

CHRISTIAN WATKINS' WORDS AT AGE 15 FOR HIS FELLOW TEENAGERS

Christine Watkins (Christian's mom): Christian, I have to give a talk to teenagers and I'm not prepared. What would you like other teenagers to know? How would you want to help them?

Christian: I guess I'd want to say that technology can be great for us, and also horrible for us.

We all know that technology is a big distraction from fulfilling our purpose in life, more for some of us than for others.

We use Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, YouTube, or Netflix. My mom uses Facebook. She must look like a grandmother to you.

I can get pulled into stuff on my phone or the Internet, and when I pull myself out of it, I wonder, "Where did the time go?" And have you ever noticed how you're left feeling after being on social media or entertaining yourself?

Don't get me wrong, I know that getting "snaps" or "likes" feels good in the moment. You may feel liked or popular by the amount of "likes" on a certain photo or how many snap notifications you get in a day, but it's not real connections. It's not bad to desire that feeling of being wanted, but you have to look for it in the right place or it doesn't last.

It's like a lollipop, in a way, because lollipops are amazing and sweet, but eventually they run out and your left chewing the tasteless stick of the lollipop.

It feels good to fill up boredom or laugh at what's on YouTube or Netflix, but when we use those things to cover up our feelings or spend hours and hours binge watching, afterward there is a complete emptiness.

I know that this may sound hard or farfetched, but if you don't want to turn to God, the only One who can fill the emptiness in your heart, you'll try to find something else to substitute that need. It could be eating too much, pornography, sex, sexting, smoking weed, drinking, or other drugs. But that's not a real connection to people.

These things can lead to, or can make our depressed feelings worse. They keep depression or anxiety at bay for a few moments or hours, but then they return heavier and worse than before.

We all desire to be happy in this life, and the problem is, we're told that we'll find happiness by being popular, or by our looks, or by the amount of friends we have, or how many people we've been intimate with, at least guys are told that.

High school can be the best of times or can be horrible, but it doesn't define you. It is a blip in time. Bad feelings don't define you. If you're made in the image and likeness of God, then how can you be anything less than that?

You are worthy and loved, simply because you were created by a loving God.

If you're around people who are bringing you down, if you have to keep wearing a mask and not be your true self, it doesn't help to hang out with them. You'll keep using that mask until you don't even know what is behind that mask anymore.

It's hard to change. I'm not saying that it ever could be easy. But this is how I found that happiness.

I always believed that there was a God and that our lives really meant something. At the start of my life, I was on level ground. I didn't have any problems. In middle school, though, I felt miserable. I didn't fit into the social groups because they had been friends since kindergarten, and I didn't feel welcome. I was horrible around girls. All the girls said that they liked me, and I felt awkward around them because of that, so I avoided them.

The seed was planted in my head that being on the inside of a social group was happiness and being outside was a nightmare. I developed anxiety and depression, and I couldn't deal with the pain of having to go to school every day. At first, I would fake being sick, and then my stress turned into real sickness. I started to get migraines.

Then high school came along, and I had a fresh new start, but with the wrong goal in mind. This is where I began digging my hole.

All I wanted to do was be popular and liked, and I succeeded. I became friends with the popular kids. I was invited to parties and hung out every weekend, but whenever I wouldn't get invited to one of these events, I'd feel horrible, left out, miserable. My anxiety from middle school carried over. I remember my mom driving me to a party, and my anxiety was so strong that I wanted to leap out of my own skin. I made her drop me off about five blocks away so I'd look cool walking in by myself. I also needed to walk to calm down.

I was so fearful of rejection, afraid of not being liked. That's what drove me. The worst part was, I couldn't say no to anything so I easily caved in to peer pressure.

That is when I started digging myself deeper and deeper.

I never stopped believing in God. But I was compromising my values. Start of freshman year, I didn't smoke that much or do anything too bad, but I wasn't really having fun, and these popular people seemed like they were having fun. Soon, I started to do what they did. I looked at pornography, and you know what goes with that. I knew it was wrong. My friends loved to talk about having sex with themselves, and it grossed me out and made me sick, but I continued to do the same. I remember one conversation in particular I had with my friend who was dating this girl for eight months and hadn't had sex with her, and I was making fun of him for it. I've never felt worse about something I've said or done. It was good that he was a virgin, and I knew that God was pleased with that. I am a virgin too.

I knew I was becoming a person that I never wanted to be, but I didn't care because I thought that I had time to change. Along with pornography, which is unfortunately just a normal thing in high school, now came weed. I hated nicotine and didn't like the taste or feeling of it, so if I was going to continue hanging out with my friends, I couldn't just sit and do nothing. I knew that it was wrong, but whenever I smoked weed, I would feel happy. It blocked out any other feeling. But after the high was done, I would feel empty again, so I started to do it more and more often. It worked for the most part. I started having more and more fun with my friends. But no matter what, there was still a gaping hole somewhere in my soul that wasn't filled.

Start of winter break, I had no intention to do anything different. I knew from my Catholic upbringing that God was the only way I could get rid of the empty hole inside of me. I could never explain that hole I felt, that desire for something more than what I was. I felt horrible, but I didn't want to change. I was trapped in a cage of my own making, and I kept making it sturdier and sturdier. I went to a big New Year's party and I was putting on my mask, having fun talking to everyone. It was easy for me to smile because I was high. But I wasn't really happy because I wasn't the person I wanted to be.

A couple days later, with no intention of telling my mom anything, I wanted to have a little chat. I ended talked to my mom about my situation. Mom pulled it out of me. She never knew what was going on at all. She was very gullible.

I told my mom everything, and I felt so stupid for what I'd been doing. I thought, "Why did I do this? I just ruined my life." But a couple days later, I was reading about what the soul is and who we are in God's eyes, and how we're made for more. I read a book my mom insisted I read, which she wrote, called: *The Warning: Testimonies and Prophecies of the Illumination of Conscience*. God is going to show us everything we did when we die. We're doing to see everything we did and weren't supposed to do, and everything we were supposed to do and didn't do. And we're going to see how this affected others, and they, in turn, affected others, and so on and so on. Being good and not sinning is a big deal. My eternal soul was at stake, and I knew I wanted to make it to heaven, so I had to change.

As I was talking to my mom, I realized that I didn't want to hang out with those friends anymore, that I wanted to live a whole different life. Now I want to give talks about how my falling into peer pressure almost ruined me. I'm also starting a Catholic podcast called "To Be Honest," "TBH."

As soon as I decided to change, I felt overjoyed that I was leaving all that sin behind and especially all those friends. I was jumping up and down with so much happiness inside of me. This was my way of being overtaken by the Spirit. This was my Pentecost. I kept saying how great God was. I'm glad I didn't start speaking in other languages. That would have been weird. I was filled with greater happiness than I ever could have had from drugs or alcohol. It was indescribable, so I'm not going to describe it to you (ha, ha), also because my mom has kept me up until 12:30 a.m. writing this talk that she was supposed to do. But she doesn't know how to relate to teenagers because, like I said, she's gullible. But I do love her, and I wouldn't be where I am today without her. So, you really should listen to what she has to say.

I hadn't wanted to dig a hole so deep that I couldn't get out of it. But it got to that point. Without God's hand reaching out to me, I wouldn't have been able to climb out. If I had used my own hands to climb out, I would have just pulled more dirt down upon myself, and it would have become too hard to ever escape. I'm not that strong. I needed Him.

So, I went to the Sacrament of Confession and then to Mass, and I don't have any anxiety any more. I'm just thankful. I actually put more thought and meaning into my prayers now. I used to think it was horrible that my parents would force us to pray every night, but now I actually see the meaning behind it. The world kind of needs prayers in more ways than we know. And it's scary what the world is like now, but one person's prayers actually make a big difference. It's like having superpowers, in a way. But He's strong and powerful, and I'm weak and skinny.

God can use our suffering for good. If you turn to Him and ask Him to do something good with your suffering, He will. I know that this sounds like B.S. Why wouldn't he just take your suffering away immediately? That's what I wanted to know, as well. But I learned that He uses that suffering to help other people now or in the future, or just people around you going through the same or similar things.

That's pretty much it. God loves you. And I love you. But not in a weird way.

Thank you so much for listening to my story, even though I think you were forced to.