

Kentucky
WMU



JOYFUL SORROW:

BREAKING THROUGH THE DARKNESS OF
MENTAL ILLNESS

BY JULIE BUSSLER

BOOK CLUB

KYWMU.ORG

**WINTER
2026**

ABOUT OUR PICK

JOYFUL SORROW:

*Breaking through the
Darkness of Mental Illness*



In *Joyful Sorrow*, Julie Bussler invites us into her own journey where a mental breakdown took her from being a missionary to a suicidal patient in a Turkish psychiatric hospital. With vulnerability and grace, Julie walks us through how to find help and hope and demonstrates that even in the sorrow of mental illness, joy can coexist.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JULIE BUSSLER

Julie Bussler is a Bible teacher, author, and speaker who is passionate about helping people find hope and joy even in the midst of sorrow. As a mental health advocate, she has authored two books: *Joyful Sorrow: Breaking Through the Darkness of Mental Illness* and *Hopeful Sorrow: Turning To God in Hope When Childhood Wounds Have You Turning Away*. She is also a contributing author to *Lifeway Women's Bible study, Grateful*. Her heart for evangelism led to her serving as the Oklahoma president of *Woman's Missionary Union (WMU)* from 2020-2024. Julie, and her husband, Ryan, have 4 children and have served as missionaries in Canada, Mexico, Germany, and Turkey.





READING SCHEDULE

This is our suggested flow of chapters per book club meeting based on the way we've arranged discussion questions. Feel free to alter the schedule to better suit the needs of your group.

WEEK 01

Chapter 1

WEEK 02

Chapter 2

WEEK 03

Chapters 3-4

WEEK 04

Chapters 5-6

WEEK 05

Chapters 7-8

WEEK 06

Chapters 9-10

WEEK 07

Chapter 11

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Chapter 1

In Chapter one, Julie writes that loneliness was an ongoing trial.

- 1 What has been an ongoing trial for you? What has been an encouragement to you in your suffering? Is there a specific verse that has helped you place your hope in Christ?
- 2 Have you ever felt pressure to have it all together? How has the pursuit of outward perfection kept you from focusing on your inner life? What are some things you could do this week to focus more on your inner life?
- 3 Julie writes, “Shame’s paralysis is no match for the Spirit’s power, but there is definitely a struggle between the flesh and spirit found in all Christians.” (p.9) What are some struggles you’ve experienced between the flesh and the spirit?
- 4 Are you able to admit you need help? Why or why not? What’s one way you can be more intentional to ask for help?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Chapter 2

- 1 “Mental illness is incapable of discrimination.” Have you experienced or known someone who has experienced trauma? How have you worked through the feeling of being abandoned by God?
- 2 How have you heard God’s voice in adversity? What Scripture has encouraged you to persevere in affliction?
- 3 How can you in the community of your church help those who struggle with mental illness? How can you walk in obedience depending on the Lord as your Shepherd?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Chapters 3-4

- 1 In Chapter 3, Julie describes the Awe she felt as she accepted God's sovereignty over every detail of her life, including mental illness and whether it would remain a part of her life. What is something that God has used to remind you of your dependance on Him? How have you seen God's power shown in your weakness?
- 2 Paul's pain (thorn in the flesh) was used by God to prevent pride. Everyone's heart is prone to pride. Julie explains, "Being called to serve the church is a sacred calling, but without the proper perspective that we are clay and God is the potter, the human heart, which is simply prone to pride, can crumble under your God-given ministry which can be devastating." (p.40) What is something you can do to make sure that God gets the glory from the ministry He has entrusted to you?
- 3 God's all -sustaining grace is amazing. Julie writes that our contentment with God's plan for us, will help others to speak of God's all sustaining grace. Take a moment to reflect on or share a story with the group of someone who has relied on God's grace in their suffering.
- 4 Read Romans 13:14 aloud and talk about practical ways to apply this verse today. "You are meant for joy despite your sorrow, and triumph even after trauma." What are some ways you've experienced dual emotions such as joy and sorrow?
- 5 Julie describes a stronghold as a thought pattern that "forms a fortress around the mind... it can be formed by repetitive thinking and/ or a traumatic event.(p 61) Take a moment to discuss how you can recognize and transform faulty thought patterns.
- 6 Trust and obey, these two concepts are linked closely throughout Scripture. Trusting that God is who He says He is and can do what He says He can do requires a response from us of obedience. Julie writes, "Setting your mind on things above is an action that requires obedience." (p63) What are some ways that you have trusted God and set your mind on things above?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Chapters 5-6

- 1 Missionaries and ministers can sometimes get put on a pedestal for their sacrificial service and it can be easy to forget that they struggle and need help and a safe place to process all that they've experienced on the field. In Chapter 5, Julie describes a time shortly after their return to America at a women's conference. It's a reminder that we don't always know what people are walking through or how to help. Some ways we can care for others is to ask good questions, listen well, and be kind. What are some specific things you can do to care well for others and be considerate of the suffering you can't see?
- 2 Take a moment to read Psalm 146:8 and write out some specific ways the Lord has helped you in your suffering.
- 3 "Suffering offers a uniquely beautiful opportunity to look at God and say, 'I don't understand, but I know You do, and I will trust You.'" (p.93) Have you settled in your heart that God loves you? What are some ways you can rehearse this truth each day?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Chapters 7-8

1 Read Colossians 4:2 and list some ways that you can continue to walk in all that the Lord has for you.

2 What stood out to you in Chapters 7 and 8 about Julie's story? How do you relate to the tension she felt as she sought to apply all that she was learning?

3 Is there any way that you are functionally denying God with your thoughts or actions?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Chapters 9-10

- What would it look like for you in this season to do the next right thing?
- 1 Over time, has this helped you form new habits and if so, how have you seen transformation as a result?
 - 2 On page 133 Julie describes how in brokenness we can bear fruit because Jesus is our hope. She writes, “Truly the secret to hope in despair, joy in sorrow, and obedience in brain fog is dwelling with Jesus—staying connected to Him.”
 - 3 What are some verses you call to mind in times of despair? Is there a verse you have found particularly encouraging in this book?
Julie writes about Paul’s hope in Christ. She explains that we can follow Paul’s example- “Paul remembered who he belonged to. Despite everything, he called God good. He believed God would keep His promises.” How can you follow Paul’s example and actively put your hope in Christ?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Chapter 11

- 1 How can you pray for your struggling loved ones? How can you encourage them and pray for them?

SUGGESTED GROUP ACTIVITIES

Want to add interactive activities to your meetings? Check out some of the activities we've come up with below. Feel free to use as few or many as you want to better suit the needs of your group.

Art + Prayer Journals

Offer materials (journals, markers, collage, stickers). Prompt participants to create a two-page spread with:

- Left page: a visual representation of their darkest moment or inner struggle.
- Right page: a symbol of hope, healing, or joy— scripture that they can cling to in hard times

Close with time of prayer

Paint a Word

Give each person a canvas, paper, or even a rock, and have them paint one word that stood out to them from the book—like “hope,” “peace,” “breakthrough,” or “surrender.”

Mental Health "Survival Kit"

Gather items that can go in a mental health “survival kit” for someone.

Example items:

- Chocolate
- A prayer card
- Fuzzy socks
- A stress ball

Place the items in a small bag that can be given to a friend in need.

Coffee & Candle Mini Retreat

Make your book club meeting into a cozy “joy retreat”:

- Everyone brings a candle that smells like comfort to them.
- Pair with a warm drink bar (tea, cocoa, coffee).
- Play calming music
- Have a guided time of prayer



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

This section offers resources your group can use to promote or make better use of your book.

Here's what you'll find:

BOOK REVIEW

This blank worksheet is here to help you and your group make sense of what you're reading. It's meant to spark discussions by encouraging everyone to jot down their thoughts. As a leader, you can also use it to check in on how your members are doing spiritually.

POSTER

This 8.5x11 poster/flyer is designed to help you promote your book in your church/ community. Simply fill in the blank meeting info and they are ready to use!

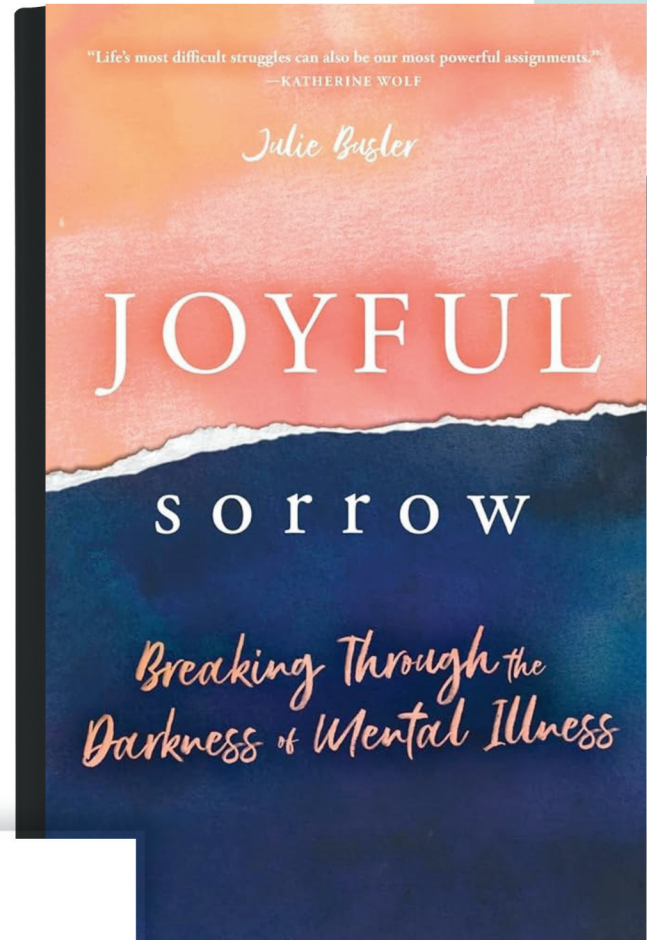
BULLETIN INSERT

Like the poster these half-page "bulletin insert" size sheets are designed to help you promote your book in your church/ community. Once again, Fill in the blank meeting info and they are ready to use!

KentuckyWMU PRESENTS

BOOK CLUB

Join us as we read and discuss
Joyful Sorrow: Breaking Through the Darkness of Mental Illness by Julie Bussler.



DATE



TIME



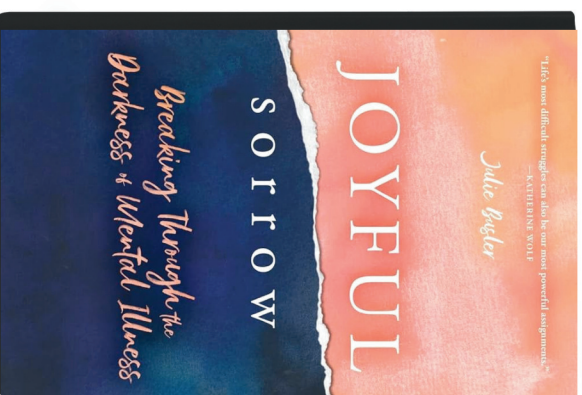
LOCATION

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BOOK REVIEW

BOOK TITLE:

AUTHOR:

SUBJECT:

MY FEELINGS ABOUT THIS BOOK:

- BEST BOOK I'VE EVER READ
- I DID NOT LIKE IT AT ALL
- MUST READ
- READ BETTER ONES
- THIS BOOK MADE ME CRY
- WISH I HADN'T READ THIS
- I COULD NOT FINISH
- SO BORING

BEST MOMENTS:

LEAST FAVORITE MOMENTS:

FAVOURITE QUOTES:

HOW WOULD I RECCOMEND (OR ARGUE AGAINST) THIS BOOK TO A FRIEND:

Yay!

Woo-hoo! You're wrapping up your book club session, or maybe you're still right in the middle of it—either way, we're thrilled! Share your book club adventures with us by tagging us on social media or sending us an email. Your stories could inspire others to start their own book clubs. Keep an eye on our socials for future book club materials, and if there's a book you'd love to see us include, let us know! We're excited to support you every step of the way.



Keep the *Conversation* going

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