



FAITH,  
HOPE  
AND LOVE

A THREEFOLD RESPONSE TO  
13 REASONS WHY

By Lucas V. Woodford





Copyright © 2017 The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod  
1333 S. Kirkwood Road  
St. Louis, MO 63122-7295  
888-THE LCMS  
*lcms.org/life*

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE .....	1
INTRODUCTION .....	2
<i>A Word from Hannah</i>	
<i>A Word of Encouragement</i>	
<i>Relating to 13 Reasons Why</i>	
CHAPTER 1: BAPTISMAL IDENTITY: LIVING IN FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE .....	5
<i>Baptismal Identity</i>	
<i>Faith, Hope and Love</i>	
CHAPTER 2: WALK BY FAITH.....	7
<i>A Word from Hannah</i>	
<i>The Father of All Lies</i>	
<i>When Faith is Absent</i>	
<i>Faith, Hope and Love</i>	
CHAPTER 3: LIVE IN HOPE .....	11
<i>A Word from Hannah</i>	
<i>Hope During Affliction</i>	
CHAPTER 4: SUICIDE.....	13
<i>Suicide in 13 Reasons Why</i>	
<i>The Selfish Side of Suicide</i>	
<i>The Bible and Suicide</i>	
<i>Appendix</i>	
<i>Sermon from the Funeral of a Suicide</i>	
<i>Resources on Suicide</i>	
CHAPTER 5: REST IN LOVE .....	18
<i>A Word from Hannah</i>	
<i>The Love of God</i>	
<i>Love is More than Sex</i>	
<i>True Love</i>	
CONCLUSION: THE FINAL WORD .....	21
<i>Living the Baptismal Life: Law and Gospel</i>	
<i>Spiritual Help for Hannah</i>	
<i>Faith, Hope and Love: A Threefold Response</i>	
REFLECTION QUESTIONS.....	23

# FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE:

## A Threefold Response to *13 Reasons Why*

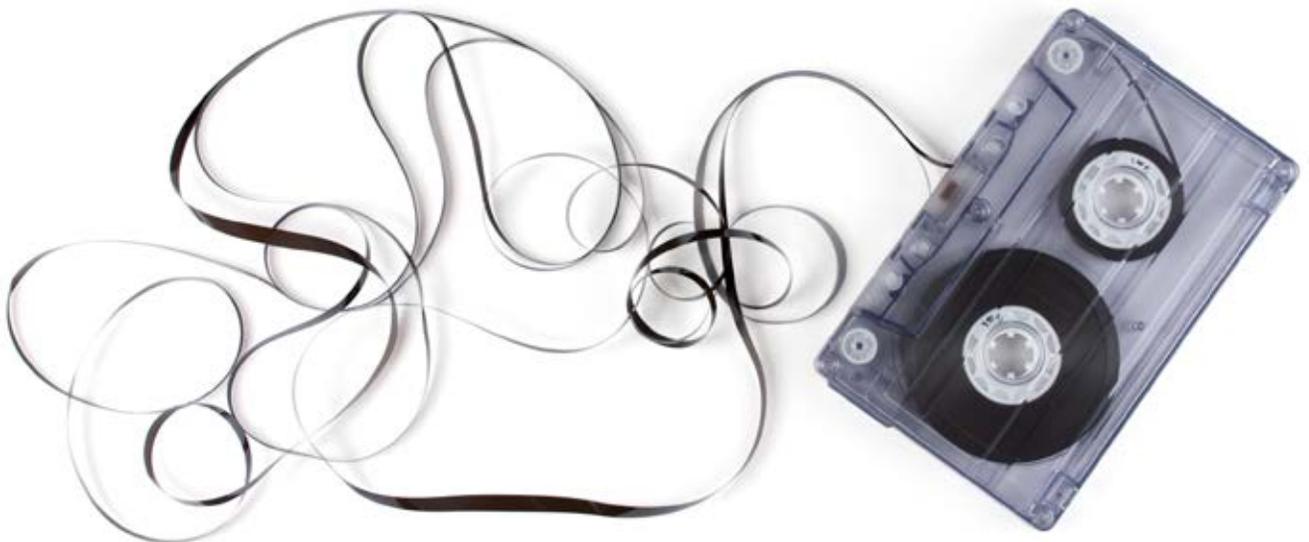
So now faith, hope and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love (1 COR. 13:13).

### PREFACE

Netflix has brought a new era to TV watching. Whole series of TV shows are made and released at once. If done well, they hook viewers and keep them watching one show after the next, binge watching whole seasons in one sitting, hours on end. The recent release of *13 Reasons Why*, based on the best-selling book by Jay Asher, *Thirteen Reasons Why*, has created buzz among teenage and college-age kids for its portrayal of high-school life. But it's also created a buzz among parents and mental health professionals for its over-the-top content and graphic portrayal of suicide.

The show's plot centers on the question why teenager Hannah Baker committed suicide. In addition to suicide,

the series depicts numerous mature themes. Christians are asking questions and wondering how to respond to the issues raised in the series. This response takes a closer look at those issues and how Christians can confidently respond. In particular, this response will explore how the Christian's baptismal identity provides a robust treasure trove of spiritual tools, namely the classic divine virtues of faith, hope and love, which can bring a clear answer to the disturbing emotions and difficult issues raised by this series. This response explores things from the perspective of the orthodox biblical theology of a confessional Lutheran (Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod) approach.



# INTRODUCTION

## A WORD FROM HANNAH

"Hey, it's HANNAH—HANNAH BAKER. Don't adjust your, you know, whatever device you're hearing this on. It's me. Live and in stereo. No return engagements. No encore. And this time absolutely no requests. Get a snack, settle in, because I'm about to tell you the story of my life. More specifically, why my life ended. And if you're listening to this tape, you're one of the reasons why."

Thus opens the Netflix TV series *13 Reasons Why*. It's a series about a high-school girl who commits suicide and leaves behind cassette tapes of 13 reasons why she did it. Such a beginning immediately hooks the audience with intrigue and curiosity. Why would this pleasant-sounding teenage girl want to kill herself? Especially curious for viewers is her use of old cassette tapes. We find out she intentionally uses them because, "it's not supposed to be easy" to listen to this. Hannah wants each recipient to listen in a slow methodical manner, so they can experience all the guilt and pain from learning the ways they contributed to her suicide.

As you can imagine, viewers are immediately sucked into the show. Tremendous emotions are instantly evoked (i.e. sadness, pity, compassion, curiosity, guilt, fear, anger). The viewers are hit with an immediate desire to find out everything that contributed to Hannah's tragic decision. And so, a hit show is born. Its creators take us on an intense journey of 13 episodes that portray all the events that led up to Hannah's decision to end her life.

Each tape has two sides, each side dedicated to one person and his or her apparent contributions to Hannah's suicide. Viewers watch how an otherwise normal and mentally healthy teenage girl goes through a series of difficult and traumatic high-school experiences. These include gossip and slander, betrayal by friends, social media bullying, public humiliation, being physically groped, and sexual curiosity. This is all depicted as Hannah's parents struggle to keep their business afloat. At one point, Hannah adds to her troubles by accidentally losing a \$700 bank deposit her parents trusted her to make for them.

In addition to these trials, Hannah endures tragic and violent events, including witnessing the rape of a friend, a classmate's fatal car accident, which she could have potentially prevented, and suffering a rape herself. Finally, she loses all hope after her inept school counselor overlooks her cry for help and fails to give her the assistance she needs. This puts her over the edge. Hannah commits suicide by slitting

her wrists. The viewer is thrust into an emotionally raw and utterly graphic suicide scene shown as a disturbing part of the final episode. (Students should understand most school counselors are very capable and would not have acted as Mr. Porter. Many are outraged by how the counselor was portrayed by the show.)

Part of the gut-wrenching scene includes the grief of her parents who are utterly distraught when they find her dead in the bathtub. The series concludes offering no hope, no advice on what to do, and no direction to turn. Even worse, viewers are left to wonder what will happen to another student (one of the 13 reasons) who was shot in the head (likely self-inflicted), and another who is shown with a large suitcase full of guns and ammunition.

All 13 episodes were released at once, which leads to binge watching the show. This format has served to amplify and intensify the disturbing emotional impact of the show. The series carries a *TV Mature* rating for the intense and disturbing subject matter. For those unsure of this official designation, this rating is equivalent to an R rating for movies. Any viewers of this series should be advised that it is very explicit and graphic in its portrayal of all the above events. It also uses intense extreme profanity and vulgar language. Alcohol and drug use are also portrayed as a regular and active part of high-school life. The series normalizes and portrays teenage sexual acts, as well as teenage homosexual relationships. Violence is vividly depicted, and the death and suicide scenes are graphically portrayed. As such, **I cannot endorse the show, nor can I advise or encourage anyone to watch this series.** But if you've already seen it, please talk to a trusted adult. If, for some reason, you feel you must watch it, be sure to watch with a trusted adult. Even so, please understand I do not even encourage or advise the series to be shown at youth groups with a pastor, DCE or parent supervising. The intensity and explicit nature of the series is such that some feel it can do more harm than good, and create fear and unrest rather than offer any real entertainment, let alone any kind of hope regarding such intense issues.

Thus, let this response take the place of watching the show if you have not yet seen it. This response was written for teenagers, young adults and grown adults alike, and can be used for individual study. (It's also possible for this to be used in a group format. The leader of any group discussions must carefully prepare to address the included reflection questions.) Be attentive to the issues, biblical reflections and helpful spiritual tools set forth in this study, so that you can be confident in your biblical baptismal identity and capable in your interaction with and care for others, especially those struggling with similar issues portrayed in this series. The aim of this study is, therefore, twofold. First, to offer a clear biblical response rooted in the Christian faith, hope and love given by the Holy Spirit through Holy Baptism. Second, to provide both



viewers and non-viewers of the series the thoughtful biblical context to discuss and confidently speak to the real-life issues portrayed in the show. This study will also enable people to confidently speak to the issues raised by the show.

## A WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Before we continue, let me express a word of encouragement. Whether you're reading this on your own or participating in a group discussion, please listen carefully. If, for any reason, you are contemplating hurting or harming yourself in any way, please talk to a trusted adult about those thoughts. I'm serious. It's important that you do this. Don't wait for the right time or hide your hurt any more. There are those of us who are on your side.

I know it's hard to reach out. But do me a favor. Please reach out to an adult now. It's very important you do this. Yes, it may seem difficult, and I know things may feel very dark, but there are people who care about you and love you! In fact, you have a Lord who deeply loves you and cherishes you. The Heavenly Father loves you so much that He sent His Son Jesus Christ to die in your place, not only to give you the forgiveness of sins, but to bring healing and release from the sins others have committed against you. (We will talk about how He does this later in the study). Whatever is weighing you down, be it guilt, shame or sorrow, especially if you are thinking of hurting yourself, please talk to a trusted adult. They will help you. They will assist you with some problem-solving and offer the hope you need and the love you crave. Likewise, if you know someone who is contemplating hurting or harming themselves in anyway, please immediately talk to a trusted adult about it. Even if you promised a friend you would not tell, their life is too precious not to tell. Please tell a trusted adult now.

And since you're reaching out, you might also consider reaching out to your Heavenly Father in prayer. He'll listen. In fact, He longs for you to talk to Him. Even more, those whom He sends to care for you in His name (pastors, parents, teachers, church workers) will encourage you in your faith and inspire you with the hope of His Son Jesus Christ. He has claimed you as His very own. Redeemed by His blood, Jesus sends His Holy Spirit to breathe new life into your fragile soul as He speaks through His mighty Word.

Your life is precious to God. That's why He gave the commandment not to murder. Such an act is a grievous sin against Him and His beloved creation — whether it's done against yourself or someone else. In fact, human beings were created as the pinnacle of God's creation. We are created in His image and likeness (Gen. 1:26). And though the fall into sin distorts that image, you were baptized into Christ, reborn from above by water and Spirit (John 3) as God's beloved child. To hurt or harm yourself violates His command and design for your life. Therefore, if you're having thoughts questioning your own worth or doubting your own value, I urge to pour out your hurting heart to the Lord, and then listen to His Word that says, **"I Love you!"** (see John 3:16). Likewise, if you're having thoughts about hurting yourself, please be sure to confide in a trusted adult who will lavish you in the consolation and love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Adults, if you have a concern that a teenager or college student might be contemplating hurting or harming themselves, or even if you've noticed something different about their attitude or behavior, reach out to them. Don't be afraid to ask them if life is hard or if they are thinking of hurting themselves. This will help you bring hope into a dark and lonely life. They are watching and waiting for you to do so. They want you to do so. Give them a call, take them out to

lunch, invite them over, and be sure to pray for them, and if possible, pray with them.

## RELATING TO *13 REASONS WHY*

If you've watched *13 Reasons Why* there are likely countless questions and impressions you have about it. Some of you probably had some intense emotions triggered as you watched the show. Whether you've seen the show or not, and whether you're a teenager or adult, this study will provide you with insight to the major issues that are addressed in the show and are very likely prevalent in your life in some form or another. The high-school and college years can be trying times. The pressures to fit in, be accepted, find your place, and make your way in that world can be an emotional and difficult maze to navigate.

If this describes you right now, then you're experiencing the pressures and challenges of life in ways that are different than your parents and other adults. That doesn't mean those pressures are automatically worse or less than those adults face. They're just different. However, sometimes adults forget what those pressures are like. Perhaps that's why you watched *13 Reasons Why* in the first place. Maybe it gave you an expression or outlet that you could relate to regarding the pressures of your high-school or college experience.

In spite of the many concerns about this series, many teenagers relate to the high-school experiences portrayed. Maybe you didn't relate to everything about the show, but to one of the characters or one of the situations and it gave you a sense of relief knowing somewhere out there someone else understands your plight.

It might be that you're simply going through this study to gain a better understanding of the issues raised in the series and to become better equipped to help those who are struggling with those issues.

Whatever your reason for going through this study, be assured there are others like you. If you're doing this study in a group setting, it will likely draw that out for you. But even better, it will draw out how our Lord Jesus Christ understands what it's like to live in this fallen and broken world. He knows what it is to suffer under it, and yet come through it as the resurrection and the life! We'll explore how He

richly and daily gives you His virtues to bear up under the pressures and challenges of this world. You will also become better equipped to share, in His name, encouragement and hope with others, particularly anyone going through similar struggles to those depicted in this Netflix series.

If you're reading this on your own as a teen or young adult, who in one way or another relates to the characters in the show, please discuss this study with a trusted friend or adult.

Part of why you're reading this alone might be that you feel all alone in the world. If you think nobody cares about how you feel, don't believe it! Those are lies straight from Hell, coming from the father of all lies, Satan himself. He'll tell you no one understands and make it seem as if no one will believe how you're feeling. I know what that's like. I've been there before. But take it from me, you can tell the devil to go to Hell! After all, that's the place God consigned for him, and it's even a proper use of that phrase.

What is more, know that I journey with you as you go through this study. I've been through it. I've wrestled with tough questions. I've felt the loneliness. I've struggled to fit in. I've been bullied and I've been the bully. I know the pain. I've experienced the frailty of life. I've even seen death up close and personal. Yes, even a suicide. And I know the utter devastation and destruction that it brings.

Even better than having me along with you, is knowing that you have the Lord Jesus Christ with you right here and right now, through His Holy Spirit. He knows your worries. He knows your fears. He hears your questions. He sees every tear-filled eye and every quivering lip, and sends His Holy Spirit to bring you courage and hope. He speaks His Word of truth to give you faith and wisdom. Even better, He wraps you in His baptismal grace and gives you a divinely designed identity that brings with it the thoughts, desires and actions to deal with all the issues raised by *13 Reasons Why*, along with everything else that comes at you in this fallen world.

Before we explore all the issues raised by this TV series, I want you to be secure in the identity that God has given you, and confident about how that identity equips you to handle the difficult issues raised by this show.

# Chapter 1: BAPTISMAL IDENTITY: Living in Faith, Hope and Love

## BAPTISMAL IDENTITY

God loves to give you gifts. That's what the Heavenly Father does. He gives you His gifts of love. First, He knit you together in your mother's womb (Ps. 139:13), gives you life through your parents and then new spiritual life by the Holy Spirit through Baptism (John 3:5).

It was likely first through the water and the Word of Holy Baptism that God sent His Holy Spirit into you. If you were baptized as an infant, you won't remember the day you received this wonderful gift of God's grace. If you were older when you were baptized, you may remember the day well. Either way, what you remember does not change the fact of what you received.

In the waters of Holy Baptism, God named you and claimed you as His very own child in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). He promises never to leave you and never to forsake you. In fact, Jesus unites Himself to you. "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27). You are not alone and never will be alone. The life you live, you live clothed with Christ — Christ in you, with you, surrounding you like a protective suit of armor, fighting for you against the powers of darkness and evil.

That's the joy of being baptized! It's more than a one-time act. It's an ongoing gift of God's grace. Baptism is the beginning of Christ at work in you. As the Bible says, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). Baptism is a gift of God's grace and mercy that unites you to Jesus, and has an ongoing life-long effect upon you.

Therefore, no matter what you're facing, the baptismal promise of Jesus remains sure and certain. In fact, it's powerful and effective precisely because it connects you to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Scripture is very clear about this: "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). This newness of life is promised to you and given to you by God Himself. You can call this new life your "baptismal identity." In Baptism, God gives you His Spirit, who defines who you are in Christ each and every day. He gives you a new identity. You are a "new you" in Jesus!

This baptismal identity offers a profound approach to navigate through the struggles of life portrayed by this TV series. If you watched *13 Reasons Why*, you saw how Hannah's identity and reputation were constantly under attack. What others did to her and said about her began to determine how she viewed herself. That began stripping away her ability to

see herself as a person of worth and value. Without faith in God, she had nothing to counter those attacks but her own will power. And when barraged by so many different attacks, one's will power becomes weaker and weaker until, for many, it finally breaks. Thus, as the episodes progressed, it was one struggle after another that further defiled and stained Hannah's identity. This caused her to lose purpose and direction in life, which caused her to lose hope for life, which ultimately brought her to end her life. Without God giving you your identity day by day, it's easy to have your identity stripped away, especially when others sin against you, you experience the cruelty of the world or when you engage in repetitive sinful thoughts and actions.

That's why I want to stress your identity in Christ! Your identity is a baptized child of God. (If you haven't been baptized and desire to be baptized, be sure to talk to a pastor and he'll be happy to talk to you about making that happen.) You are holy and precious in God's sight specifically because you are united to Jesus Christ. You see, when God the Father looks at you He sees the everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness of His Son covering you inside and out. And because it covers you inside and out, it also produces within you the specific God-pleasing thoughts, desires and actions consistent with your baptismal identity.

What does that look like and sound like? It begins with daily repentance: recognizing your own sinfulness and putting to death all evil desires within you. It means replacing sinful thoughts and actions like gossip, constant use of vulgar language, cruelty to classmates, underage drinking, drug use, sexual immorality, and violence, with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control (Gal. 5). Think about that for a moment. How would the show have sounded and looked different if this had been happening among the characters?

Baptismal life means daily dying and rising, putting off the old, putting on the new. Of course, that doesn't come from your own will power or internal fortitude alone. It comes from Jesus Christ Himself. Remember, you're united to Jesus' death and resurrection. He was crucified for your sins, having them nailed to the cross with Him to win forgiveness for you. Three days later He rose victorious from the grave to bring new life to all who believe in Him. Therefore, to be baptized into Him means the old sinful self (often called the old Adam, referring to the first sin in the Garden of Eden and the source of our inherited sinful condition), should by daily contrition (sorrow for sin) and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires. In other words, the sinful flesh is continually crucified with Christ in Baptism. You and I need to remember we're perpetrators of sin as much as we

are the victims of sin. Thus, before we can spiritually help anyone else, we need to know what to do with sin.

Not to worry. Your Baptism leads the way! United to Jesus, the old Adam is daily crucified through repentance, while a new man then arises with Jesus to live a new life before God in righteousness and purity forever. This is your baptismal identity. Baptism tells you who you are and whose you are. It declares you are spiritually safe and eternally secure as a child of God. And, as you'll see, when you have that kind of identity, you can't help but have robust faith, hope and love to face all of life and share with others.

## FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE

To be sure, sometimes the view we see of this broken world leaves us wanting and scared. We wonder what's next, where God is in all of this, and how we can make sense of everything. Misbeliefs fester in our mind as the devil, the world and our sinful nature deceive us and mislead us into all kinds of false belief, despair and other great shame and vice. However, though we are attacked by these things our Baptism gives us the light of His grace to make our way forward, no matter how dimly lit the world seems.

In *13 Reasons Why* the world is awfully dark, because the entire show is devoid of faith. In fact, faith conversations are entirely absent. How do you think Hannah might have acted differently if she had faith in Christ? Without faith, it becomes easy for others to beat the living hope right out of you. That's what happened to Hannah. The cruelty of others and their lack of love made the world go dark for her. She had no strength to press forward, no hope to lead her on, and no light to brighten her life.

God's grace gives you the strength to live each day by faith, and the ability to see Him at work in your life. Even when things seem difficult, even when you can't make sense of why things are happening, faith helps you press forward. It points you heavenward. It fixes your eyes on Jesus. It fills you with hope, and surrounds you with God's love. Faith lets you realize you are intimately known by God. Even when your world seems dark, you still walk by faith, live with hope, and rest in love. The Apostle Paul says it like this, "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:12-13).

The three divine virtues of faith, hope and love are gifts from God. In fact, they are bestowed upon you as part of your baptismal identity. When you are united to Jesus — the very Jesus who walked this earth in perfect *faith*, approached the cross of Calvary in unyielding *hope*, and spread out His arms to die in limitless *love* — you have those same divine virtues put in you through the water and Word of Baptism. They are a powerful trio, to be sure. Ready to pounce on doubt, overrun despair, and melt away hatred, faith, hope and love equip you to take on whatever challenge this world might throw at you. Whether it's high school, college, a new job, marriage, illness, tragedy, or the death of a loved one, you are spiritually equipped to make your way through life and to likewise help others along the way.

From our fallen human perspective, it's often quite difficult to see God at work in the dreariness of this world. Nonetheless, God still knows you inside and out. From your deepest darkest secrets, to your fears, your favorite food and favorite color, to your hopes and dreams, to your terrible, horrible, no good, very bad sins. He knows you, baptizes you and loves you head to toe.

He then calls you to live by faith. Not an empty or blind faith, but a faith that trusts in Jesus Christ as the Lord of your life and loves Him in return.

With this faith comes the sure and certain hope that the darkness of sin and evil cannot, does not and will not win. By His life, death, resurrection and ascension, Jesus rescued you from every evil of body and soul, possessions and reputation. Presently, you cannot see it. Presently, you must hear it and believe it. But one day, you will see it as you will see Jesus.

This is the hope that Hannah was missing. Yet, that's the hope you have and the kind you can give to those in despair. In fact, take a moment to think if you know someone who could use a little hope this week. What might you be able to do to share hope with them?

Baptized into Christ you have the identity and the ability to face the challenges of this life. Baptized into Christ you are given the divine virtues of faith, hope and love that Jesus Himself possessed while living on this earth and works in you. These joyful virtues shed the light of His Gospel upon the lies Satan tells you, the deceit others throw at you, and the false beliefs that afflict you. Even more, these baptismal virtues enable you to give help, hope and love to your friends and family, and many others, especially those facing struggles like Hannah. So be bold about living out your baptismal identity!



# Chapter 2: WALK BY FAITH

## A WORD FROM HANNAH

"When you mess with one part of a person's life, you're not messing with just that part. Unfortunately, you can't be that precise and selective. When you mess with one part of a person's life, you're messing with their entire life. Everything affects everything."

Those are Hannah's words from episode three during which she talks about the butterfly effect. It's the idea that one small event can set in motion a whole chain of events, like a hurricane resulting from the mere flapping of a butterfly's wings thousands of miles away. Hannah asserted that the subject of this tape, Alex Standall, set into motion the hurricane of events that ultimately lead to Hannah's death by her own hand.

It's a heavy guilt trip to be sure. But is such an assertion true? It's legitimate to ask whether the show is being irresponsible by portraying things in such a cause/effect relationship. Could it all really be Alex's fault? Did he hurt Hannah's feelings and damage her reputation? Absolutely! Was it wrong? Without a doubt. But Hannah notes there are 12 other reasons why she killed herself besides what Alex did to her.

For those of you wondering, Alex put Hannah on a best body list that was passed around school. (She was said to have the best butt.) Though it was perhaps a twisted compliment from a guy's perspective, in Hannah's mind it only complicated and compounded her troubles. She was already dealing with the lies and corresponding rumors that she was "easy," that she was a slut. Consequently, this list only added to that slanderous reputation. Hannah asserts this list caused the series of tragic events that brought about her death.

Let's be clear. Suicide is utterly devastating and destructive. I have counseled families whose loved ones committed suicide, and I have conducted a funeral for someone who committed suicide. But those cases were far different from the one portrayed in this series. Those cases all included severe mental affliction and some form of clinical depression, which is often the case in many suicides. However, by no means does this mean that all depressed people commit suicide. Far from it. Nonetheless, it should be noted that of those who do commit suicide, there is a very high percentage that have been diagnosed with mental illness.

The cases of suicide personally familiar to me occurred as the result of individuals who were no longer in their right rational mind, and who were acutely afflicted by severe mental disease. *13 Reasons Why* fails to deal with the inner mental workings of Hannah in terms of any clinical depression, but focuses solely on her perception of life given the hurricane of

events that happen to her that lead her to lose hope and seek revenge through suicide.

Can suicides happen just as this show portrays? Sure. But is that the standard and likely reason that most suicides occur? Absolutely not! The show fails miserably to depict what truly goes on in the mind of a suicidal individual. Rather, it focuses only on how the cruelty of others was her reason for suicide. In this way, the series' portrayal of suicide is irresponsible. Suicide prevention groups and mental health professionals have rightly criticized the series for this very reason. Many have criticized the show for romanticizing revenge suicide and the pain it causes those who supposedly caused the suicide. This is quite dangerous according to mental health professionals who say it can cause others to fanaticize about suicide, and create misbeliefs about how suicide can be used to get back at people who wronged them.

This observation does nothing to lessen the deeply emotional nature of the show. Yes, Hannah was hurt. Yes, she had a right to be angry. Yet, she came to a point where she had no hope. She believed the lie that no one cared. Somehow that lie even included her parents, who, though they were burdened with work and finances, were actually shown to love and care for Hannah. Nonetheless, she had the misbelief that life wasn't worth living, and that Alex was the one who set all her problems into motion. What's important to note about this, is that misbeliefs are often at the heart of suicidal thoughts. Such misbeliefs are not limited to suicidal thoughts. They are at the heart of your sinful flesh. They are also what the devil is constantly telling you day in and day out. In fact, he's been telling lies since the very beginning. His whole desire is to destroy your faith, hope and love through the lies he tells you and others. The next section will explore the lies he tells and how to combat them with faith.

## THE FATHER OF ALL LIES

**Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" (Gen. 3:1).**

From the very beginning the devil has been telling lies. He constantly desires to deceive you and mislead you, to get you to believe his damnable lies. His first and last tactic, as it was with Adam and Eve, is always and everywhere to get people to doubt, disregard and disbelieve the Word of God. He knows the power of God's Word, so he's willing to do anything to get people *not* to hear it, read it, speak it or share it. Much like our media today, full of fake news, made up news, and biased news, the devil wants to confuse you and sabotage the truth. He wants to control the narrative of your life with his lies, misbeliefs and fake truths. In fact, Jesus is very clear about Satan's nature. When He was speaking to the unbelieving Pharisees and Jews of His day, Jesus said: "You are of your

father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44).

It's the age-old battle. Good versus evil, light versus darkness, truth versus lies. The devil aims to destroy the body and soul of every last man, woman and child. From toddlers to teenagers, from parents to pastors, Satan's sinister plan is to lie and deceive. And to be sure, there is evidence of his lies all around us. There are countless broken souls who have conceded and given in to the father of all lies. They often vacillate between two extremes — "I'm not a sinner," or "I'm too much of a sinner to be forgiven." Both extremes are misbeliefs. Both are deadly. (Of course, there are variations and shades of each extreme.)

First, the misbelief that "I'm just fine," — the idea that, "I'm a pretty good person, there's nothing wrong with me, and nothing wrong with what I do," the misbelief that "I'm not a sinner" — can lead you to a sense of entitlement, the idea that you deserve certain things. It also feeds the notion that you're a pretty good person compared to others, and that God really isn't angry at your sin. It is a deadly misbelief.

Second is the misbelief that "I'm too bad of a person for God to care about me, forgive, or love me" — the thought that, "I don't measure up, add up, and haven't grown up the way I was supposed to. I'm worthless. I'm a constant disappointment." — the misbelief you are not worthy of affection or love is dangerous to your faith.

Mixed in with these extremes is the false belief that God is absent from your life. That He is too distant, uninvolved and uncaring to offer any help, hope or love. This false belief has consequences that can lead to apathy and despair.

On the one hand, people think they're better off without anyone else — that God is unimportant and not needed, and they can do anything they want and are entitled to do whatever they want. They have believed the lie that Satan is constantly whispering into their ears, "Did God really say...? You don't need Him. You're entitled to get what you want, when you want, however you want." Think of someone like Bryce. He did whatever he wanted whenever he wanted, regardless of who it hurt.

On the other hand, people believe Satan's lies that no one cares, no one can help and no one even wants to help. They believe his lies that there's no hope for you. You're too bad, and too much of a screw up. You need to do more, try harder and be better. Satan is relentless with his lies. He wants to drive you into despair. He wants you to believe that you're worthless, your life is pointless and no one loves you because you're just not lovable.

Adolescence and young adulthood are times of great spiritual trials and temptations. During this age in life people undergo all kinds of emotions and life experiences for the first time. High-school and college-age kids are often riddled with the trials and tribulations of trying to navigate through the minefield of popularity, embarrassment, acceptance, belonging and overall identity. Often, when you're so focused



on trying to fit in, you become more susceptible to Satan's lies. It's easy to convince yourself that believing his lies, whatever they may be (i.e. you need to dress a certain way, talk a certain way, act a certain way), are what you need to do to fit in and get through this time in your life.

However, those lies are often complicated by your own sinful nature. The defilement and spiritual contamination of life contribute all the more to your misbeliefs and heartaches. In *13 Reasons Why* Hannah got the inaccurate reputation of being easy. She was then objectified with her butt being put on the best body part list that was passed around school. This led Bryce to believe he was entitled to grab her butt, while she was standing in line, to see if the list was accurate. Hannah was defiled in reputation and body. Even worse, later on Bryce thinks he is entitled to have sex with her while she's in his hot tub, so he rapes her. He was full of misbeliefs and when combined with his own sinful nature he defiled a young girl's body with his sin, poisoning her body, mind and spirit with his cruelty.

In real life, traumatic events such as these have an unseen spiritual side to them. They were sins against her, with contaminating effects. Like radiation poisoning, these sins ate away at her body, mind and soul. Real-life sins do the same to you. In Hannah's case, they distorted how she thought of herself. They sent her emotions all over the place. She lost her bearings. Misbeliefs were raging in her mind. Her

identity suffered from the lies, sins and chaos. Her misbeliefs became an increasing threat to her well-being, until finally, she wrongly believed she could disregard her own body, like others had done, and bring great harm to it. *13 Reasons Why* is an example of what happens to those who believe and act upon the lies of the devil.

Thanks be to God that Jesus Christ was sent as the way, the truth and the life. He stomps on the head of Satan and destroys the devil's lies with His Word of truth. Thanks be to God that Christians have the cleansing blood of Jesus to bring healing, hope and love to all those defiled by sin. If this was real life, from a spiritual perspective, Bryce needed to be brought to repentance (as well as to the authorities), and Hannah needed to be brought to the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ (as well as a compassionate professional therapist). You see, as your baptismal identity unites you to Jesus, the Lord's Supper gives you His body and blood. Not only is there forgiveness given in this meal, there is cleansing given in this meal. Your baptismal identity points you as a catechized Christian to the words of Jesus at His Last Supper, when He says of the wine, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:27–28). The sacramental blood of Jesus gives you the forgiveness of sins for all the sins you have committed, but it also brings cleansing to you from all the sins committed against you.

The father of all lies tries to deceive you and mislead you into despair and unbelief. But the Heavenly Father sends you His Son to give you hope and relief.

## WHEN FAITH IS ABSENT

*13 Reasons Why* is secular, which means it is utterly lacking in any religious undertones or faith conversations. Aside from a few very minor occurrences, like a reference to a meal prayer at Zach Dempsey's house, the Christian faith, or faith of any kind, played no part in the series. The show's decidedly secular (nonspiritual) nature only adds to the despondent and hopeless ending.

Think about it. The show ends with a girl gut-wrenchingly killing herself. She leaves tapes telling 13 people it was their fault, one of which, Alex, is so overwhelmed with guilt that he tries to end his life with a gunshot to his own head. (The show ends leaving us in the dark about what whether or not he lives.) Hannah's parents are given a digital copy of the tapes. The implication is that they will likely listen and utterly agonize over how their daughter was treated. All the while the protagonist of the story, Clay, has been on a journey discovering how people could have been nicer to Hannah and should be nicer to each other. At the end of the show, Clay committed to be nicer to people. However, he did confront the counselor who failed Hannah and made sure he received the copy of the tapes (he is reason number 13 after all), which will inevitably destroy his career and maybe also his life. The final scene is of Clay and a girl named Skye (an old friend he committed to be nicer to), along with Tony and his boyfriend (homosexual relationships are a normalized part of the

series) driving off down the road fading into a sad and sorry ending of darkness.

That's it. Show's over. Story's done. Viewers are simply left with overwhelming grief and anguish. There is no closure, no sense of justice and no resolution. Even worse, there is no hopefulness or optimism, no guidance and no direction forward. We're simply left with the brutal reality of a dead girl, grieving parents, countless messed up classmates, one possibly dying at his own hand, and the massive darkness of guilt and shame for all the failures to be nice. Is there any wonder why there are so many reports of students and adults being triggered? Not only is the subject material intense, there is no closure for viewers. We're left to deal with all those disturbing emotions on our own.

Viewers without a Christian faith will fair no better than the unbelieving characters on the show. They have only emptiness, their own inner impulses and the off-chance of someone being nice to them. It's a recipe for despair — one that will walk right into Satan's sinister lies.

On the show, Hannah had no faith to rely upon — nor did her parents, any of her friends or her classmates. Instead, the show depicts an overall emptiness. The characters have little to live for other than pleasing their own desires or satisfying their emotional impulses. Morality — the sense of right and wrong — has no agreed upon form, other than the overarching message that you must be kind and nice to people so they don't kill themselves. But that, too, has little staying power to comfort people or even order a society (how we treat each other). If being nice is all that counts, whose standard of niceness are we to use? What counts as being nice and what counts as being mean? Do you see the problem with this?

This study considers these issues from the point of view of baptized Christians, as a person of faith. And that faith is a powerful weapon to fight against the lies and misbeliefs that attack us in this world. That faith is full of hope and brimming with love that unceasingly flows from the Heavenly Father. What is more, baptismal faith gives you a confident identity. Remember, you are united to Jesus Christ in Baptism (Gal. 3:28). By faith, therefore, He gives you His identity, His virtues, His hope and His love to live by. Do you see what this means? Jesus provides you with clear moral direction to guide your behavior, affect your attitudes and direct your interaction with others. Just as Jesus walked this earth obeying all the Heavenly Father's commandments, He calls you to do so too. However, He doesn't leave it there. He not only calls you to obey those commandments, He gives you the faith and the ability to obey those commandments.

Faith, of course, is at the core of Christian life. The Bible says, "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). It also says, "You have been saved by grace through faith, and this not of yourselves but it is a gift of God" (Eph. 2:8–9). Faith is more than a blind belief and more than head knowledge. Faith is trust. It's the sure and certain hope that the Triune God — Father, Son and Holy Spirit — created you, redeemed you, sanctifies you and loves you right here and right now. You are His very own

precious and beloved child. Faith is the belief that amid all the lies, heartaches and sin of this world, there is one who says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

Faith leads you to live in a distinct way, by a distinct truth, through all of life. It’s more powerful than some random acts of kindness by a classmate. It’s rooted in the love and kindness of God our Savior. The Bible speaks of it like this: “But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:4–6). Faith brings hope. It shines light in the darkness, breathes life into your soul and gives relief to your anxieties

This faith is delivered to you as a gift by the Holy Spirit. In fact, that’s the whole reason Jesus ascended into Heaven — so that the Holy Spirit, who Jesus calls the Spirit of truth, would come to lead you in the truth. He says as much to His disciples, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you” (John 14:16–17). Let that soak in for a minute. You are not alone and will never be alone. Jesus has sent you a helper — *the* Helper. As you face the lies and misbeliefs of this world, the Holy Spirit will guide you into the truth of God’s Word.

Faith recognizes that you cannot by your own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ or come to Him, but the Holy Spirit calls you by the Gospel, enlightens you with His gifts, sanctifies you, and keeps you in the true faith (see also 1 Cor. 6:11 and 1 Peter 3:21). You can’t conjure this faith up by yourself. You can’t earn it, buy it or win it in the lottery. Faith is all a gift. It teaches you to look away from yourself, away from the lies of Satan, and to turn toward God. *13 Reasons Why* offers nothing along these lines and is why Christians who watch it long for help in processing what it all means.

## FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE

Faith is the first of those three great divine virtues noted above. “So now faith, hope and love abide” (1 Cor. 13:13). Abiding in faith is, therefore, the beginning point to combat all the lies, the deceit and the false beliefs that the devil, the world and our sinful flesh throw before us. By faith we also combat despair and hopelessness. *13 Reasons Why* is nothing but one despairing episode after another. After watching something like that we need to be vigilant about exercising our faith through prayer and the reading of God’s Word. Some formal ways to do this might be to read the Gospels’ accounts of Jesus. Pray the Lord’s Prayer. Speak the Psalms out loud and meditate on what they say and how they direct you to God amid the ups and downs of life.

By faith you can confidently confront the challenges and heartaches of life. By faith you are given the courage of Jesus Christ. And if there is ever a time His courage is needed, the teenage and young adult years are certainly it. Through His Holy Spirit Jesus puts His courage into action in your life. The Apostle Paul reminded the Christians in Corinth about this. (They were likely facing similar challenges that we are talking about in this study.) While we live in this body, Paul calls it a tent, and as we face various hardships, we live by faith and not by sight. We trust God’s Word and promises to take us through the difficulties of life. “For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened--not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, *for we walk by faith, not by sight*” (2 Cor. 5:4–7). Don’t rely upon your own resilience or intestinal fortitude. Rely upon the object of your faith, Jesus Christ, and His life-giving Word and Spirit.

*13 Reasons Why* presents viewers with a lot of disturbing images and plenty of challenges young people face in life. It reminds us that lies are a brutal part of this world. Lies sting and hurt. They betray and belittle. Lies hurt reputations, deceive us and mislead us into all kinds of false belief and other great shame and vice. Likely you’ve told a lie or two before. Perhaps you’ve been on the receiving end of a lie. These sins and wounds are part of why Jesus suffered and died on the cross. He came to throw down and beat down the lies of Satan and destroy his vile deception. And by His glorious resurrection and ascension He destroyed death’s grip and Satan’s power over you. In their place, He gives you His everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness. This, too, is all a gift that comes by faith.

Where there is faith, there is hope, and where there is hope, there is God’s love. The lies in the show can be undone with a vibrant faith in Jesus Christ as Lord. Likewise, the despair of *13 Reasons Why* can be undone with the bold and brilliant hope that comes through the same Jesus Christ. Let’s find out how.

# Chapter 3: LIVE IN HOPE

## A WORD FROM HANNAH

"I need it to stop. I just need it all to stop... All of it. People. Life..."

Those are Hannah's words to Mr. Porter, the school counselor, in the final episode. She had decided to give life one last try, so she went to see him with the faint hope that he might give her a reason to live. Instead, he ignored her cry for help. Sure, he heard her say the above words, but then he seemed to forget them when she talked about what happened at the party (where Bryce sexually assaulted her). She didn't outright say she was "raped," but it appeared she was trying to get the courage up to express it in a comfortable way. Mr. Porter, however, took the lead and asked if Hannah had "an encounter" at the party. He shaped the conversation about that "encounter" in a way that made Hannah seem at least partially responsible. And when Hannah was not comfortable giving him the name of her rapist, Mr. Porter suggested that "the only other choice is to move on."

Hannah's response was rather blunt: "Are you 'F\_\_\_ing kidding me!'" She captured the injustice of his comment. For a moment, her anger and outrage sparked some life in her and put some fight back into her. But that spark soon faded into the countless other injustices she experienced. As a result, she despondently said, "I'm just supposed to do nothing?" At this point Hannah gave up. She left his office. However, even then, after stepping out of his office, she stopped to wait, giving it one final last try, hoping Mr. Porter would come out after her. He didn't. Any hope that Hannah had left was finally beaten out of her. She prepared her tapes, delivered them, and then in a brutal and deeply disturbing scene, she slit her wrists and bled out in a bathtub.

There are a couple of important issues that should be addressed at this point. The act of suicide will be addressed in just a moment. But first is the issue of hopelessness. Hannah's decision was portrayed as flowing from her lack of hope. She felt she had nothing to live for. She mistakenly believed the lie that no one understood her, no one cared about her, her life had no purpose and no reason to continue. In a word, she was hopeless.

If you allowed yourself to get emotionally invested in the show, watching that suicide scene was likely extremely disturbing. It may have left you feeling hopeless, especially as the show ends with no one offering an optimistic way forward, no one providing the love and compassion needed and no one showing where healing can be found. At the same time, with so much violence, gore, and death in movies and video games today, some viewers may not perceive the scene as intense or disturbing. Tragically they may have even found it strangely enticing. An increasing number of people have become desensitized to the tragedies and horrors of life because they see them so readily depicted on a screen.

However, that doesn't automatically lessen your suffering should tragic events happen in your life. If you've personally experienced any of the tragedies or horrors depicted in this show, you know the intensity of that pain and heartache. Please know there is hope for you. In fact, there's hope for anyone feeling the heaviness and dread of this broken world pressing down upon them. But even if you haven't had a tragedy or difficulty in life, Satan will do whatever he can to try and beat the hope out of you.

Some young viewers of this series have reported feeling quite down and even depressed after watching the culminating scene of *13 Reasons Why*. For days after watching the final episode, teens have reported feeling they're in a fog, that breathing seems heavy and life seems darker than normal. Perhaps that was you.

Regardless of what you're dealing with right now, there's hope for you. Whether it be a tragedy, some kind of difficulty, or just a disturbing TV show, do not be dismayed. Remember, Christ has claimed you as His very own and sends His Holy Spirit to breathe hope and life into your soul. Take a moment to remember who you are and Whose you are. Baptized into Christ you are a beloved child of God. That special identity brings profound hope. Through this hope comfort and encouragement are not far away. Be assured the Lord has also placed people in your life (i.e. parents, pastors, teachers, counselors) who are ready to listen to your heavy heart and offer the same encouragement and hope.

With this encouragement, you can also be a ray of light and hope for someone else — especially someone like Hannah, someone who's desperate for just an ounce of hope. You can give them that hope. First, by simply taking an interest in their life and affirming them as a human being created in the image of God. Second, by sharing the hope and encouragement you have with them. In other words, tell them why they are precious in God's sight. Tell them their life is valuable, that Jesus Christ loves them so much He went to the cross to die and rise for them, and that you've been sent to them by God to speak the Good News of Jesus Christ into their ears. In fact, this is exactly what the Bible tells us to do. "In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15).

This hope is what flows from faith in Jesus Christ. Make no mistake, it is a powerful hope! It does not disappoint. This hope can pierce through the darkness of your mind and inject courage into your soul. In fact, this hope brings divine confidence to face tragedy, blessed assurance to face fear and divine repose to confront hardship.

## HOPE DURING AFFLICTION

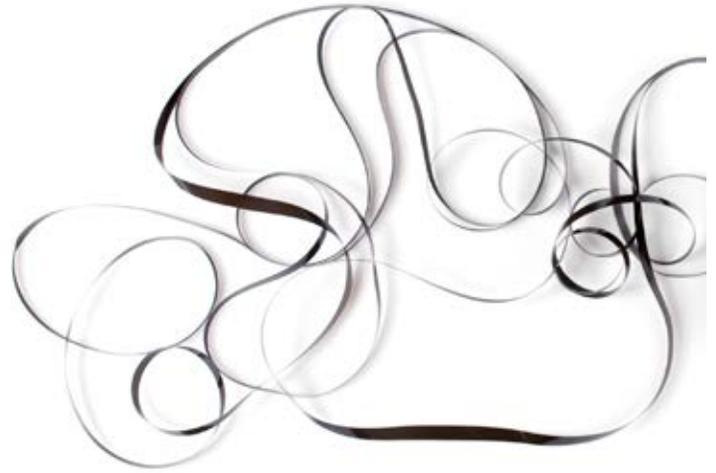
In general terms, hope is the belief that tomorrow will be a better day, that your burden will lighten, and the darkness will pass. Christian hope provides an even more robust optimism because it's rooted in the One who walked through the valley of the shadow of death and came through it as the resurrection and the life. Jesus Christ is the author and perfecter of your faith and sustainer of your soul.

Remember, you are united to Christ through Baptism and have been given His Holy Spirit to sustain you. What is more, Jesus Himself endured suffering and tragedy during His earthly life. He draws you into Himself and His suffering amid your tragedy, sorrow and suffering. Please understand. This isn't to make light of whatever difficulty you might be going through. Nor is it to suggest, like Mr. Porter did to Hannah, that there's nothing you can do about it. Quite the opposite. Faith can sustain you with a powerful hope and comforting solace as you endure affliction. Faith brings hope, and hope helps you fight your way through difficulty and suffering whatever age or season of life you're in — be it high school, college, middle age, or old age.

We have a treasure of hope and courage stored up within us by faith in Jesus Christ. And as we experience pain and difficulty, Jesus embraces us with His love and life all the deeper. Not that we should look for ways to suffer bad things like Hannah experienced. Rather, we grit our teeth and look upon our suffering and difficulty through the eyes of faith to see how Jesus is drawing us deeper into Himself, and deeper into His pain and His cross. Perhaps that seems like an odd way to talk about suffering, but it is how the Bible talks. The Apostle Paul told the Corinthians to think about it like this, "We have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you ... So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:7–16).

We exercise our faith "day by day" — patiently, just one day at a time, reading the Word, praying, believing, and trusting that Jesus carries us through each day in the power of His resurrection victory. Remember, faith is more than merely knowing facts about God, it's truly knowing God Himself. That is, trusting in His mercy and goodness no matter what may come your way. Our confidence comes in Jesus' victory. He reminds us of this Himself, "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

This can be difficult to see during times of "tribulation" and distress. However, by faith you look to Christ, hear His Word, receive His Spirit, and eat of His holy meal (the Lord's



Supper), which produces within you a divine endurance and a renewed baptismal character to bear up under your sorrows and burdens. Such character inevitably brings with it profound hope, and, as difficult as it may be to believe, even a certain amount of rejoicing amid such tribulations. The Bible says it like this, "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom. 5:1–5).

Be encouraged dear reader. God has poured His love into your hearts by His Holy Spirit. His promise is never to leave you and never to forsake you (Heb. 13:5). This doesn't mean bad things will never happen to you. Remember the devil always lies to you. He relentlessly seeks to oppress you and lead you astray. This world is fallen and broken. Evil exists. Your flesh is weak. Sin is present. And that means bad things happen to good people. It doesn't always make sense to us. We often ask God, "why?" Many times, we are not given a clear answer to that question. But we do have God's clear Word of promise to sustain us: "According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:3–4). This is good news! Rest in that "living hope." Live in its promise. Commit those verses to memory. Recall them when you encounter difficulty. Speak them out loud. Use them to help you pray out loud. Even more, consider memorizing hymns and spiritual songs to sing them when you're down, anxious or hurting. Sing them even when you are content. Let the hope of God fill you until you are overflowing. So many people of this world are desperate for some hope. And you can be ready to give it to them.

## Chapter 4: SUICIDE

### SUICIDE IN *13 REASONS WHY*

In the show, Hannah gave 13 reasons why she committed suicide. But that was for a TV show. It was not real life. There is something very important that must be noted about how this series portrays suicide. *13 Reasons Why* did not address the mental inner workings of Hannah's mind. In real life, suicide is often far more complicated and filled with intense mental distress, and very likely mental disease, than how the show depicts it for Hannah. The show focused on the culminating grief and apparent hopelessness that Hannah experienced, but not upon what was really going on in her mind. We get an idea about her embarrassment, sadness, shame and despair, but we're left to guess what specifically was going through her mind. We're left to assume she was just so overwhelmed by shame, had no real friends to lean on and had no other coping mechanisms, that she simply became despondent. Being hopeless she therefore thought suicide was her best option to end it all and get back at those who hurt her. It's portrayed as a rational, intelligent decision.

This hits the viewer especially hard because Hannah is otherwise portrayed as a confident, witty, seemingly well adjusted, intelligent girl, who by all indications took care of herself and had no previous suicidal ideation (repetitive thoughts about killing herself). The viewer is led to believe that the progressive offensive circumstances of life were just too much for Hannah, that if just one of those 13 people had given her a little more hope, she would not have killed herself. It should be noted that the show largely ignores her parents' positive role and the hope that they, like most parents, could give her. Overall, parents and adults are depicted as uninvolved, preoccupied and generally absent from the life of the kids on the show. But the fact is, most parents do love their children, do take an interest in them, and do give them hope.

This portrayal has been deemed very irresponsible by countless mental health specialists. In fact, they've been quick to point out that suicide is more complicated than a series of unfortunate events. It often includes various levels of corresponding mental illness. One of the glaring problems with this show's portrayal of suicide is that it ignores the larger reality of the mental disease often behind suicide. I'm not saying a suicide like Hannah's cannot or would not happen. Sadly, it does. But, at the risk of generalizing, many suicides have some accompanying form of mental illness, either preexisting in some form or another, or brought on by a traumatic event, substance abuse or even an eating disorder, that produces a progressively worsening mental affliction over a long period of time. Thus, things like bullying or a series of events like Hannah's would then play into that mental affliction, where, over time, a person is put out of their right mind and prone to give in to the temptation or the ideation to hurt themselves. (For more specific details regarding

suicide, please see the professional resources at the end of the chapter.)

The show failed to address the mental illness aspect of suicide. As a result some people are now thinking anyone who has a series of cruel events happen to them is likely to commit suicide. But suicide is not a common response to life's challenges or adversity. According to suicide prevention and awareness professionals, the vast majority of people who experience bullying, the death of a friend or any other adversity described in *13 Reasons Why* do not die by suicide. In fact, most reach out, talk to others and seek help or find other productive ways of coping. They go on to lead healthy, normal lives. The inadequate solution being put forth by *13 Reasons Why* is that if everyone would just be nicer, no one would commit suicide. But that misses a larger reality. Suicidal individuals are tormented in ways that require care in more ways than just being nice to them. They have a serious mental illness that requires professional care and often medical treatment. Pastoral and spiritual care can and should also certainly be part of that care. But it must be realized suicidal individuals have a complex mental sickness.

In my own experience with those who have committed suicide, significant mental illness preceded their final act. In the two cases I am close to, those suicidal symptoms developed over a longer period of time after experiencing brutal physical trauma in the one case, and from chronic and continued clinical depression in the other. Both cases were receiving professional psychological and psychiatric care, while I also gave frequent pastoral care. But in both cases, the mental disease took them out of their right mind. The "voices" in their head continued to torment them and push them toward death. In fact, both attempted suicide multiple times before finally ending their life.

*13 Reasons Why* ignores the deep mental affliction of suicide. Rather, the show presents suicide as the result of an emotional hopeless distress that is the direct result of mean people. We get little insight into the actual thoughts of Hannah, other than what she supposedly says on the tapes. Again, this portrays suicide in a twisted way that allows it to be seen by viewers as a way to get back at those who hurt you. Suicide prevention experts have been quick to remind us that when you die, you don't get to make a movie or talk to people any more. Leaving messages from beyond the grave, as Hannah is portrayed as doing with her tapes, is a dramatization produced in Hollywood and is not a likely possibility in real life. You will not get to see the hurt or devastation you cause by suicide. You will not get to feel any gratification from it. *13 Reasons Why* is a story that tried to create awareness of suicide but fails to treat it responsibly.

## THE SELFISH SIDE OF SUICIDE

Please understand. Being nice to people is certainly important, but Christians already know this, are called to do this and will naturally do this as part of our baptismal identity. I want to clarify the full reality of what leads to suicide as opposed to how the series depicts it. The show is very narrow in what it presents and leaves the wrong impression about suicide, its victims, those hurt by it and how to deal with it. In fact, experts say that memorializing someone who died by suicide is not a recommended practice. They are adamant that decorating someone's locker who died by suicide and/or taking selfies in front of such a memorial, as depicted in *13 Reasons Why*, is not appropriate and does not honor the life of the person who died by suicide.

The show fails to present the very selfish side of suicide when committed in a manner like Hannah's. When someone is afflicted by mental illness and out of their right mind and commits suicide, it is different than when someone takes their life out of despondent spite and revenge, as Hannah seems to have done. That seems harsh to say, since the series wants viewers to feel bad for Hannah and be angry at all those who caused her pain. But they only show one perspective — Hannah's. What about her parents, her grandparents or any other people who truly cared about her and loved her? What about all the time, money and care they gave to her?



The love they poured into her? The hopes and dreams they had for her? Why didn't she confide in them? Why didn't she give them one last chance? Why is she permitted to dismiss them so easily? I ask not to disparage a dead person, but to give voice to the other perspectives of those hurt by suicide. The show wants the viewers to blame anyone and everyone but the individual who actually committed the murder, for we must remember that is what it is.

What Hannah did was very selfish. That truth is not intended to demean someone's suffering in any way — especially hers. Nor does it mean she did not deserve to be loved. It's simply meant to demean the horrible act committed against oneself and other people when done out of spite and revenge.

Remember how the show started? With Hannah saying, "it's not supposed to be easy." In other words, she wants those on the tape to squirm and suffer, to feel the great and lasting pain of guilt because she's dead. To make that happen, she goes to great lengths to carefully explain how each person contributed to her death and why they should feel accountable. To be clear, she certainly had every right to be angry, to be hurt, to be sad and to want justice. But she goes beyond those desires. She wants revenge. She wants retribution. She wants to pay them all back for the pain they caused her.

There is no other way of saying it other than she was acting selfishly. In fact, based on her desires for revenge, Hannah would be glad Alex tried to take his life (in the final episode) since the guilt she wanted everyone to feel was acutely felt by Alex. Looked at this way, we would have to admit that Hannah was no better than any of the others who hurt her. Thankfully the Bible is clear on what suicide is as well as how God's grace is always bigger than someone's weakness and stronger than anyone's sinfulness.

## THE BIBLE AND SUICIDE

The Bible clearly says murder is wrong. The fifth commandment states, "You shall not murder" (Ex. 20:13). Thus, we need to be clear that suicide is a sin. It violates God's law and destroys one of His beloved human creatures made in His image. God Himself reminds us of the precious nature of His human creation: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image" (Gen. 9:6).

What people really want to know, however, is whether someone who commits suicide can be saved. Some traditions say that suicide sends you directly to hell. Their reasoning is that if someone commits a sin to end their life, how can they be forgiven since they cannot repent after the act? Is that a legitimate thought? Is that how the Bible speaks? What do you think? Does someone who commits suicide commit the unforgivable sin?

To help you think this through, consider the following hypothetical situation. One day before school you lie to your parents about where you're going after classes, you gossip about one of your classmates at school, cheat on a quiz you forgot to study for, and steal an extra serving of fries at the school lunch (normally \$1.50). On the way home, you are

killed in a car accident. (Someone was texting while driving, ran a red light and smashed into your car.) You did not yet repent of your sins from the day. So, are you forgiven? Would you go to heaven to be with Jesus? Or would you be condemned because you have not repented of those sins? Do see where I am going with this and how it might relate to suicide?

God's grace is more powerful than any of your sins. It's stronger than any of your weaknesses. And it remains true even when you are not. That's God's baptismal promise, remember? He remains faithful even while you are a poor miserable sinner. This, of course, takes you right back to your baptismal identity. Through the water and the Word you are marked as God's own precious and beloved child. He sends His Holy Spirit into you and gives you faith. You are united to Jesus' death and resurrection. Sinner that you are, God's grace covers you completely and totally, inside and out. This does not give you permission to sin, but permission to be the sinner that you are, a sinner who has been redeemed by the blood of Christ the crucified.

As we've discussed, ordinarily the old sinful self should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires. But what if you die before you have confessed your sin of that day? What then? Does the blood of Jesus still cover you and give you forgiveness? In other words, if you happen to die before you confess those sins, but you died fully believing you're a sinner in need of Christ's forgiveness, would God's grace become null and void because you did not confess those specific sins? Of course not! That's why God's grace is also called a promise. He promises to save you by grace through faith, and He means it (Eph. 2:8-9)! He can't break His promises. He can't break His Word. That's why repentance is not episodic, but constant. Baptized into Christ we live by faith in continual contrition and faith.

When we consider the issue of suicide we must tread carefully lest we make absolute pronouncements about one's salvation or damnation. Better still, let's leave absolute pronouncements about salvation and damnation to God alone who judges. The power of grace is that it comes from God, not from us — not from our attitudes, not from our efforts — but from God's love for us. Faith believes this love and desires to live a repentant life because of this love. However, our sinful nature makes us prone to give in to temptation and to sin — to lie, gossip, cheat and steal. Grace does not give you license to sin, but confidence to trust God's promise that the blood of Jesus Christ covers *all* your sins, every last one of them, from beginning to end. This trust delivers God's forgiveness and salvation, even to the soul that dies before repenting of the day's sins.

Please note that every suicide is an utter and terrible tragedy. We must not take it lightly. Suicide should never ever be committed! It is never the will of God, and it is never an act of faith. Nonetheless, God's grace is always greater than our sin or weakness. Ultimately, God alone knows the condition of someone's heart and faith at the time of their death. We can boldly proclaim the certainties of God's promise of salvation given in Baptism and received by faith, and if faith is

present, even if for a moment it is overshadowed by illness or mental disorder, those promises still hold true.

In cases where suicide is committed in a manner similar to Hannah Baker's, we must urge caution in how we speak. We must not glamorize suicide on the one hand, nor diminish the mercy of Christ on the other hand. Should the act be done in spite, for revenge and in willful, blatant and intentional defiance of God's command, it becomes increasingly difficult to speak of the person as a child of God. It's not that God's grace in Christ is not bigger than their sin. It certainly is, and always will be. Rather, it's a question of whether the person rejected God and His grace, and therefore died in open unbelief. For it is unbelief that condemns: "Whoever believes in [Jesus] is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God" (John 3:18).

In the end, we must be very clear that suicide is wrong, is a sin, and should never ever be done. Yet, in those cases that do occur, God is the Judge and will give eternal life to all who die in faith, even if that faith was for a moment plagued by mental illness or the crafts and assaults of the devil, and He will condemn those to eternal damnation who die in unbelief. It's by grace through faith in Jesus Christ that you are saved and by unbelief that you are condemned. Suicide is a bitterly sad occurrence that leaves loved ones in great uncertainty and ambiguity. But it is one that still ultimately falls under the watchful eye of a merciful God.

## APPENDIX

For those that may be interested, and to help you understand how this sad occurrence can be addressed from a public pastoral perspective, I include below a recent funeral sermon I preached for the family and friends of a young lady who committed suicide. The sermon is public in both written and video form and therefore the names remain with permission. The young lady succumbed to the long battle she had with PTSD after suffering terrible trauma while serving overseas in the United States Army during the Iraq War. She was an active life-long member of the congregation I serve and loved by many.

### Sermon for the Family and Friends of KariAnn Uecker (4-9-16)

Dearest Uecker family, extended relatives, gathered friends: grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Today we have come to a place that no parent, no sister, no brother, no grandparent and no friend ever want to arrive at. It's the place where hearts have been broken, dreams have been shattered, the pain is searing, and the darkness is heavy.

The death of KariAnn is a reminder of all that is wrong in the world. Her death is a reminder of the cruelty and unfairness that comes from the curse of this sin-filled fallen world. It makes you want to shake your fist and say, "This isn't right!" "This isn't fair!" Sin is a relentless oppressor. It sends us to our knees wondering what to do and where to go.

The Apostle Peter helps at times like these. We sang it earlier. While talking to Jesus he puts it plainly for us, “Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). At times like these, Peter’s words become our words — they become your words, Uecker family. When death is staring you in the face, there is One to whom you can go and hear the sweet words of eternal life. His name is Jesus Christ.

You see, He has done something marvelous about death. He has defeated it! He has walked through it. Crucified for your sins, for my sins and for KariAnn’s sins, Jesus died and rose again to give eternal life to all who believe in Him. There is no stopping His love and no ending His mercy. He literally went through Hell to bring His love, mercy and grace to you.

And make no mistake about it. Jesus Christ loves KariAnn. In fact, the Heavenly Father named and claimed KariAnn as His very own precious child on Dec. 2, 1984, when she was baptized into the powerful name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Through the water and Word of Holy Baptism, Jesus made KariAnn a powerful promise — a promise that is always and forever bigger than any weakness and stronger than any frailty of our flesh.

We heard it read from the book of Romans at the start of the service. In Baptism KariAnn was personally united with Jesus Christ and His death, which also means she will be united with Him in His resurrection. That’s His baptismal promise. And God does not break His promises.

In fact, the Apostle Paul says it this way in Romans 8, “For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” God’s love for KariAnn is vast and deep. Nothing can stop Him from loving her. Did you hear that? *Nothing!*

Yet, I know many of you are here asking questions. Many are wondering “why?” Why did this have to happen? Why did it have to come to this? To a precious daughter who loved her parents, a cherished sister who looked out for her siblings, a beloved granddaughter who loved making ginger bread houses with grandma, and a tender, ever helping friend, death is so cruel.

That a young woman was so afflicted with such a sickness of her mind is an absolute tragedy. Yet, we might rightly compare it to someone afflicted with a physical life threatening disease. Both take a devastating toll on a person. In KariAnn’s case, her sickness relentlessly oppressed her, ate at her and lied to her. That’s why she, along with all others suffering like her, need our compassion and not our judgment.

Serving her country proudly in the United States Armed Forces, particularly serving in multiple tours overseas during the Iraq War, she poured her life into serving with honor, integrity, duty and dignity. Like Isaiah told the Lord, “Here I am! Send me” (Isa. 6:8), so KariAnn stepped forward when her country was in need and said, “Here I am! Send me.”

However, while in brave service to our country she experienced unbelievable brutality and endured such savage trauma that brought her to the brink of despair. *Post-traumatic stress disorder* is a wicked demon to deal with. It’s difficult for us

who did not go through what she went through to understand how this trauma could lead to such a heart-breaking condition. But that is what trauma does. That’s what this *disorder* does. It rips everything out of *order*. PTSD robs its victims of the ability to think straight.

Yet, KariAnn herself knew its irrational nature, even acknowledging it to me, and her doctors multiple times, but simply could not shake its sinister oppression and repeated lies. Such is the nature of this sickness and we dare not treat it lightly, as if she could have just shaken it off or beaten it with a mere song and dance.

Rather, like any disease of the body that leads to death, this mental sickness pressed heavily upon her until in a moment of great weakness, not being in her right mind, KariAnn succumbed to its affliction where an untimely death by her own doing was the result.

It was not God’s desire that she or anybody do this to themselves. Nonetheless, this act too is one for which our Savior Jesus Christ shed His blood and died. In fact, in the long line of broken hearts, the Lord Jesus Christ is the first in line to weep.

This act is not the unforgivable sin. Yet, it often carries with it an unfortunate and cruel stigma. But we must be ready to distinguish between what happens as the result of a horrendous sickness that disordered and disoriented KariAnn’s mind, over against a willful decision of defiance and open unbelief. Only God knows the ultimate state of her heart on that day.

But again, let me be clear. The baptismal promises of Jesus Christ are far stronger and far bigger than any one moment of weakness, no matter how great you think it is. The mercy of God in Christ Jesus is immeasurable, His love irreversible and His compassion unconditional.

Therefore, we can in good conscience say that Jesus’ promise of salvation is sure and certain, even in moments of our great weakness, as with KariAnn. His death paid for every sin, *every single sin, past, present and future, no matter how big or how bad!* Yours and mine included. That’s the Good News — Jesus Christ came into this world to bring compassion to the broken, hope to the hurting and life to the dying. That includes you and me, right here and right now, even in the midst of this soul-numbing heartache. So, listen up, hear His Words, receive His love and feel His compassion.

Jesus Christ knows how the pain of this world can be so infuriating and debilitating. He knows because He’s walked this road Himself. He experienced all of life’s sad and tragic edges, witnessed its unfairness and felt its fury, most especially when He was innocently nailed to the cross of Calvary. Yet three days later, on Easter Sunday, He walked out of the tomb alive, giving to you and me a hope that cannot be *broken* because He has *spoken*, “**I am the resurrection and the life!**” That means we can cry out in expectant hope: **Alleluia, Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed, Alleluia!**

Even in the face of terrible tragedy and heartache, we have the words of eternal life. As you carry on from this day forward, you do so with the resurrection power of Jesus Christ on your side. Jesus will bring you through all the ups and

all the downs. With Jesus, you have a Lord who loves you, forgives you and fights for you! Therefore, we can say with the Apostle Paul in the reading we heard earlier:

“We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh” (2 Cor. 4:8–11).

So, let’s all remember this so there is no mistake, KariAnn unequivocally and regularly confessed Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. In fact, her last Church service she attended was Easter Sunday at our Zion festival celebration service up at LHS (Mayer Lutheran High School) a few days before she died, where she was with Sonya, her service dog, and where she received the very body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ into her own frail and hurting body.

It was given and shed for her so that she might carry in her body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus might also be made known on the day of the resurrection. Yes, the power of Jesus’ body and blood is the power of a *sin eater* and *death defeater* — it is for you as well.

Consuming every moment of weakness, every minute of sin and every offense ever heaped upon you, Jesus’ body and blood readies your body to meet death, enter into it and then triumph over it. Jesus wants you to carry His life around in you, and so would KariAnn.

In fact, there are few people who I know who were so at ease and intentional about witnessing their faith to others. In fact, KariAnn quickly got the reputation of a woman of faith during basic training, with many of her fellow recruits coming to her asking to pray for them and with them, and often asking her what the Bible taught about this or that. And while serving in war overseas, she requested me to send her boxes of hymnals and bibles that she could pass out.

So be assured, she readily confessed Jesus Christ as **the way, the truth, and the life**. In fact, from little on KariAnn was one who sought out the truth. Barry, her father, tells the story of how when KariAnn was around six years old, she was riding the bus home from school, and sitting with a friend. Apparently KariAnn had somehow gotten her school backpack covered in mud. Her friend was attempting to talk her into telling her parents some made up story about how it happened. But truth seeker that she was, KariAnn simply told her friend (and then later, her parents) that, “No, I’m going to tell the truth.” Yes, KariAnn sought out the truth. And that truth, as does all truth, points to Jesus Christ who is **the way, the truth, and the life**.

So here is the truth for you. In the very midst of death, there is life in Christ Jesus. In fact, if there’s anyone here today who hasn’t been to church for awhile, or if you don’t believe in Jesus Christ as **the way, the truth, and the life**, be assured KariAnn’s desire would be the same as the Lord’s desire, namely, that you would repent of your sins and come to the knowledge of salvation in Jesus Christ.

It’s important. You need to know Jesus. Without Him, your moments of weakness and moments of sin will only result in eternal death and damnation. You need Jesus. He not only has the Words of eternal life, He gives eternal life! That’s a promise Jesus gives to all who believe in Him. Jesus put it like this in the Gospel reading:

“Jesus said, ‘Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also’” (John 14:1–3).

These are the Words of eternal life. Listen to them. Read them. Believe them, so that in your moments of weakness, and on the day of your death, you might experience them in all their sin forgiving, pain-freeing, never-ending, joy-packing, death-defeating, Jesus-filled, life-giving, fullness.

To whom shall we go? We go to Jesus, like KariAnn, because He has the Words of eternal life. **Alleluia, Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia!** Amen.

## Resources on Suicide

### \* Teen Help Hotline:

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline  
800-273-8255

### \* Teen Online chat help available at:

[suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

### \* MYTHS about suicide:

[suicide.org/suicide-myths.html](http://suicide.org/suicide-myths.html)

### \* Overview of multiple online resources for teens:

[pbs.org/wnet/cryforhelp/episodes/resources/hotlines-and-web-sites-for-teens/?p=11](http://pbs.org/wnet/cryforhelp/episodes/resources/hotlines-and-web-sites-for-teens/?p=11)

### \* Book on Suicide

Preus, Peter. *And She Was a Christian: Why Do Believers Commit Suicide?* Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2011.

# Chapter 5: REST IN LOVE

## A WORD FROM HANNAH

"How many of you remember, 'O my dollar Valentines?' Those were fun, weren't they? You fill out a survey and for just a buck you get the name and the number of your one true soul mate... The dollar Valentine was a two-parter - describe yourself and describe what you're looking for in someone else. And as I filled mine out I realized I was actually describing a certain someone. You'd think that if all my answers described one person, that one person would at least appear in my top five. But no. I didn't match up to the one person who may have really been right. Maybe it wasn't my fault. Maybe none of us can say who we truly are. Maybe we're more than what the world sees. Or less. Maybe none of us are what we seem."

Those are Hannah's words from episode six. It's the episode during which Hannah's date on Valentine's Day with Marcus doesn't go as planned due to the rumors that she's "easy."

Hannah wanted to be loved. She was looking for someone to understand her and be her soul mate. We all crave love and affection. However, the high-school and college years can be a trying time as that desire is pursued and explored through different relationships. *13 Reasons Why* portrays Hannah's different attempts at romantic relationships with others. Each one failed for one reason or another. But the series also portrays other romantic relationships among the characters of the show. Tony is in a committed homosexual relationship. Two other classmates are lesbians. One episode features Hannah and another girl, Courtney, making out after an alcohol-induced game of truth or dare. Justin and Jessica have an openly sexual relationship, with various scenes depicting sex acts between them.

Such relationships create various emotions, and their success or failure only adds to those emotions. In Hannah's case, she could have made better decisions to minimize some of the pain she endured. The same goes for others in the show, especially when alcohol was added to the mix, as it was quite often portrayed. Alcohol lowers inhibitions and prompts a willingness to act upon sexual desires. There is a profound danger with the abuse of alcohol. Jessica drinks so much she passes out while making out with Justin, who then leaves her

and allows Bryce, who was also drunk, to rape her. Hannah, also drunk, watched from the closet and did nothing about it.

The pursuit of love can be a difficult road to travel. Along the way, Satan bombards you with his lies, the world assaults you with the pressure to fit in and your sinful flesh wages war against God's desire for you. Learning to know the difference between love and lust is part of growing up. Learning to control sexual impulses and desires is part of growing in the faith. Acting appropriately upon the two desires of love and lust is part of your baptismal identity. But when God is missing from your identity, the search for love can become severely disordered and easily misled. This final section will deal with how the love that comes from God can order your life with meaning, direction and purpose, especially as you enter into romantic relationships. It will also address how the lack of love can affect us, and how disordered love can lash out in unhealthy ways. But in the end, your baptismal identity sustains you in your search for love, helps clarify what true love is and shapes how you express love toward others.

## THE LOVE OF GOD

People often quote the phrase, "God is love." Because God is love, they say, we should all just learn to love one another and let others live and love as they choose. Love is all that matters, after all. So, "Who are you to judge someone? God is love, so how could you say someone expressing their love is wrong?" But is the expression of love they're talking about the same love expressed in God's Word? It is helpful to examine those passages that teach God is love: "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:7-11).

God's love for us is shown by sending His Son to die for our sins (see also John 3:16). God's love is ordered and rooted in His very being, which is perfect and pure. If we are to love as God loves, then we must understand who God is, how He defines love and what He means by love. Jesus helps us understand: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:12-13). The word used here for love in the original Greek is *agape*. This is specific and intentional. It's distinct from all other forms of love that might be expressed, such as parental love, friendship love or erotic love. *Agape* is not a feeling or a desire, but an action of self-sacrifice toward another. "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son" (John 3:16). *Agape* is used here too. It is an act of will to lay

down one's life for another. That's what it means that God is love. Jesus calls us to love one another with that kind of love, not the "love" of our choice or our definition. We are not free to change the meaning of love simply because society has a different view than God. It's important that we understand what God means when He says He loves us and what He means when He says we should love one another.

To keep it simple, it begins and ends with the love God has for us in Jesus Christ, and His command to love as He loves. Jesus made this clear to His disciples: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another" (John 13:34).

The love of Christ is rooted in His love for the Father as well as His compassion for us, which is shown through His obedience to the Father and in His self-sacrifice and service to us. His love is not a license to do whatever you jolly well please. The love of God is not about satisfying the impulses and desires of sexual lust. God's love is selfless and holy. And He calls you to love as He loves, with compassion, in purity and in service to others. However, if we try to love on our own, without God's love within us or guiding us, we'll mess it up and fail miserably.

The love rooted in our being is corrupted by our sinful flesh, and disordered by our fallen passions. Left to ourselves, we act upon every selfish desire whether or not it's good for us or for others. Bryce demonstrates this in brutal fashion when he rapes first Jessica, and then Hannah. It's an example of the destructive nature of our disordered passions. That is not love. Simple consent, that is, if two or more people consent to have sex together (be it heterosexual or homosexual) is not true love. Jessica and Justin consent multiple times to have sex, but is that really love? Not as God defines it.

## LOVE IS MORE THAN SEX

Love is more than sexual intimacy. God's love is selfless and serves others, which means it goes beyond things related to sexual intercourse. True, sexual intimacy is an expression of love in a rightly ordered relationship of a husband and wife. In fact, it's a comprehensive one-flesh union that points to the union of Christ and His bride, the Holy Christian Church (see Eph. 5:31–32). But like so many other things in this life, sexual intimacy has been terribly disordered. Casual sex among unmarried individuals is said to be "making love," when in reality it's simply indulging in the passion of lust to satisfy the desires of the flesh.

High-school and college-age years present various challenges to sort out the impulses of raging hormones. But God's love brings us under His care and calls us to let His love order and fill our lives. His love as He defines it is the answer to our emptiness and the healing to our heartaches. However, we must be willing to receive God's love as He defines it without redefining it according to our desires.

The Bible is clear about what God means by love. It's not about gratifying your desires and impulses, but obeying God's Word and baptismally putting on Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul wonderfully captures both elements: "Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,' and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law ... Let us [therefore] walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires" (Rom. 13:8–14).



Once again this takes you back to your baptismal identity and the life you live in Jesus. How do you “put on the Lord Jesus Christ?” By daily dying and rising with Jesus through Baptism in prayerful contrition and repentance. Putting on Jesus means putting on those divine virtues He had while on earth — faith, hope and love — and living them out in word and deed. Baptism shapes your thoughts, desires and actions. When you put on Christ, you walk in faith, are filled with hope and overflow with love. You no longer live, but Christ who is in you lives. And the life you live in the body you live by faith in the Son of God who loved you and gave Himself for you (Gal. 2:20). Even more, the love of Christ fills the void left by the cruelty of this world and the heartache of failed relationships.

## TRUE LOVE

Hannah was in desperate need of the love of Christ. In her mind all her relationships failed. She believed the lie that no one loved her. However, the love of Christ does not fail. It’s not conditional. It makes no demands. God loves you simply because it is His delight to do so. And the good news about this love is that it’s irreversible and unstoppable. Nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus. The Bible speaks very powerfully about this: “For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38–39).

This means even the sins you commit will not separate you from the love of God. Your sin can certainly separate you from God Himself. This is what happens when someone dies in unbelief. However, God’s love for you is total and complete. He loves you not as you should be, not as you ought to be, but as you are, sinner and all. That doesn’t mean you’re free to stay in your sin, whatever it is. Rather your sin simply cannot stop God from loving you. As Paul told the Romans, “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

This is the kind of love that Hannah and everyone desperately needs. Regardless of the failures, flops and falsehoods in your life, God’s love will always remain true. That’s why of those three divine virtues of faith, hope and love, the greatest of them is LOVE. His love remains true even when we do not.

God’s unconditional love for you is what produces true love for others. When you are secure in His love, you can share that love with others in both word and deed. *13 Reasons Why* needed this kind of love. I think it’s safe to say all the Hannahs of this world desperately need God’s love to fill their

hurting souls. The awesome thing about God’s love is that it will never run out. There is plenty of it for you and plenty left to share with others. As you are loved by God, you are also equipped to share that love with others.

Where there is faith, you will have hope, and where there is hope, there will be love. “So now faith, hope and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13)

## DISORDERED PASSIONS

Hannah’s high-school life was peppered by her classmates’ cruel acts of disordered love. The show curiously uses this disordered love as the basis for the whole series. Hannah begins seeking love, gets burned by it and sets her on a perpetual road of disappointment and heartache because she’s seeking what she thinks is love, but only finding emptiness and disappointment. The lack of love from her classmates, at least as she wanted to be loved by them, was not supplemented enough by others to make her feel significant and secure. But that’s why sharing the love of Christ is so important. Sharing His love can bring healing to relationships, wholeness to broken hearts and forgiveness to wrongs that have been suffered. As Scripture says, “Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8).

Sin distorts and disorders all our desires. We saw multiple expressions of that in the series. Things like jealousy, betrayal, anger and rejection result from disordered passions and misdirected desires. Alex tries to make Jessica jealous and Hannah gets caught in the cross fire when Alex puts her on a best body list passed around school. Ryan betrays Hannah by publishing her deeply personal poem in his school magazine against her will. After Hannah refuses to go out with Zach, he feels rejected and sabotages her emotionally during a class project. Out of revenge, Clay then damages Zach’s car.

Numerous other demonstrations of disordered desires are portrayed. Likely you’ve experienced them in many forms, either as a victim or an offender. Trying to make your way through them is often no easy task. But the divine virtues given to you through Baptism — **faith, hope and love** — equip you to put these disordered desires to death and replace them with the love of Christ. It doesn’t mean it will be easy or pleasant, but that you can make your way through the awkwardness and intensity of those emotions in a Christian manner trusting your Lord and His forgiveness. By **faith** you trust He goes with you and forgives you, giving you **hope** that He will take you through it, and rejoicing that His unconditional **love** covers you through and through.

# CONCLUSION: THE FINAL WORD

## LIVING THE BAPTISMAL LIFE: LAW AND GOSPEL

In summary, it's helpful to consider what all this looks like and sounds like in the life of a teenager and young adult struggling through the pressures of school and social life. How do you tame the disordered passions in your life? How do you deal with the disordered passions of others who lash out against you? There is no secret to success to be uncovered. Rather it simply takes patience and vigilance. Your baptismal identity will lead the way on both accounts. You live by faith, which means you see more to reality than meets the eye. Baptized into Christ you know that the spiritual dimension to your life can influence and shape the earthly dimension. So, you exercise your faith. You turn to God and His Word for strength. You pray, you read God's Word (I'd suggest reading it out loud), you attend worship, sing hymns and spiritual songs, receive the forgiveness of sins, receive instruction for daily and eternal living, and are given God's divine blessing. That is part of the baptismal life of faith.

God has claimed you as His own. Whose you are determines who you are. It gives you identity and purpose. It shapes your thoughts, desires, words and actions. It equips you to deal with sin, both your own and those who sin against you. First, your own: Baptized into Christ, you put to death all the sinful desires and passions within you through contrition and repentance. To know what sin is, of course, you need to study and mediate upon God's commandments. His Law shows you your sins and tells you what He expects you to do in thought, word and deed. One simple place to start is to think upon the Ten Commandments. They are a list of what God commands you to do. When you fail to keep them, He calls you to repentance, and asks you to change your life.

God's law could have helped Hannah avoid compromising situations that ended up adding to her troubles. And when she still did find herself in those situations, it would drive her back to Jesus, where sin is met with His love and forgiveness.

God's law tells you what to do and it shows you your sin. It does not, however, have the power to make you do what God desires. That power comes from His Gospel, the Good News of love and forgiveness in Jesus Christ. Thus, united to Christ in Baptism, He sends His Holy Spirit to work in you those thoughts, desires and actions that are good and pleasing to God. This occurs not by magic, but by the Holy Spirit working through the Word of God, both of which lead you in the ability to control yourself and the desire to do good. The Bible says it like this: "So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with

each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit" (Gal. 5:19-25).

As baptized believers, we are both of the flesh in Adam and of the Spirit in Christ. We are simultaneously righteous saints and unholy sinners. The sinner must daily die, the saint must daily rise. It's an ongoing struggle for the rest of our lives, until we finally die and rise to eternal life. Until then, there's a spiritual war going on within us, Adam vs. Christ. We need the Law to teach us to mortify the old self with its passions and lusts. And we need the Gospel to free us from our sins and bring us back to the freedom of being children of God in Christ. Baptized Christians are children of God who walk by the Spirit and live by the Spirit, producing the fruit of the Spirit.

Part of this fruit is also the ability to cope with the sins that others commit against you. As we discussed earlier, the healing and cleansing blood of Jesus Christ is brought to bear upon those wounds, and the Holy Spirit applies that balm to the offenses you have received at the hands of others. "The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:7). This includes all the unrighteous acts done to us by others.

## SPIRITUAL HELP FOR HANNAH

This is where Hannah could have benefitted tremendously. Rather than trying to find her identity and value in the eyes of her classmates, Baptism teaches that your identity is in Jesus Christ and His actions of love for you. By faith, Hannah could have looked past the unfair labels and treatment she received by her classmates, to see how God completely and utterly loves her and cherishes her. (Just like He does you!)

God's promise to love her and keep her could have been spoken in the face of the rejection she experienced. Even more, she could have listened or read how Jesus was rejected by God in our place so that we never have to face that ultimate rejection. When she was emotionally hurt, she could have unburdened her heart to God in prayer, using one of the Psalms (13, 42, 46, 77, 121) to give expression to her pain, and then be wrapped in His amazing love through Jesus' own

words that say, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28–30).

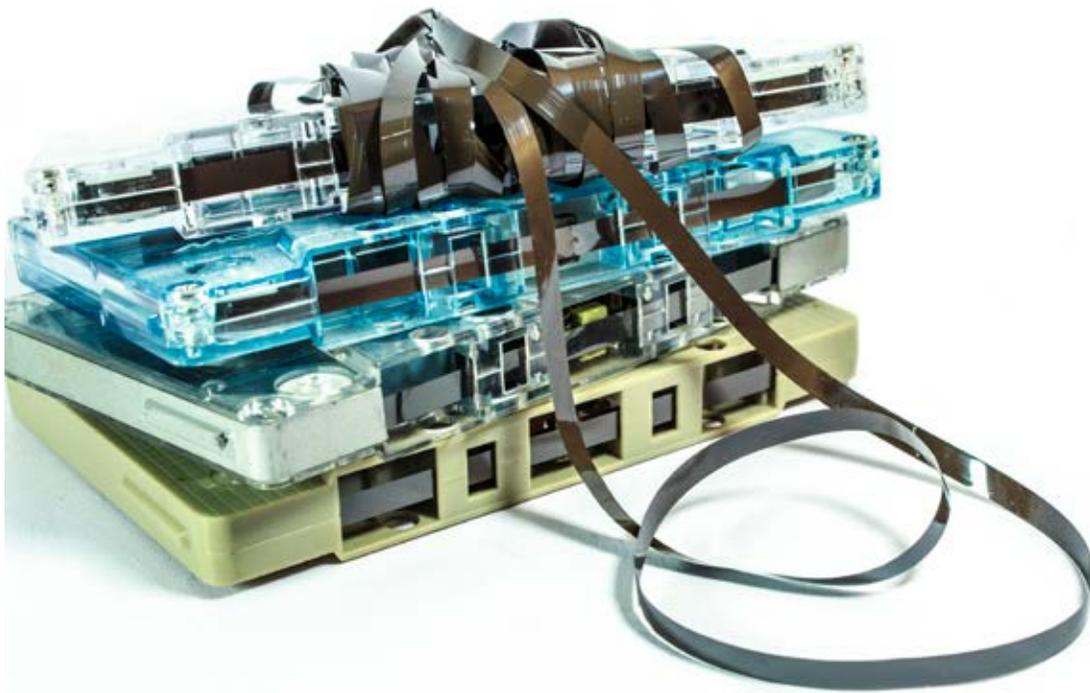
When her classmate, Jeff Atkins, was killed in the car accident, the resurrection power of Jesus could have brought light to her darkness and hope to her despair. If Hannah had an active faith in Jesus, hope would be sure to follow, and with it, the abundance and safety of God’s love. Even after being raped, she could turn to her Baptism to wash away the shame, bind up her broken heart and find solace in the holiness and cleansing that Jesus gives through His Holy Spirit. (This would by no means take the place of careful professional help she would likely also need to sort out that trauma, but with Christ there is always hope, and always love). Finally, rather than turning to suicide to get revenge on her classmates, a baptismal identity could help her find peace knowing that vengeance is the Lord’s (Rom. 12:19), and that He promises to wipe away every tear from our eyes and in the end, set all things right (Rev. 21:4).

## FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE: A THREEFOLD RESPONSE

*13 Reasons Why* is full of misbeliefs, despair and death. As Christians, we wonder how to make sense of it all. Not just the show itself, but all the real life issues that go with it. The answer is found in your baptismal identity and the divine virtues given to you by Jesus Christ. Your Baptism into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit gives you a comforting and powerful identity to live within each day as a redeemed child of God. That identity equips you to meet life’s challenges and address life’s difficult questions with **faith, hope and love**. **Faith** gives you the ability to see through Satan’s lies and correct the misbeliefs that ail you and others. **Hope** grants you assurance to see beyond hardship and despair to live confidently in the grace of Jesus Christ. And **love** permeates your body, mind and soul with the affection of God the Father who sent His Son to die for you and give you words and actions as you express that love for others in the resurrection joy of Jesus Christ.

You are equipped for life. Teenager, young adult, or mature adult, you have the spiritual tools to face what this sin-filled world will throw at you. You have your baptismal identity, full of faith, hope and love. God gives it to you and daily sustains you in it. All that remains is for you to boldly live in it. God bless you as you do so.

*So now faith, hope and love abide, these three (1 Cor. 13:13).*



# Reflection Questions

The following reflection questions are for personal use. They could also be used in a group setting with leaders who are comfortable leading discussions on the intense subject matter portrayed in *13 Reasons Why* and potentially raised in the reflection. If you are going to use it to lead a group discussion, please be sure to carefully read through the questions and thoroughly prepare prior to any group discussion.

## Reflection Questions: INTRODUCTION

1. What kind of cliques (“in-groups” or “cool groups”) do see at your school? In your opinion do they have a positive or negative impact upon individuals and/or the overall student body? Explain why.
2. In what ways do gossip and slander affect your life or your school? Have you been hurt by a rumor? How did it get started? Did social media play a role? Is there any bullying at your school? If so, what kind? Is there any shaming? What kind?
3. For those who have seen it, did you find the series disturbing? If so, what specifically bothered you? The theme of suicide? The depiction of sexual assault? The lack of hope? What, if anything, about this series stuck with you the most? Why? If the series really didn’t bother you, why not? (Perhaps it wasn’t much different from any other movies you’ve seen or video games you play.) For those that have not seen it, does talking about it make you want to see it? If so, why?
4. What emotions do the topics of suicide and sexual assault create in you (fear, revulsion, anger, sadness, maybe curiosity, or fascination)? For those who watched the show, what emotions did the series evoke in you, especially the sexual assault/rape and suicide scenes (sorrow, anger, unrest, angst, sick to your stomach, compassion, maybe curiosity, or morbid fascination if you’ve never seen such graphic scenes before)? Did you find yourself dwelling on scenes you saw more than other shows? Why? How do you think you could divert your mind from dwelling on those scenes?
5. There are those who are different from you in many ways. Maybe they’re odd, eccentric, loud, unpopular or just plain weird from your perspective. Think of two specific people who might fit that description. How do you treat them? Have you taken the time to get to know them better? Identify two ways you can show more kindness and understanding toward them (say hello, befriend them, encourage them, etc.).
6. Did you relate to any of the characters in the series? If so, who and why (Hannah, Clay, Justin, Alex, Jessica, Tyler, Courtney, Marcus, Zach, Ryan, Sheri, Bryce, Mr. Porter, Hannah’s parents, Clay’s parents, others)? What about them did you relate to? Their personality? Their behavior? Their social standing? Their looks? Their family life?
7. Do you think the series accurately portrays high-school life? How about compared to your experience? How was it similar or different?
8. Whether you have seen the show or not, has anything about this series made you think about issues you’ve never really thought about in-depth before (i.e. suicide, sexual assault/rape, teenage sexual relationships — homosexual or heterosexual— the perspective of parents, the peer pressure of teens, what life is like without faith in Jesus, where does hope come from)?
9. For those who watched the show, how can your Christian faith help you sort through all the emotions and questions that went through your mind during the show? How does it offer hope? How does it inform you how to behave toward those like Hannah? Her classmates? The sexual behavior? The drugs and alcohol? The vulgar language? Suicide? Bullying?

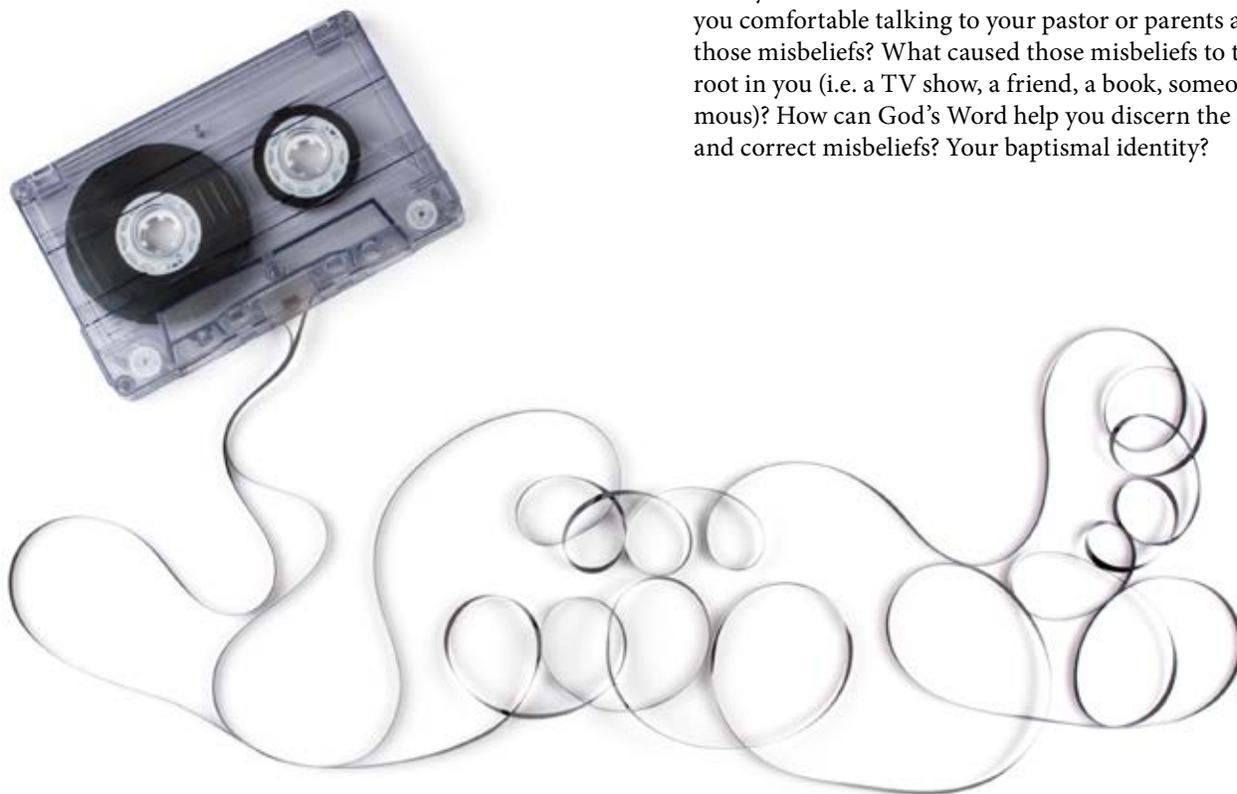
## Chapter 1 Reflection Questions: BAPTISMAL IDENTITY: LIVING WITH FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE

1. Have you ever thought about your identity in terms of your Baptism before? Does it provide you with any new insight to how you look at yourself or others? What is freeing about it?
2. How can your baptismal identity help you confront the challenges of teenage and young adult life (temptations to sin, guilt over your failures or sins, peer pressure, following the crowd)?
3. Give some examples of how your baptismal identity might shape your thoughts desires and actions. Your purpose and meaning in life (i.e. How should a guy look at a girl, especially her body? Does he control his eyes or objectify her body with lustful thoughts? How might baptismal identity shape how a girl dresses? Do you think about how you can outdo your classmate, or how you can serve your classmate? Do you find more value in how many people like you or how much God loves you?).

4. How might baptismal identity address many of the issues portrayed in the series?
    - a. Suicide and suicidal thoughts
    - b. Drugs/alcohol
    - c. Sex
    - d. Gossip/slander
    - e. Compassion and kindness for others
  5. Who is the source of your faith, hope and love? And how are those divine virtues received?
  6. How can faith, hope and love address many of the questions or issues raised by *13 Reasons Why* (i.e. suicide, loneliness, anger, violence, insecurity, desire to be liked)?
3. What are some specific ways you can strengthen your own faith? The faith of others? (i.e. pray the Lord's Prayer, the Psalms, meditate on God's Word, attend the Divine Worship Service, devotions, caring conversations)
  4. How do you incorporate your faith into your daily life, especially in your thoughts, desires, and actions at school (i.e. using self-control, showing kindness, meditating on what God wants, daily prayer, reading God's Word, family devotions, weekly worship, Confession and Absolution, The Lord's Supper, acts of service, mentoring younger kids in the faith)?
  5. What were some of Hannah's specific misbeliefs about herself and her classmates? (About her reputation? Her self-worth? Her identity? Her peers? Her past? Her future?) How did they contribute to her ultimate decision? How could they have been altered or corrected? What kind of misbeliefs do you have about your life? (About your reputation? Your self-worth? Your identity? Your peers? Your past? Your future?)
  6. How do you think misbeliefs about yourself and others become part of your thinking? Have you ever found yourself dwelling upon a negative or cruel comment someone said about you to the point of later believing it was true? How did it cause you to talk about or think about yourself? When are you most likely to say unkind things to yourself that you would never say to a friend? What might you say to yourself, to encourage yourself? How can your baptismal identity counter those misbeliefs? Consider how you can begin to listen to (believe) your own negative descriptions about yourself.
  7. Have you ever had a misbelief about God before? Were you comfortable talking to your pastor or parents about those misbeliefs? What caused those misbeliefs to take root in you (i.e. a TV show, a friend, a book, someone famous)? How can God's Word help you discern the truth and correct misbeliefs? Your baptismal identity?

## Chapter 2 Reflection Questions: WALK BY FAITH

1. Do you view all of life through your faith, or is it more of just a Sunday thing? How does faith play a role in your daily decisions? Does it enter into your conversations with friends, your parents, your neighbors? How can you use faith to combat Satan's lies?
2. How can your faith help you sort out all the questions raised by the show?
  - a. Suicide/death (when it seems like there is no hope)
  - b. Sexuality (how you treat another's reputation and their bodies)
  - c. Bullying (as the victim or the perpetrator)
  - d. Gossip/slander (as the victim or the perpetrator)



8. How easy is it for you to tell a lie? Can you keep a straight face? Does your heart race? How easy is it for you to believe a lie? How do you discern the truth from a lie? What role should God's Word play in discerning the truth?
9. What lies have you told before? Were they big or small? What were the consequences of those lies? What lies have been told to you before? How did they affect you? What were the consequences of those lies?
10. What lies is the devil tempting you to believe right now?
  - a. You're not good enough, smart enough, pretty enough, popular enough?
  - b. You are not that bad of a sinner?
  - c. You don't need God in your life?
  - d. Nobody cares about you?
  - e. Life sucks! (Or as in the show, FML.)
11. Think of two friends you know well. Are they susceptible to believing any lies about themselves right now? What are those lies? What could you do to help them see the truth?

### Chapter 3 Reflection Questions: LIVE IN HOPE

1. Can you remember a time when it felt like you had no hope? What thoughts were going through your mind (if you are comfortable sharing)? What emotions were you feeling? How did you get through it? Did anyone in particular help you through it? How do you think that experience might allow you to help someone else?
2. What are ways to keep hope alive in your life? How can you exercise your faith to sustain that hope (i.e. prayer, memorize parts of God's Word, attend worship, family devotions)?
3. What are some specific things you can say and do for someone who seems like they have no hope?
  - a. What words could you use?
    - \* (Consider ways you could give a compliment, encouragement, affirmation, or even a blessing, "God bless you and protect you.")
  - b. What actions could you perform?
    - \* (Consider ways you could write a note of encouragement, walk with them in the hallway, sit by them at lunch, etc.)
  - c. Who could you tell?
    - \* A trusted adult
    - \* Counselor
    - \* Teacher
    - \* Parent
    - \* Pastor

### Chapter 4 Reflection Questions: SUICIDE

\*\*\*If these reflection questions are being asked in a group setting, some participants may consider them extremely personal or too intense to talk about, and thus may not be comfortable sharing these in a group setting. Consider letting participants answer these on their own and then invite only those who are comfortable and willing to discuss them with the group. Do not force anyone to answer. Be attentive to those who may be too uncomfortable or become emotional and need some follow up one-on-one care if they would desire it.

#### For Personal Reflection

1. Have you ever known anyone who committed suicide? How close were you to them? Immediate family, extended family, friend, acquaintance, or know the name but otherwise unfamiliar? How did it make you feel — sad, angry, hurt, sick, questioning why, other? (This may be too intense for some to answer, especially if it was a family member.)
2. Thinking about hurting oneself is no small thing. Many of us simply have never thought in those drastic terms. What things do you think might make someone else think about hurting themselves (A breakup with your boyfriend or girlfriend? Constantly being made fun of at school? Parents getting a divorce? Parents always yelling at you? Having no friends? Rumors and gossip? Girlfriend pregnant?)? How could you talk to someone who is experiencing one of the things above, but has not necessarily expressed any consideration of hurting themselves?
3. Identify two specific people (name them in your mind) who you would be comfortable talking to if you were ever considering harming yourself (at least one adult). What about them makes you willing to talk with them (i.e. they are a blood relation to you, their willingness to listen, you can trust them, they just understand, they love you, they've experienced what you're going through)?
4. Do you know anyone who is thinking about hurting or harming themselves? (Identify their names in your mind). Identify some specific actions you will take to make sure they receive care and support (i.e. talk to them with words of affirmation, talk to an adult about their situation, walk with them to the school counselor, go with them to his or her parents).

## Chapter 5 Reflection Questions: REST IN LOVE

1. What are ways you can rest in God's love (i.e. receive absolution, hear God's Word, remember your Baptism, receive the Lord's Supper, sing hymns, talk to your pastor about God's love for you, talk to your parents about God's love for you, etc.)? What are some specific ways you can share that love with others at your school (in the halls, in the classroom, in the parking lot, at practice, etc.)?
2. What kind of public displays of affection do you see in your school/college? Does it make you uncomfortable? If so, why?
3. How would you describe the difference between love and lust? How would you describe all the different kinds of love (erotic love, brotherly love, familial love, divine love)?
4. How far is too far? Teenagers and young adults want to know how far you can go physically with a boyfriend or girlfriend. The secular culture has one standard. How would you describe it (Look up Jer. 8:12 to see if that's an apt description regarding secular society's explicit sexuality)? The Christian community has another standard. How would you describe it? How far is too far? Holding hands? Open mouth kissing? Touching various body parts on the outside of clothing? Touching underneath clothing? Oral sex? God's standard for purity is rather clear. Look up Eph. 5:1-7 to see what God expects of His baptized saints.
5. God's Word calls for sexual purity among His people. They are to avoid sexual immorality. Thus, what relationship does God create for sexual expressions to be shared (See Gen. 2:24)? How is society trying to redefine that relationship (Consider the recent Supreme Court ruling of *Obergefell v. Hodges*)?
6. The Bible does not speak in terms of sexual identity, sexual orientation, or gender identity. It only speaks of sexually moral and immoral acts (whether they are heterosexual or homosexual). How might you talk to someone who says they were born gay and says that Christians are wrong about homosexuality? Should they be allowed to act upon those desires if they feel they are born that way? What about a baptized Christian who has same sex attraction? What does their baptismal identity have to say about their sexuality?
7. How would you describe the love of God based on what the Bible says?
8. Reflect on how God's love empowers you to love others. What are some specific ways you can share that love? What words can you say and what actions can you do with ...
  - \* someone who seems down?
  - \* your parents?
  - \* your siblings?
  - \* an unbeliever?
  - \* your neighbor?
9. Think of a time when you felt unloved. What emotions did you experience in that emptiness (i.e. loneliness, sadness, tired/fatigue, anger, disappointment)?
10. Are you comfortable saying the words, "I love you?" To God? Your parents? Your siblings? And for you adults, to your children?

## Reflection Questions:

### CONCLUSION: THE FINAL WORD

1. How do the Law and the Gospel apply to your baptismal identity? Which one contains God's commands? Which one contains God's promises? In what ways can you apply each to your own life?
2. How does God produce good works in us (HINT: the fruits of the Spirit)?
3. How can your baptismal identity help you with the desire to get revenge? How can it redirect those urges?



THE  
LUTHERAN CHURCH  
Missouri Synod

**Life Ministry**

*lcms.org/life | 888-THE LCMS (843-5267)*