

BOOK GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR *THE JOYOUS RECOVERY*

Book discussion groups for *The Joyous Recovery* can take place in person or online. If you'd like to have a book group, you can recruit members from among people in your life, from people who are already involved in PLN, or a combination of the two. And you can facilitate the discussion each week or take turns so that a different person facilitates each week.

Facilitation doesn't need to involve a great deal of work. Discussions can largely be left to take care of themselves. For each chapter, the guide below gives you a recap that you can read aloud. If you choose to, you can say a few sentences about each point in addition to reading it off. Then just put the questions to the group one at a time. Don't worry about getting through all the questions; it doesn't matter whether you do or not; what matters is to have a lively discussion. So if people still have things they want to say about the last question you asked, I don't recommend moving them on to the next question; wait until the conversation has died down.

Similarly, don't even worry about staying on the topic of the chapter that you're discussing. Group conversations sometimes take off in unexpected directions, and I find that these weeks can be some of the most enjoyable. Let the group go where it wants to go.

The only role that I consider crucial for the facilitator is to step in if some people are dominating the conversation in a way that isn't allowing other people much chance to talk. It's great to say things like, "I'd love to hear from some of the folks who haven't had a chance to say much today." If you have repeated problems week after week with one or more people who do way more than their share of the talking, consider asking people to raise their hands before speaking and you call on them; that will give you chances to steer the conversation toward the quieter people.

Start your meetings on time or close to on time, and dive in fairly quickly to talking about the book rather than allowing opening chit-chat to go on for a long time. Wandering off topic later in the meeting can work fine, as I said above; but I find that the group loses energy if that happens before the book discussion has even gotten going.

If you decide to start a group, let us know so that we can announce it for you within the network! And feel free to contact us for support or suggestions if you run into rough spots in running your group.

On PeakLivingNetwork.org you will also find "Exercises to Accompany *The Joyous Recovery*." [LINK] These are questions for individuals or groups to explore who want to do emotional healing work based on the concepts from the book. Most of these questions are very personal, so you wouldn't necessarily want to ask them in a book discussion group. But if at any point you're feeling like you need more questions to ask, take a look at that guide and see if there are ideas there you'd like to bring to your book group.

All page numbers are from the print edition of the book.

CHAPTER 1

Recap:

- 1) Healing is a collective process.
- 2) You're not broken.
- 3) Healing others, healing ourselves, and healing the world all go together, and do so all the time.
- 4) a) Healing happens in *cycles*, not in stages. b) Healing doesn't involve a choice between focusing on healing and focusing on taking action to improve our lives; those two go hand in hand.
- 5) Deep emotional discharge is our most powerful healing path.

Questions:

What stood out for you?

What gave you hope?

What rang true for you?

What did you disagree with?

What fit your own experience? What clashed with your own experience?

What's your understanding of what Lundy means by "structured support"?

CHAPTER 2

Recap:

- 1) Our emotional difficulties are rooted in our injuries, not in our "faults"
- 2) Our injuries are also encoded in our bodies
- 3) Many of our injuries, including most of our deepest ones, are rooted in *oppression*
- 4) Patterns were crucial to our survival at the time they arose, even if they aren't anymore
- 5) "Mental illness" is a very problematic concept
- 6) The concept of *frozen needs*
- 7) Flip-sides to patterns
- 8) Rigidity vs. flexibility

Questions:

What was new?

What resonated for you in the section on what is hard about having things go well?

Any reactions to the concept of a "flip-side" to a pattern?

Anyone have thoughts regarding the apparent contradictions on pg. 43?

Thoughts on frozen needs?

Do you feel like the subject of oppression belongs in a guide to emotional healing, or not?

CHAPTER 3

Recap:

The central elements of emotional healing:

- 1) Remember and understand
- 2) Reforge connectedness – to others, to ourselves, to our bodies, to nature, to everything that exists
- 3) Build from strength
- 4) Express the full truth
- 5) Feel and reflect
- 6) Discharge, discharge, discharge
- 7) Take action
- 8) Feed your soul (meaning get your needs met!)

Questions:

What do you think about these elements of healing? What examples would you add under these categories? Would you add additional categories? (In other words, are their elements you consider essential to emotional healing that don't fit under any of these?)

CHAPTER 4

Recap:

Listening well involves:

- * Paying full, undivided attention
- * Not fixing or advising
- * Not letting our own feelings take over, not switching the focus to ourselves
- * Supporting and accepting feelings
- * Asking questions, questions, questions

Questions:

What makes you feel listened to, and heard? What makes you feel not listened to or heard?

What helps you open up with someone? What makes it hard to open up with someone, or sets off internal warning signals not to open up?

How do you decide whom to open up to? When is it worth the risk and when not?

Are there contexts in your life where you're actually listening too much? Could you share about that?

CHAPTER 5

Recap:

The following things are true about you, whether you remember them or not:

- 1) You have survived experiences that were very nearly unbearable, which required unimaginable strength.
- 2) You have loved people.
- 3) You have fought for what is right.
- 4) You've been smart – there are multiple intelligences.
- 5) You've been brave.
- 6) You've contributed to the world.

Questions:

How would your life change if you acted on the assumption that these things are true about you (whether or not you really believe it)?

Did this chapter stimulate you to think of anything positive about yourself? Could you share that?

Look over the multiple intelligences list together as a group. In what areas do you think your intelligence is the strongest (or has been so far, anyhow)?

Do you resonate with the concept of “invisible resistance”? What can you share about that?

CHAPTER 6

Recap:

- 1) Looking at the blocks to telling the full truth
- 2) Positive truths get held back, not just painful ones – we have passions, loves, and beliefs that you don't allow others to see
- 3) Read the questions aloud from pg. 85

Questions:

- 1) Can you share some responses to the questions from pg. 85?
- 2) What ways other than through words have you used to express your experiences? What expressive channels might you try in the future?

CHAPTER 7

Recap:

- * Taking charge of building the support system you need
- * Avoiding people who tend to take the other person's side when you're expressing a grievance about someone, or who tend to say that you should look at things differently, or who are fond of "playing devil's advocate."
- * The important role played by physical touch and affection in emotional healing
- * The importance of considering and trying a range of strategies for meeting new people
- * Learning to ask for help
- * Nurturing your support system
- * The challenge when two things both feel like they both need to come before the other one -- for example, we can feel like we need to heal emotionally in order to feel confident enough to go out there and build relationships, but we need to have strong relationships in order to heal well

Questions:

What has worked for you as ways to meet people?

What are your feelings and reactions regarding the points about physical touch and affection?

What are your thoughts about learning to ask for help more? What makes that hard to do?

How do you decide which people to pursue and which ones to avoid?

CHAPTER 8

Recap:

- * We have inherent processes for releasing and healing pain. These are our most powerful path to healing pain and recovering our lives.
- * These processes are largely misunderstood and prohibited in society.
- * There are five inherent releases (pgs. 102-103)
- * The key releases have seven characteristics in common (pgs. 114-115)

Questions:

What stories can you share about times when you had a very deep and prolonged cry? About intense laughing fits? About times when you got a case of the shakes?

What did you think about the concept that we discharge pain more deeply when we're simultaneously aware, on some level, of positive things about our current lives? Do examples of this dynamic come to mind?

What messages did you grow up with about crying and the other inherent releases?

CHAPTERS 9-12

Recap:

- * We can do profound healing work in pairs by following a set structure. This process is called “co-counseling.”
- * A co-counseling session follows a set format that is particularly effective.
- * Co-counseling focuses very little on pursuing insight, with most of our energy going into experiencing and expressing our feelings, and viscerally releasing our pain through emotional discharge.
- * Many people find that the healing work they do through co-counseling is deeper than the work they’ve done in professional therapy.
- * Long-term healing requires a commitment to going into our past experiences deeply.
- * The Peak Living Network is a free support system for people who wish to pursue emotional healing. A large proportion of people in PLN learn and practice co-counseling.

Questions:

- * What healing paths have you tried in the past? What ones have made a difference to you?
- * What do you think about the idea of co-counseling? In what ways does it appeal to you? In what ways does it concern you or seem risky?
- * Tell some positive and negative experiences you’ve had with healing or faith communities, or with systems of thought and belief.

CHAPTER 13

Recap:

- * Having power over our lives, and power in the world, is positive and important. People who abuse their power don’t define what power is all about.
- * We have all had experiences where our power was taken from us.
- * Reclaiming our power is a complicated but essential process for our healing.
- * What it means to be a leader
- * How to overcome obstacles to getting our power back

Questions:

Looking at the list on pgs. 182-183, which forms of power are most important to you personally?
 What most holds you back from acting more powerfully in your life?
 In what ways do you act powerfully? How have you done so in the past?
 What would help you reclaim your power now?

CHAPTER 14

Recap:

- * The crucial distinction between responsibility and blame
- * Gathering resource before taking on new goals or responsibilities (“no additional responsibility without additional resource”)
- * The nuts and bolts of goal work
- * How we support each other’s goal work – especially the absence of criticism or impatience with our co-counselors / healing partners
- * The concept of setting and holding a “direction”

Questions:

What are your thoughts on the difference between responsibility and blame?

Could you share a few of your goals and dreams?

What reactions do you have to this chapter’s approach to pursuing goals?

Is it possible to become more goal-oriented without it becoming burdensome? Why or why not?

CHAPTER 15

Recap:

- * Almost everybody struggles with some addictive behaviors, even if they have no issues with substances such as alcohol or drugs.
- * Addiction results from the pursuit of numbness (relief from pain). However, it’s often mislabeled (both by the addicted person and by the society) as being about the pursuit of pleasure. Addictive behaviors bring only very superficial pleasure and are not fulfilling.
- * Addiction creates loops that cause us to feel the need for the addictive behavior even more deeply.
- * Inner emptiness plays a large, and often unrecognized, role in addiction, especially to problematic behaviors regarding food.
- * Overcoming addiction requires a carefully-planned process (pgs. 221-228) including lots of emotional support.

Questions:

Could you share examples of how you’ve been affected or saddened by other people’s addictions?

Have you seen encouraging examples of people overcoming addiction? Can you tell about that?
Have you found any approaches that are helpful to you in getting away from repetitive behaviors that you don’t like?

CHAPTER 16

Recap:

The most powerful and omnipresent dynamics of experiences of abuse include:

- 1) Entrapment
- 2) The abuser convincing the victim(s) that the abuse is their own fault
- 3) The victim struggling to figure out what's real and what isn't, and doubting whether it all is (or was) as bad as it seems. (The answer is yes, it is/was real and that bad.)
- 4) Abuse leads to isolation, and isolation keeps us trapped in abuse. Therefore, overcoming isolation is the number one project.
- 5) With proper support you will escape current abuse and heal from past abuse.

Questions:

Are there elements you would want to add to the five highlighted in the chapter?

Do you feel like sharing about a time when someone was abusing their power over you, or over someone you cared about?

What do you believe is most helpful to people in these situations? And, specifically, what are some ways to overcome isolation, or to help someone else to do so?

Do you believe that abusive people can change? [If you decide to ask this question, be ready for a heated debate – there are strongly conflicting opinions on this subject!]

CHAPTER 17

Recap:

Our core human emotional needs are definable, not mysterious and idiosyncratic. They are (in no particular order): a) To be loved, b) To give love (and have that love treasured), c) Physical affection and closeness, d) Attention, e) Self-expression, f) Play, g) Independence, h) Solitude, i) Creativity, j) Community (including feeling that you contribute in important ways), k) An equal voice, l) Nature and beauty, m) Connection to all that is.

Two additional elements need to be thought of as having a place on this list as well: a) the meeting of our physical needs, since when this chronically doesn't happen we suffer lasting emotional harm; b) the opportunity to heal emotionally, since some degree of emotional injury is inevitable.

Questions:

How do you feel about the assertion that human emotional needs are universal? How does this fit or not fit with your outlook?

Does the above list feel overwhelming? Unrealistic?

Share your thoughts regarding the following challenge: Healing depends on improving our ability to get our needs met, but improving that ability depends on healing.

CHAPTER 18

Recap:

- 1) Oppression is the source of our deepest wounds.
- 2) Oppression teaches and enforces inferiority/superiority.
- 3) A set of common dynamics run through all systems of oppression and exploitation (see list pgs. 263-264 of the print edition)
- 4) Internalized oppression
- 5) Resistance to oppression

Questions:

How do you feel about the assertion that everyone has a personal history of resisting oppression? Is this wishful thinking? Do you believe that you have such a history?

How do you feel about the assertion that personal healing is inseparable from questions of social justice? Share your thoughts about that.

Are these issues too heavy to ask people to think about while they're trying to deal with their personal recovery?

CHAPTER 19

Recap:

- 1) Reclaiming *collective* power, not just personal power
- 2) Ordinary people have paths to significant power in society (and these work much better than voting does in most cases)
- 3) Organizing and leadership
- 4) Finding the best role for yourself

Questions:

Review the list of paths to collective power (pg. 276 in the print edition). Share thoughts and reactions to this list.

Review the list of roles in social change efforts (pgs. 278-279 in the print edition). In what role(s) do you feel like you might best share your gifts?

Can anyone share stories about a time when you felt part of a collective effort to work for justice or change?

CHAPTER 20

Recap:

- 1) Leaning into love
- 2) The inherent nature of human beings
- 3) Balance and fluidity
- 4) Joy

Questions:

What do you believe is the role of love in emotional healing?

How do you feel about the assertion that no one is born bad? Share thoughts that agree or disagree with this view.

What role do you believe is played by balance? What is the role of joy?