

Yes, I'm a Christian

Girl's courage in Littleton shootings challenges religious faith



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It took more than 10 days for the reality of the massacre that took place at Columbine High School to hit me.

It took a call to my cousins in elementary school in my former hometown of Littleton, Colo., for me to understand why this tragedy rocked the nation.

It took more than 10 days before I finally read the articles and watched the special edition shows, before I finally said a prayer for the friends and families of the dead, before I finally began to listen to the murmur of proposed solutions to these dangerous school environments.

But it took only the soft-spoken courage of 17-year-old Cassie Bernall displayed before Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold took her life to shake the very foundation of my dedication to my beliefs.

I can't tell you why the killings didn't move me. I am concerned with American culture manifesting itself in children in the form of hatred, violence and absolute emptiness.

All of my extended family lives in or around Littleton. My darling little cousins will probably attend Columbine. As a freshman I attended a neighboring high school and spent countless hours at Columbine during extracurricular competitions, performances, etc. Somehow, I just wasn't interested.

I can't tell you why. Maybe I've been desensitized to violence. Maybe I'm becoming an apathetic member of society. Maybe I didn't want to comprehend the horror of the slayings. Maybe I'm just too busy trying to pass my classes. Somehow the events that took place on April 17 just didn't hit home. I don't know why.

What I do know is that Cassie Bernall took a bullet in the head because she spoke up and pro-

nounced her faith in God. Students were asked by the gunmen if they believed in God, and Cassie chose to say yes. Cassie said there is a God.

Yes, there is a God. I believe there is a God. I define myself by my belief. I try to live a life that exemplifies my belief in Him. But I don't know if I could be ready to lose my life to avow my faith. I don't know if I would have looked into the eyes of those boys and shown that much courage.

Is there something in your life you believe in strongly enough that you would die for it? Do you think you would have taken the stand Bernall took for your own religious convictions? As a Christian, if you are a Christian, do you have that kind of faith?

Christians are sometimes ridiculed for their faith, their belief that the Bible is the inspired word of God, and the absolute truth gets challenged. And I think most believers stand their ground, but that's been easy. Most go to church, and some talk about God's mercy and kindness with others, but that's easy too.

When I think about the incident at Columbine, I am reminded of

Cassie's incredible courage. I can't help but ask myself if I would proclaim God in the face of death. I can't help but ask myself if other Christians I know would profess their belief in God when presented with the same situation.

Personally, I want my answer to be yes. In fact, I would tell you my answer is yes, I would tell you that I would affirm my faith in Christ at all costs. But Cassie affirming her faith last week made me reevaluate my resolve. I have to be honest; if saying there is a God meant I would lose my life, I am utterly ashamed to say I don't know if I would speak out or hold my tongue.

There will come a time when Christians will be persecuted for their faith. Some would argue that the time has already come as missionaries all over the world are losing their lives in countries where the message of Christ is not welcome.

In Luke 21, Jesus tells of the time when all Christians will be persecuted, when believers will be betrayed by relatives, friends and parents, and hated by all for His name's sake.

Jesus goes on to instruct us how to handle these situations and assures us

that "it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony" (Luke 21:13).

As Cassie's story is recounted among her peers, among the body of Christ and in the national media, there is no doubt in my mind that her death has turned out to be an occasion for testimony. Her testimony, in life and in death, may be some people's only knowledge of Christ.

The truth of her testimony should resonate in the Christian community. If one little girl could have such a strong voice for Christ in her death, how much more can each of us say in the way we live our daily lives? How loud could the collective voice of the body of Christ be if only we would set our sights on having a heart after His own?

Maybe Cassie didn't know that proclaiming God would get her killed. Maybe he would have shot her regardless of her answer. What matters is that her answer was yes, there is a God. What matters is the message of truth she sent out in her answer.

Her message should serve as a challenge to Christians to be as courageous in life as Cassie was in death.

Hello Jesus

Columnist asks for spiritual guidance, clarifications



JAY GISH is a senior broadcasting major and Daily Nebraskan columnist.

Well, Jesus, it's just you and me from here.

(All right, it's not JUST us. I probably gained more friends in this, my last year of college, than ever before. But they won't be around every minute of my life.)

I've chosen you as my hero, the one I turn to above all else. Or, maybe, you chose me. I've heard it put both ways.

I've heard limitless opinions on why this shouldn't be: Christians are all hypocrites. The Gospels are just some books written by cloudy-minded ancient fanatics. The words in the Bible are irrelevant to living a good life.

None of these, nor any other opinions, matter. No matter how much truth might or might not be contained in any one of them, they are all irrelevant.

You see, I grew up with you. You've drifted from being the first consideration in my decisions to being a very cursory factor, and back again. But you've always been there in my mind, and you always will be. To put it practically, I'm stuck with you, and you're stuck with me.

During that period growing up when ending my existence was a daily consideration; when I felt so estranged from everyone, including family, that sleep seemed my lone, intangible friend; it was my belief in you that slowly carried me through.

Maybe it was your real spirit that saved me, maybe it was just my mind's own determination. Again ... irrelevant. What mattered was that I believed in you, and that you wanted me to keep living.

And ever since then, I've known that I couldn't abandon you even if I wanted to; not anymore than you could abandon me.

Now I've reached another point in my life where the questions seem more pressing. Some call it a crossroads.

I've got to get somewhere from here. I don't know where, but somewhere. And you're my main resource. So talk to me.

What do I do when someone asks me how I feel about abortion? I can find dozens of folks who purport to be — and probably are — stronger Christians than myself who sit very passionately on separate sides of the issue.

I'd like to trust you before them. I'd like to turn open a page of Mark, and see either "Be pro-choice" or "Be pro-life," and also find specific instructions on how far I'm supposed to go to defend that belief. But it's not there.

I'd like to see point-by-point how you feel about fetuses that endanger their mothers and/or have no real chance of living past birth. But the apostles didn't write that down.

Sure, just about any one of those folks I mentioned would happily tell me, "Of course, the answer's there, if you just let the Word speak to you. And right here it is." Then they would point out to me the passage they felt best supported their position.

Jesus, that just doesn't seem good enough.

How do I live my life regarding premarital sex? It's something I've felt all along was probably a bad idea. But, if I'm nitpicky, it's hard to find a verse that expressly tells me not to do it. Among all the stuff about how marriage is God's union and sex is a gift to humans, I'd like to see a straight sentence.

Never have sex before marriage. Or ... Feel free to have sex before marriage. Either way, at least it would be clear.

Oh yes, I'm quite aware that "Thou shalt not commit adultery" is a commandment. Nevertheless, most dictionaries define "adultery" as an affair "outside of marriage," not before a marriage.

The Bible uses "sexual immorali-

ty." Which person should I let define that for me?

And what did you say, Jesus, when asked what the greatest commandment was? No. 1 was to love God through and through. No. 2 was to love my

neighbor as myself.

I could find 100 people to tell me sex is an expression of love; therefore to have consensual sex is to share part of God because we all know God is love. I could find another hundred who'd say misusing God's gift of sex is to hate God.

And what's more, there are pastors — ordained ministers of the Word — who live by each of those opposite interpretations.

I've never actually been in a relationship where sex was a real option. Should I take that to mean you put your foot down on that one?

How do I respond to my country at war? You told your disciples to turn the other cheek. Yet I realize that, at many points along the timeline of history, if one of my forefathers or one of freedom's defenders HAD turned the other cheek, I might not be here today.

If they'd all turned their cheeks to Hitler

indefinitely, Christianity might not exist, in any form.

So you see, Jesus? You need to talk to me. I know my brothers and sisters under God are supposed to be here to spread your word, and to make living out your intentions easier.

But they don't all tell me the same thing. Who do I trust? How do I identify the ones who are right?

And when perusing your words in the Gospel, do I look at the King James Version, the Living Bible, the Revised Standard Version or one of the hundreds of other translations?

Most Bibles say somewhere in them that they are the true Word of God. Does that mean they are all right? Is every translation throughout history and the future a full and accurate translation of what you want me to know?

Talk to me, Jesus. How do I deal with every secular history class that tells me what Christians say about you can't possibly all be true? With every logic class that "proves" our idea of the Trinity must be mistaken?

Maybe most importantly, how do I react to close friends — those who are supposed to be here to help me — that live by different standards (often standards opposite to mine) and seem to pull me with them? Especially those who state or once stated that they were your followers, just like me?

Talk to me, Jesus. I'm following you. It's your call.



DEB LEE/DN