

3 Words a Parent Never Wants to Hear From Their Teenage Daughter

Sarah B. grew up in LaGrange County, Indiana, on a farm that her great-grandfather had once tilled. She is small and plump and must have worked about fifteen or sixteen hours that day, but she looked as fresh as a daisy. Her warmth was reassuring and welcoming, and her eyes grew soft as she spoke of her godly heritage. "My grandfather was a minister, my father was a bishop, my husband is a deacon."

Such a lineage means a great deal to her. "My sisters and me," she said, "we grew up knowing that we had to behave.

People were watching." She was up to the task. Sarah married her childhood sweetheart at the age of eighteen and had her first child at nineteen. In due time, more children arrived. Life was sweet for Sarah.

And then everything turned upside down on a hot August afternoon when Sarah's firstborn, her fifteen-year-old daughter, whispered words no mother would ever want to hear: "Mom, I'm pregnant."

"That moment shook me to my core," Sarah said. "I didn't *want* my daughter to be pregnant. I didn't *want* to be a thirty-four-year-old grandmother. I didn't *want* my husband, a new deacon, to have a mess in his own family. I had tried my best to be a good mom. I felt humiliated. I was sure that everybody thought I had failed. I wanted to hide. I struggled with God. How could He have let this happen to me? I was a good girl. I did everything right."

For the first time in her life, Sarah said she became aware of how it felt to be wounded, to suffer, to feel broken. "I began

to see my own judgmental tendencies, to realize how critical I had been of other people.” Shame, she discovered, had been a very powerful tool to control others. “But when I *felt* shame, I was astounded at what it did to me. It made me feel stuck. All I could think about was my own failure, my shortcomings, my sins.”

Over the next few months, Sarah found herself changing from the inside—areas, she said, that were necessary. “I grew compassionate to those around me who I knew were also suffering. Suddenly I wasn’t judging them because I was right alongside them. I think I finally realized that we are all wounded, each in our way. That God can use our wounds for His purpose.”

Sarah started to relate to people around her in a different way. “The closer I drew to Christ, the more empathy I developed for others. The more I loved the Lord, the more I loved those He loved.” And that included having the grace to forgive her daughter, as well as the young man (non-Amish) who had fathered the child. “He did not want to marry our daughter, nor did we want him to,” Sarah said, without malice. And that was all she had to say about the matter. Sarah and her husband are raising their little granddaughter, now a vivacious and charming seven-year-old, as part of their brood.

She admitted that this wasn’t the path she would have ever wanted or expected for her family. “But would I change it? No, absolutely not. I’m a different person because of this experience. When someone else is facing a difficult situation, I’m able to say, ‘Me too. This happened in our family too, and we got through it. No—better than that. We are better *because* of it.’”

Sociologist Brené Brown is a vulnerability researcher at the University of Houston. In one of the most watched talks on the website, Brown encouraged listeners to embrace their brokenness. “Vulnerability is not weakness. It’s emotional

risk. In order for us to have connection, we have to allow ourselves to be seen. Really seen. To be vulnerable, to let ourselves be seen, to be honest.”¹

One friend told Sarah that, during her family’s hard time, they displayed God’s splendor to the community. “Isn’t that amazing?” Sarah said, smiling that radiant smile of hers, in which her whole face lights up. “To think that our trial could end up displaying God’s splendor. Only God could do that.”

Reflections on Peacemaking

Define *empathy*. Why does empathy have an essential connection to forgiveness?

Empathy, Sarah implied, was lacking in her life until she faced a personal hardship. In what way can someone who has walked a difficult path relate to others who suffer in a way that no other can?

What difficulty in your life has taught you empathy?

Sarah said she realized she had hurt others with her judgmental tendencies. What mistakes have you made that have hurt others? Who has forgiven you for these mistakes?

Sarah’s friend gave her timely encouragement when she said that the way Sarah’s family handled a teenager’s unplanned pregnancy was used to display God’s splendor. What do you think her friend saw in their family that made such an impression? Think of the difficulties in your life. How is God redeeming those difficulties so they can be used to display His splendor? (See Rom. 8:28.)

Plain Truth

“Do the Amish have problems? Yes. They are humans and, like all human societies, have their share of problems. Sometimes rebellious youth act out and abuse alcohol or use drugs. Some

marriages turn sour. There are documented cases of incest and sexual abuse in some families. Although such problems do exist, there are no systematic studies to enable comparisons with other groups or mainstream society. In general, the Amish way of life provides many sources of satisfaction for most of its members.”²

¹. Brené Brown, “The Power of Vulnerability,” TED Talk, June 2010, Houston,

². “Frequently Asked Questions,” Amish Studies, Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies, Elizabethtown College,

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