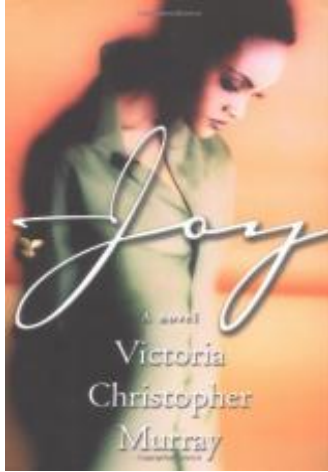


Joy: A Novel

by Victoria Christopher Murray



About the Book

Anya Mitchell has it all: a successful L.A. financial services company, a loving fiancé, and an unshakable trust in God - until she is brutally attacked in her office by a stalker. Anya's faith and her fiancé help her deal with the horror, but soon she is faced with a heartbreaking dilemma and must decide how far she is willing to go to have a future clear of this tragedy with the man she loves.

Discussion Guide

Anya

1. David, and others, initially found Anya to be a paradox as she was a successful Christian businesswoman. Why do some people believe that Christianity means a life of mediocrity or even paucity with regard to material successes? Read Deuteronomy 29:9; Jeremiah 29:11; 1 Chronicles 4:9-10. Think of (you may use your Bibles!) at least three biblical examples of righteous persons who also were rich in earthly things. How can Christians who are successful in temporal endeavors use their achievements as a testimony of what it means to be a Christian?
2. Should Anya's hesitance to set a wedding date have been a clue to her that Braxton - even though he was a Christian; may not have been God's best for her? Read Psalm 86:11; Proverbs 2:7-8. Was she ever in danger of compromising her faith in order to stay in a relationship with Braxton? Read 2 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 5:6.
3. What should have tipped Anya off that she and Braxton might not be equally yoked regarding their spiritual growth in the Lord? What does God's Word say about spiritual compatibility? Read 2 Corinthians 6:14. How might their relationship have been used for a greater purpose? Read Genesis 50:20; Judges 14:3-4.
4. Braxton and Anya had been sexually active earlier in their relationship and in the heat of passion convinced

themselves that it was justified because they loved each other. What are some ways that Christians can work to avoid the trap of premarital sex and avoid such deceptive thinking? Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 2 Corinthians 7:1. Discuss what it means to be in a "compromising position" and discuss the wisdom of Proverbs 6:27.

5. Anya lied to Braxton in order to avoid him. Why do people, even Christians, sometimes lie to avoid unpleasant situations? What does God's Word reveal about truth and honesty? Read Psalm 15:2; Psalm 43:3; Proverbs 24:26.

6. Anya's faith remained constant, even after her attack, yet she wondered why God allowed the assault to happen to her. How can believers find consolation through difficult situations and turn it around to help build their faith and trust in God? Read Exodus 5:22 ; 1 Kings 17:18-22; Psalm 10; Mark 15:34.

7. Immediately after her attack, could Anya have been using her faith as a means of avoiding the painful reality of what happened to her. Or was her faith simply so strong that it did not affect her as many would have expected? Read Genesis 25:22; Why do some Christians fail to understand that God can use trained professionals to help His people and that counseling is not the antithesis of faith? Exodus 28:3; 1 Chronicles 25:7; 2 Chronicles 2:7 (NIV); Proverbs 22:29; Isaiah 6:8.

8. Do you think that most Christian women would have made a similar choice as Anya - even if they risked losing the love of their life? How can God's Word encourage us to make such difficult choices? Read Psalm 9:10; Psalm 125:1.

9. By the end of the book, Anya's life had changed drastically, yet her faith in God remained constant. How can we use circumstances, both good and bad, to affect positive change in our lives and help our faith to grow? Read Genesis 45:4-5; Psalm 34:17; Isaiah 12:2.

Braxton

1. Despite the fact that Braxton was successful in his own career, he was intimidated by Anya's success. How can godly men be confident with their mate's successes and support her efforts instead of discouraging her? Read 1 Samuel 1:22-23; Ruth 2:10-16; Psalm 40:4.

2. Think about some of Braxton's actions, (some of which on the surface looked good! That boat ride was the bomb!) that demonstrated his desire to manipulate people and circumstances - like when he hired the private yacht to seduce Anya or wanting her to be a stay-at-home mom so he could attempt to win custody of his son. How does such manipulative behavior reveal immature faith and a believer's lack of trust in God? Read Proverbs 14:8; 1 Corinthians 3:3; 2 Corinthians 4:2; 1 John 1:6.

3. How did Braxton's actions hint that his love for Anya was conditional, based on her willingness to do what pleased him? Why must Christians be willing to extend unconditional love in their relationships? Read John 13:34-35; Romans 12:10; Romans 13:10.

4. Why did Braxton interpret Anya's choice as wrong? Proverbs 16:3; Proverbs 21:2.

5. Braxton thought he could find happiness by marrying a woman who would do what he wanted. How do people cut their blessings short by refusing to leave comfort zones and follow God's way rather than their own? Read Psalm 37:5-6;

Proverbs 3:5.

Sasha

1. What might have been some things that contributed to Sasha's worldly attitude toward men and her disinterest in God? Read John 4:7-19.

2. How did God use Anya to show Sasha the kind of life that is available to Christians? How can believers remember that our lives are living testimonies to those who do not know Christ? Read 1 Corinthians 10:32; 1 Peter 2:5.

3. Sasha found Anya refreshingly different from other Christians she had encountered. How can believers strive to be an inspiration rather than a "turn-off" to unbelievers? Read Matthew 23:23-28. What can believers do to make sure they live God's Word so that it is understood as more than just a collection of rules that people must follow? Read John 3:16; John 9:25.

4. Why did Sasha choose to ignore the warning signs about Hunter Blaine? What are some reasons why people ignore their inner signals and choose to follow their earthly desires? Read Ecclesiastes 4:13; Isaiah 8:11.

5. Sasha's attempt at a relationship with God began with her wanting God to get Hunter Blaine to fall in love with her. Were her efforts an attempt to bargain with God? How could her attraction to Hunter draw her closer to God? Read Psalm 51:10; Matthew 6:8-13; Hebrews 5:12.

6. Sasha was a beautiful woman who had the potential to be anything she wanted, yet her self-esteem was extremely low. Among other things, she believed she had to settle for a "sex only" relationship with Hunter. How does Satan attack our self-esteem to make us feel we are unworthy of the abundant life that comes from obedience to God and His Word which in turn puts us in position to receive His blessings? Read Luke 7:38-44; 1 Peter 3:3-4; James 4:8.

David

1. Initially, David was held in bondage by secrets in his past. How does Satan use secrets and deception to keep people from reaching their fullest potential? Read Genesis 3:1-6; Isaiah 43:18-19; Luke 4:1-13.

2. Through his association with Anya, David came to accept Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior and resolve past secrets that were dominating his life. How can believers resolve to allow God to use them to reach others and help them find the way to Him? Read 2 Corinthians 5:20; 2 Corinthians 11:3.

Pastor Ford

1. In a sermon, Pastor Ford admonished her parishioners to "practice the presence of God." How can living in constant awareness of God's presence help believers to abstain from sin? Read Psalms 143:8; 1 Timothy 5:22; 2 Timothy 2:22.

2. Pastor Ford explained to Anya that as she grew in the Lord, she no longer experienced being angry with Him. Is anger at God a sign of spiritual immaturity? How can believers learn to allow God's will to manifest without anger? Read

Psalm 40:8; Psalm 143:10; Matthew 6:10; Matthew 26:42; Hebrews 10:9.

Author Bio

Victoria Christopher Murray is a *New York Times* bestselling author of more than 30 novels, including *THE PERSONAL LIBRARIAN*, a "Good Morning America" Book Club pick, and *THE FIRST LADIES*, Target's 2023 Book of the Year, both of which she coauthored with Marie Benedict. She is a NAACP Image Award Winner for Outstanding Literary Work for her novel, *STAND YOUR GROUND*, which also was a *Library Journal* Best Book of the Year. She holds an MBA from the NYU Stern School of Business.

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