

Trigger Warning

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Troubled children who have access to a poorly-stored firearm, a hurting high school senior who wants to get back at their bullies, a man who, instead of seeking help, seeks the death of fifty-eight people in Las Vegas; these stories and ones like them are commonplace in the news nowadays. We, as Americans, have become far too familiarized with the reality of gun violence, to the point where we are no longer even surprised when we hear of these fatalities. Occurrences like these will only end when guns are stored properly, mental health is made a priority, access to guns/ammunition is less accessible, and all different types of people are reached with the Gospel.

On average, there are 30,000 deaths by firearms in the U.S. each year (Dessus). That means that out of 100,000 people, 3.6 die by gun. For comparison, the next closest country with gun deaths per 100,000 people is a tie between Canada and Portugal with .5. In America, ninety-six people are shot and killed each day (“Gun Violence in America”). That’s ninety-three moms, dads, husbands, wives, brothers, sisters, children, grandchildren, aunts, uncles, and cousins, every single day.

Of all the different types of gun violence in America today, suicide by gun is the most common and accounts for approximately 23,000 deaths per year (“Mental Health Information”). That’s over one-third of the overall gun deaths annually. Somewhat surprisingly, suicide by gun is much more common in rural cities/states than in urban cities/states, and researchers believe this is because rural areas have a higher percentage of gun-owners than those who live in more urban areas (“Firearm Suicide”).

While suicide is the leading contributor to gun violence in the United States, another very common act of violence is mass murder. On October 27th, 2018, eleven innocent Jewish people were killed by gunfire (Andone). On November 8th, eleven Californians who were out on a

Friday night were shot dead (Said-Moorhouse). These are only two of over 300 mass shootings in 2018 alone. While these shootings have been spread all across the United States, the majority of them have happened on the coasts, as opposed to the Midwest (Robinson).

Policymakers want to make changes to help diminish these numbers, but they may be reluctant to due to the guaranteed opposition they will face, no matter what they decide to do. In the Midwest, farmers and hunters would not very willingly give up their guns because they are very useful and/or serve as an enjoyable hobby, whereas the coasts would be much more willing to implement stronger blanket policies concerning gun ownership. However, policymakers would face strong opposition from interest groups on both sides of the spectrum no matter what they decide. More importantly, though, policymakers have to consider the Second Amendment, which states “... the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed” (The Second Amendment). In addition, there are many different interpretations of the Second Amendment that policy-makers need to be sensitive about. These, along with other reasons, would undoubtedly hinder some of the laws they would make.

The lawmakers want to find a happy middle, but it seems impossible to do. However, a good motivation to do something might be the fact that since 1999, suicide rates in the U.S. have increased by 30%, and over 50% of suicides are by gun (Ritu, *Mental Health Information*). Another motivation may be that there have been 307 mass shootings so far in 2018, as of November 8 (Robinson). Or, perhaps, the fact that there have been sixty-five school shootings as of October 4, which is the same amount as the total for 2017, will put a little fire behind their actions (Courtland).

While each state has their own laws concerning firearms, blanket policies that cover all fifty states might be taken more seriously at this point in time. Some policies that might help

subtract from the number of deaths could include better gun storage, implementing public gun lockers, and all middle and high schools, private and public, being required to have at least one qualified school counsellor per one-hundred students. If a middle/high school should be smaller than one-hundred students, that school will still get one counsellor.

Better gun storage could heavily decrease the number of homicides/suicides because even if a person has a well thought out plan for how they will execute their shooting, they would not be able to easily access guns. Especially in households with teenagers, guns should be properly stored in a gun safe with a lock and key. The key, and the ammunition, should be stored in a locked safe away from the guns. In addition, a person should not be able to purchase a gun if they cannot prove by testing that they know how to properly store a gun. If they fail the test, they should not be allowed to have the gun in their house; instead, they could store the gun in a public gun locker.

A public gun locker would be a place where a person could store their gun if they could not properly store it themselves, or if they did not want to have it in their home. It could also be a place where a person could rent a gun if they, for example, wanted to go hunting but did not want to buy a gun. In order to check out a gun, a person would need to have a quick background check as well as answer an involved questionnaire for why they want/need the gun. That way, people could still have access to guns, but not immediate access. However, not everybody would have to use these public gun lockers. If a person felt that they needed to have their gun on hand, they would just have to prove through a series of tests that they are able to properly store their gun in their home.

Lastly, more school counselors could greatly help with the issue of gun violence, especially when it comes to suicide. A counselor is a person who is trained to help people deal

with their problems instead of giving in to them. Research shows that 80%-90% of people who suffer with depression and seek help from a counselor/therapist are successfully treated, either by therapy or medication (*Suicide Facts*). Numbers do not lie, and these numbers are very encouraging! Plus, having counselors in schools could a) take away the fear of having to go to a private practice and b) help families who are struggling financially but still recognize the need to get help.

Even if all these policies are set in place, however, the issue of gun violence would not be solved. There are all different types of demographics and environments throughout America, and they greatly influence a person's reaction to/handling of guns. A young girl who grows up with a mom and dad in a gated community will react to guns very differently than a young boy who grows up in a rundown section of a city where gang violence is rampant, and he has no father to teach him right from wrong, and a little boy or girl who grew up on a farm in South Dakota will be more acclimated to guns than a little girl or boy who grew up in Los Angeles, California, with divorced parents.

The little girl in the gated community will be called Christine, the boy in the rundown area Demetrius, the little boy on the South Dakota farm Tom, and the girl in LA Alisha. Christine goes to a private, all-girls school in New York, New York. Her father works as the manager of a big corporation and her mother is a fashion designer. She lives a sheltered life and is highly unlikely to ever even want access to a gun.

Demetrius, on the other hand, deals with guns every day. He also lives in New York, but he lives in a untended district. He has two younger siblings, and all three of the kids have a different father, but there is no father in his house. He is taken in by one of the gangs and his "father" is a drug dealer who carries guns with him all the time and is not afraid to use them.

Demitrius knows the ins and outs of guns, but he hates them with a passion, and he hates all the death that surrounds him all the time.

Tom works with his dad on the weekends when he does not have a lot of homework. Sometimes he will go pheasant or racoon hunting with his buddies, so he is very familiar with how to use a gun. He has also seen his dad use the gun to shoot rabid animals that come onto the farm, as well pigs and cows who are injured. He has never thought of guns as a bad thing and he has heard of school shootings and homicides and all that, but he feels safe because he has never had to deal personally with any of that.

Alisha goes to public school in California and goes shopping on the weekends with her friends. However, ever since she was thirteen and her parents divorced, she has struggled with depression and anxiety. She is too afraid and embarrassed to tell anybody about it, so she just goes on with her normal life. One day, though, she is at her dad's house, and he left the gun case unlocked. She decides she has had enough of it all and pulls the trigger.

Of the four, Demitrius would be the first person who people assume would be the user of a gun, so they avoid him. However, as Anabaptists, it is our job to reach not only the Demitriuses of the world, but also the Alishas, and the Toms, and the Christines. In Matthew 28:19-20 it says, "Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (NIV). 1 Corinthians 13:13 says, "And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love." (NIV). Matthew 22:37-39 says, "Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (NIV).

These verses make it pretty clear, we are supposed to go out into the world and love people. The issue of gun violence is not going to be solved or stopped by implementing more policies or making new laws. While those steps could help tremendously, the core issue of gun violence is the heart of the shooter. As Christians, it is our duty to go show love to every single person you meet because you never know when your kindness could save a life, or many lives. There is no more time to sit by and watch this happen; this is an issue that requires action. Let's go out and love the world, just like Jesus told us to.

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