

## **God's Presence and a Shattered Mind**

In this session, we will consider how pain and suffering experienced by people diagnosed with severe mental health challenges affects their spirituality, relationship with God, and how their lives affect and shape the local church. How should the church respond? How can we bring hope in the midst of such pain?

**Jelena Sivulka** was born and raised in Serbia, where she got her master's degree in psychology and a master's degree in theology. She became a Christian 30 years ago and a few years later got involved in ministry with her husband Greg, planting churches, distributing humanitarian aid, and partnering with Joni and Friends, serving people with disabilities. Jelena has also worked as a counselor in Serbia's schools, social centers, medical clinics, and she is currently teaching Biblical Counselling at Baptist Theological College in Novi Sad, MENA Region, and doing Ph.D. research on the topic of Mental Illness and Suffering. She is the founder and director of the non-profit organization Hana's Hope. She has been blessed with three children: Benjamin, Sara, and Hana, who has autism.

### **I. Introduction**

#### A. Mental health challenges today

1. In the World
2. In our congregation

#### B. Bible and mental health challenges

1. Biblical case study Nb. 1, Saul
2. Biblical case study Nb. 2, David

#### C. Mental health challenges through the story of Church.

### **II. God and Mental Health Challenges**

#### A. Imago Dei

#### B. Demons vs. Neurotransmitters

C. Evil and Pain

D. Pathos of God

*“Of all the miseries that people experience, sickness is greater than any of them. It is the immediate sword of God.... In poverty I lack things and in banishment I lack the company of other people, but in sickness I lack myself.”* John Donne (1572-1631)

### **III. Different Type of Pain**

A. Depression. Finding God in darkness

B. Psychosis. A strange kind of Silence

C. Mood disorders.

*“Caring for the needs of people living with mental health problems is not an option for the church. Rather it is a primary mark of its identity and faithfulness.”* John Swinton

### **IV. Divine Society, Path to Healing**

A. Psychopathology and Church

B. Society and healing:  
Liturgical healing  
Healing of dignity  
Testimonial healing  
Healing of solidarity

### **V. Lessons from a broken vessel**

- Troubled mind. Story of Amy Simpson
- Disabled God. Story of Nancy L. Eiesland

**Suggested Readings:**

Eiesland, N.L. *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994.

McRay, B.W., M.A. Yarhouse, and R.E. Butman. *Modern Psychopathologies. A Comprehensive Cristian Appraisal*. Second edition. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016.

Simpson, Amy. *Troubled Minds: Mental Illness and the Church's Mission*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2013.

Swinton, J. *Finding Jesus in the Storm*. London, UK: SCM Press, 2020.