

SUMMER BOOK REVIEW

Blessed Youth by Sarah Lund



Dr. Kanessa Doss, C.A.R.E. Design Team

Kanessa Miller Doss, Ph.D. designs curricula and educates leaders, parents, and caregivers who work with K-6 children. Dr. Doss is an Associate Professor of Psychology, a Licensed Professional Counselor, Certified School Psychologist, Certified Counselor, and former Director of Family & Children Ministries at First Christian Church Montgomery, AL. This fall she begins her Master of Divinity at Phillips Theological Seminary in Tulsa, OK.

Mental health is a growing concern for ministry leaders, particularly those who work directly with families and children. *Blessed Youth: Breaking the Silence about Mental Illness with Children and Teens* by Rev. Dr. Sarah Lund, is more than a basic resource book. It is a beautiful medley of personal reflection, storytelling, research, and practical tools. Not only does this book scream for us to break the silence about children and youth when it relates to mental illness, it wants us to bridge the gap between mental health and faith.

As a licensed professional counselor, psychology professor, and children's ministry leader, I appreciate the simple truths of this book. Lund shares her deep and personal experiences with mental illness, yet she highlights the prevalence and impact of mental health for our young people within the context of family, school, and faith communities. Suicide is often a tough subject to discuss, especially within faith communities. However, this book doesn't shy away from this tough topic, but uses it to catapult an argument for changing our perspectives by highlighting God's unconditional love in all things, the importance of being wholly present for our children and teens, and sowing seeds of hope with actions.

Blessed Youth challenges my thinking as a professional, but also as a mother of three children. Parenting is definitely my most rewarding, and perhaps, most difficult on-the-job training that I've ever faced. There is no guidebook to direct parents with the necessary skills to foster mental wellness for themselves or their children, nor the appropriate actions for supporting their blessed children living with mental illness.

Key Ministry Takeaways:

- Each of us can make a difference for blessed children and youth. We all have a role to play in breaking the silence about mental illness to foster mental wellness.
- Faith communities can share messages of love in action and words. This can be achieved by providing safe blessed spaces through building relationships, offering unconditional love, supporting diversity and mentorship initiatives, creating spiritual support groups, promoting mental health education and advocacy, and giving reasons for hope.

Throughout this book, we are challenged to destigmatize mental illness with a call to action. From young people themselves to the ecosystems of families, schools, and faith communities, there are tangible actions presented to navigate a spirit of hope and foster positive futures for all God's children, including young people living with mental illness and their loved ones. I encourage every faith leader, educator, parent, mental health professional, and advocate to read and implement suggestions in this book.

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Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope by bell hooks



Rev. Dr. Miseon Choi, C.A.R.E. Design Team

Miseon Choi, Ph.D. is an ordained pastor in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). She holds a Ph.D. in Practical Theology with a focus on Spiritual Formation and Religious Education from Claremont School of Theology. Rev. Dr. Choi leads youth ministry at First Christian Burbank and Saegil Christian Church while striving to create a strong bridge between theology and action across various contexts.



In her book, *Teaching Community*, bell hooks reminds us that our position can shape not only what we do, but also how we think and speak. As we grow more experienced in teaching, it can become easy to assume that our perspective is the norm. Without realizing it, we may begin to use the language of privilege—whether shaped by race, culture, education, or social status—and treat it as if it were universal. The following passage reminded me that one of the greatest gifts of teaching is remaining open to being taught by our learners:

"As our locations change, our dialogue also changes. I worry that you as an administrator will be sucked more and more into a conventional hierarchy that will change your language and cause you to speak from the very locations of privilege, race, and gender that you have so consistently critiqued."

Some of the most meaningful lessons I have learned have come from the honest questions, unexpected insights, and lived experiences of learners. Their voices have often challenged my assumptions and helped me see God's work in ways I had overlooked. Perhaps faithful teaching begins not with having all the answers, but with the humility to keep listening and learning together. This book brought forward that educators do far more than teach information—they also shape students' understanding of whose voices matter and whose stories are worth hearing. It made me wonder how often I have accepted the absence of certain voices without even noticing it. When the experiences of marginalized people are left out of our teaching, students may quietly learn that those stories are less valuable or less important.

bell hooks writes, "As a girl I had initially believed white teachers who told me we did not read black authors because they had not written any books or any good books." Perhaps one of the ongoing invitations of religious education is to keep asking whose perspectives are present, whose are missing, and what those silences might be teaching. I find myself believing that truly inclusive education is not simply about adding more diverse voices to the curriculum, but about creating spaces where every learner can recognize both their own dignity and the dignity of others. hooks said, "Education is about healing and wholeness. It is about empowerment, liberation, transcendence, about renewing the vitality of life. It is about finding and claiming ourselves and our place in the world."

Takeaway 1: Teach for Transformation that Leads to Justice

Education is more than the transfer of information. At its best, it nurtures the growth of the whole person—helping learners discover their God-given dignity, cultivate compassion, seek justice, and find their place in God's story.

Takeaway 2: Learn with Humility and Listen Deeply

Remain open to the voices and experiences of your learners. As we listen with humility, we may begin to notice assumptions we have long taken for granted—including the language we use and the perspectives we consider "normal."