

What if Somebody Had Shared Jesus With the Orlando Killer?

America has been in mourning for days. We've cried for the 49 victims of the senseless Orlando shooting. We've prayed for the families and friends of the innocent people who died in the Pulse nightclub, and the 53 others who were wounded in the massacre. We've shaken our heads in disbelief that the deadliest terrorist attack since 9/11 occurred in a nice town known for its theme parks, palm trees, and carefree attitude.

We've also listened to countless theories about why Omar Seddique Mateen, the 29-year-old Muslim-American assailant, would walk into a gay nightclub and mow down people with an assault rifle.

At first, news reports focused on the fact that Mateen was a Muslim, of Afghan heritage, and that he called 911 during the shooting and acknowledged allegiance to the Islamic State. FBI officials theorized that he was a "lone wolf" terrorist who was radicalized by reading articles about ISIS.

But after two days, other facts surfaced about Mateen's complicated life. Now, it has become apparent that he may have actually been a gay man who was deeply conflicted about his sexuality. *The Palm Beach Post* released a story this week claiming that Mateen had visited the Pulse nightclub a dozen times and that he set up profiles on gay dating sites.

Mateen's first wife, who left him after he abused her, told the *New York Times* that she believed he was gay. A male classmate of Mateen's said Mateen tried to pick him up at a bar in south Florida. At least four regular patrons of the Pulse nightclub said Mateen was a frequent customer for many years, and that he often sat in a corner and drank heavily.

Why would a Muslim man frequent the same gay bar for years and then open fire on dozens of unsuspecting people with an assault rifle? Was he mad at homosexuals? Was he troubled that his sexuality conflicted with his Muslim heritage? Had he been jilted by a boyfriend at the club and then vented his anger on everyone there?

We may never know what was going on in the mind of Omar Mateen. He's gone, and he took 49 others with him.

Much of the national discussion today is about how we can prevent these horrific massacres. The Orlando attack marks the 24th mass shooting in the United States since President Obama has been in office, and I'm sure he is weary of having to console the country in a speech—especially when words seem powerless to change anything.

When I think about the Orlando tragedy, I can't help but wonder what might have changed if a loving, caring Christian had befriended Mateen and led him to Christ. I have lived in Orlando for 24 years. It is possible that I have even passed this man in a store or sat near him in a restaurant.

He lived his entire life in the United States, first in New York and then in central Florida. He worked as a security guard. Did he ever meet a Christian? Did any Christian ever show him kindness or offer to share the gospel with him?

When I first began following Jesus seriously, I was challenged to be bold about sharing my faith with others. I tried not to be obnoxious, but I believed Christians have a serious responsibility to talk about Christ everywhere we go, without fear.

When I was a college student, I prayed every day for “divine appointments”—special, God-ordained opportunities to share Jesus with strangers or friends. I also prayed for supernatural boldness to speak to people about God. I even worked up the courage to walk into a bar and share my faith

with a man sitting at the counter.

Today I don't hear many Christians talking about radical evangelism. Most believers keep their faith to themselves—we hide it under our bushels until we get to church where we don't have to worry about what unbelievers think about us.

But Jesus called us to be aggressively evangelistic. He said: "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a basket, but on a candlestick. And it gives light to all who are in the house" (Matt. 5:14-16, MEV). Today I'm concerned that our light has dimmed and our salt has lost its savor.

It's too late to reach Omar Mateen. But it's not too late for us to begin preaching the message that has the power to transform a troubled potential killer into a peaceful, law-abiding citizen. Please pray today, and every day, that God will direct people into your path so you can give them the words of the Savior. {eoa}