

# Mass Shootings and the Search for a Quick Fix

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Timothy Zebell  
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Columbine—a 1999 tragedy so traumatic and severe that that the very word has become permanently synonymous with mass shootings—no longer ranks among America’s 10 deadliest public mass shootings.<sup>1</sup> In the wake of the church shooting in Sutherland Texas, the *Huffington Post* ran the headline, “Mass Shootings in America are Becoming More Common - and More Deadly.” Are public mass shootings on the rise? How much do we actually understand about this issue? More importantly, can we do anything about it?

## Are Mass Shootings on the Rise?

Three of the deadliest mass shootings in modern history have occurred within the last year and a half, beginning with the Pulse Nightclub shooting in Orlando, Florida. In an apparent act of loyalty to ISIS, Omar Mateen shot to death 49 people on June 12, 2016 and injured 53 others.<sup>2,3,4</sup> Heralded as the deadliest mass shooting in U.S. history, *TIME* wrote, “The death toll makes the attack deadlier than the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting, in which student Seung-Hui Cho shot 32 people to death before killing himself, and the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Newtown, Conn., in which gunman Adam Lanza killed 27 people before killing himself.”<sup>5</sup>

Only 16 months later, CNN ran the headline, “The Las Vegas Attack is the Deadliest Mass Shooting in Modern US History.” From his perch atop the 32<sup>nd</sup> floor of the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino, Stephen Paddock opened fire upon a crowd of more than 22,000 who were gathered on the Las Vegas Strip for the Route 91 Harvest Music Festival.<sup>6,7</sup> While Paddock’s motives are still unknown, 58 victims are reported dead, and another 489 were injured.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Shapiro, “Mass Shootings in America are Becoming More Common - and More Deadly.”

<sup>2</sup> Durgin, “Let’s Not Overthink the Motives of the Orlando Shooter.”

<sup>3</sup> Zapotosky, “Orlando Gunman Who Pledged Loyalty to ISIS was ‘Homegrown’ Extremist Radicalized Online, Obama Says.”

<sup>4</sup> Follman, “US Mass Shootings, 1982-2017: Data from Mother Jones’ Investigation.”

<sup>5</sup> Shapiro, “Orlando Nightclub Attack was Deadliest Mass Shooting in U.S. History.”

<sup>6</sup> Criss, “The Las Vegas Attack is the Deadliest Mass Shooting in Modern U.S. History.”

<sup>7</sup> Bui, “At Least 59 Killed in Las Vegas Shooting Rampage, more than 500 Others Injured.”

<sup>8</sup> Gomez, “Here are All the Victims of the Las Vegas Shooting.”

The next month, Devin Kelley executed what the Texas governor referred to as “the largest mass shooting in our state’s history”,<sup>9</sup> and the *Washington Post* called “the worst church shooting in U.S. history.”<sup>10</sup> Kelley entered a First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas during its Sunday morning worship service and began shooting.<sup>11</sup> He killed 26 people, including an unborn child and an 18-month infant, and he injured 20 others.<sup>12</sup> Authorities believe the motive was a domestic dispute with his mother-in-law who attended the church.<sup>13</sup>

The magnitude of these shootings, coupled with their proximity to one another, has provoked a general sense that mass shootings are on the rise. This feeling is only intensified with misleading headlines such as *Newsweek’s* “There’s a Mass Shooting Almost Every Day in the U.S.,” *The New York Times’s* “511 Days. 555 Mass Shootings. Zero Action from Congress” and *News Max’s* “FBI Warns Mass Shootings on Rise, We Need to be ‘Prepared’.” But before one can understand headlines such as these, consideration must be given to how mass shootings are defined.

There is no consistent standard for defining mass shootings. This is why Gun Violence Archive identifies the Las Vegas shooting as the 273<sup>rd</sup> mass shooting in 2017 while *Mother Jones* lists it as only the seventh such incident.<sup>14</sup> Gun Violence Archive “uses a purely statistical threshold to define mass shootings based ONLY on the numeric value of 4 or more shot or killed, not including the shooter”,<sup>15</sup> while *Mother Jones* defines a mass shooting as “a single attack in a public place in which four or more victims were killed.”<sup>16</sup> In other words, if an attacker shoots and kills three people without injuring anyone else, Gun Violence Archive does not label the incident a mass shooting. If, however, an attacker injures four people, the bullets only grazing them, and nobody dies, the attack is labeled a mass shooting. Also, Gun Violence Archive is not concerned whether the attack occurred in public, whereas *Mother Jones* only focuses on public mass shootings. As such, data from Gun Violence Archive includes hundreds of incidents which fall significantly short of what the public envisions by the label “mass shootings.”<sup>17</sup>

This is why *Mother Jones* catalogues 33 mass shootings since the beginning of 2013, while crowd-sourced databases such as Mass Shooting Tracker catalogues 1,903 such incidents as of November 15, 2017.<sup>18,19</sup> Likewise, *Mother Jones* catalogues seven mass shootings in 2017, while Mass Shooting Tracker catalogues 391 over the same period.<sup>20,21</sup> (*Mother Jones* uses the classification standards used by the FBI and most criminologists dating back to at least 2005, until President Barak Obama

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<sup>9</sup> “Governor: Church Shooting Worst in Texas History.”

<sup>10</sup> Phillips, “‘Evil has Invaded Sanctuary’: Texas Massacre Likely the Worst Church Shooting in U.S. History.”

<sup>11</sup> Rosenberg, “Texas Church Gunman Escaped Mental Health Facility in 2012 after Threatening Military Superiors.”

<sup>12</sup> “The Lives Lost in Sutherland Springs, Tex.”

<sup>13</sup> Harris, “Motive of Texas Church Shooting was ‘Domestic Situation’ and Gunman Threatened Mother-in-Law.”

<sup>14</sup> Kertscher, “Was the Las Vegas Mass Shooting the 273<sup>rd</sup> this Year? Or the Seventh? Or Somewhere in Between?”

<sup>15</sup> “General Methodology.”

<sup>16</sup> Follman, “A Guide to Mass Shootings in America.”

<sup>17</sup> Graff, “How Many Mass Shootings have there Really been in 2017? It Depends on the Source.”

<sup>18</sup> Follman, “US Mass Shootings, 1982-2017: Data from Mother Jones’ Investigation.”

<sup>19</sup> Mass Shooting Tracker.

<sup>20</sup> Follman, “US Mass Shootings, 1982-2017: Data from Mother Jones’ Investigation.”

<sup>21</sup> Mass Shooting Tracker.

lowered the baseline to three or more victims in 2013.<sup>22</sup>) The higher statistics are often a result of conflating public mass shootings with broader classifications, such as active shooter incidents or any crime—public or private—involving four or more gun-related injuries and/or deaths.

While every public mass shooting is a tragedy, statistically, the difference between the years, going back to 1982, is negligible. *Mother Jones* notes that there has been some increase in frequency since 2011. From 1982 to 2011, public mass shootings occurred every 200 days on average. Since late 2011, public mass shootings have occurred every 64 days on average.<sup>23</sup> When adjusted for population growth, however, the rates are mostly consistent over this same period of time. Grant Duwe, author of *Mass Murder in the United States: A History* and research director for the Minnesota Department of Corrections, writes:<sup>24</sup>

“ A mass public shooting, as I’ve defined it in my research, is any incident in which four or more victims are killed with a firearm within a 24-hour period at a public location in the absence of other criminal activity (robberies, drug deals, gang “turf wars”), military conflict or collective violence. For instance, last year’s mass murder at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando would qualify, but the 1890 massacre at Wounded Knee would not, nor would a familicide in a private home, nor a shootout between rival gangs.

Within these boundaries, there have been 140 mass public shootings in the United States since 1976 (the rest have been mostly familicides and felony-related massacres), which amounts to an average of a little more than three per year.

Duwe concludes, “Since the mid-2000s, the incidence of mass public shootings on a per capita basis has been a bit higher than it was in the preceding 10 years. But the rates over the past 10 years are no higher than in the late 1980s and early ’90s, when the frequency of mass public shootings led to the creation of policies designed to address violence in schools and workplaces.”<sup>25</sup>

Likewise, research by University of Illinois professors Sheldon Jacobson and Douglas King found that while Americans are more aware of mass-killing events, the rate at which they’ve occurred has remained steady for more than a decade.<sup>26</sup> According to the *Illinois News Bureau*:<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Follman, “A Guide to Mass Shootings in America.”

<sup>23</sup> Follman, Mark. “Yes, Mass Shootings are Occurring More Often.”

<sup>24</sup> Duwe, “Mass Shootings are Getting Deadlier, not More Frequent.”

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ahlberg, “Mass Killings Happen Randomly, yet Rate Has Remained Steady, Study Finds.”

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

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The researchers used publicly available data about incidents in the United States in which four or more people were killed, totaling 323 events from Jan. 1, 2006 to Oct. 4, 2016 – the latest available data when the study was written. Jacobson and King looked at the data set as a whole and also divided it into groups by method and by type of event – for example, public killings versus family killings.

They found that the events, both collectively and in each subgroup, were distributed uniformly over time – meaning that the rate at which they happened remained steady throughout the decade, without any significant bunching in a certain season or year.

They also found that “the amount of time since the last event doesn’t have any impact on the amount of time until the next event”, dispelling the fear that an event is likely to trigger subsequent similar events or copycats.<sup>28</sup>

While mass shootings may not be particularly more prevalent, they are becoming deadlier.<sup>29</sup> In an article for *Politico*, Grant Duwe writes, “Before 2012, the five-year moving average never exceeded 20 victims shot (per 100 million Americans). Since then, the five-year moving average rate has been above 20 every year but one (2014).”<sup>30</sup>

## Is there an Easy Solution?

Public mass shootings incite waves of grief, fear, and outrage that lead to a strong desire to do something. Inevitably, this leads to a national debate regarding gun control. Z. Byron Wolf reports, “The details don’t really matter when it comes to mass shootings in the current political climate. The script now is set – and depressingly familiar. Gun control opponents offer their ‘thoughts and prayers,’ but little in the way of solutions, while advocates bypass bipartisan mourning periods and immediately seize on tragic events to make their case.”<sup>31</sup>

Unfortunately, rather than thoughtful effective responses, a number of prominent leaders have reacted by looking for quick fixes. A week after the Orlando Pulse Nightclub shooting, House Democrats walked out of a moment of silence held for the victims and then staged a 26-hour sit-in on the House floor to protest the Republican majority’s decision not to vote on changes to gun laws.<sup>32</sup> Likewise, only hours after the Las Vegas Shooting, advocates of gun control were demanding greater

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Bump, “America’s Deadliest Shooting Incidents are Getting Much More Deadly.”

<sup>30</sup> Duwe, “Mass Shootings are Getting Deadlier, not More Frequent.”

<sup>31</sup> Wolf, “Democrats are Desperate to do Something – Anything – on Gun Control.”

<sup>32</sup> Phillips, “After Las Vegas, Democrats are Jumping Straight into the Gun-Control Debate.”

restrictions on gun ownership. Even before it was known what weapons the gunman used, Hillary Clinton Tweeted, “The crowd fled at the sound of gunshots. Imagine the deaths if the shooter had a silencer, which the NRA wants to make easier to get.”<sup>33</sup> Also, “Our grief isn’t enough. We can and must put politics aside, stand up to the NRA, and work together to try to stop this from happening again.”<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Senator Chris Murphy declared, “It is positively infuriating that my colleagues in Congress are so afraid of the gun industry that they pretend there aren’t public policy responses to this epidemic. There are, and the thoughts and prayers of politicians are cruelly hollow if they are paired with continued legislative indifference.”<sup>35</sup>

Even as the news media was scurrying to piece together the facts for the American public, the Las Vegas shooting coverage was peppered with continual debates regarding the necessity of increased gun control legislation. At first, the debate focused on an existing House bill titled “The Hearing Protection Act” which would relax restrictions on suppressors. Like Hillary Clinton, Senator Tim Kaine told the *Washington Post*, “He only was stopped finally because he didn’t have a silencer on his weapon. And the sound drew people to the place where he was ultimately stopped. Can you imagine what this would have been if he’d had silencers on these weapons?”<sup>36</sup> The *Washington Post* fact-checker gave Senator Kaine two Pinocchio’s for this claim. Nevertheless, pundits repeatedly stressed how much higher the death toll may have been had Stephen Paddock had access to suppressors which would have prevented the victims from hearing the gunfire. This despite the fact that suppressors only silence gunfire in Hollywood movies.<sup>37</sup>

In reality, suppressors only reduce the volume of gunfire by 20%, bringing it to the decibel level of a jackhammer or a jumbo jet on the tarmac 100 yards away.<sup>38</sup> After investigating the pundits’ claims, *Politifact* concluded, “Gun silencers can slightly lower the visual and sound impact of a shooter, but experts agreed the impact would have been negligible in the case of Las Vegas.”<sup>39</sup>

Honest news coverage could have dispelled the myth of suppressors by interviewing gun experts rather than political pundits. Even the least bit of effort to research such claims would have resulted in an immediate repudiation of the notion. Instead, the media repeatedly stressed the importance of killing the Hearing Protection Act as a means of protecting American citizens from higher death tolls in attacks such as the Las Vegas shooting. Uninterested in substantive changes, they pointed at the first thing available to make them feel as though they were making a difference. Several Republicans also eagerly jumped aboard the bandwagon, viewing this as an easy way to take a stand against gun violence without sacrificing political points.<sup>40</sup>

However, this debate was quickly replaced when it was learned that Stephen Paddock may have used a “goofy little doodad” that had been approved under the Obama administration weeks after the

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<sup>33</sup> Killough “Clinton Talks Gun Legislation Immediately Following Massacre.”

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Phillips, “After Las Vegas, Democrats are Jumping Straight into the Gun-Control Debate.”

<sup>36</sup> “Tim Kaine Doubles Down on Clinton’s Post-Vegas Silencer Claim, Gets Fact-Checked.”

<sup>37</sup> Charen, “In Las Vegas, a Peculiarly American Madness Rears its Ugly Head.”

<sup>38</sup> Tobias, “No, Gun Silencer Wouldn’t Have Worsened the Las Vegas Shooting.”

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Karnie, “Trump being Thrust into Gun Debate after Vegas Shooting.”

Fort Hood shooting.<sup>41</sup> Twelve of the 23 weapons in Paddock's suite were equipped with bump stocks.<sup>42</sup> According to *Popular Mechanics*.<sup>43</sup>

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Bump stocks are simple pieces of equipment that replace the stock of a rifle and add a small “support step” in front of the trigger. The shooter rests his finger on this step and pulls forward on the barrel or forward grip to press the trigger against his finger. The recoil of the shot then propels the rifle backwards into a gap in stationary stock where the loose fit gives the rifle freedom to bounce forward. This along with sustained forward pressure on the rifle, has the effect of ‘bumping’ the trigger back into the shooter’s unmoving finger. So long as a shooter maintains forward pressure, the rifle will continue to fire at a rate much faster than could be accomplished with even the quickest possible series of manual trigger pulls.

Despite the fact that few people had ever heard of bump stocks, including many lawmakers, it was quickly villainized as if it were the primary culprit in the Las Vegas narrative.<sup>44</sup> Reuters called it a “major factor” in the high casualty count,<sup>45</sup> and CNN reported that bump stocks allowed the killer to “convert a killing machine, an AR-15 rifle, into a weapon of mass destruction”.<sup>46</sup> This was based upon the presumption that automatic weapons are necessarily more deadly. However, the addition of the bump stock may have reduced the number of casualties because automatic fire causes the muzzle to climb uncontrollably.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, bump stocks tend to cause rifles to jam and to overheat because they are not intended to be fired this way.<sup>48</sup>

Once again, a little research, or conversations with gun experts instead of political pundits, would have dispelled the notion that the bump stock enabled the high death tolls. Nevertheless, the bump stock proved to be an exceptional scape-goat. By first villainizing it and then criminalizing it, the American people could feel good about its leaders. The bump stock was the quick fix politicians were desperately seeking. Senator Michael Williams admitted, “The tragedy in Las Vegas broke my heart, but any talk of banning or regulating bump stocks is merely cheap political lip service from career politicians. In reality, the bump stock is the new, shiny object politicians are using to deceive voters into believing they are taking action against gun violence.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> David, “The ATF-Approved ‘Goofy Little Doodad’ Used by Las Vegas Gunman Stephen Paddock.”

<sup>42</sup> Elliott, “The Fight Over Gun Control Isn’t Really about Guns.”

<sup>43</sup> Limer, “Vegas Shooter had ‘Bump Stocks’ to Give Rifles to Full-Auto Firing Rates.”

<sup>44</sup> Stolberg, “Republicans Open to Banning ‘Bump Stocks’ Used in Massacre.”

<sup>45</sup> Bernstein, “Pence Offers Solace as Las Vegas Police Puzzle Over Shooter’s Motive.”

<sup>46</sup> Nutter, “The NRA Thinks You’re Stupid.”

<sup>47</sup> Baird, “Vegas Gunman’s Use of Bump Stock Reduced Casualties.”

<sup>48</sup> Limbaugh, “Obama Made Bump Stocks Legal.”

<sup>49</sup> Colburn, “Did Bump Stocks Prevent More Casualties in Las Vegas?”

Oddly enough, gun control proponents readily admitted that no proposed piece of legislation would have prevented the Las Vegas shooting. Even Senator Dianne Feinstein, author of the 1993 assault weapons ban and long-time gun control advocate, admitted this. The *Washington Post* reports, “Asked by CBS’s ‘Face the Nation’ host John Dickerson whether any law could have stopped him, Feinstein said, ‘No. He passed background checks registering for handguns and other weapons on multiple occasions.’”<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, Senator Feinstein was quick to introduce a bill banning bump stocks as if such legislation would have prevented the Las Vegas shooting, saying, “Mr. and Mrs. America, you have to stand up, you have to say enough is enough. No target practice justifies what happened on Sunday.”<sup>51</sup>

Before it was known whether Stephen Paddock used any of the guns equipped with the bump stock, before it was known what effect this might have had on the effectiveness of the crime, and despite the bump stock not being implicated in any other criminal activity, politicians demanded the immediate criminalization of bump stocks. In other words, regardless of the facts, and regardless of the effectiveness of the measure, bump stocks must be banned to make the American people feel like they’ve done something meaningful to prevent future mass shootings. And as an added bonus for gun control activists, such legislation might also pave the way for future restrictions, as House minority leader, Nancy Pelosi, admitted, “They’re going to say, ‘You give them bump stock, it’s going to be a slippery slope.’ I certainly hope so.”<sup>52</sup>

Banning the bump stock may be a quick fix that makes people feel like they’ve done something meaningful, but it is likely to have virtually no impact on the real issue. Likewise, despite the narrative, there is little reason to believe that increased gun control would prevent—or even dramatically reduce—public mass shootings.

It was in response to the growing number of high-profile mass shootings in the ’90s that Senator Dianne Feinstein and President Bill Clinton enacted the 1994 federal assault weapons ban.<sup>53</sup> However, even gun control advocates have admitted that the ban made little difference.<sup>54</sup> *TIME* reports, “In 2004, Bill Clinton’s ban on semiautomatic rifles, known as assault weapons, expired. But rather than spiking back up, the rate of gun homicides continued to drop. From 1993 to 2014, that rate declined from seven firearm-related homicides per 100,000 Americans to half that, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.”<sup>55</sup> Despite the rhetoric of gun control activists, the American murder rate has been steadily declining for the past 20 years.<sup>56</sup> This decline appears to be independent of gun legislation.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Newmyer, “No Law could have Prevented Vegas Shooting, Feinstein Says.”

<sup>51</sup> Rayman, “Sen. Dianne Feinstein Introduces Bill to Ban Bump Fire Stocks as NRA Stays Silent on Las Vegas Shooting.”

<sup>52</sup> Chumley, “‘Slippery Slope’ of Bump Stock Ban.”

<sup>53</sup> Duwe, “Mass Shootings are Getting Deadlier, not More Frequent.”

<sup>54</sup> Beckett, “The Assault Weapon Myth.”

<sup>55</sup> Elliott, “The Fight Over Gun Control Isn’t Really about Guns.”

<sup>56</sup> McGill, “Is Violence in America Going Up or Down?”

<sup>57</sup> Ehrenfreund, “We’ve had a Massive Decline in Gun Violence in the United States. Here’s Why.”

Dudley Brown, president of the National Association for Gun Rights, said of the Las Vegas shooting, “Short of a total ban on firearms, nothing being suggested would have stopped this kind of shooting.”<sup>58</sup> *Mother Jones* reports that in 62 mass shooting cases between 1982 and 2012, the killer obtained weapons legally in 49 cases. And of the 143 weapons used, 71 were semi-automatic handguns, 28 rifles, 23 revolvers, and 21 shotguns.

## Quick Fixes or Root Issues?

There is no easy resolution to the problem of public mass shootings because, at its core, it is a moral issue. As such, it is not something that can be legislated away. President Donald Trump rightly called the Las Vegas shooting an “act of pure evil.”<sup>59</sup> Likewise, Carl Chinn, who runs an extensive database on violence at places of worship, said of the Sutherland Springs, Texas shooting, “Evil has invaded the sanctuary.”<sup>60</sup>

The problem with evil is that it is rooted in the human heart and is difficult to root-out. Genuine fixes are often painful and arduous. It should not be surprising, then, to learn that politicians prefer the easier path of quick fixes. However, politicians are not the only ones attracted to the convenience and comfort of a quick fix rather than substantive changes when it comes to moral issues. As Christians, we too have targeted our fair share of scape-goats.

Like the political focus on superficial issues, such as suppressors and bump stocks, Christians have focused on dress standards, styles of worship music, violent video games, legalized gambling, and local strip clubs. At other times, like the greater political focus on gun control, Christians have focused on cultural behemoths. Recently, the LGBTQ movement has been targeted by Christians as the primary impetus behind God’s apparent lifting of His hand of blessing upon our nation. Prior to this, abortion was the chief culprit. Earlier still, the rebellion, drug culture, and free love of the Hippies were the central focus of the church. Christians have ardently opposed these issues as if turning the tide on these cultural trends would necessarily resolve the widespread evil in the human heart and reverse our nation’s spiritual woes. However, like the relationship of gun ownership to mass shootings, a reversal of these trends would not solve the problem.

Certainly, these issues have accelerated the moral decline of our nation and have played a significant role regarding our national favor with God. In Leviticus chapter 18, God warns the Israelites not to adopt the sinful practices of homosexuality, infanticide, and adultery. According to [Leviticus 18:24-28](#), *“Do not make yourselves unclean by any of these things, for by all these the nations I am driving out before you have become unclean, and the land became unclean, so that I punished its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. But you shall keep my statutes and my rules and do none of these abominations, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you ... lest the land vomit you out when you make it unclean, as it vomited out the nation that was before you.”* There

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<sup>58</sup> Elliott, “The Fight Over Gun Control Isn’t Really about Guns.”

<sup>59</sup> Liptak, “Trump on Las Vegas Massacre: ‘An Act of Pure Evil’.”

<sup>60</sup> Phillips, “‘Evil has Invaded Sanctuary’: Texas Massacre Likely the Worst Church Shooting in U.S. History.”



is value in resisting the progression of the LGBTQ movement, abortion, and free love as these are sins that, when embraced by the culture, may invoke God's judgment upon our nation. However, they are merely symptomatic of the root disease.

Specifically, we have lost our fear of God and what it means to come before him in humility, faith, and heartfelt repentance. Even within the church, we have lost our fear of God. We have become like God's people in [Jeremiah 5:30-31](#), *"An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule at their direction; my people love to have it so, but what will you do when the end comes?"*

According to researched conducted by the Barna Group, 90% of pastors believe the Bible addresses today's key cultural issues, but less than 10% of pastors are teaching God's Word regarding these issues."<sup>61</sup> Like the religious leaders in Israel, our spiritual leaders often ignore key aspects of God's Word in favor of teaching things that make the people happy and comforted. They have emphasized cultural concerns, political correctness, and personal preference above the whole council of God's Word.

In [Jeremiah 5:21-25](#) God warns that when a nation loses its fear of God, its sins prevent God's blessings:

“*Hear this, O foolish and senseless people, who have eyes, but see not, who have ears, but hear not. Do you not fear me? Declares the LORD. Do you not tremble before me? I placed the sand as the boundary for the seas, a perpetual barrier that it cannot pass; though the waves toss, they cannot prevail; though they roar, they cannot pass over it. But this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart; they have turned aside and gone away. They do not say in their hearts, 'Let us fear the LORD our God, who gives the rain in its season, the autumn rain and the spring rain, and keeps for us the weeks appointed for the harvest.' Your iniquities have turned these away, and your sins have kept good from you.*”

In the case of the Israelites, there was:

- **a lack of justice.** *"Run to a fro through the streets of Jerusalem, look and take note! Search her squares to see if you can find a man, one who does justice and seeks truth that I may pardon her. ... They judge not with justice" (Jer. 5:1-2, 28).*
- **a lack of truth.** *"Though they say, 'As the LORD lives,' yet they swear falsely" (Jer. 5:2).*

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<sup>61</sup> Hamilton, "Most Pastors may be Committing this Sin, Study Suggests."

- **a lack of repentance and a teachable spirit.** *“O LORD, do not your eyes look for truth? You have struck them down, but they felt no anguish; you have consumed them, but they refused to take correction. They have made their faces harder than rock; they have refused to repent”* (Jer. 5:3).
- **a lack of spiritual understanding.** *“Then I said, ‘These are only the poor; they have no sense; for they do not know the way of the LORD, the justice of their God. I will go to the great and will speak to them, for they know the way of the LORD, the justice of their God.’ But they all alike had broken the yoke; they had burst the bonds”* (Jer. 5:4–5).
- **a lack of faithfulness to God.** *“Your children have forsaken me and have sworn by those who are no gods”* (Jer. 5:7).
- **a lack of faithfulness to their wives.** *“When I fed them to the full, they committed adultery and trooped to the houses of whores. They were well-fed, lusty stallions, each neighing for his neighbor’s wife”* (Jer. 5:7–8).
- **a lack of concern for the needy.** *“[T]hey do not defend the rights of the needy”* (Jer. 5:28).
- **a lack of restraint.** *“They know no bounds in deeds of evil”* (Jer. 5:28).

Because of these sins, God was compelled to withhold His blessings, *“Your iniquities have turned these away, and your sins have kept good from you”* (Jer. 5:25).

Given the similarities between the sins of Israel and the sins of America, we ought to take heed. Sometimes terrible things happen because God is no longer shielding us from the effects of our sin. In such moments, a quick fix may make us feel better temporarily, but it will do nothing to guard against future trials.

God summarized the root cause of the Israelites’ failures by declaring, *“They do not say in their hearts, ‘Let us fear the LORD our God’”* (Jer. 5:24). Ultimately, their failure to address this root issue led to a national judgment from God, *“Shall I not punish them for these things? Declares the LORD; and shall I not avenge myself on a nation such as this? ... They have spoken falsely of the LORD and have said, ‘He will do nothing; no disaster will come upon us, nor shall we see sword or famine. The prophets will become wind; the word is not in them. Thus shall it be done to them!’”* (Jer. 5:9, 12–13).

Traumatic events such as public mass shootings should serve as a stark reminder of what evil we are capable of when, as a church and as a nation, we lose our fear of the Lord. Truly, as God declares, our evil deeds know no bounds (Jer. 5:28). Therefore, let us resolve in our hearts to address the root cause behind our moral degradation before it is too late.

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