



## **DVD DISCUSSION GUIDE**

### **Personal Stories & Bonus Content**

#### **PERSONAL STORIES**

##### **Bob Carolla**

1. Why does it take so long for doctors and therapists to get an accurate diagnosis when it comes to mental illness? Persons often complain about inept diagnoses, but how can friends and families be helpful and supportive as those with symptoms seek help?
2. Did you know that police are often called rather than an ambulance if a psychiatric disturbance is suspected? Why is this? Is that the way it should be? Do you know how it is in your community? Discuss.
3. Some persons enjoy and thank God for the creative side of bipolar disorder, even going so far as to say if they had a choice they would accept being bipolar even with its negative and life-threatening implications, rather than miss out on its creative inspiration. What does it mean to be created in the image of God when it comes to mental illness?

##### **Judy Herbold**

1. At one time Judy wanted to reject a label of schizo-affective disorder for her son because of her mother's life with schizophrenia, yet when he was finally diagnosed she felt relieved to find out that something "really big" was wrong. How can labels be limiting? But how can it be good to name an illness and deal with it? Has anything similar ever happened to you?
2. Some people seek out help and comfort from others when faced with a problem such as the one Judy and her family face. Others withdraw and want to be alone to sort things out. Which style are you? Why? Are you different from your spouse?
3. How can telling your story to others be helpful?

##### **Amber Joplin**

1. Have you ever known someone with paranoia? How does one decide when someone simply has mild paranoid tendencies, or when it becomes something that needs treatment? How does one know when "hard to live with" has become something that has to be addressed?

2. Why do people tend to think that someone with a mental illness is not as intelligent as other people?
3. At what point is it helpful to realize that you can't fix the other person, and that it is advisable to "learn to live with this new situation in a successful way"?
4. Amber had to deal with the difficult reactions of her adolescent daughter to her husband's illness. Share stories of how you or others have dealt with the responses of children/teens to tragedy, illness, disabilities, or death.
5. Amber's church and others came through for her in very supportive ways. How can you make sure the same kind of response happens in your congregation?

### **Lyn Legere**

1. Do you know or have you known anyone who "self-medicates" for depression or other mental illness? What are the dangers? What are the advantages?
2. Lyn talks about the importance of a therapist who believed in her. When has someone demonstrated belief in you and what did it mean to you?
3. Lyn talks about getting to the place of forgiving her mother and accepting her in spite of the poor choices she made in life. How can forgiveness contribute to good emotional health? Other examples?
4. How can you avoid judging people on appearances?
5. What does Lyn's story say to you?

### **Johnny Limbaugh**

1. How do you weigh the rights of a patient to privacy and the need of a family to be given information about their loved one? Which is more important?
2. Should policies be different for persons with mental illness?
3. How can Johnny's experience be instructional for you—how he felt being surrounded by police cars, versus the more individual approach where he was told everything that was being done to him and why?
4. Have you ever seen someone talking to him or herself in public (and not on a cell phone or other device)? What did you think? Did you judge them or were you fearful? Have your views towards those with mental illness changed as a result of education on these issues?

### **Debbie Miller**

1. For those of us who grew up in families that attended religious services two or more times a week, some of Debbie's compulsions and guilt about religion sound familiar. Discuss how much perceptions of God are shaped by family and early church experiences, and how much they are shaped by our own personality, illness or idiosyncrasies.

2. Did you ever feel like you were supposed to respond to an altar call, or give a testimony, or some other religious act? How did you respond? How did you feel? What is the difference between those experiences and genuine faith-changing movements of God in your life?
3. How does the experience of growing up overseas or in a missionary family impact kids? How can it be a good experience? How can it be a bad or difficult experience? How can you be tuned into the experiences of families in your own congregation with this background?
4. Have you ever felt, as a child or adult, that you just did not want to live?

## BONUS CONTENT

### How congregations can help

1. How can your congregation do a better job of meeting the needs of those with mental illness?
2. Most pastors have only had a few classes to deal with mental illness. Is there anyone in your church who is fully trained? How can persons tap professionals in the congregation as resources without taking advantage of getting “therapy” without an appointment?
3. In this segment David says, “Sometimes religious leaders believe that people who are suffering from a mental disorder just don’t have strong enough faith.” Have you ever heard this expressed? Do you agree? Disagree? How is it unhelpful?
4. Susan shared that her family was unable to get the support and care they needed through her illness, mainly because she felt she had to keep it quiet. How can we create a congregational environment where there is no need to keep silent about mental illness?
5. Susan says: “It is in relationships and persons that we experience the presence of God, and the ministry of presence to another person is the biggest gift that can be given.” Share experiences of this truth.
6. Are there any ways your congregation can develop a program or plan for responding to persons with mental illness? Consider planning an ongoing support group, reach out ministry (visiting or phoning those who are ill), or educational activity regarding mental illness for others in your congregation.

### Husband-wife relationships

1. Have the group name some of the steps mentioned in the DVD of relating to a spouse with deep depression. Which items would be difficult for you? Which would come more naturally?
2. How can spouses plan for understanding in a time of mental illness, such as agreeing up front to seek counseling together? How could this potential issue be addressed in marriage counseling, at the time of making a living will, or other time?

3. How do spouses walk the fine line of the well one helping to care for the ill one without doing too much and engendering an unhealthy dependency?
4. How would you feel having a disagreement with your spouse on an important issue, fearing that it could cause them to become depressed again?
5. Stan says at some point the recovery or a next step was up to Susan. At what point is it helpful to allow the person with depression to initiate the next step? When is it not caring, and when is it the best possible response?
6. How can you just be present with someone in their pain without necessarily trying to fix them or it? Is that hard for you? How can you learn the ministry of presence?
7. How can a spouse work and still care for a person with a mental illness?
8. Stan stresses how difficult the long journey is, that one must be persistent, and to keep trying over and over. What keeps you going through difficult places in your marriage, no matter what the problems are?

### **Stress and self-care**

1. How do you manage stress? What are tips that work for you?
2. Do you have people who tell you when you seem stressed, or who you can go to and ask for feedback on how you are coming across?
3. Have you noticed any links between stress and any particular kinds of pain (headache, back ache, shoulders, etc.)? How do you deal with physical pain (besides taking a pill)?
4. How is a comprehensive approach to health beneficial? How can you help your doctors look at your emotional, spiritual and mental health as well as your physical? Whose responsibility is that?
5. How do world events or community events contribute to your own stress? Does it bother you? Should it? How about church conflict?
6. Does your job, lifestyle or chosen career contribute to your stress?
7. How can you help your pastor watch that he or she has downtime?

### **Support of Family and Friends**

1. Have you ever sent a card or casserole for a person dealing with mental illness?
2. How does struggling in silence make an illness worse?
3. What do we fear about a person with mental illness?
4. Ray says that "One of the catalysts of my recovery was when my family was educated and it was explained to them and they realized it wasn't their fault." How can you help this to happen for families who are suffering?

5. Susan says many wanted to “get me better right away.” However, a pastoral counselor “... was vulnerable enough himself to enter into my dark place and to be there with me. And it was his faith that I was a child of God, even in the midst of all that I was going through that was one of the sustaining factors that helped me come back around to a point of healing and wholeness.” How can trusting God even amid doubts and anger be life transforming?

### **History of Treatment**

1. What was new to you in the documentary or this segment about the history of treatment with mental illness? What have you learned?
2. It has been said it is a miracle that anyone got better in the “grim” atmosphere of mental hospitals in the first half of the 1900s. How does our current fractured mental health care system contribute to more illness? Are there any signs of hope you would point to in the system(s)?
3. Several of the experts pointed to the tradition of care for the mentally ill being a need shouldered by the community, from the days of state sponsored mental hospitals, to today’s state and government sponsored aid programs. The current rehabilitation movement puts some responsibility into the hands of those with illness. Is this good? Bad? How can those with mental illness be best cared for?
4. Dr. Joyce Burland talks about some of the early psychotropic medicines that would “drop an elephant.... They were very hard to tolerate. They were Civil War medications. And so people who took those found ways to go off of them.” How are people and society still bearing scars from those early medications?
5. Should a person have a right to not take medication even if everyone else says they should? Who decides?

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