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Sutherland Springs, Texas Church Shooting

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It seems like another week and another tragedy. This time, a small community church in Texas came under attack by another coward, leaving at the time of this writing 26 killed and 20 wounded. The fact that this person is a coward cannot be disputed. What kind of person walks into a church during Sunday morning service and opens fire on innocent victims? Attacks like this are both evil and the utmost sign of cowardice.

Unfortunately, the reality is these types of people do exist among us. Sometimes they can go for long periods completely undetected and without giving much of a hint of the evil thoughts they possess. But in this case, like most cases, there was some past behavior that should have been clues. There are reports that at some level, this shooter's behavior was noted and punished, but perhaps not documented properly. Time will tell where breaks in the system might have occurred that allowed this guy to get his hands on a firearm.

But another point of reality is that these lapses in process occur all the time! Flagging behavior goes on without being addressed all the time. We must assume that every single law, rule, process and procedure erected to keep us safe can and will fail. And when that happens, and the bad guy is in front of you... what do you do? You must deal with it.

But how?

Recently I wrote a forum piece about there being no such thing as an Active Shooter expert. Well of course in the aftermath of the Sutherland Springs tragedy, the news shows have done their best to prove me wrong, with one "expert" after another paraded in front of the cameras to tell us what happened, why it happened, and what could be done about it in the future.

I have heard the same folks say the same things for 20 years: prevention strategies, gun control, more laws, mental health screenings, etc.

The problem with these debates is that they focus all of our attention towards larger system change, but ignore preparing individuals to respond to violence. These events keep happening. Systems keep failing. We need to focus on preparing individuals on how to respond, rather than having people rely on these larger systems to keep them safe.

How many years of these events do we need to suffer before we just face the facts... reliance on others, on the larger system, does not work.

The reality is that these events will keep happening and that they can happen to anyone, anywhere. We cannot keep waiting for others to solve this problem and save the day.

When violence occurs, people need to be empowered to participate in their own survival and utilize the strategies they have in the moment to survive. People have options, many just don't know about them.

Takeaways from the Texas Church Shooting:

1. It is never the victims' fault.

Generations of Americans have been trained to remain passive in the face of violence – and that is a failure of our society. We have not trained people properly for decades and it has left us with a chronic problem; passivity in the face of violence. The folks at Sutherland Springs church had many options available to them to mitigate this incredible tragedy at various times during the event. We can assume from an incredibly high kill rate that the targets were probably static. We know that from the hit numbers, surely there were reloads. We know they outnumbered the shooter by a huge ratio. We know they had numerous distraction tools readily accessible. It is not their fault for not knowing the options that existed to them. It is our fault as a society for telling them for too long to rely on someone else, when we should have been teaching them how to rely on themselves.

2. Systems meant to keep us safe can, and have, failed.

The shooter in this attack should not have been able to buy a firearm – but he did. We cannot rely on external systems to keep us safe. Yes – improvements to the system can help – but ultimately, individuals need to be trained and empowered to participate in their own survival with proactive response strategies.

3. It does not take a good guy with a gun to defeat a bad guy with a gun.

In this case in the great State of Texas, there was a local hero who was armed and potentially saved lives by shooting the bad guy and causing him to leave the church. But almost 50 people were already shot. And had one or many inside the church been armed, do we recommend to all the unarmed folks to rely on them to end the attack for them? Good guys lose gunfights too. And good guys miss the targets also, but every bullet fired hits something... or someone. How many people do we want shooting in a small church sanctuary? The answer should be less instead of more, shouldn't it?

4. People need to know their survival options.

Those who could find themselves facing one of these cowards (which means every one of us) must be prepared to help themselves. Stop relying on safety advice from “experts”, tough talk by gun-toters, the gun control debate by politicians, behavioral profiling by psychologists, and learn what you can do to help yourself. Every able-bodied person has God-given natural abilities that makes harming them with a gun very difficult. Every group of good people possess huge tactical advantages over the lone gunman.

These violent events are survivable, and people do have options.

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