Sparking Joy

One night while I was exercising, I happened across the Netflix show Tidying Up with Marie Kondo. It looked interesting so I thought, “Why not? Maybe I’ll learn something.” Wow! This show motivated me to begin ‘Tidying Up.’ I started with my clothes. What didn’t fit, didn’t give me joy and wasn’t used anymore I thanked God for, as I set them aside to give them away. A couple months later I took several bags of clothes to Bethany House, a women’s shelter in Martinsburg, WV.

But there was more! I also learned how to neaten up my drawers and closets. Decluttering the kitchen took both my husband, Tom and me because each of us had things we needed to ask ourselves like, “Do I really need 6 tea strainers? Or how many bottle openers are too many?! As we answered these questions, we were again able to thank God that we had so many extras that we could give several away. The newly organized kitchen drawers made cooking and cleaning up so much easier!

What started as a way to rid our overstuffed closets and drawers of clothes and stuff that we no longer used or that no longer (or maybe never did) ‘give us joy’, caused me to think about finding joy in life. What brings you joy? There have been times in my life when I felt very little joy. Times when it was easier to blame others for the joylessness I was experiencing in my own life. Maybe you have felt that way too. If we find ourselves being critical, tearing others down or getting angry often, it may be because we are deeply unhappy. How do we say goodbye to this lack of joy and spark joy in our own hearts?

Thankfully, the Bible has much to say about joy. In the Old Testament, Nehemiah 8:10 we are told “the joy of the Lord is our strength.” Hmm, where do we find this ‘joy of the Lord?’ Is that different than our own joy? We find other passages that talk about the Jews going to the Temple with “shouts of joy.” In Psalm 126:2 we read: “Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them."

I have come to understand that we aren’t always able to create our own joy- to find or spark joy in our hearts and lives. The joy we do create is often fleeting. One way I have found joy is to come before God in prayer and humility. When we come before God in Jesus, we have the opportunity to unpack the stuff we carry around inside our hearts, minds, and lives -the people or things we pursue hoping they’ll give us joy instead of God.

A good example of this is when King David forgot about being King and did not follow God’s ways one spring– he left the joy of the Lord and sought joy in adultery and then hired a murder to cover it up. Thankfully God sent the prophet named Nathan to help David see how much harm he had caused others and how he’d grieved God. (To read the full story check out 2 Samuel 11-12.) In response to this mess he’d created, David wrote Psalm 51. Here’s a snippet of his prayer to God: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.”

We may not find ourselves in the extreme place David did, but nonetheless, we may have wandered from the joy we are called to have in God. David realized he couldn’t make this right, even in his own heart. He needed God to forgive him and give him a willing spirit to receive God’s joy. We may find this is true for ourselves as well. The prophet Nathan may not come to us, but thankfully, God’s son, Jesus did come and still comes to us when we call on him, and seek him with all our heart. He will help us sort out ‘our stuff’, letting go of what is hurtful, harmful and joyless and through his love and forgiveness, he’ll help our hearts be ready to receive his joy so that our joy may be complete (John 15:11). Then we may find that we are able to “shout for joy” to the Lord!