Living Joy! Reflection

Jesus is the Journey

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:

I am the way. — John 14:6

We are writing this that our joy may be complete. – 1 John 1: 4

"All the way to heaven is heaven, because Jesus said, 'I am the way.'" — Catherine of Siena

Let's Get Started:

I have many questions and very few answers, but the one answer I know is Jesus. Ultimately, He is the answer to every question that is worth asking. Jesus is the journey because He is the way!

As we conclude Chris Stefanick's Living Joy and the 9 Rules, it's vital to remember that Jesus is the journey. Because as they say at every graduation ceremony… "this is not the end; it's just the beginning." In this concluding chapter, Chris states, "These rules are about something greater than self-help: God's help. Following these rules merely prepares the way for he who IS joy." (pg. 182) And the "he who IS JOY" is Jesus! Chris goes on to say: "You can't have fullness of joy without him, because you can't have joy without love, and there is no love that compares with what we find in the God who is love and made us for himself." (pg. 183) When we place Jesus at the center of our lives and in the center of these rules, his presence puts everything into balance, and JOY follows because Jesus is JOY.

I'll be honest. At times, I struggle to find JOY. Perhaps I am still looking for that happy feeling when everything is going right instead of deep abiding JOY that only comes from God. The challenge is to find JOY when life is not going right, when perhaps we do not feel the presence of God. Maybe we feel He is asleep in the boat or out to lunch or is not home. Perhaps I overthink everything! My heart usually has a hard time keeping up with what my brain tells me. This is where I lean back on the last chapter and frame my mind with faith. We have the promise from scripture that Jesus is with us always (Matthew 28:20). We have the faith (from John 6 and the Last Supper accounts) that Jesus is fully present in the Eucharist. We have the faith that Jesus is present in our neighbor. A friend of Chris's died, and Chris quotes the priest at the funeral: "Joy isn't the absence of pain. It's the presence of Jesus." (pg. 183) Seek and believe in the presence of Jesus in all situations.

Perhaps, too, I take life a little too seriously. In one section, Chris invites us to think of something mighty: God's mirth (pg. 180). Chris quotes CK Chesterton, who felt that Jesus was holding back his true nature.
CK Chesterton states: "There was some one thing that was too great for God to show us when He walked upon our earth; and I have sometimes fancied that it was His mirth." (pg. 181) Chris gives us this powerful image: "I love to think of the deeply satisfied, gut-level laugh that welled up from the heart of love 13.8 billion years ago and produced a universe—and you." (pg. 182) Does a mirthful God fit into our image of God? A mirthful image of God that brings us JOY? Can we turn to the God of mirth when our life seems to be falling apart? Just thinking about God smiling makes me smile!

As we wrap this adventure up, I want to share with you a list from scripture that Chris provides. Jesus is our example. He lived these 9 rules!

"Jesus:

- Gave thanks (Luke 22:19)
- Retreated to the silence (Luke 5:16)
- Loved himself, because we know he always practiced what he preached we should do (Matt 22:39)
- Had fun. He walked on water alone at night (John 6:19 … don't tell me that wasn't fun!) and celebrated and feasted with people (Matt 11:19; John 2:1–12)
- Was physically active. He walked thousands of miles during his public ministry, with each round trip from Galilee to Jerusalem alone—and he made many—being over 150 miles
- Had friends (John 15:15)
- Rested (Mark 6:31)
- Served (John 13:5)
- And always kept his eyes on the Father (Luke 23:46)

His path was one of joy. And when we walk with him, we discover living joy, even when our way is the cross." (pg. 184)

Thank you for going on this adventure to have a more JOY-filled life! I will pray for you and hope that you will pray for me!

**Questions to ponder:**

1. Of the 9 rules, which is the easiest to follow? Which is the most challenging?
   - Rule #1: Give Thanks
   - Rule #2: Practice Silence
   - Rule #3: Love Yourself
   - Rule #4: Have Fun
   - Rule #5: Engage Your Body in Battle for Joy
   - Rule #6: Make Friends
   - Rule #7: Rest
   - Rule #8: Serve
   - Rule #9: Reframe Your Mind with Faith

2. How has this adventure of JOY helped you?
3. Think of one or two things you would like to remember from this adventure. Find a post-it note, write it down, and place it somewhere you will see it.

How-to's from Janet:

1. Be JOY-filled! Make a decision to seek the giver of JOY each day.
2. Continue to unpack the chapters that you found challenging. Reread them. Share with God your difficulties. Concentrate on putting Chris's how-to's into action.
3. Pray the scriptures verses from above. Imagine Jesus and the JOY He felt as you read the passages. Imagine Him sharing His JOY with you.
4. Share your JOY with others! Share these messages with someone who needs to hear it.

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.