

Turn Up Your Love, Tone Down Your Anger

We may never know what possessed Nevada gambler Stephen Paddock to fire his deadly automatic weapons at an unsuspecting crowd of country music fans this week in Las Vegas. Why would a guy whose family and acquaintances describe as “friendly” sneak more than 23 handguns and rifles into a hotel room, fire them at a crowd of 22,000 people and then shoot himself?

Paddock was 64, the age when most guys his age would be slowing down to enjoy vacations or grandkids. He lived in a nice suburban home. He had no financial problems and no extreme political or religious views. But something snapped the night of Oct. 1.

This “friendly” man is now responsible for the worst mass shooting in modern American history. At least 58 people are dead and more than 500 are wounded. And Americans are wondering if it is safe now to go to a concert or even walk down the street.

In my column last week, “Is America About to Explode?”, I explored the culture of hostility that has been growing in our country in recent years. I noted that our sharp political differences have created a dangerous minefield. And I stated: “Violence could break out at any moment in today’s atmosphere of rage.”

I was not predicting the Las Vegas massacre when I wrote those words. It doesn’t take a prophet to know that more violence is likely to erupt if we don’t do something. We are living in a time of intense spiritual conflict. You can feel it in the air. It reminds me that Jesus described the last days as a time when “the love of many will grow cold” (Matt. 24:12).

I don't believe we can end this senseless violence unless the church "resets the thermostat" by turning up our love. It may sound trite, but God's love is the greatest weapon in our arsenal. Here are six practical ways you can help solve this crisis:

1. **Dial down your anger toward your political enemies.** Do you find yourself blowing up in anger when you watch newscasts or when you discuss politics with co-workers? Are you known for being a hothead because of your diatribes about politicians or social issues? Remember this: Proverbs 29:11, NASB, says, "A fool always loses his temper, but a wise man holds it back." The Bible calls angry people fools!
2. **Check your heart for racial prejudice.** If harsh, hateful words are spewing out of your mouth it's because you have hate in your heart. Jesus said in Matthew 15:18 (MEV), "But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile the man." I'm baffled when I see how many people still use racial slurs when posting comments on online forums. Shame on you if you are a white Christian and you use [a derogatory term] to describe a black person. Let's grow up and leave grade-school foolishness behind. If racial slurs come out of your mouth, your soul is poisoned.
3. **Wash your mouth out.** I don't think Christians should use profanity. But just because you don't curse doesn't mean your words are acceptable. I'm amazed when I hear the venom that comes out of Christians' mouths these days—toward celebrities, the media and politicians on both sides of the divide. Every time we lash out at our enemies through our self-righteous tweets and smug Facebook posts, we are driving a deeper wedge between Jesus and the people who need Him. If you can't tone down your harsh rhetoric, go on a social media fast until you can control your addiction to ranting.

4. **Speak words of kindness to others.** My 89-year-old mother taught me that if I don't have anything nice to say, I should keep my mouth shut. I hope good manners don't die with her. You have the power to diffuse anger by blessing people with a smile, a hug, a sincere compliment or a word of encouragement. Be aware of the people around you. Learn to "season" your words with grace, as the apostle Paul said, "as though seasoned with salt, that you may know how you should answer everyone" (Col. 4:6).
5. **Reach out to loners.** Jesus often showed love toward people whom society shunned. He dined with the lonely Zacchaeus, He empowered a Samaritan woman who was an outcast and He drove the demons out of a madman in a cemetery. Mass shooters are usually loners who experienced deep rejection. Why are we afraid to love people who keep to themselves or who struggle with emotional or mental problems? If Jesus befriended them, so should we.
6. **Turn up your love for your Christian brothers and sisters.** Jesus didn't say the world would respect us because of our Christian bumper stickers or T-shirts, our convincing apologetics or our trendy megachurches. No, he said: "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, *if you have love for one another*" (John 13:35).

As long as the church is toxic, unbelievers will avoid us. As long as we are divided by race, doctrine and political opinions, we will be weak in the face of a skeptical world—and they will not be drawn to the message we preach. Only love will make the gospel attractive.