

# Stranger in our Midst: The Church and People with Mental Illness

## Study Guide

### Materials Needed

- The DVD Stranger in our Midst: The Church and People with Mental Illness
- Enough photocopies of the study guide for the attendees.
- Three large sheets of paper measuring 4' by 3', or comparable writing surface such as a large dry erase board. For use in a group discussion.
- Markers or writing utensils.

### The Stranger in our Midst: The Church and People with Mental Illness

Find someone in your congregation or community who had first-hand experience with mental illness. It could be someone who has experienced depression or a family member who has had to cope with mental illness. They could be your resource person during this session.

1. The Govigs had difficulty understanding the behavior of their son. It could have been adolescent rebellion, or an alcohol or drug problem. How do you know when to ask for help for a loved one? Where should this help be sought?
2. When the Govigs obtained a diagnosis, they had to deal with the reality that they lost their "perfect" family. When problems like this arise, we first lose our dream for a perfect life and family. How do we cope with this new reality?
3. The Govigs are people of faith, yet God didn't protect them from suffering, nor did he cure John of his mental illness. What does it mean for Christians to suffer? Where is the hope for healing?
4. Dr. Jarrett Richardson talks about mental illness being an illness just like other chronic illnesses. Why is mental illness a matter of embarrassment for families? What kinds of stigmas are associated with mental illness? What could we do to overcome the stigmas?
5. The Govigs are now able to accept John (Jay) as he is, knowing that the person he once was is not here any longer. Where do we receive the capacity to accept our circumstances and accept people in our midst who are hard to love? Could it be that the healing in their family happened when they surrendered to their powerlessness and accepted their son as he is, not as he once was?
6. 6. What could our church do to allow members to admit to mental illness in their family and receive the kind of support they need? What barriers need to be overcome within the congregation?
7. Often those suffering with mental illness are ignored or banished from our view thereby becoming invisible in our society. How might we help to avoid turning a blind eye to the problem around us?
8. It is important to remember that not only is the individual with mental illness suffering, but their families are also in pain. What kind of support could we offer to the mentally ill, and to their families?

**References:**

*Strong at the Broken Places: Persons with Disabilities and the Church*, Stewart Govig,  
Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky

*Souls are Made of Endurance: Surviving Mental Illness in the Family*, Stewart Govig,  
Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky

*Martha, Martha: How Christians Worry*, Elaine Leong, MD, Haworth Press

Produced/Directed by Hal Dragseth, Larry Foreman  
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