

Mass Shootings — The Real Cause

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | August 13, 2019



In the aftermath of the recent mass shootings in El Paso, Texas, and Dayton, Ohio, President Trump and other leaders have expressed concerns that these acts are linked to mental illness. Some mental health professionals have been quick to point out that the data does not support such an assertion as more than 75 percent of mass shootings are committed by people without a history of mental illness.

If one allows the American Psychiatric Association's DSM-5 (*The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition*) to be the measure of mental illness and disease, then these mental health professionals are correct: Most mass shootings are not committed by those with diagnosable mental illnesses.

If, however, we use a different standard of health, a different lens to measure mental illness, then the president is correct. And what is that standard? Love — the selfless, compassionate regard for the welfare of others. If our standard of health is God's design for life, the principle of love upon which the Creator built life to operate, then selfishness is seen as sickness and exploitation and injury to others is seen as pathology.

Desperate for Answers

It's understandable that frightened people want an explanation for why violence and mass shootings are increasing. Some argue that these violent occurrences are mostly due to easy access to guns. However, guns have been easily accessible in America since its independence, yet the frequency of such violence is increasing; mass shootings are a problem of the past few decades.

Others argue that the problem is racism, but racism and class discrimination were much more pervasive and openly oppressive in America 75 to 100 years ago than today, and such mass violence was not occurring in our society then. I am not suggesting that racism doesn't exist, but the data does not support the claim that it is the cause of this increase in violence. According to the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, during 2012-15, the rate of white-on-white violent crime (12.0 per 1,000 white persons) was about four times higher than black-on-white violent crime (3.1 per 1,000). The rate of black-on-black violent crime (16.5 per 1,000 black persons) was more than five times higher than white-on-black violent crime (2.8 per 1,000).[\[1\]](#)

No — racism is just another manifestation of the root problem causing the increase in violence: the lack of love and the rise in selfishness.

Something has changed in America; an insidious attack on the bedrock principles woven into the fabric of this society has occurred — and it is the true reason for the rise in mass shootings. There are ideas, practices, and policies that have taken root in America that undermine love, increase selfishness, degrade concern for others, and are thereby the actual cause of the increase in violence we are experiencing.

All Symptoms Point to One Disease

I propose that the rise in mass shootings is a symptom of a movement advancing in America that undermines integrity, personal responsibility, moral decency, basic civic responsibility, and, ultimately, love for others.

This rise in selfishness, a lack of regard for others, is evidenced not only in these mass shootings, but also in recent online video postings. For instance, take Cori Ward, a 30-year-old mother who was arrested in Florida after she posted a video of her daughter licking a tongue depressor in a doctor's office and then putting it back in the container with unused depressors; she posted the video with the title: "Don't tell me how to live my life."[\[2\]](#)

Or the viral video seen by more than 11 million people of a 17-year-old girl opening a container of Blue Bell ice cream, licking the ice cream, putting the lid back on, and then placing the container back on the shelf. [\[3\]](#)

Yes — love is decreasing and selfishness is on the rise!

Jesus, speaking about this time in human history, said:

Sin will be rampant everywhere, and the love of many will grow cold (Matthew 24:12 NLT).

The apostle Paul said:

There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God (2 Timothy 3:1-4 NIV84).

The real reason violence is on the rise is because love is on the decline. People are becoming more self-centered and are losing concern for anything other than self.

Recent studies have demonstrated that narcissism has steadily increased in the United States since the 1970s, with each subsequent class of college freshmen scoring higher on narcissism rating scales than the class before.[\[4\]](#) This rise in selfishness, this “me-first” mentality, is rife in society today and heralds the death of love for our fellow human beings — and all types of violence are on the rise.

So what is destroying love and increasing selfishness?

The Bible teaches that:

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love (1 John 4:18 NIV84).

Love and fear are inversely proportional; as love increases, fear decreases — and as fear increases, love decreases. The more fear we experience, the more quickly we see threats, real or imagined, and take actions designed to make us feel safe. Rather than searching ourselves to identify and overcome our deficiencies in character, fear focuses our minds on self-protection, making us look outward to identify potential threats. This can lead to the projection of one’s own shortcomings onto others and can cause greater division and loss of love for our fellow human beings.

Trigger Point

Why is fear and selfishness rising and love declining, with its subsequent increase in violence? I would like to suggest several factors.

Historically, in America, the national consciousness focused on three other-than-self objects; these virtues were considered so vital that it was worth sacrificing self to defend. These big three were love for God, love for family, and love for country. These three objects — God, family, country — were promoted as being greater than self and worthy of our sacrifice to support.

But in society today, it is taught that there is no God, all families are dysfunctional, and our country, being an evil exploiter of minorities and the poor, is one that cannot be trusted. Thus, a mindset of altruism, of love, of higher purpose is replaced with a sense of fear and isolation; when there is nothing greater than the self, and no higher power or institution can be trusted, fear increases and each person becomes an island to themselves, frantically struggling to survive.

One can even see this rise of self-centeredness evidenced by the change in U.S. Army recruitment slogans over the past century. One hundred years ago, during World War I, the Army's recruitment slogan was the picture of Uncle Sam pointing his finger and saying, "I want you for U.S. Army." The nation wanted you, emphasizing the value of the country and how your service would benefit the nation.

From 1950 to 1971, the slogan "Modern Army Green" was used, emphasizing the value of the Army and how your service could benefit the military and, thus, the nation.

Then a very subtle elevation of the self and diminishment of the Army occurred from 1971 to 1980 with the slogan, "Today's Army Wants to Join You." Notice here that it isn't about you joining the Army, an institution larger than you; rather, you are so important that the army wants to join you.

And from 1980 to 2001, it got even more narcissistic with the slogan, "Be all that you can be." It's really all about you advancing you, not sacrificing for the greater good. And this narcissistic corruption became pathologic with the 2001 to 2006 slogan, "An army of one." Could any other slogan be so contrary to reality yet stand as clear evidence of the collapse of love?

The problem of violence in our society is a result of increased selfishness in the hearts of people, regardless of skin color or class. When selfishness reigns and love dies, people exploit those in their world. Thus, we readily abuse others for gain, even those closest to us (domestic violence and child abuse are also on the rise) — exactly what the Bible predicted would happen when love breaks down.

There are several other factors, in addition to the attack on the three big institutions (God, family, country), that are working together to destroy love, to increase fear and selfishness, and to cause more deadly violence.

The constant bombardment of society with fear-inducing messages: global warming, unsafe foods, terrorism, economic collapse, illegal immigrant invasion, drug crises, failing schools, increasing debt, healthcare crisis, economic warfare and tariffs, nuclear threats, war with North Korea or Iran, unstable political climate, destruction of the family — and on and on these fear-inducing messages go.

This fear leads to threat assessment, causing people to identify perceived enemies of the state that need to be removed. This leads to the next problem: trying to fix a heart problem (lack of love) with legislative solutions: gun control, border wall, free health care for all, protection of the sanctity of marriage, minimum wage increases, overturning Roe vs. Wade — and on and on the proposed legislative solutions go.

But these attempts at changing how we value each other with law will all fail!

Love only exists in an atmosphere of freedom. Love cannot be commanded, legislated, or coercively enforced; attempts to fix character problems with legislative or policy solutions always fail and, instead, contribute to further divisions in society with increased fear, selfishness, and protectionism.

Such legal solutions fail because the problem of violence in society is not due to having the wrong laws, but no longer having love in the hearts of people. We cannot increase love for each other by passing laws!

Fear leads to more fear as people seek to pass laws to fix the problem. Why? Because this process ends up only reinforcing the problem of ever-increasing selfishness as the other side responds with its own

self-interested legislation.

What happens? A person or group experiences a real or imagined wrong perpetrated against them; being conditioned by society to be motivated by fear — by survival, by threat assessment — and no longer having God, family, or a country we can trust, we don't respond in love; instead, we proclaim how our rights have been violated and demand that the violators, or their proxies, be punished or be made to pay. This is the eye-for-an-eye mentality, one that leads only to ever-increasing cycles of hate and violence.

Martin Luther King Jr. knew such behavior would never work:

Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that (as quoted in *Strength to Love*, 1963).

Gandhi has been credited with the saying, "An eye for an eye will make the whole world blind."

Jesus taught that love doesn't seek to retaliate, doesn't seek to get for self; rather, it seeks to save the abuser, to heal the oppressor, all to turn enemies into friends. Thus, Jesus taught that we should love our enemies and do good to those who persecute us. But this requires that we stop living in fear, stop living for self, and begin to live to love others!

This love is not natural to the human heart and can be experienced only in a trust relationship with our God of love. This means we must present the truth about God as Creator, the builder of reality, whose laws are the protocols upon which reality works, all based in His character of love — the principles of giving and beneficence. We must love others like Jesus loves us.

But when we present God as functioning no differently than a human dictator, passing laws that require Him to inflict punishment, then we become like that false god; we become fear-driven, lose love, and become ever more willing to try to use government to mandate that others live by our standards — and inflict punishment when they violate our morals.

I invite you to embrace the God of love and practice the methods of love in how you live. Don't get caught up in the world's system of fear and selfishness, but instead seek to reveal Jesus in all that you do.

[1] https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/rhovo1215_sum.pdf

[2] <https://www.local10.com/news/florida/florida-mom-arrested-after-daughter-licks-tongue-depressor-puts-it-back-at-doctors-office>

[3] <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/woman-seen-licking-ice-cream-viral-video-faces-20-years-n102>

[4] Twenge, JM, et al, Egos inflating over time: a cross-temporal meta-analysis of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory. *J Pers.* 2008 Jul;76(4):875-902; discussion 903-28. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-6494.2008.00507.x. Epub 2008 May 23.