

Athena Strand Murder Trial: Pastor Reveals Disturbing Conversation With Convicted Killer

The pastor who met with convicted killer Tanner Horner after the murder of Athena Strand testified this week about a conversation that has now become part of one of the most horrifying criminal cases in recent American history.

Athena, 7, vanished from her family's property in Paradise, Texas, on Nov. 30, 2022. Authorities found her body two days later in a river several miles away. Horner later pleaded guilty to capital murder and aggravated kidnapping. Jurors are now deciding whether he will receive life in prison without parole or the death penalty, as reported by People.

The pastor, identified only as Gary, told the court Horner reached out to him after the killing and asked to meet.

"As a pastor, we don't always get to do the easy things," Gary testified. "We do what we're called to do. So I met with him, and I just wanted to make sure he was okay and wanted to make sure he understood, you know, really what had happened."



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Gary said he prayed with Horner and warned him about the gravity of his actions.

"He told him his life was "never going to be the same," adding that he wanted him to understand the severity of his actions.

During cross-examination, Gary testified Horner never admitted

the full truth of what happened to Athena during their meeting.

“All I knew at that time was what had been out,” Gary said. “That is, he was driving for, I think, FedEx and had hit Athena, panicked, and then did what he did. That’s all I knew.”

When prosecutors asked if he now understood that version of events was false, Gary responded, “Yes, sir.”

The details presented during the sentencing phase painted a devastating picture of Athena’s final moments. Prosecutors showed surveillance footage that reportedly captured Horner lifting the little girl into his truck. Jurors reportedly became emotional while viewing the evidence.

Prosecutors said Athena remained calm during the abduction and questioned her captor before fighting back during the attack.

According to a report by People, the medical examiner testified that Athena died from blunt force trauma, smothering and strangulation.

The murder of Athena Strand left many of us heartbroken for a little girl we never even knew personally. We look at a case like this and grieve with Athena’s family because we cannot imagine the pain they have carried every day since her death. We should continue praying for her loved ones and ask God to hold them close, strengthen them and bring them peace in the middle of unimaginable sorrow.

James Lasher, a seasoned writer and editor at Charisma Media, combines faith and storytelling with a journalism background from Otterbein University and ministry experience in Guatemala and at the LA Dream Center. A Marine Corps and Air Force veteran, he is the author of *The Revelation of Jesus: A Common Man’s Commentary* and a contributor to Charisma magazine. For interviews and media inquiries, please contact media@.