

Teaching the Faith with
CURRENT EVENTS

The Most Important Reasons Why Life is Worth It

Overview

By now most of us have probably heard of or seen the new Netflix show “13 Reasons Why.” An adaptation of the young adult novel of the same name, the show tells the fictional story of Hannah, a teenage girl who commits suicide. Prior to her death, Hannah records 13 cassette tapes that each explain a “reason” why she made the decision to take her own life. Each reason blames a different person for something they did or failed to do to her.

While the show may have some laudable anti-bullying goals, the suggestion that there could be any reasons that justify committing suicide is a dangerous one in our modern culture and especially for our students. Although we recommend against explicit discussion of the show with students, this cultural event provides an opportunity for us as adults, parents, and educators to have a conversation with the young people in our lives about the value and beauty of life, the truth about the existence of suffering and evil, what the Church teaches about suicide, and how to find help if someone is experiencing suicidal thoughts.

In this lesson your students will:

- ▶ Understand Catholic teaching about the beauty and dignity of human life
- ▶ Explore what it means to be made in God’s image and likeness and the obligations that flow from our origin

- ▶ Consider the existence and nature of evil and human suffering and how God alone can bring good even out of evil
- ▶ Understand Catholic teaching about suicide and the sanctity of human life

Resources:

- ▶ **For teachers:** “Catholic leaders urge extreme caution for new Netflix series,” by Mary Rezac, *Catholic News Agency*. <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/catholic-leaders-urge-extreme-caution-for-new-netflix-series-31586/>

- ▶ **Optional parent reading:** “Before You Watch 13 Reasons Why...” by Leah Murphy, *Lifeteen.com*. <http://lifeteen.com/blog/watch-13-reasons/>

Activities:

1. Given the sensitive nature of the topic of suicide, use caution when discussing these issues. Based upon the needs and maturity level of your students, use all or some of the *Catechism* and Church document readings and activities that accompany this lesson to engage in a meaningful discussion, to the extent that is appropriate, about the Catholic Church’s teaching on the dignity of human life, the question of sin, suffering and evil, and suicide.
2. We recommend that you first read the “For teachers” reading, “Catholic leaders urge extreme caution for new Netflix series,” by Mary Rezac, from the *Catholic News Agency* (found at the link above). This article will provide a good primer regarding the show, the issues it presents, and potential topics to address with your students. Consider reviewing with your students the appropriate way to seek help if someone is struggling with bullying, depression, abuse, and/or suicidal thoughts. Help your students identify the adults in your school who can provide help, and when to seek out help. Take care not to encourage your students to keep things from their parents.
3. Optional parent reading: You may choose to offer parents of your students the article “Before You Watch 13 Reasons Why...” by Leah Murphy from *Lifeteen.com* (found at the above link). Because of the graphic nature of the descriptions of the show it contains, we do not recommend giving this article to students directly, but to let parents discern whether to read it with their children.
4. Extension option: Have your students create their own list of things to be thankful for in their own lives. You may also have them create a list of people they love, and/or their goals. Then,

spend some time having students share some of the items on their lists and discussing why they are important to them.

Answer Key:

On the Goodness of Life: An excerpt from *Evangelium Vitae* (34) by Pope Saint John Paul II

1. Accept reasoned answers.
2. Even though man is formed from the dust of the ground, he is a manifestation of God in the world, a sign of His presence, and a trace of His glory. In Genesis, the story of the creation of man is presented as the result of a special decision on the part of God, a deliberation to establish a particular and specific bond with the Creator. Only man is made in God's image and likeness. The life which God offers to man is a gift by which God shares something of Himself with His creatures.
3. The dignity of every human being comes from God and is based on the intimate bond which unites him to his Creator: in man there shines forth a reflection of God Himself. Nothing can ever lessen or take away the dignity of any human being because it is given to them by God.
4. Human beings are placed at the summit of God's creative activity, as its crown and culmination. Everything in creation is ordered to man and everything is made subject to him. God has given human beings a primacy over all of creation and he has been entrusted to care for all of creation responsibly.
5. Accept reasoned answers. The fact that we alone are made to know and love our creator should affect the way we live our lives. We have a special responsibility to seek to know God and to love Him in all that we do.

On Man Made in the Image of God: *Catechism of the Catholic Church* nos. 1701-1709

1. It is in Christ that we find the fullest revelation of who we are as human beings made in God's image and likeness, because He is the very "image of the invisible God." He restores the divine image that was disfigured by sin, to its original beauty.
2. Accept reasoned answers.
3. Accept reasoned answers.
4. Our gifts of reason and free will allow us to be capable of understanding the order of things established by the Creator and to direct ourselves to our true good. We are able to find our perfection by seeking and loving what is true and good. Reason understands the voice of God urging and obliging us to do what is good and avoid what is evil, which is fulfilled in our

love of God and neighbor. Living a moral life bears witness to the dignity of the human person.

5. We still desire the good, which is difficult for us to find because of our wounded nature due to sin. We are inclined to evil and subject to error. We are divided in ourselves and struggle between good and evil, light and darkness.
6. Christ has delivered us from Satan and sin and He has merited for us the new life in the Holy Spirit. His grace restores what sin has damaged in us. When we believe in Christ and follow Him as His disciples, we are capable of acting rightly and doing what is good. In union with Jesus Christ, we are able to be holy.

On Evil and Suffering: *Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 309-314

1. The whole Christian Faith. The goodness of creation, the drama of sin and the patient love of God who comes to meet us by His covenants, the redemptive Incarnation of His Son, His gift of the Spirit, His gathering of the Church, the power of the Sacraments, and His call to blessed life all give answers and solutions to the question evil.
2. So that the world can journey to its ultimate perfection. This journeying, for angels and men as intelligent free creatures, necessarily involves their free choice and preferential love. Love necessarily involves choosing.
3. Moral evil is worse than physical evil because they are evils that are willed. Accept reasoned answers.
4. God is never the creator of evil, either directly or indirectly. Moral evil is the result of the sin and choices of human beings. God permits moral evil because He respects the freedom of His creatures. Only God can (mysteriously) bring about good from evil. Evil, however, can never be good in and of itself. God is all-powerful and can bring about good even from evil. We are not all-powerful, and therefore, cannot ensure good from evil. Therefore, we should never do evil even with a good intent.
5. The greatest moral evil ever committed was the rejection and murder of God's only Son, caused by the sins of all men. From this evil, God, by His grace, brought about the greatest of goods, the glorification of Christ and our redemption from sin.
6. Accept reasoned answers.

On Suicide: *Catechism of the Catholic Church* nos. 2280-2283

1. Accept reasoned answers. We are obliged to accept life gratefully and preserve it for His honor and the salvation of our souls. We are stewards, not owners, of the life God has entrusted to us. It is not ours to dispose of.

2. Suicide is an offense against the just love of self and contradicts the natural inclination of human beings to preserve and perpetuate his life. It is an offense against our neighbor because it unjustly breaks the ties of solidarity with family, nation, and other human societies to which we have obligations. It is an offense against God because it is contrary to love for Him.
3. Suicide is made an even graver sin if it is done with the intention of setting an example for others, especially the young. Then, it is also the sin of scandal. One's responsibility for committing suicide is diminished when it is done as a result of grave psychological disturbances, anguish, or grave fear of hardship, suffering, or torture.
4. The Church should always pray for the eternal salvation of those who have taken their own lives and for God's mercy upon their souls.
5. Accept reasoned answers.
6. Accept reasoned answers.
7. Accept reasoned answers.

The Most Important Reasons Why Life is Worth It

Directions: Read the given readings and then answer the questions.

On the Goodness of Life: An excerpt from *Evangelium Vitae* (34) by Pope Saint John Paul II

Life is always a good. This is an instinctive perception and a fact of experience, and man is called to grasp the profound reason why this is so.

Why is life a good? This question is found everywhere in the Bible, and from the very first pages it receives a powerful and amazing answer. The life which God gives man is quite different from the life of all other living creatures, inasmuch as man, although formed from the dust of the earth (cf. Gen 2:7, 3:19; Job 34:15; Ps 103:14; 104:29), is a manifestation of God in the world, a sign of his presence, a trace of his glory (cf. Gen 1:26-27; Ps 8:6). This is what Saint Irenaeus of Lyons wanted to emphasize in his celebrated definition: "Man, living man, is the glory of God". Man has been given a sublime dignity, based on the intimate bond which unites him to his Creator: in man there shines forth a reflection of God himself.

The Book of Genesis affirms this when, in the first account of creation, it places man at the summit of God's creative activity, as its crown, at the culmination of a process which leads from indistinct chaos to the most perfect of creatures. Everything in creation is ordered to man and everything is made subject to him: "Fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over ... every living thing" (1:28); this is God's command to the man and the woman. A similar message is found also in the other account of creation: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it" (Gen 2:15). We see here a clear affirmation of the primacy of man over things; these are made subject to him and entrusted to his responsible care, whereas for no reason can he be made subject to other men and almost reduced to the level of a thing. In the biblical narrative, the difference between man and other creatures is shown above all by the fact that only the creation of man is presented as the result of a special decision on the part of God, a deliberation to establish a particular and specific bond with the Creator: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen 1:26). The life which God offers to man is a gift by which God shares something of himself with his creature.

Israel would ponder at length the meaning of this particular bond between man and God. The Book of Sirach too recognizes that God, in creating human beings, "endowed them with strength like his own, and made them in his own image" (17:3). The biblical author sees as part of this image not only man's dominion over the world but also those spiritual faculties which are distinctively human, such as reason, discernment between good and evil, and free will: "He filled them with knowledge and understanding, and showed them good and evil" (Sir 17:7). The ability to attain truth and freedom are human prerogatives inasmuch as man is created in the image of his Creator, God who is true and just (cf. Dt 32:4). Man alone, among all visible creatures, is "capable of knowing and loving his Creator". The life which God bestows upon man is much more than mere existence in time. It is a drive towards fullness of life; it is the seed of an existence which transcends the very limits of time: "For God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity" (Wis 2:23).

1. Pope Saint John Paul II writes in *Evangelium Vitae* that "Life is always a good." In part, this means that having life is always better than not having life. What experiences from your own life can you point to as support for the idea that life is always a good?
2. How is human life different from that of all other living creatures?
3. The word "dignity" refers to the value, worth, or honor that a person possesses. Where does the dignity of every human being come from? Despite the many different situations in which someone might find themselves in life, can anything lessen or take away their dignity as a human being? Why or why not?
4. How does the Book of Genesis affirm the goodness of human life? What does it tell us about humanity's relationship to the rest of creation?
5. The Pope writes, "Man alone, among all visible creatures, is "capable of knowing and loving his Creator". What are some ways that we are able to come to know God? How are we able to show Him that we love Him? How does this fact affect the way that we live our lives?

On Man Made in the Image of God: *Catechism of the Catholic Church* nos. 1701-1709

1701 "Christ, . . . in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, makes man fully manifest to himself and brings to light his exalted vocation." It is in Christ, "the image of the invisible God," that man has been created "in the image and likeness" of the Creator. It is in Christ, Redeemer and Savior, that the divine image, disfigured in man by the first sin, has been restored to its original beauty and ennobled by the grace of God.

1702 The divine image is present in every man. It shines forth in the communion of persons, in the likeness of the unity of the divine persons among themselves (cf. chapter two).

1703 Endowed with "a spiritual and immortal" soul, the human person is "the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake." From his conception, he is destined for eternal beatitude.

1704 The human person participates in the light and power of the divine Spirit. By his reason, he is capable of understanding the order of things established by the Creator. By free will, he is capable of directing himself toward his true good. He finds his perfection "in seeking and loving what is true and good."

1705 By virtue of his soul and his spiritual powers of intellect and will, man is endowed with freedom, an "outstanding manifestation of the divine image."

1706 By his reason, man recognizes the voice of God which urges him "to do what is good and avoid what is evil." Everyone is obliged to follow this law, which makes itself heard in conscience and is fulfilled in the love of God and of neighbor. Living a moral life bears witness to the dignity of the person.

1707 "Man, enticed by the Evil One, abused his freedom at the very beginning of history." He succumbed to temptation and did what was evil. He still desires the good, but his nature bears the wound of original sin. He is now inclined to evil and subject to error:

Man is divided in himself. As a result, the whole life of men, both individual and social, shows itself to be a struggle, and a dramatic one, between good and evil, between light and darkness.

1708 By his Passion, Christ delivered us from Satan and from sin. He merited for us the new life in the Holy Spirit. His grace restores what sin had damaged in us.

1709 He who believes in Christ becomes a son of God. This filial adoption transforms him by giving him the ability to follow the example of Christ. It makes him capable of acting rightly and doing good. In union with his Savior, the disciple attains the perfection of charity which is holiness. Having matured in grace, the moral life blossoms into eternal life in the glory of heaven.

1. In whom do we find the fullest revelation of who we are as human beings made in God's image and likeness? What is restored by this revelation?
2. The *Catechism* tells us that the divine image is present in every human being – that every person is a reflection of God himself. This especially “shines forth” in the “communion of persons,” or in the way that we love and serve one another as we are called to do. What are some ways that you have experienced the love of God through others? What are some ways that you have shown the love of God to others by your own actions?
3. “Beatitude” means “supreme happiness,” or “fulfillment.” The *Catechism* tells us that God made us for “eternal beatitude.” What do you think this means? How do we achieve this goal for which we are made? Do you think it's possible to be “happy” or to find “fulfillment” in the midst of pain or suffering? Why or why not? Give an example if possible.
4. What do our gifts of reason and free will allow us to do? What does our reason understand the voice of God urging and obliging us to do? How is this fulfilled and to what does it bear witness?
5. Even though our original parents abused their freedom and sinned against God, what do we still desire? Why is this difficult for us to find? Between what things do we struggle?
6. What has Christ delivered us from? To what has He restored us? How are we able to act rightly and do what is good? How are we able to be holy?

On Evil and Suffering: *Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 309-314

309 If God the Father almighty, the Creator of the ordered and good world, cares for all his creatures, why does evil exist? To this question, as pressing as it is unavoidable and as painful as it is mysterious, no quick answer will suffice. Only Christian faith as a whole constitutes the answer to this question: the goodness of creation, the drama of sin and the patient love of God who comes to meet man by his covenants, the redemptive Incarnation of his Son, his gift of the Spirit, his gathering of the Church, the power of the sacraments and his call to a blessed life to which free creatures are invited to consent in advance, but from which, by a terrible mystery, they can also turn away in advance. There is not a single aspect of the Christian message that is not in part an answer to the question of evil.

310 But why did God not create a world so perfect that no evil could exist in it? With infinite power God could always create something better. But with infinite wisdom and goodness God freely willed to create a world "in a state of journeying" towards its ultimate perfection. In God's plan this process of becoming involves the appearance of certain beings and the disappearance of others, the existence of the more perfect alongside the less perfect, both constructive and destructive forces of nature. With physical good there exists also physical evil as long as creation has not reached perfection.

311 Angels and men, as intelligent and free creatures, have to journey toward their ultimate destinies by their free choice and preferential love. They can therefore go astray. Indeed, they have sinned. Thus has moral evil, incommensurably more harmful than physical evil, entered the world. God is in no way, directly or indirectly, the cause of moral evil. He permits it, however, because he respects the freedom of his creatures and, mysteriously, knows how to derive good from it:

For almighty God. . . , because he is supremely good, would never allow any evil whatsoever to exist in his works if he were not so all-powerful and good as to cause good to emerge from evil itself.

312 In time we can discover that God in his almighty providence can bring a good from the consequences of an evil, even a moral evil, caused by his creatures: "It was not you", said Joseph to his brothers, "who sent me here, but God. . . You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive." From the greatest moral evil ever

committed - the rejection and murder of God's only Son, caused by the sins of all men - God, by his grace that "abounded all the more", brought the greatest of goods: the glorification of Christ and our redemption. But for all that, evil never becomes a good.

313 "We know that in everything God works for good for those who love him."¹⁸⁰ The constant witness of the saints confirms this truth:

St. Catherine of Siena said to "those who are scandalized and rebel against what happens to them": "Everything comes from love, all is ordained for the salvation of man, God does nothing without this goal in mind."

St. Thomas More, shortly before his martyrdom, consoled his daughter: "Nothing can come but that that God wills. And I make me very sure that whatsoever that be, seem it never so bad in sight, it shall indeed be the best."

Dame Julian of Norwich: "Here I was taught by the grace of God that I should steadfastly keep me in the faith. . . and that at the same time I should take my stand on and earnestly believe in what our Lord shewed in this time - that 'all manner [of] thing shall be well.'"

314 We firmly believe that God is master of the world and of its history. But the ways of his providence are often unknown to us. Only at the end, when our partial knowledge ceases, when we see God "face to face", will we fully know the ways by which - even through the dramas of evil and sin - God has guided his creation to that definitive sabbath rest for which he created heaven and earth.

1. What provides an answer to the question "why does evil exist"? In what ways?
2. Why did God create the world "in a state of journeying"? What does this journeying necessarily involve?
3. Physical evils are natural harms or sufferings such as death, disease, or harms caused by natural disaster. Moral evils are evils willfully committed by human beings, such as murder, theft, violence towards another, or other sinful actions. According to the *Catechism*, which is worse: physical evil or moral evil? Why? Why do you think this is true? What example/s can you give to support this fact?
4. Is God the creator of moral evil (or any evil at all)? Why or why not? What can God (and only God) do with evil? Can evil ever be good? Why or why not?
5. What was the greatest moral evil ever committed? What did God bring out of that evil?
6. When was a time in your own life that God brought about something good from a bad or difficult experience?

On Suicide: *Catechism of the Catholic Church* nos. 2280-2283

2280 Everyone is responsible for his life before God who has given it to him. It is God who remains the sovereign Master of life. We are obliged to accept life gratefully and preserve it for his honor and the salvation of our souls. We are stewards, not owners, of the life God has entrusted to us. It is not ours to dispose of.

2281 Suicide contradicts the natural inclination of the human being to preserve and perpetuate his life. It is gravely contrary to the just love of self. It likewise offends love of neighbor because it unjustly breaks the ties of solidarity with family, nation, and other human societies to which we continue to have obligations. Suicide is contrary to love for the living God.

2282 If suicide is committed with the intention of setting an example, especially to the young, it also takes on the gravity of scandal. Voluntary co-operation in suicide is contrary to the moral law.

Grave psychological disturbances, anguish, or grave fear of hardship, suffering, or torture can diminish the responsibility of the one committing suicide.

2283 We should not despair of the eternal salvation of persons who have taken their own lives. By ways known to him alone, God can provide the opportunity for salutary repentance. The Church prays for persons who have taken their own lives.

1. The *Catechism* tells us that we are responsible for the life God has given us. Why is this so? (Use what you have learned from the previous readings in this lesson to help answer the question). In what ways are we obliged to treat our lives?
2. In what way is suicide an offense against one's own self? In what ways is it an offense against our neighbor? In what ways is it an offense against God?
3. What can make suicide an even graver sin? What can diminish the responsibility of the one committing suicide?
4. For what should the Church pray for those who have taken their own lives?
5. Today, there are many reasons that some people falsely use to justify the taking of one's own life. Our Catholic Faith tells us that there are no reasons enough to justify suicide. For someone who is in full possession of their reason and will, suicide is a grave mortal

sin. Aside from its sinful nature, what argument can you make for why no reason is enough for someone to commit suicide?

6. Since the beginning of mass media, and especially today, many in the news and entertainment industry have sought to manipulate audiences and make suicide seem like a reasonable choice, or even a good thing. Why is it important to watch TV, news, and movies critically, and be prudent in the viewing choices we make?
7. Television shows are only successful if they bring in advertising revenue or, more recently, subscription dollars. Since the beginning of mass media, and especially today, many programs have over-dramatized and sensationalized the struggles faced by many young people in order to increase revenue. Are there good reasons to watch these shows, or should they be avoided? Why or why not?