



In 2022, Deaths by Mass Shootings Reach 637

The Wired Word for the Week of December 4, 2022

In the News

On November 13, three University of Virginia football players were shot to death by a fellow student on a bus. Then, on the 19th, five people were killed by a shooter inside Club Q in Colorado Springs, and a few days later six people were killed by a disgruntled employee of a Walmart in Chesapeake, Virginia. In 2022 so far, at least 3,179 people have been shot in mass shootings, defined as an incident in which at least four people are shot (excluding the shooter). The death count stands at 637, according to *CNN*, with more than 2,500 people injured.

Authorities say that a University of Virginia student methodically shot and killed three football players (and injured two others) on a bus that had just returned to the Charlottesville campus from a field trip on Sunday, November 13. People who knew both the suspect and the victims have struggled to discern a motive for the killings. Though the suspect "at one time played football," reports *The Washington Post*, "former players said his 2018 stint was short and unremarkable, and there was no overlap between him and those he is accused of killing with bullets to the head."

In February 2021, the suspect was stopped by a police officer because the tags on his vehicle were not on file. The officer discovered that the suspect had a stolen firearm in his waistband. He was convicted of possessing a concealed firearm without a license and received a suspended sentence. In September 2022, university officials received a report that the suspect owned a gun, which led to the start of an investigation by the university's threat assessment team. There is no evidence that the team ever talked with the suspect, and officials say that the suspect did not cooperate with the probe.

Later that week, on Saturday, November 19, a shooter opened fire inside Club Q, an LGBTQ+ nightclub in Colorado Springs, Colorado. He killed five and injured 25 others, before being subdued by patrons in the club. According to *Fox News*, the suspect "used a long rifle and was halted by two club patrons, including Richard Fierro, who told reporters that he took a handgun from [the suspect], hit them with it and pinned them down with help from another person until police arrived." Public defenders say the suspect is non-binary and uses they/them pronouns.

The suspect was arrested last year after their mother reported her child threatened her with a homemade bomb and other weapons. At the time, authorities said that no explosives were found. Gun control advocates have raised the question of why police didn't use Colorado's "red flag" laws to seize the weapons reported by the mother. Such laws allow law enforcement and private citizens to petition a judge to temporarily seize a person's firearms if they are deemed a risk.

Then, on Tuesday, November 22, six people were killed by a disgruntled employee of a Walmart in Chesapeake, Virginia. The employee was a leader of an overnight team, according to *ABC News*, one who is suspected of walking into work and shooting his coworkers dead. The suspect was found to have died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound in the store's break room, alongside two others killed in the mass shooting.

Officials say that a note was found on the suspect's phone, which was found at the scene. The note says, "Sorry God I've failed you, this was not your fault but my own. I failed to listen to the groans of the holy spirit which made me a poor representation of You." The note then says that the suspect was "harassed by idiots with low intelligence" but "remained strong through most of the torment" until his "dignity was completely taken away beyond repair by [his] phone getting hacked."

The note on the suspect's phone goes on to say, "My only wish would have been to start over from scratch and that my parents would have paid closer attention to my social deficits. Sorry everyone but I did not plan this I promise things just fell into place like I was led by the Satan." The note ends with a line asking for God to forgive him for what is about to do.

According to police, the suspect had no criminal history. A police search of the suspect's home uncovered a box of ammunition and the receipt for the gun. Officials say that the 9mm handgun was purchased legally on the morning of the shooting.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Mass Shootings in the US: 2022 Could Be the Second-Highest Year. *CNN*](#)

[What Was U-Va. Shooting Suspect's Motive? Clues Offer Possibilities. *The Washington Post*](#)

[Colorado Club Q Shooting Suspect Makes First Virtual Court Appearance, Held Without Bail. *Fox News*](#)

['I Was Led by the Satan': Chesapeake Walmart Mass Shooting Suspect's 'Death Note' Manifesto Revealed. *ABC News*](#)

Applying the News Story

Wildly different responses to gun violence are offered by citizens across America, with little consensus on how to reduce it. Our political leaders -- both local and national -- often deadlock on gun control legislation. Perhaps this is no surprise, since even most churches include both those who support some form of additional regulation as well as people who think that there should be less regulation.

But the religious community is challenged to take action to keep guns out of the hands of people who will use them to do violence to themselves and others, whether they are depressed young people, delusional shooters, or children who stumble across guns in the home. Use this news story to develop a new consensus on the proper place of firearms in our society, on how guns can be properly handled and used by individuals, and on steps that can be taken to reduce gun violence.

The Big Questions

1. From biblical times to the present day, people have had to strike a balance between individual rights and societal good. In what issues today do you see individual rights being favored, and where do you see an emphasis on the good of the whole society? What happens when one side is favored over the other?
2. Gun control legislation tends to curb individual rights, while unfettered freedom to bear arms has a terrible social cost. With regard to guns, where do you find the right balance?
3. Many suicides occur when depressed people gain access to firearms. How can the church and community do a better job of identifying people with mental health issues, and expanding mental health services? Be specific.
4. Some violence occurs when gun owners become lax about gun security, leading to children or disturbed family members being given access to firearms. How can the manufacturers and owners of guns do a better job of preventing guns from falling into the wrong hands?
5. What laws in your community, such as gun purchase background checks, have reduced gun violence, if at all? Where do you see a need for additional gun legislation, if anywhere? Where do you see the need, if anywhere, for doing away with some laws or regulations?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Leviticus 19:14

You shall not revile the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind; you shall fear your God: I am the LORD. (For context, read [Leviticus 19:1-16.](#))

God speaks to Moses about ritual and moral holiness, asking him to address Israel about the importance of revering mothers and fathers, keeping the Sabbath, and turning away from idols (vv. 3-4), all echoes of the Ten Commandments. Then God focuses on how the people of Israel are to treat people at the margins of society, such as "the poor and the alien" (v. 10) and the deaf and the blind.

[Rabbi Marc Katz of Brooklyn](#) focuses on the command to avoid putting "a stumbling block before the blind." Katz says that the rule speaks not only of a physical barrier, but anything that creates undue danger or harm. Guns can certainly be a "stumbling block" for children who don't comprehend their deadly power, or for mentally ill people who don't have the ability to keep their emotions under control.

Questions: Where do you feel it is the responsibility of the community to avoid putting stumbling blocks in front of people who can easily fall? How does this connect to guns, if at all?

Luke 22:50-51

Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, "No more of this!" And he touched his ear and healed him. (For context, read [Luke 22:36-53](#).)

On the night before his crucifixion, Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper and then goes out with his disciples to the Mount of Olives to pray. While speaking to the disciples, a crowd led by Judas arrives. Judas approaches Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus identifies him as his betrayer. The disciples ask Jesus if they should defend themselves with swords, since Jesus has asked them to bring swords along (vv. 36-38). One disciple strikes the slave of the high priest and cuts off his ear. Then Jesus stops them and heals the ear of the slave. He says to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police and the elders, "this is your hour, and the power of darkness" (v. 53).

Questions: How would you describe the perspective of Jesus on weapons, based on this passage? Given that he healed the slave of the high priest, what would it mean to follow him in taking a healing step toward victims of violence?

1 Corinthians 8:8-9

"Food will not bring us close to God." We are no worse off if we do not eat and no better off if we do. But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. (For context, read [1 Corinthians 8:1-13](#).)

In his first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul explores whether it is ever appropriate to eat meat that has been offered to idols. He wants the Corinthians to make decisions based on the welfare of those who have concerns about eating meat offered to idols. He says that for such people, "their conscience, being weak, is defiled" (v. 7). Paul has no particular objection to the eating of such meat, and says, "We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak." Because he cares for such "weak" people, he says that "when you thus sin against brothers and sisters and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ" (v. 12).

Questions: Consider this application of Paul's words to the Second Amendment: "Yes, Americans have the right to keep and bear arms. But we should take care that this liberty of ours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak." With regard to guns, where do you see the proper balance between rights and responsibilities? How can we all do a better job of keeping guns out of the hands of people who will hurt themselves and others?

1 Peter 2:16

As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil. (For context, read [1 Peter 2:13-17](#).)

The apostle Peter is writing to followers of Christ in Asia Minor, counseling them on how to live their faith under the governmental control of the Roman Empire. He begins by encouraging them to "be subject to every human authority" (v. 13), whether it be led by the Roman emperor or his governors. Peter understands the government to have a responsibility to "punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right" (v. 14). Peter wants them to "live as free people," and yet he counsels them to "not use your freedom as a pretext for evil." In other words, they are to

practice their freedom in a responsible way. In the end, they are to "Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God." And even "Honor the emperor" (v. 17).

Questions: What helps you to live your freedom in a responsible way? If you own a gun, how do you apply this passage to your firearm use? Whether you are a gun owner or not, how do you think guns fit into the challenge of living "as free people" while also accepting "every human authority" (v. 13)?

For Further Discussion

1. "Officials at Virginia admitted that they knew [the suspect in the shooting of the football players] had been convicted of a concealed weapons charge, but didn't follow up in any way," writes [sports columnist John Feinstein](#). "A year earlier, the suspected [Club Q] shooter's mother called police to her house saying the shooter had threatened her with bombs and guns. No arrest was made; no guns were taken away." How do you feel these killings could have been prevented, if at all? Why do you think authorities didn't follow up on either of these "red flag" warnings? What changes, if any, would you like to see in the way that authorities respond to threats of violence?

2. The Walmart suspect left a note that indicated that he was in a spiritual and emotional crisis. How could members of the suspect's family and church community have intervened when he was spiraling into despair, and taken steps to make sure that he did not use the firearm for murder and suicide? What prevents such interventions, and what encourages them to take place?

3. Religious journalist Lisa Miller has suggested that guns are a "stumbling block" for both the mentally ill and children, and our moral obligation is to remove them from the hands of such people. What would it mean for the church to formulate a clear statement on guns as potential "stumbling blocks," one that is grounded not in politics but in religious conviction? Suggest several steps that the church could take to prevent people from "stumbling" across a firearm and using it to take a life. Suggest several steps that the church could take to encourage responsible ownership of firearms and their use to protect the owners and others.

4. Pastor [Paul Carter writes](#), "Seatbelts and speed limits do not solve the problem of traffic accidents -- they do however serve to limit the frequency and severity of traffic accidents. The same basic logic applies to gun control. The government can and should have a role in limiting how much damage one angry person can do." Discuss.

Responding to the News

Be mindful of those around you who may be struggling with depression or other forms of mental illness, and look for a way to steer them toward the help they need. If you have control over firearms, make sure they are secured in such a way that they cannot fall into the hands of children or troubled family members. As a citizen, take advantage of opportunities to shape public policy in a way that reduces the chances of guns becoming "stumbling blocks" for those who might harm themselves or others. If so called, also take advantage of opportunities to learn

more about firearms and to become trained in their proper use in case you are in a situation requiring you to protect others or yourself.

Prayer

Almighty God, you sent Jesus to show us the path to peace. May we follow him as free people, balancing our rights and responsibilities in ways that honor and protect both ourselves and our neighbors. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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