

# WHAT WE (REALLY) NEED

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Who has not been saddened to learn of yet another school shooting in Parkland TX that claimed the lives of 14 students and 3 faculty members? Too much senseless violence! I want us to pray for the families, the students, the faculty and staff, and the community of Parkland.

But before we pray, I want to offer some perspective. In these days of loose and casual news “reporting,” there are some people who use events to further their own agendas by exaggeration or omission of facts.

One such case is the frequently quoted figure of “18 school shootings in 2018,” promoted carelessly by news networks, politicians, internet bloggers, and celebrities. Have you seen or heard that?

The figure of “18 school shootings in 2018” originated with Everytown for Gun Safety, a non-profit group, co-founded by Michael Bloomberg, that works to prevent gun violence and is most famous for its running tally of school shootings.

Everytown has long inflated its total by including incidents of gunfire that are not really school shootings, such as those that occurred at empty school buildings or after school hours.

Just five of Everytown’s 18 school shootings listed for 2018 happened during school hours and resulted in any physical injury. Three others appeared to be intentional shootings but did not hurt anyone. Two more involved guns — one carried by a school police officer and the other by a licensed peace officer who ran a college club — that were unintentionally fired and, again, led to no injuries. At least seven of Everytown’s 18 shootings took place outside normal school hours.

Not to minimize the trauma caused by even non-injurious shootings, the matter simply does not require exaggeration. The fact that 150,000 students attending 170 primary or secondary schools have experienced a shooting on campus since the Columbine High School massacre in 1999 is terrible enough.

Let us pray, but not from terror or panic, but from faith in God, the God who loves humanity and willingly shed His own blood, not only to prove His love, but to provide an intervening hope for change at the individual level—for it was individuals (broken, hurting, angry people), who, apart from the love of Christ, committed these atrocities.

Let's pray that those who are just now beginning to think of acting out in such ways will be informed by caring Christians and arrested by the love of Jesus Christ and transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. God, save them, and in so doing, save all those whom they would harm.

## Real Answers

This brings to mind the words of the Apostle Paul in his letter to the church in Ephesus (6:10-18):

Ephesians 6:10-12

*<sup>10</sup> A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. <sup>11</sup> Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. <sup>12</sup> For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.*

Clearly, we need better control of lethal weapons, especially assault rifles, that should have no place in the general population. But no political or legislative measures can *prevent* evil from subverting the minds and hearts of individuals.

Do not minimize the Gospel, "*for it is (still) the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes.*" So, Paul continued:

Ephesians 6:13-18

*<sup>13</sup> Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm. <sup>14</sup> Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness. <sup>15</sup> For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared. <sup>16</sup> In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil. <sup>17</sup> Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. <sup>18</sup> Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.*

I cannot overemphasize the value and necessity of the prayer of faith. While we decry the removal of prayer from our public schools, the greater tragedy is the lack of prayer in our churches and in our homes! No legislated school routine can replace the irresistible power of a mom or dad taking their son or daughter by the hand and bowing their heads together before the Mighty God of the universe to ask for His aid and give Him the praise that is due His name.

We should never again speak of prayer in the schools until we first demonstrate prayer in the church and in our homes.

It is not “those people” or “that party” or “that religion” that prevents the spread of the Gospel and the positive transformation of society—the power for such change rests in the care of the church, and only the church. Revival is not withstood by worldly cultures of godless systems, but by the faithlessness of God’s own people. It is not the sin “out there” that is the problem, but the sin “in the camp.” And the greatest manifestation of that sin is personal prayerlessness, and its lazy cousin, selfish prayers.

2 Chronicles 7:14-16

*<sup>14</sup> Then if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land.*

God’s promise is clear and timely, but it is not universal; it is only for His people. Only His people can satisfy the condition. Will we? If we will, then He will.

## **The Temple**

*<sup>15</sup> My eyes will be open and my ears attentive to every prayer made in this place. <sup>16</sup> For I have chosen this Temple and set it apart to be holy—a place where My name will be honored forever. I will always watch over it, for it is dear to My heart.*

Those of you who are familiar with the New Testament, have read that through a transformative relationship with Jesus Christ, *your body* has now become the Temple of the Holy Spirit. God no longer dwells in buildings made of stone and wood, but in hearts of flesh. You have been *chosen* in Christ and *set apart* to be holy (devoted to God), as the *place* where His name will be honored forever. He is always watching over *you*, for you are *dear* to Him!

That is the privilege we have when we gather together in His name—we form a place (a space and time) for meeting with the Living God. For many people, Sunday morning church is simply one of many options. For some people, Sunday morning church is just a religious habit. *Let it be more than that for you!*

## **The Takeaway**

There is often a correlation between what you put in and what you takeaway.

Luke 6:38

*Give and it shall be given to you, pressed down, shaken together, and running over...”*

This is true in the church experience. Now, I don’t need you here in order to meet with God. I find that whenever I give Him my attention, He pays attention to me. It’s as if He had nothing else to do, no one else to care for. He blows my mind!

I don't need you here to meet with God, but I long for *you* to meet with Him also. The only numbers that matter to me are the number of hearts engaged with Christ. When you're not here on Sunday mornings, my heart hurts for you. I know you have good reasons for what you choose to do with your time (mostly), but frankly, some of those reasons just aren't enough for missing time with Jesus and His church.

Our services are usually 90 minutes. Add prep and travel, and it's still less than 3 hours, out of 168 hours in a week. That's less than 2% of your week given to God and His people. That's not even close to a tithe! Yet the national average of church attendance is less than two Sundays each month. This is a pitiful report! We can do better. We must.

How can we expect to build a community of faith like that? How can we advance the Gospel in our cities? How does that release hope for our families? When the Lord returns, will He be pleased by such behavior? Will He think it was appropriate? Will your reasons persuade Him?

When our lives become dry, fruitless, unsatisfying, distracted by many things, confused, fearful, or aimless... then we *need* to meet with God, we need His comfort, His assurance, and His grace. And just there, when we bow before Him, we feel unfit, unworthy, because our condition is as I just described.

The very reason we are driven to God, is also the reason we feel unfit to meet with Him. We prefer to give God our best, our shiniest, our finest, but He just wants us, as we are (however we are!). He can (and will) take care of all our messes, if only we will bring them to Him.

The enemy of our souls tries to deceive us and keep us away from the Father, by suggesting that only our best is enough. The fact is, even your best *isn't enough*, because you're a mess—I'm a mess, we're all a mess! But thanks be to God, our Father is the Mess Forgiver, the Mess Cleaner, the Mess Fixer.

## **A Truth Sandwich**

Here's a Truth Sandwich for you (I'll explain that analogy in a moment):

I John 1:8-10

*<sup>8</sup> If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. <sup>9</sup> But if we confess our sins to Him, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. <sup>10</sup> If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that His word has no place in our hearts.*

Two slices of truth bread (verses 8 and 10) put a spotlight on our conniving self-justification. "*If we claim we have no sin*" and "*If we claim we have not sinned.*"

In between is the true meat that sets us free (verse 9)! *“If we confess our sins to Him, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.*

God doesn't hear our confessions with a switch in one hand to beat the sin out of us; with open hands He receives us, and forgives and cleanses us—He meets us with mercy and grace!

Why does the devil bother to lie to us like that, telling us we're unfit and unworthy? Because he knows that the Father *always* receives us when we come in Jesus' name, *never* turns us away because of our condition, and in our connection with Him is the answer to our every need. The devil knows that if we listen to the lies he feeds us, we'll always be a *victim* of our own making, but if we come to God and listen to His Word, we'll always become a *victor*, no matter how we may have stumbled.

Jesus came, not to be served, but to serve. He sent us to do the same. This life isn't about *getting* everything that you want; it's about *giving* everything that you can. As long as you pursue getting, you'll be frustrated, you'll be miserable. Once you really get that in your heart, you'll have joy every day!

Matthew 10:39

<sup>39</sup> *If you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give up your life for Me, you will find it.*

These words are recorded in each of the first three Gospels; they must be significant!

### **Passionate Pursuit**

We need a passionate pursuit of God. Where is your passion? What are you passionate about INSTEAD of God? What will you get up early for, or stay up late for? What will you miss a meal for? What will you spend your last five dollars for?

We just don't get it! We still don't realize how *much* God wants *for* us, and how *little* He requires *from* us.

### **Vibrant Worship**

He deserves your vibrant worship. Is your worship vibrant? Why not? What element of your life *is* vibrant? Why that?

### **Priority Number One**

Is Christ on your Priority List? If He is a real priority, you will make time for Him. You will listen intently to Him. You will aim to please Him. If Jesus is a priority to you, you will be an active part of His church. And you will be on time. God has made relationship with you His priority; return the favor.

Matthew 6:33

*<sup>33</sup> Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and He will give you everything you need.*

If you pursue what's important to Him, He'll provide what's important to you.