

'Jesus Found Me in a Jail Cell': Mother of Slain Idaho Student Finds Hope Amid Tragedy

When Cara Kernodle lost her daughter, Xana, in one of the most chilling mass murders in recent U.S. memory, her world unraveled.

On Nov. 13, 2022, Xana and three fellow University of Idaho students were brutally murdered in their off-campus home. The case captivated the nation, and the man accused—Bryan Kohberger, a former criminal justice doctoral student—has now accepted a plea deal admitting guilt to avoid the death penalty.

For Kernodle, the news brought unexpected emotions.

"My initial reaction was a little bit angry, because I just felt like it was just too easy for him to just admit that he did it and not have to give an explanation or answer our questions," she told CBN News in a deeply personal interview. "And here we have been planning on going to this trial ... I think that all of us were wanting answers."

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But in the midst of unanswered questions, Kernodle said God gave her peace.

"The Lord is just so good in helping me to understand that it's OK that I don't know everything, and that likely is for my protection," she said. "Even if I were to know why he did it or all the details, what is it going to change? Is it going

to make me feel better?"

A Dark Spiral

The path to healing was anything but immediate. Kernodle shared that after Xana's murder, she turned to addiction instead of hope.

"I wish I could say that that was my 'aha moment,' that that is when I ran towards Christ, but I ran towards drugs and alcohol instead," she said. "I knew that I was either going to die living the way that I was, or I could draw close to Jesus and surrender and change my life."



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Her breaking point came in a jail cell.

"I actually turned my life over to the Lord in a jail cell," Kernodle revealed. "Once I did that, it was like I was free. I was just filled with such joy and peace when I finally surrendered to God and decided that I was going to fully surrender and do it His way and not mine anymore."

A New Life in Christ

After her release, Kernodle joined a faith-based recovery program led by longtime friend Pastor Tim Remington. She described the experience as transformative.

"It's just a beautiful program where you are fed the Word from sunup to sundown every day and with no distractions," she said. "That was huge for my healing and to begin forgiving."

Today, Kernodle is 18 months sober, free from addiction, cigarettes, and medication. "I am completely free of every bondage through Christ," she said. "There's just no other answer for that except for Jesus."

The Power of Forgiveness

Forgiving Kohberger wasn't easy, but it was necessary.

"Forgiveness ... the Lord asks us to forgive, and He does that so that we don't have to hold on to that bitterness and that anger and that hate," she explained. "It truly was destroying me."

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She added, "It doesn't excuse what he did in any way ... but it releases me from that bondage of bitterness and anger and hatred that is not of the Lord."

Honoring Xana's Memory

Kernodle remembers her daughter as someone full of joy and light.

"Xana was amazing," she said. "She lit up a room. She was funny. She could make you laugh. She had a way of making everybody around her feel important and special."

Though grief still lingers, faith gives her hope.

"I know that the Lord holds her now. And I know I have that hope of seeing her again," she said. "She's safe in His arms now."

'He Will Redeem You'

Kernodle says she shares her story now not for sympathy—but to help others.

"Jesus. Because people need to know that it is possible with Jesus to overcome addiction in the worst circumstances. And I'm proof of that," she said. "If I can just help one person

see that ... the Lord will redeem you. He will break all those strongholds if you allow Him to."

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She continues pushing forward in life with a message of hope: "He's not a respecter of persons. It's not just for me. He can do this for anybody no matter what your circumstances are."

Kernodle says she will continue to share her story, and Xana's, as a testimony of God's grace and healing power.

James Lasher *is staff writer for Charisma Media.*