

FROM ONE CONFUSED PARENT TO ANOTHER

Lesson's from the Decisions of Cassie Bernal's Parents

Introduction:

Cassie Bernall was one of twelve teens who was murdered at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado in the spring of 1999. What you're about to read are statements from her parents during an amazing interview with 20/20, less than a week after Cassie's death. At gunpoint, just before she was shot, Cassie professed her faith in Christ to the gunman who killed her. Her story could have been written differently were it not for her parents. Though she was killed, her life was truly saved by the decisions of her parents in the years prior to her death.

Statement: "Her parents, Brad and Misti remember a little girl who always wore a smile..."

Lesson: Life brings many transitions from childhood to teen years. A smiling, light-hearted ten-year-old is no guarantee of a trouble-free teenager. Parents must prayerfully prepare to help their children through these transitions in God's protection and strength.

Statement: "I had a gut feeling something was wrong. I couldn't pinpoint it, but I knew something was wrong."

Lesson: As a parent I must be in tune with God's impressions on my heart. Many parents are out of touch and completely unaware. First, be available to sense those "gut feelings! Then, when God lays a suspicion or a gut feeling on your heart, don't ignore it! Go with it until you feel certain the situation has been resolved in a way that pleases Christ and strengthens the family

Statement: "I just felt like neither of us had any kind of connection with her..."

Lesson: There are definable factors that destroy the connection between teens and parents. Sometimes they flow from the parent, sometimes from the teen. It doesn't have to be that way. When I feel no connection, it should be a giant "red warning light" demanding my attention in this relationship. If I allow a relationship to continue on with "no connection" I am on a sure path to disaster.

Statement from 20/20: "Cassie's parents decided to search their daughter's room!"

Lesson: Parents must be accountable for every influence in their teen's life. To be accountable for it, I must be aware of it. If need be, I will even search a room to uncover a snare that could destroy my teenager.

Statement: "I had never seen anything like this before..."

Lesson: The teen years bring with them uncharted territory in family life. This requires parents who are willing to have an "Indiana Jones" spirit of adventure and risk. Sometimes you'll be shocked... other times dismayed... disappointed... and other times delighted! Some parents ignore... get too busy to notice... dare to take the challenge. Be willing to plunge into unfamiliar territory by God's grace and in a spirit of faith. Even when you don't know what to do or how to respond... decide that "not responding" is not an option.

Statement: "We didn't know what to do..."

Lesson: Parenting a teenager will often bring me to "dead ends in the road!" There may seem to be no way out... block walls on every side. No matter how much I feel at a dead end... there is a way to get through it! During these times, I am forced to look up and depend completely on God to lead me step by step through the confusion.

Statement from 20/20: The Bernalls' decided the only way to stop their daughter from making bad decisions..."

Lesson: I must take the responsibility upon myself. Every life, situation and family is different. I am responsible, as a parent, for my family and children. I must follow God's leading, apart from external factors, and deal with the situation, to the best of my ability, the way God wants me to.

Statement: "It's the hardest thing a parent will ever do... to put your foot down and say 'It stops right here...'"

Lesson: Parents must assume their God given authority just as teens must submit to it! A parent who doesn't take responsibility is no different than a teen who won't submit. Rather than blame shift or ignore the signals, as a parent I must know when to step up to the plate, plant my feet in what I know is right, and simply say, "It stops here!" Though they would never admit to it - deep within, every teen wants this. This is a true display of love and they know it.

Statement: "You're taking the chance of driving your child further away from you... because they hate you for that."

Statement: "This child that you love with all of your being is telling you that she hated you."

Lesson: As a parent, my love for my teenager must transcend how they might feel about me in the heat of the moment. My love must run deep enough to face rejection, ridicule, and even pain. Because of my love, I must be willing to suffer short-term pain so that my teenager won't suffer long-term devastation!

Statement: “We had to make good decisions for her...”

Statement: “We had to do what we felt was best for her... it was what we had to do”

Lesson: Contrary to popular humanistic teaching, teenagers face many things with which they are not prepared to deal. They are not adults. They are children transitioning to adulthood. Satan will prey on their ignorance and lead them into sins of destruction. As a parent, it is my responsibility to step in where my teen is lacking in wisdom and understanding... and if need be, make good decisions for him as the Lord leads me, whether he likes it or not.

Statement: “For a long time all she could do was youth group... church...”

Statement from 20/20: “Church worked...”

Lesson: Church is a place where God's work happens. If I want God to work in the heart of my teenager, I must get him into church. While being in church is no guarantee that he will soften his heart, being out of church is a very good guarantee that God's work will not be knocking on his conscience on a regular basis. Keep your teenager in church. It's the first step to “breakthrough!”

Statement from Cassie: “Mom, I've changed... I've totally change. I know you're not going to believe it, but I'll prove it to you.”

Lesson: The simple fact is, teens know when they have problems, and they can be motivated to change. They can be encouraged to work on their problems. BUT... they need someone in their corner. They need someone to believe they can. Someone to step into the battle with them, shoulder to shoulder, and fight through with them in a way that demonstrates unconditional love.

Statement: “She may have been seventeen, but she was probably a better woman than I will ever be.”

Lesson: Honestly, sometimes our teens far “outshine us” don't they? Sometimes they far supercede what we are now, not to mention what we were when we were their age! As a parent, there's a deep underlying, intangible part of a relationship called “respect” or “honor.” It is communicated through the way we treat each other. How we speak... listen... look... talk... of one another to others. It flows deep within the fiber of the

relationship and has huge implications. As a parent, I should honor and respect my teenager intensely. If I do, it will show. If I do, my teen will be different for it!

Statement: “I don’t know how we got on the topic, but Cassie said to me ‘Mom, it would be ok if I died... I would be in a better place...”

Lesson: Sounds like the “connection” that was once lost, returned. As a parent commits to the battle... to getting their teen through, regardless of the cost... eventually there is a light at the end of the tunnel and the relationship takes a turn. As a result of the patience and constant energy expended, it is much stronger and deeper than it would have been. It might take years... but it’s worth it!

Statement from Cassie: You can’t live without Christ. It’s impossible to really have life without Him.

Lesson: It is easy to communicate that Christ is a “nice part” of life rather than to communicate that He is the sum total... all... everything in life! He is life! All my life is His and without Him I am desolate and without real life. In my dreams, lifestyle, plans, hopes, and guidance of my teen; it’s vital that Christ be all in all... not just a “nice part” of a bigger picture. His will... His plans... His purposes are the bigger picture... the biggest picture... and they should be supreme in every decision and every circumstance.

Statement: “You worry about your kids when you don’t know where they are... but we know where Cassie is!”

Lesson: The most important thing Brad and Misti gave Cassie was her faith in Jesus Christ. It took a lot of pain, trials, and tough decisions... but it was worth far more than anything else they could have given her. The most valuable thing you can give your kids is faith in Christ. What price are you willing to pay to make sure they get it? You never know... it just might save your teen’s life.

WHAT SAVED CASSIE BERNAL'S LIFE?

- Do you ever wonder where to draw the line?
- Do you ever get weary of struggling with your teenager?
- Do you ever second guess whether you're really doing the right thing?
- Do you ever wonder just exactly how far to go in disciplining your teen?
- Do you ever get compared to other parents by either yourself or your teenager?
- Are you always able to “stand your ground” no matter how hard it gets?
- Has your teenager ever “threatened” you with running away, leaving, etc.?

If any of these questions have ever haunted you... then don't miss the special teen parent meeting Sunday night November 7, 1999, in the Main Auditorium after the service! You will personally hear the gripping story of how Cassie Bernal's parents literally spared her an eternity of anguish. Hear how they helped her turn from a life of rebellion to a life of committed to Jesus Christ. It will be a meeting you will never forget!

For the sake of your teenager's future... please don't miss it.
