg. 106) Chris tells a beautiful story of orphans in Haiti who visited the old people placed in a home to die. As the orphans continued to visit, the old people were literally brought back from death’s door and became alive again.

Another image Chris uses to describe the power of friendship are sequoia trees. These trees are tremendous in size – both width and height. But their roots only go 5 feet deep into the ground. The way a mighty sequoia stays standing is to interlock its roots with the neighboring sequoias. The trees support each other. A similar image is found in Exodus 17: 8-12. The Israelites are engaged in battle and as long as Moses held his arms up holding the staff of God, the Israelites would win. But when he let down his arms, the Israelites would start to lose. Moses grew tired and he had trouble keeping his arms up. Aaron and Hur came and supported him. Throughout our lifetimes, we are called to hold up someone who is tired of fighting the battle, and at other times we must accept the help of our friends to support us in our own battle. That’s what friendships and communities should do for each other.
The How-to’s this week provide more food for thought. I want to delve a little more into How-to #2 - Be Intimate. We all need someone in whom we can confide our deepest fears and thoughts. Someone we trust and someone we know will honor our friendship by not gossiping or ridiculing us. It’s hard to find someone like that. We can all get too caught up in our own head and start to think we must be the only person in the galaxy that thinks this or that. So many times, I have shared this thought with a trusted friend only to find out they have that thought, too!

Friends and community are essential for us to grow in faith. Chris encourages us to find a group of friends that can gather once a month and not just talk about superficial stuff but delve deeper into the spiritual life. He suggests these questions: “What is God doing in your life?” Or maybe the 1, 2, 3 of: “What are you grateful for? What are you struggling with? And how do you want to grow?” (p. 111) Even if you just find one friend to gather with on a routine basis and have a conversation about faith, Jesus is present. He promised! (Matthew 18: 20). If you cannot think of anyone, then do as Rule 6 invites us and go make a friend!

Questions to ponder:
1. Think about someone in your life that you consider a close friend. What gifts do they have that you are most thankful for?
2. Who has supported you during a time of battle? Have you been able to support someone during their battle?
3. How did you experience loneliness during the pandemic? What did you do to help alleviate the loneliness?

How-to’s from Chris (pgs.108-114):
1. **Put in the hard time:** Friendships are relationships and therefore require some effort. Be intentional about finding time to spend with a friend.
2. **Be Intimate:** See the paragraph above. In addition, do not be afraid to tell your friends you love them.
3. **Be merciful and let things go easily:** “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive others”. Loving people and having relationships are hard because everyone has flaws. Everyone can be annoying. Learn to be merciful and let go of other’s imperfections.

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.