



# NOTES

## FROM THE ORCHARD

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### A REPORT ON THE 45<sup>TH</sup> GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA By Mr. Caleb Cangelosi

Last week, elders, members and friends of the Presbyterian Church in America gathered at the Koury Convention Center at the Sheraton Greensboro at Four Seasons in Greensboro, NC, to participate in the 45<sup>th</sup> meeting of the PCA's General Assembly. Ken Haynes and I represented Pear Orchard as elder commissioners, while John and Martie Kwasny and Rod and Jeanne Russ were there with One Story Ministries in the exhibition hall. Tammie Haynes was also with Ken to take part in the activities of the week.

You may be unfamiliar with what happens at a General Assembly. It is part trade show, part family reunion, part training seminars, and (most importantly) part meeting of the highest court of our church. The GA is an opportunity for denominational agencies and committees, as well as organizations and ministries like One Story that are connected to the PCA, to display their offerings and services so that we might learn ways

we can increase our fruitfulness and participation in the kingdom of God around the world. It's also a time to reconnect with old friends and meet new ones. It was a rich blessing for me to get together with friends from seminary and those I've met since being ordained in 2003, as well as building new relationships with elders from around the country and world. One highlight for our POPC contingent was getting dinner with Kenny Foster and Jonathan Seda from Grace Dover, the church that has been such an encouragement to us as we seek to become a more multi-ethnic congregation. On Tuesday afternoon, Wednesday morning, and Thursday morning, seminars covering a wide array of topics were offered. We purchased recordings of all these seminars if you are interested in hearing them (visit <http://bit.ly/2tu18js> to see the list of seminars offered this year).

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The most important part of the week is the gathering of teaching and ruling elders to deliberate on matters pertaining to the life and work of our denomination as a whole. From Tuesday evening through Thursday evening, commissioners debated overtures and motions that came from Presbyteries and permanent PCA committees and agencies. Here are a few observations from this year's assembly:

1. Dr. Alexander Jun was elected Moderator of this year's assembly. Though the PCA has had Korean members for awhile, this was the first time a Korean elder was elected Moderator. He is a ruling elder of New Life Mission Church in Fullerton, CA, and teaches at Azusa Pacific University in California. The growing diversity of the PCA was beautifully on display this year, particularly when Dr. Irwyn Ince, an African American teaching elder, gave a report on the committee he chaired. The sight of these two men standing before the Assembly was an encouragement for the PCA to continue seeking to reach the whole of our country with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

2. There was a disappointingly low number of ruling elders this year (1094 teaching elders compared to 292 ruling elders). The PCA affirms that ruling elders share an equal place in the government and oversight of the church at all levels, yet when few ruling elders attend the assembly, the denomination is prevented from enjoying their individual and collective wisdom. Perhaps it was too costly to fly to Greensboro, or too costly to take time off of work – whatever the reasons, the history of the PCA's formation shows the importance of ruling elders to keep our church from drifting away from faithfulness to the Scriptures and our confessional standards. So it's never a good thing when ruling elders don't attend GA.

3. The biggest issue discussed at this year's General Assembly was the report of a study committee on women in ministry. Based on its understanding of the Bible, the PCA allows only men to be ordained to the office of elder and deacon, and women minister to the church and to the lost in many ways. Yet there has been a minority, more vocal in the past decade or so, that has

challenged our belief and practice regarding the office of deacon in particular. There has been an increasing polarization between those who believe women's gifts are not being used by the church in appropriate ways, and those who believe churches are overstepping the biblical boundaries of what are appropriate ways for women to be involved in the ministry of the church. A study committee was appointed at last year's GA to examine this issue further, and to write a report and come with recommendations to this year's GA. Through much debate and many close votes, we passed the following recommendations:

- That sessions, presbyteries, and the General Assembly recognize that, from the founding of the PCA, there has been a variety of views and practices regarding the ways in which women may serve the Lord and the church within scriptural and constitutional parameters, without ordination, and that such mutual respect for said views and practices continues.
- That sessions, presbyteries, and the General Assembly strive to develop, recognize, and utilize the gifts, skills, knowledge, and wisdom of godly women in the local, regional, and national church, and particularly consider overtures that would allow qualified women to serve on appropriate committees and agencies within the church.
- That sessions, if possible, establish a diaconate of qualified ordained men.
- That sessions consider how to include non-ordained men and women in the worship of the church so as to maintain faithfulness to Scripture, as well as utilizing the gifts God has poured out to His entire church..."
- That sessions and presbyteries select and appoint godly women and men of the congregation to assist the ordained diaconate.
- That presbyteries and the General Assembly consider an overture that would establish formally the right of sessions, presbyteries, and the General Assembly to establish the position of commissioned church worker within the PCA for qualified and gifted unordained men and women.

- That sessions, presbyteries and the General Assembly consider how they can affirm and include underprivileged and underrepresented women in the PCA.

These recommendations are the advice of one General Assembly to the churches, affirming what we have always held, that ordination to office is open to men only, and challenging both those who try to circumvent this belief by not ordaining any diaconate at all, and those who would keep women from using their gifts in the church in ways that are faithful to the Scriptures. As advice and recommendations (note the use of the language of “consider”), in and of themselves they change nothing about the ways that we believe or practice. For that to happen, Presbyteries would ultimately have to send overtures to future General Assemblies requesting that the *Book of Church Order* be changed. If and when these overtures come, and depending on what they request, I foresee even more

disagreement and polarization than we currently see in the PCA. We in central Mississippi do not experience much of this polarization, since for the most part we are all on the same page in both belief and practice. But as you look at the PCA across the country, different camps and views exist. This issue of women in ministry has the possibility of being a divisive one, though I believe the report of this study committee and the recommendations that were passed will continue to hold the various positions together in our church.

I love the meeting of the General Assembly. I’m so thankful for our denomination. God has been good to sustain us and keep us walking with Him since 1973. My prayer is that through the coming years the Lord would keep us faithful to His word, united in the truth, and committed to fostering all the gifts and graces of every member of the body in ways that are pleasing to Him and edifying to the body.

## THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT NETFLIX’S *13 REASONS WHY* (PART 2)

By Ms. Molly Dawkins

*Warning: the following article contains spoilers. For Part 1 of this article, read May’s issue of Notes from the Orchard.*

It was a relief to finally finish the Netflix series *13 Reasons Why*. In the last three episodes the darkness continues to deepen leading up to Hannah’s suicide in the concluding episode. There are a few major events that contribute to her final decision to commit suicide.

- She can’t get the flashes of her bad sexual experiences out of her head for a “good” experience with Clay.
- She loses the money she was supposed to deposit in the bank for her parent’s pharmacy.
- She goes to a party and is raped by the same guy that she witnessed rape her friend Jessica in episode 9.

- She meets with the school counselor and doesn’t get the responses she wanted.

Hannah desperately desires to be loved. We all do. We can all identify with Hannah in that desire. Tim Keller says it well in his book *The Meaning of Marriage*:

“To be loved but not known is comforting but superficial. To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. But to be fully known and truly loved is, well, a lot like being loved by God. It is what we need more than anything. It liberates us from pretense, humbles us out of our self-righteousness, and fortifies us for any difficulty life can throw at us.”

Hannah wants this real love. Not only in a romantic sense with Clay, but also in a friendship love by Jessica or Alex. We have all been designed as relational beings,

and she is missing a core of who she is. She does not have the freedom from fear that Keller talks about. She does not know the unending love we have from our Father, the love that never wavers because of what we've done. As Christians, we are fully known in our brokenness. We experience freedom because of the perfect sacrifice in Christ and are clothed in his righteousness, not our own. Hannah has isolated herself, and her past experiences have closed her off. Justin betrayed her by sending a sexually explicit picture of her around the school. Courtney left her to take the hit after the picture of them kissing circulated around the school because Courtney didn't want anyone to know she was a lesbian.

The afternoon before Hannah's suicide she meets with the school counselor. He is the 13<sup>th</sup> reason she gives of why she kills herself. She goes into his office with the intention to record their entire meeting. It's as though she's testing him, wanting him to fail. Based on their conversation, I think there were things he could have done differently, but I don't think he can be blamed for her suicide. He could have pointed her to someone to talk to when he learned that she was raped, but there was no way for him to know the extent of her internal struggles. As an audience we know what has been

happening in her life, but Hannah did not give him enough information for him to know she was to the point of suicide.

Towards the end of the series, Hannah's parents open a trial to look into their daughter's suicide. Students are brought in for depositions. The students on the tapes become increasingly more nervous about the tapes coming out and their involvement being made known. One student named Alex wants them to turn in the tapes, but the others refuse. Alex is overcome by the guilt of the situation, and in the end shoots himself in the head. We learn that he is in critical condition at the hospital. Is this the reaction that Hannah wanted? Another attempted suicide? What was she hoping would happen when she recorded the tapes? Similar to Clay's reaction to get revenge on Tyler (more details in Part 1), Hannah is only continuing the cycle causing more pain and suffering on others in her "revenge suicide."

Suicide is never the answer. You can always get help. Be honest about your struggles to a trusted parent or friend. Parents, ask your teens, "What is school like for you?" "What are some lies you can pick out from *13 Reasons?*" "What is the truth of these issues based on Scripture?"

## KICKING AGAINST THE GOADS

By Mr. Evan Haynes

I'm an ox. I admit that freely. I may not be as dumb as one, but I'm just as slow as one. God has me plowing his field. He guides me in the row of righteousness for his name sake. He prods me with an ox-goad. I don't like the way it feels, but it teaches me humility, how to gain strength from weakness, and submission. I focus on the discomfort often. When I do, I kick against that goad and thereby cause myself more pain as the goad sinks deeper in to my rear. It was only meant to poke

me but because I fought against it, I unwittingly forced it to pierce me.

Every Christian has a goad. Whether you feel like an ox or not, Jesus describes you as one in Acts 26:14. He was originally describing the apostle Paul, but the illustration also applies to us. We kick against our ox-goads when we act out in anger towards God. We may do so by committing a sinful act, we may do so by questioning His judgment, but however we do it, it causes us more pain in the process. My goad is

something that has prodded me all my life and I have kicked at it ever since I learned about it. My goad is my disability.

I was born with Asperger's syndrome, a high functioning form of autism. Ever since I was little, growing up under Presbyterian biblical teaching has grown my deep belief in the sovereignty of God. I have never quite understood why God decided that I would be born with special needs. I have often found myself unable to live with God, hating him for what he has made me. And yet I cannot live without him either. I have seen, through the eyes of faith, that God has a plan to use my disability and abilities for His glory.

God's gift of Asperger's to me has made me unable to drive, and that has taken away a lot of potential freedoms, such as independence and the freedom to go where I want when I want to. Other people have graciously compensated for this by driving me places, but mostly it's to where I *need* to go, not where I want to go. This makes me want to question God's wisdom, because it feels like foolishness to me sometimes. I wonder why God would want to hinder me like this. Driving is often dangerous, I know, so He may be protecting me. But a lot of times, I don't want his protection.

Another providence of God that I have struggled with is He did not give me the skills I need to have my childhood dream job. When I was young, I would pretend that I was a rock star. I was the front man of my own concert. That's what I wanted to be when I grew up. It's still what I want at times, but that wish has not been granted. God gave me gifts that place me backstage. I am a playwright, not an actor; a lyricist and decent guitar player, not a front man. I would be working a stage or toward a stage production, but I can't play the starring role. I acted in a lot of plays in high school, but I never got a huge part until one of my last performances, and it took me a long time to be able to

act without being nervous. And even in that show I entered before I was supposed to once, embarrassing myself. So, when I started taking writing classes at Belhaven one of my poems expressed this same story, but in more of a complaining tone. I felt that God had robbed me at a chance for greatness at not giving me the talent to do what I wanted to do.

Writing is not a lucrative occupation and I have found it hard to find lucrative work; none of my jobs have put my writing skillset to work. This is how God's providence has prodded me, only giving me the opportunity to share what I have written in ways that glorify him. I have written about topics other than my faith, but something usually goes wrong when I do. It doesn't get the response I have wanted or expected. So, I find myself asking God, "Did you or did you not inspire this work I have done? And if you did, why are you not using it to its full potential?"

And yet through that storm we have reached a shore. God has taught me to accept my Asperger's as a gift, not a curse. I can understand and reach out to others like me, and have ministered to my local and southern special needs community through Joni and Friends and my church's special needs program. God has given me all this, but I still want more. Christ gives himself away through salvation, revelation, and mediation every day. But I still struggle to trust God with my life and my future.

I keep asking Him to tell me His reasons why he has made these judgement calls, and I get no answer. As Jerry Bridges points out in his wonderful book, *Trusting God*, God never explains. He doesn't owe us an explanation for His plans for us. I feel like He does and I have convinced myself that He does, but I have been deceiving myself. The best thing I can do is stop questioning him and trust that He is prodding me in the right direction. I must die to wanting to know His reasons, to kicking against his goad.

# SCRIPTURE IS SUFFICIENT

By Dr. John Kwasny

Early in my marriage, my typical response to something breaking or needing repair in our home was simply to buy a new one. Now, this method would have worked just fine if we were an independently wealthy young couple. But, alas, we were not. So after years of frustrating my wife with my lack of Mr. Fix-it knowledge and skills, I discovered the beauty of YouTube repair videos. Google almost any repair issue on the planet and find a handyman who can actually walk you through the process on your phone! Miracle of miracles, I have now been able to fix many of the routine things around my house, much to the joy of my wife and the gratefulness of my budget.

Is that how we look at Scripture when we look to “repair” a difficult problem in our lives? Do we use the Bible like a Google search, hunting down verses about anger, addiction, anxiety, and marital problems in order to fix those problems? Or maybe we find ourselves wishing the Bible could be turned into a YouTube video, guiding us step-by-step towards an ultimate repair. Unfortunately, this can be what comes to mind when we hear Biblical counselors speak of how the *Scriptures are sufficient* to speak to our problems. With this thinking, the Bible is reduced to just another self-help book which is read only when I have a problem to solve. Unfortunately, there is also a great possibility of disappointment when it appears that the Bible doesn’t really address my particular problem.

So let’s briefly consider what Biblical counselors really mean when we talk about the sufficiency of Scripture for our problems. **First, it acknowledges that Scripture is the ultimate authority for life.** There are all sorts of people, philosophies, and systems that claim to be authorities on why we develop problems and how to solve those problems. But the only trustworthy authority for how to properly address our problems is God’s Word. All explanations and solutions must be grounded in the truth of Scripture.

**Second, it emphasizes Scripture as Special Revelation.** We can certainly learn a lot about people and their problems by a true, scientific observation of the world around us. Yet, we know that God’s Word is defined as “special revelation” because it alone teaches us how salvation is found in Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone, for the glory of God alone. Solving humanity’s problems begins with the worst problem of all—being lost in our sins and headed for eternal death!

**Third, it recognizes that Scripture teaches us who God is and how we are to respond to Him.** In one sense, what more do we need than to know who God is and what it means to be His redeemed child? The Bible is so much better than any self-help book because it reveals God to us, shows us our sin, and points us to redemption and sanctification in Christ! By definition, that is sufficient for our ability to handle all the problems in life, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Fourth, it demonstrates the comprehensiveness of Scriptural principles to solve spiritual, emotional, mental, and relational problems.** The Law, the prophets, the narratives, the Gospels, the epistles—all of God’s Word is applicable to teach, rebuke, correct, and train God’s people in righteousness. The principles of God’s Kingdom found in the Bible are sufficient for us to learn how to solve problems God’s way. Even though we use all sorts of modern labels to describe our problems, there are always Scriptural principles that are to be learned in order to address those challenging problems.

**Finally, it means that Scripture sufficiently feeds our hearts, minds, and souls.** The Holy Scriptures are the bread and meat provided for our spiritual growth. Rather than looking at the Bible as a just a Google search for solving our problems, we must see it as the spiritual food that will give us the spiritual health to face our problems. The Word of God, empowered by the Spirit, changes the way we think, act, live, feel and relate.

It does this not by just giving us information to apply, but by offering transformation for our lives!

When we consider something to be sufficient, it is ENOUGH. Scripture is enough to solve our ultimate problem of sin and death, as well as the other problems that emanate from our core heart issues. When we understand that Scripture is sufficient, we will seek wisdom that is grounded in God's Word and rightly

apply God's Word to our lives. As grateful as I am for YouTube repair videos, how much greater is it to have the Scriptures at our disposal—the authoritative and sufficient Word of God to address all our real problems!