

The Devastating Truth About School Shootings in America

Those of us who have not lost a loved one to an act of wanton violence cannot fully relate to the agony being experienced by the families and friends of the victims of the Parkland, Florida school shooting. Who can imagine the shock, the trauma, the pain, the disorientation, the overwhelming sense of loss?

At least 17 dead and a number of others injured. Young lives, full of dreams, cut down in a moment of time and gone from this life.

This, alone, is devastating news, more than we can readily process. But then consider something even more devastating: "There have been at least 17 other school shootings in the US in 2018" –and we're only in mid-February. What in the world is going on? Or, perhaps, more precisely, What has happened to our world?

To be clear, my focus is here not on guns or gun control, nor is my focus on theological questions about divine activity and human free will. My focus is only on the facts before us: School violence is increasing at epidemic proportions.

I did not have the time to fact-check every detail in the Wikipedia article on "School shootings in the United States," but where I did spot check, the facts were accurate (aside from discrepancies in totaling numbers). And there are ample links provided for those wanting to check in further detail. Based on the figures supplied there, school violence is almost off the charts.

According to the article, there were 28 school shootings in America in the 19th century, 226 shootings in the 20th century and 223 already in the 21st century. (We are not even one-

fifth through the 2000s!) Of those 223 school shootings so far this century, 60 occurred from 2000-2009 and 153 from 2010-2018. (I adjusted the totals listed in the Wikipedia article based on other information.)

As for the victims of this violence, the 19th century saw 24 killed and 30 injured in these school shootings, the 20th century saw 254 killed and 406 injured, and so far, in the 21st century (excluding the bloodbath of 2018), we have seen 227 killed and 278 injured, the vast majority of them school children.

What an unspeakable horror.

And note how the violence is spiking: During the 1950s, there were 17 school shootings; in the 1960s, 18; in the 1970s, 30; in the 1980s, 39; in the 1990s, 62; in the first decade of this century (2000-2009), 60 school shootings; from 2010-2018, 153.

Is it any wonder that the mother of one student at Parkland High School said, "Her biggest fear is a school shooting. She is always begging me to be home-schooled because she was scared of this." (Thankfully, her daughter was not shot.)

I'm quite aware that some will point the finger at easy access to guns, while others will point to the need for greater school security. But again, that is not my focus here. Let those who are more qualified to debate these issues lead the way in constructive discussion and strategy.

Others will look at our larger culture of death, from 45 years of legalized abortion to our fixation with violent entertainment, while still others will ask, "Where was God during this tragedy?" (To this question, still others will respond, "We kicked God out of our schools long ago.")

But today, as I write, my focus is on the shock and grief of those directly affected by today's massacre and on the

exponential increase in school shootings we are witnessing in our country. That drives me to my knees and to my face before God, asking Him to have mercy on our blood-filled land, asking Him to grant us repentance as a people, asking Him to intervene on our behalf. Without that intervention, we are utterly lost.

Of course, I'm not saying that we simply pray and do nothing else, as if we have no responsibility in the matter. But I am saying that we must *really* pray –with passion and persistence, with brokenness and fasting, with desperation and faith, as if the fate of America depended on our prayers.

It does.