



Trend Alert!

“13 REASONS WHY” ... LOOKING FOR TRUE NORTH...

By Walt Mueller

Trend Alert: “13 Reasons Why”

Have you been watching? It’s compelling. It will suck you in. It’s certainly done that for millions of kids. It’s the Netflix series “13 Reasons Why.” High School student Hannah Baker has taken her own life. But before she does, she records a series of messages to individuals who have given her a reason. Like I said. . . it’s compelling.

The series seems to hit on just about every single teen issue and cultural reality we talk about here at CPYU. One of the trends “13 Reasons Why” so clearly reflects is a trend reflected through its’ absence. The life-giving narrative of the Gospel isn’t there. In fact, in its’ place is a huge void. . . which is exactly what happens in lives young and old alike when the narrative one lives (or dies) by lacks hope.

Since watching “13 Reasons Why,” I’ve been thinking about how to best respond. The implications are not just one or two. There’s a multitude. But one that sticks out to me right now is one that has to do with those called to love and lead kids. It’s an implication for parents and youth workers: To *give* hope, we must *have* hope. And the starting point for doing that in a culture that has lost its’ true north is to do some good hard listening ourselves. **We must be intent on listening *ourselves* to the narrative of the Word, rather than to the empty narrative of the world.**

Whether we are children, teenagers, or adults, we all look to some authority for guidance, direction, and answers. That authority, be it a friend, parent, spouse, writer, film star, musician, self, or even our changing opinions, becomes our compass, directing our steps as we try to figure out who we are, who to follow, and how to live in our world.

In a world where there are many “experts” sharing conflicting opinions on the purpose of life, how to live our lives, and how to raise and relate to kids, it’s good to know that there is a compass we can trust, handed to us by the One who created life, children, teenagers, parents, and families. That compass is the Bible. God’s revelation of Himself in the Bible reveals what we need to know about *everything* we encounter on the journey of loving and leading teens in today’s world.

The words of the apostle Paul to Timothy, a young man who needed encouragement, apply not only to Timothy’s life and ministry but to us today as we fulfill our God-given ministry in parenting or ministering to kids: “Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another – showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God’s way.” (2 Tim. 3:16, *The Message*). In this verse, Paul lists four valuable uses for the compass, all of them helpful as we parent teens in this loud and convincing culture.



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First, the Bible offers sound instruction. It is a believable teacher and the only true source of knowledge about God's world. Like the instruction manual accompanying a complicated machine or appliance, God's Word helps us to understand and bear through the complexities of life, including our changing children and their confusing world.

Second, a growing knowledge of the Bible helps us to evaluate and test everything else that claims to be true. All worldviews, parenting philosophies, youth ministry strategies, advice, manuals, and approaches should be measured against the blueprint of the Bible.

Third, the Bible serves as a diagnostic checkup and trouble-shooting guide. As we look at our own lives and approaches to youth ministry or parenting, the Bible helps us to see where we have gone wrong while offering clear guidelines and instructions on how to correct our course.

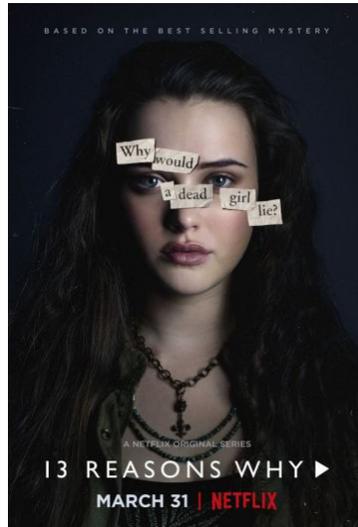
Fourth, the Bible is a road map that helps us stay on course in all of our tasks and activities. It lays out a clear path for right and godly living. In a day and age when some kids grow up without parents or any other positive role models, our children and teens desperately need godly parents and youth leaders whose disciplined and regular study of and meditation on Scripture pays liberal dividends in Christlike love and direction.

Looking back on my own life and experience, I know how clearly the compass speaks to life, giving us guidance, perspective, comfort, hope, and direction. When I graduated

from high school my parents gave me a gift that I've treasured since that day. It was a large Bible Concordance. While I've used it quite a bit over the years, I value the words my parents wrote on the inside cover more than I value the book itself: "Listen to counsel and accept discipline, that you may be wise the rest of your days (Proverbs 19:20)." When each of our kids

graduated from high school we used the space allotted to us in their yearbooks to send them a message including these words from Proverbs 3: 5-6: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."

When our kids go through difficult times in which there seems to be no way out, we must stand by them, support them, care for them, and communicate hope. Perhaps we can use these words from Jeremiah 29:11 – "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."



That just might be the reason why "13 Reasons Why" is so compelling. It serves to remind us of God's gift of a hope-filled narrative that begins with the resurrection and ends with the restoration of all things. It serves to remind us to live and teach the Gospel narrative. . . which is much more compelling than any other story that's ever been told.

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For more information on today's youth culture, visit the website of the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding at www.cpyu.org.

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