

TAGGARTS SHARE THEIR STORY OF LOSING SON TO ADDICTION

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Hundreds of people from all over Yazoo and Madison counties gathered at Parkview Church of God on Wednesday to hear testimonies about the impact of drugs on young people and their families.

Brother Ken Lynch, pastor of Parkview Church of God, invited the community to hear the testimonies of Andy Taggart, a Madison County attorney, and his wife Karen.

The Taggarts lost their youngest son Brad, at the age of 21, to suicide five years ago after his secret battle with drugs which affected his mind and threw him into a deep depression.

The church was nearly filled to capacity with people from all walks of life, including a great number of middle school and high school aged students who came with their church youth groups.

Andy Taggart spoke a great deal about spiritual warfare and the struggles our youth face every day against temptations like drugs and alcohol.

One important point that Taggart made to the congregation is that people should never assume that just because a person is using drugs, it means that they had a bad upbringing.

Taggart revealed a large portrait of a well groomed young man in his early twenties, well dressed and handsome, smiling for a formal photo at his brother's wedding.

"I show you this to let you see that he's not a thug, he's not a statistic, he's not just a picture on a newspaper. He's our son." said Taggart, in an effort to show the audience the face of a human being with a secret addiction.

Taggart went on to explain several misconceptions the public has about addicts: they had parents who didn't love each other or broke up, they were abused at home, they broke up with their significant other, they did badly in school or were unpopular, or the person just had problems to begin with.

"Just because a young person allows his or her life to spin out of control with drugs and alcohol, doesn't mean he or she started out as a loser to begin with," said Taggart.

Brad Taggart was good at everything, according to his father. He was tall, at 6 feet, 7 inches, good looking, and always had cute girls with him. Brad was a class favorite every year all throughout high school, very intelligent, and even won an academic scholarship to Ole Miss.

The young man was also known to be very good with his hands, being mechanically inclined he could fix or work on almost anything, and became an expert hunter and fisherman at an early age.

Andy Taggart reflected on his son, saying that he had all the qualities you would expect from someone who would undoubtedly become successful in this world.

Brad's parents had no reason to ever suspect he had a drug problem. Taggart said there were never any clues to indicate that he was using.

"Our kids are very sophisticated and they can live parallel lives if they want to," Taggart said, in a message to all the parents and grandparents in the audience, "Our son did. He was engaged in illicit drug use for one year and we did not know he was in trouble."

The day that Brad Taggart took his own life on the front lawn of his parents home in Madison county, he had been staying with them for nearly 8 weeks, taking summer classes at Mississippi College.

After enduring the awful experience of a criminal investigation at their home and a receiving a toxicology report on their son, the Taggart's found relief in the fact that there were no drugs in his system at the time of his death.

The only way the Taggart family discovered Brad's drug use, was from the lengthy confessional he wrote inside his suicide note.

Karen Taggart, Brad's mother, read her son's last words to the audience at Parkview.

Brad's note depicted a person who regretted his life decisions, telling his family in great detail his fall into drug use, and how he spiraled out of control into the person he was that day, empty, hopeless, and feeling as though he had no reason to continue living.

"My drug use started with just weed," part of the note said, "It really started to go downhill just under a year ago, with LSD. I began using it regularly. It was a way that I could escape into an alternate reality, one that was euphoric and free of problems."

The long letter went on to say that Brad's drug use extended from marijuana and LCD, into mushrooms, MDMA, cocaine, and Nitris Oxide.

Brad also confessed in his letter that he had been selling marijuana in large amounts to support his own drug habits, even while he was at home with his parents the whole summer.

The Taggarts never knew any of this. All they saw for those last 8 weeks with their youngest son, was the same smiling face, eating dinner with them, washing dishes, and spending time with them the same way he had been his entire life.

By the end of the summer with his parents, Brad was unable to continue selling marijuana on the side to support his habit, and was soon unable to purchase the drugs he was using as an escape. His mind began to deteriorate rapidly, throwing him into an unstable mental condition.

"It started to become difficult to control the negative thoughts in my head," said the last part of the note, "I didn't know it back then, what I know now, but I was slipping into this psychosis that controls me now."

Brad's parents have gone over and over this note countless times, and still wish that they could have seen some kind of clue or sign that would have let them know their son was in trouble.

"We know from literature that drugs do in fact change the chemistry of our brains," said Taggart. "the note was an A essay, no errors. The boy's brain worked just fine, but he had weakened himself and he believed the lies of the enemy."

Taggart went on to tell the audience about the spiritual tools and weapons God gives us to combat the evils of this world.

They are the Word of God, the human brain, testimonies, and prayer, each with their own unique trait to help combat worldly enemies such as drugs and alcohol.

Before ending the service, the Taggart's had a few words of wisdom to leave with the audience.

To the families present who had endured similar tragedies, Andy said "Let people talk to you about your loved one. Embrace stories and tales about them, its therapeutic for everyone involved."

To all the youth and students present, Karen had this to say "The best thing you can do is tell somebody if you have a friend that is doing drugs. You're gonna save their lives. Please don't keep it a secret."