

Did a Texting Driver Kill 13 Christian Seniors?

The news of the crash was horrifying enough. Thirteen Christian seniors, most in their 80s, were returning from a three-day retreat when their church bus crashed into a pickup truck. The bus driver, along with 12 of the passengers, died in the crash. The pickup truck driver survived.

All 13 victims were members of the same Baptist church. Some of them sang in the choir. They were parents and grandparents and great-grandparents, with deep roots in their community. Now, in a moment of time, they were gone. Can you imagine the trauma this community is experiencing?

But there's more to the story that adds to the horror.

According to reliable reports, the pickup truck swerved into the oncoming traffic, so the crash was entirely his fault. And an eyewitness who spoke to the driver claims that the reason he swerved was because he had been texting.

How murderous texting can be.

The witness, Jody Kuchler, said he was driving back to his home with his girlfriend "when he came across a truck that was driving erratically across the road."

Kuchler stated, "He kept going off the road and into oncoming traffic and he just kept doing that."

While following the truck for "at least 15 minutes," Kuchler called two different sheriff's offices "and told them 'they needed to get him off the road before he hit somebody.'"

Kuchler then witnessed the crash, then went to check on both vehicles, finding the pickup truck driver alive: "He said, 'I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I was texting.'"

"I said, 'Son, do you know what you just did?' He said, 'I'm sorry. I'm sorry.'"

So far, the police have not confirmed this report, only saying that they are considering "distracted" driving as a potential cause of the crash. But if, in fact, Kuchler's account is correct, the whole story is even more tragic and jarring.

How many times have you and I been distracted while driving because of texts and emails? How many times have we endangered the lives of others, along with our own?

I confess that I have been guilty. I have texted or emailed many a time, all the while knowing that I should not be doing it, fully aware that, no matter how careful I tried to be, what I was doing was reckless.

But I am determined to do so no more, and I am writing this article to help reinforce this determination, along with warning others. (I waited a few days to write this to allow things to sink in more deeply and to adjust my habits.)

Texting and driving is not only dangerous. It can be deadly and disfiguring.

On November 2, 2014, the Daily Mail carried this headline: "Popular teen disfigured by wreck after texting at the wheel warns other young drivers how distraction destroyed her life and how her so-called friends abandoned her because she was disabled."

The young woman, Liz Marks, now 20, "was left blind in one eye and severely disabled after crashing her car while texting at the wheel" at the age of 17.

She had been "driving her Mazda 3 along a road in St Michaels, Maryland, when she received a text from her mother, Betty. Without thinking, she looked down at her phone to read the message."

Again, I wonder: How many times have you and I done the exact same thing? We are almost programmed to respond to messages on our phones.

“Seconds later, she crashed into a tow truck driven by 25-year-old Roy Dixon that was stopped on St Michaels Road waiting to turn left on to Wales Lane. The truck had its left signal turned on.”

She “was airlifted to the University of Baltimore Shock Trauma Center with serious brain and facial injuries, where she remained in intensive care for nearly a month.

“In subsequent weeks, she was forced to undergo a number of surgeries, including an 11-hour procedure on her brain, according to The Star Democrat in Maryland.

“Two-and-a-half years on, she remains blind in one eye, has lost her sense of smell, cannot hear properly, is unable to create tears due to damaged tear ducts and cannot fall asleep naturally.”

Her before and after pictures are jarring, giving a small glimpse into her sufferings. Adding to her pain, most of her friends left her, moving on with their lives while she remained behind.

All this for a momentary, innocent glance at her phone.

And now, 13 elderly lives have been snuffed out, apparently because a driver just had to text—and text, and text.

May we take all this to heart, not just for ourselves, but for others. No life is worth forfeiting—or maiming or destroying—for a text. {eo}