

# A Conflict in Values

## MY daughter

My daughter, Shawna, sat down beside me on our living room couch.

"Dad, we need to talk."

"Oh, about what?"

"Now that I'm 16, you and Mom said I can date," she said with a smile.

I gazed into my blonde-haired daughter's blue eyes. I'd dreaded this moment over the last few years as I watched her transform from a tickle-me-Daddy-girl into an oooh-he's-cute teenager.

"A guy at school asked me out to a movie. I said he'd have to talk to you first."

I took a deep breath.

"Is he a Christian?"

"Well, no. . ."

"Then you're not going out with him."

"But Dad, that's not fair!"

And so began an eight-month ordeal that wrenched my heart, yet refined my faith in God's ability to guide my daughter.

When Shawna became a teenager, my wife, Joy, and I started to teach her about courtship dating. This meant that Shawna would wait to date until she was ready to start thinking about marriage. But I also had ulterior motives. I'd often thought about my dating years and wanted to delay the emotional roller coaster ride that awaited her.

"There's a fun side to dating," I said. "But if you go steady and then break up, it's similar to the soul-crushing heartache of a divorce, especially when it involves your first boyfriend. Think about your friends and the relationships they've been in. How do they feel when they break up? Does it make sense to put yourself through the same emotional turmoil?"

We encouraged Shawna to focus on her friends and schoolwork, assuring her that when she was ready, Mr. Right would come along. If we did allow her to date, we would discuss the matter when she turned 16.

Joy and Shawna often had girl talk times that I wasn't privy to, but they helped Shawna accept Joy's and my viewpoint.

Then Steve came along.



## An Agonizing Decision

"Come on Dad, Steve's kind, considerate, and has more morals than most Christian guys I know," said Shawna.

"Besides, Mom's met him and she likes him."

"That doesn't mean I agreed they could date," Joy told me later. "I'd rather she not date, but at some point she has to make her own decisions. Remember, she could move away to college in two years and will have to make tough decisions then. Let's pray and see what the Lord says. If we don't get an answer, I'll back whatever you decide."

As I sought the Lord, I wrestled with scriptural principles. Did "Do not be yoked with unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 6:14) supercede Jesus' mandate in Matthew 28:19 to make disciples? Was this an opportunity to lead Steve to the Lord?

"What is your will, Father?" I asked many times, but silence was my only reply. A couple of days later, Shawna asked for my decision.

"Let me talk to him alone, then I'll let you know," I said.

Soon after, Steve and I met at a coffee shop. A football player, his six-foot, eight-inch, 240-pound build towered over my six-foot frame. We

talked about school, his family, and what he wanted to do in life, while I silently prayed for wisdom. About 20 minutes later, I decided to be up front with him.

"Steve, I'm sure Shawna told you we're Christians. If I allow you to date her, I have three rules: she's to be home by her curfew; I don't want you to drink around her (Steve was 18, the legal drinking age in Canada); and I don't want you to compromise her sexually."

"I go to church, so I'm cool with all that," he replied.

What more could I say? *Lord, I commit this relationship to you, and have to trust that you're in control.*

## The Relationship Grows

A few weeks later, Shawna burst through the front door with a wide grin.

"Steve asked me to go steady!"

My heart dropped. That's the last thing I wanted to hear. Was I being overly protective? Perhaps I didn't like another man taking my place in Shawna's life. Or were my feelings the Holy Spirit's way of keeping me in tune to him?

"That's nice, but don't get too serious," I replied.

My words fell on deaf ears. They were seldom apart, and Shawna rarely had time for her friends. Joy greeted Steve with a smile and a hug every time he came over.

'Now that I'm 16, you and Mom said I can date.'

"I trust God to guide Shawna and want to show Steve God's love," she told me. "He's never missed a curfew and Shawna says he treats her with the utmost respect." I, however, had no peace. *Lord, what's going on? Does this relationship really have your blessing?*

#### A CRISIS BUILDS

At Christmas time Shawna agonized over buying "the love of her life" just the right gift (she settled on a new watch for Steve) and gushed over receiving one from "someone who really loves" her. Steve continued to be polite toward me, but we rarely had a conversation.

"Steve doesn't think you like him," Shawna told me one evening.

"I'm not sure how I feel. But I certainly haven't been rude toward him."

"Well, Mom likes him and I love him, so you better get used to him."

I'm sure the neighbours heard the ensuing argument.

"You can't stop me from seeing Steve!"

"Well guess what? While you're under my roof you'll abide by my rules. You're grounded for a week—including from seeing Steve."

I rarely saw him after that night. Whenever he picked Shawna up he waited in the foyer, but made sure she was home on time. Shawna remained cool toward me, but had many girl talks with Joy.

Then one night, Shawna dropped a bombshell.

"Steve's mom and her boyfriend are renting a house boat for a week, and asked if Steve and I wanted to come."

As the blood drained from my face, Joy nodded toward our bedroom.

"Don't blow up," she said after closing the door. "She can't go, but screaming won't do any good. She can be as stubborn as you, so let me talk to her."

Joy explained to Shawna that, though we accepted Steve, we couldn't compromise on this issue.

"Don't you trust me?" Shawna asked.

"Trust isn't the point," Joy replied. "Doing what's right is. If your dad or I were single, we wouldn't go on such a trip, and we can't allow you to."

I held my tongue throughout the conversation, thankful that Joy's wisdom overruled Shawna's protests. After the conversation, she was even civil toward me.

Shawna may have grudgingly accepted our decision, but Steve's mom was livid.

"Do you think I'd allow them to sleep together?" she screamed at Joy over the phone.

Joy patiently listened to her outburst, then tried to explain our viewpoint.

"How do you explain a conflict in values without sounding judgmental?" Joy asked after hanging up the phone. "Without being a Christian, she'll never see our side of the story."

#### LESSONS LEARNED

Steve never came into our house after this incident. Whenever he picked Shawna up, he honked his car horn from outside. My blood boiled every time, but I held my tongue. True to his word, he still had her home on time.

In my prayers, I asked God to guide Shawna. I felt it was a matter of time before the relationship ended, and I asked him to prepare her heart. A couple of weeks later, she came home in tears.

"It's over," Shawna announced. "I hope you're both happy." She stormed into her bedroom and sobbed the rest of the night. She hardly spoke to Joy or me for almost a week. Then slowly Joy began to draw her out of her

shell. Their girl talks picked up again, and I left them alone. Soon Shawna and I went out to talk over dinner.

"I'll never forget Steve, but I can now see the trouble that lay ahead if we had stayed together," she said. "If I were to marry him, I would have opened myself—and you and Mom—to all kinds of conflicts and relational heartache between our families. I guess it's better that we broke up now, instead of having to face these battles later in life."

Shawna is almost 18 now. School, sports, friends, and a part-time job occupy most of her time. She has also embraced the concept of courtship dating again.

I would never encourage Christian parents to allow their children to date unbelievers. I wouldn't want them to experience my anguish. Charles Spurgeon once said, "God is too good to be unkind, and he is too wise to be mistaken. When we cannot trace his hand, we must trust his heart." Shawna's dating experience showed me how true these words are. ■

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God to guide Shawna.

