

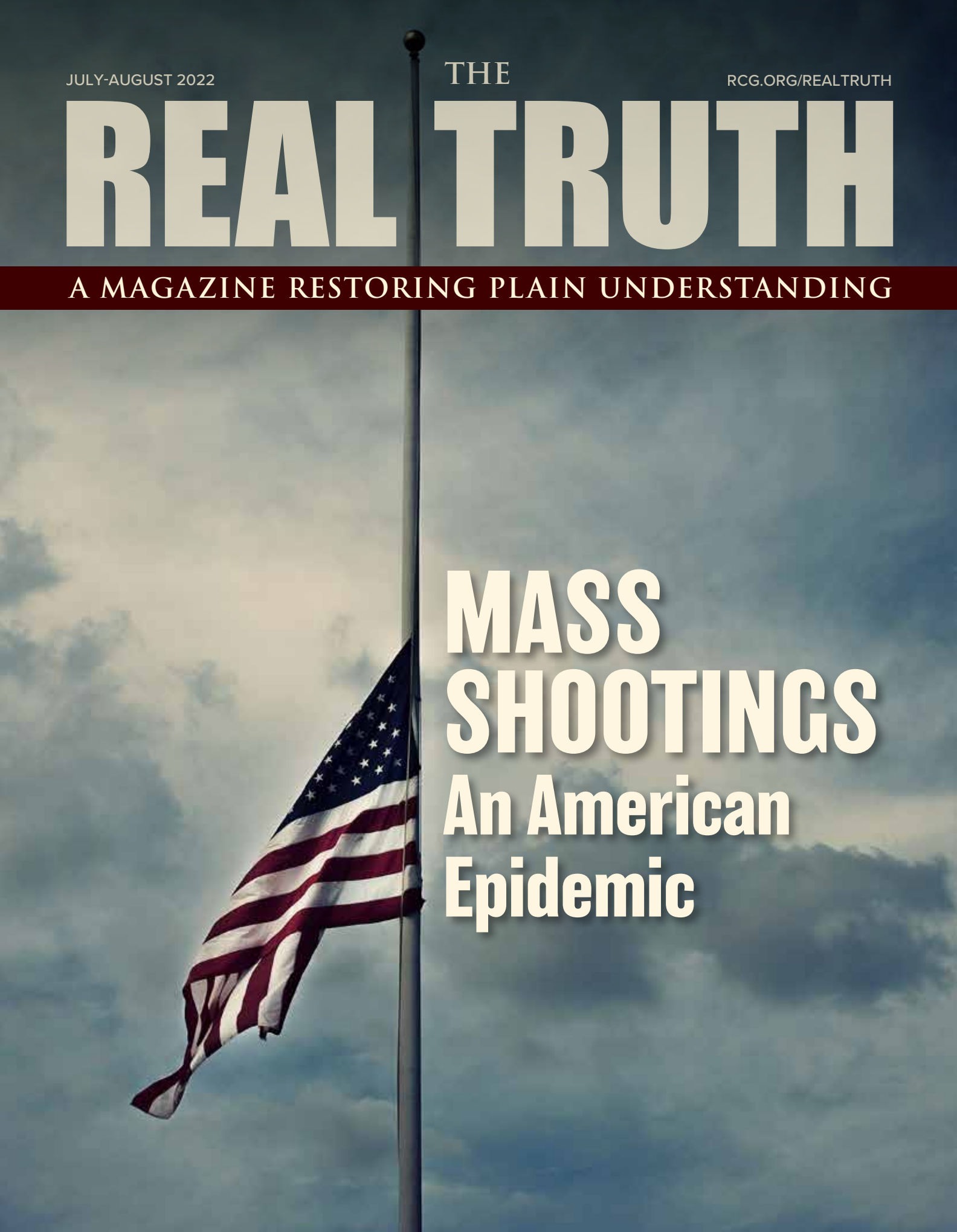
JULY-AUGUST 2022

THE

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# REAL TRUTH

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING



## MASS SHOOTINGS An American Epidemic



**Parenting in the Smartphone Era**

Parents are stuck between a rock and a hard place. They know smartphones can cause their kids harm, yet modern realities do not allow children to completely disconnect. What options do parents have to properly raise their children?

**Page 23**

*Personal from the Editor-in-Chief*

**What Is Human Nature?**

**Page 1**

**Mass Shootings: An American Epidemic**

The number of gun deaths in the nation continues to grow. Why do these tragedies seem contagious?

**Page 4**

**Science Confirms the ‘Give’ Way of Life!**

Researchers have discovered what compels us to give. Yet what they found validates what was revealed thousands of years ago.

**Page 10**

**For Sri Lankan Tea Pickers, Economic Crisis Shatters Dreams**

**Page 14**

**Why Christians Must Watch the News**

Everyone can become sick of the news. Here’s why we should keep watching anyway...

**Page 16**

**In God We Trust?**

Most Americans today say they believe in God. But we cannot seem to agree on which one.

**Page 20**

**World News Desk**

**Page 32**

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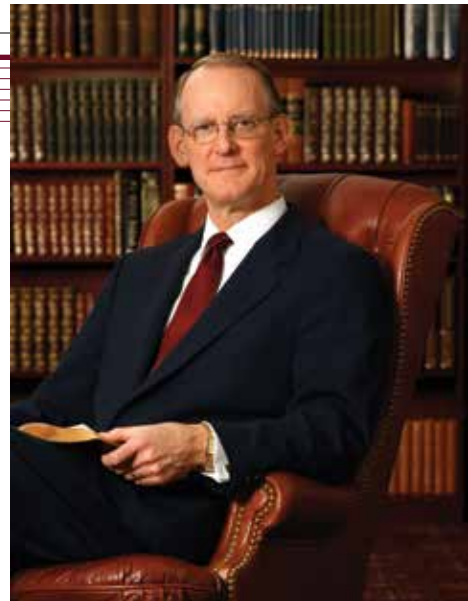
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## PERSONAL FROM

David C. Fack



# What Is Human Nature?

**W**HAT IS human nature? Why does it exist? Where did it come from? Did God create it? Why is it so selfish and evil? Few have understood this subject. This personal presents the truth.

Human troubles and evils are foretold to grow far worse in this age. Appalling violence, terrorism and war are escalating as human nature hurtles further out of control. After a school shooting where many lay slaughtered, a parent remarked, “I don’t understand this world anymore.”

You *can* understand both this world and the *cause* of its troubles. Understanding human nature is the key.

All human beings possess human nature. The selfishness, rottenness, violence and terrible evils that spring from it have plagued the world for thousands of years. The Bible states that “the *whole world lies in wickedness*” (I John 5:19). The cause of this lies directly at the feet of evil human nature.

### Differing Opinions

Every “expert” has a different opinion about *what* human nature is and *where* it comes from. Yet none know *why* human nature exists. This is because they reject the source to understanding the answers to *all* of life’s greatest questions.

Consider the paradox! Think of all the wonderful things the human mind is capable of producing. Its ingenuity and inventiveness are practically limitless. Yet it cannot solve the most basic of life’s greatest problems—poverty, ignorance, immorality, crime, war and misery. All these—and many more—are byproducts of unbridled human nature!

Many theologians and religionists teach that all humans are endowed with a “better nature” inside, waiting to be tapped and channeled. The Bible says no such thing! Yet millions subscribe to this idea.

This teaching comes from the long-held pagan doctrine of the *duality* of body and soul—that all people have a pure, pristine soul locked in an evil body that serves as a prison house until death, when it is freed. This is an attempt to explain the root of human nature without examining the truth of what God says.

Millions more believe the unbiblical doctrine of “original sin.” While Adam and Eve certainly *did* sin, the Bible teaches nothing about any “*original sin*” passed on, generation by generation, to every person. This term is a fiction of men.

Romans 3:23 states, “For *all* have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” Every human being has sinned on his own account! All are responsible for and guilty of their *own* sins—not those of Adam and Eve or anyone else!

Adam's sin brought two consequences: (1) It cut mankind off from the Tree of Life and (2) brought the death penalty on all human beings.

### What Jesus Taught

Jesus explained what comes out of the human heart: "That which *comes out* of the man, that defiles the man. For *from within, out of the heart* of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things *come from within*, and defile the man" (Mark 7:20-23).

This is a staggering revelation. Jesus said it—so it has to be true! And the prophet Jeremiah added, "The heart is *deceitful* above all things, and *desperately wicked*: who can know it?" (17:9). Of course, most do *not* know this about themselves, though they often readily see it in others. Further, the apostle Paul wrote that "the *carnal* [natural] mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, *neither indeed can be*" (Rom. 8:7).

These are incredible statements about the minds of *all* human beings. But how did the torrent of evil thoughts, which pour from people, come to exist in them in the first place? How did human nature get there?

Does God infuse human nature into tiny babies at birth? Does an all-wise, all-powerful, loving God take innocent children and turn them toward terrible evil from birth? And, if God does not put this nature there, then where *does* it come from?

### Satan's Influence

Ephesians 2:2 references the devil's power and influence upon the world: "Wherein in time past you walked according to the course of this world, according to the *prince of the power of the air*, the *spirit* that now works in the *children of disobedience*."

Notice Satan's "*spirit...works* in the children of disobedience." Do you see this? Did you grasp it? Satan has the *power* to use the "air" to broadcast, through his *spirit*, an attitude of dis-

obedience! His spirit sends moods, feelings and attitudes of hostility into people's minds. These "work" to bring disobedience. This "air power" gives the devil tremendous influence, allowing him to send thoughts of deceit, anger, pride, hatred, vanity, jealousy, lust, greed, envy and confusion directly into people!

Think of it this way. The devil owns the world's most powerful radio station, broadcasting 24 hours a day. Revelation 12:9 states that he "deceives the whole world." And his cunning has been so seductive that he has even been able to convince most that he *does not exist!*

The devil is immensely more powerful than most realize. The Bible identifies him as this world's god: "In whom the *god of this world* has blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ...should shine unto them" (II Cor. 4:4).

As this world's god, Satan blinds and deceives on a staggering scale. The result is a world *filled* with disobedience—lawlessness!

On the other hand, Christians follow God and obey His spiritual Law, which is *holy, just* and *good* (Rom. 7:12, 14)! But how do they do this?

The apostle Peter referred to "the Holy Spirit, [which] *God has given to them that obey Him*" (Acts 5:32). God's Spirit is given upon repentance and baptism (2:38). *This* Spirit helps Christians obey the Ten Commandments!

### Human Nature Is Satan's Nature

Before the invention of radio, Satan's power could not be as easily understood. We can now better understand the "children of *disobedience*." Like Christians with the Holy Spirit, these people are also inspired and guided by the spirit of this world's god. Satan broadcasts a *spirit* of rebellion against—and *disobedience to*—God's Law.

A deceived world knows nothing of this understanding!

If you listen to the radio, you usually pick a station that plays what you

want to hear. People surf radio or television stations, and of course the internet. Eventually, something interests them, and they stop and listen by choice. People have control over what they hear or watch.

It is not the same with Satan's station. The world—and you—do not *decide* to tune into the devil's broadcast. No one sets out to be deceived. But every person on Earth is automatically tuned to Satan's wavelength! His wickedness, hostility, rebellion, deceit and selfishness are continually "on the air."

Therefore, it is really Satan's nature that is being labeled as human nature. In fact, once it is injected into people, Satan's nature becomes natural to them. It becomes their nature—now, human nature.

Though you cannot see it any more than you can see radio waves or television signals, the air around you is charged and "crackles" with the energy of Satan's broadcast.

It is critical to see *how* this spirit works. It is the single most important key to understanding how Satan can deceive and manipulate almost *eight billion* people.

### How the Devil Works

Consider an illustration. It demonstrates how Satan can influence and sway humanity through his broadcast.

The setting involves King Cyrus of Persia. God wanted him to allow captive Jews to return to Jerusalem and build a second temple to replace Solomon's, which had been destroyed. Here is how God communicated to Cyrus: "Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia...the LORD *stirred up the spirit* of Cyrus...that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom" (Ezra 1:1).

God communicated with Cyrus through his *spirit*—by "stirring it up."

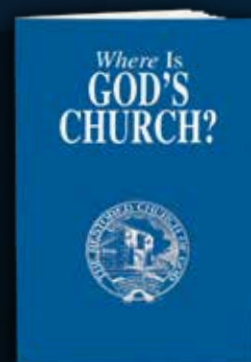
Satan does the same thing. Just as God can lead a human being toward a right purpose, Satan's spirit influences people toward hate, anger, selfishness,

Please see **PERSONAL**, page 28

# Can You Find God's Church Today?



Jesus Christ declared, "I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). If He promised His Church would never be destroyed, where is it today? Jesus gave identifying signs in the Bible to locate it.



Order Your Free Copy of *Where Is God's Church?* at [rcg.org/wigtc](http://rcg.org/wigtc).



# MASS SHOOTINGS: AN AMERICAN EPIDEMIC

The number of gun deaths in the nation continues to grow. Why do these tragedies seem contagious?

BY SAMUEL C. BAXTER

**B**AD THINGS come in threes, the old saying goes. Yet, for those in America, mass-shooting tragedies seem to come in tens, dozens...and now hundreds.

Since the start of the year, more than 200 mass shootings—an event where four or more persons are

injured or killed—occurred in the United States. Before the tears of loved ones dry from a previous massacre, another one occurs. There is never enough time to grieve or process any of these tragedies before the next.

On May 24, there was the 18-year-old gunman who stormed into an

elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, killing 19 children and two teachers—the deadliest U.S. school shooting in nearly a decade. That took place just seven days after one was killed and five wounded in a Taiwanese church in Irvine, California—which was just days after the incident in Buffalo, New

York, where 10 were killed in a racially motivated attack.

While mass shootings have been a longstanding problem in the nation, the coronavirus pandemic made matters much worse.

Gun violence increased by more than 30 percent in America during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a new study by Penn State College of Medicine researchers. The researchers said that stress, domestic violence, lack of social interactions and greater access to firearms might have contributed to the increase.

U.S. firearm sales reached a record 22.8 million in 2020, which is about 1.9 million per month. The number was similar in 2021 with 19.9 million sold for the year.

Now that the pandemic is winding down and people are returning to work and other normal activities, another problem is arising—a significant uptick in violent critical incidents, including mass shootings in workplaces, public spaces and schools.

The United Nations stated the coronavirus pandemic “has the seeds of a major mental health crisis.” For America, the most gruesome and tragic consequence of that crisis is the staggering number of cases of mass shootings.

A police officer walks past a makeshift memorial for the shooting victims outside Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas (May 27, 2022).

CHANDAN KHANNA/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

So the coronavirus pandemic has enflamed America’s mass-shooting epidemic. While one is caused by a literal virus, the other is a social sickness.

Viewing mass shootings and gun violence through the lens of a disease outbreak reveals why this violent scourge plagues America.

### COVID-19 Stoked the Fire

Each mass killing involving a teenage shooter prompts educators to lead staff discussions on how they might respond differently when confronted with what they can do better.

Robert Bardwell, director of school counseling for Tantasqua Regional High School in Fiskdale, Massachusetts, said the shooting in upstate New York shaped how he handled a threat assessment. He told staff, “Dot our i’s, cross our t’s because I don’t want to be on the news in a year, or five years, saying that the school didn’t do something that we should have to prevent this.”

Yet being able to catch the red flags is growing increasingly difficult—especially with the mental burden COVID-19 put on students.

A surge in student mental health needs, combined with staff shortages and widespread episodes of misbehavior and violence, has put extraordinary strain on school counselors and psychologists. How can teachers and administrators adequately screen for those who might show potential for violence?

Even when teens are flagged as potentially violent, it does not stop the spread of the social sickness.

When the accused shooter in Buffalo, Payton Gendron, was asked in spring 2021 by a teacher at his Conklin, New York, high school about his plans after graduation, he responded that he wanted to commit a murder-suicide, according to law enforcement. The comment resulted in state police being called and a mental health evaluation at a hospital, where he claimed he was joking and was cleared to attend his graduation.

“I get that schools are [largely] still safe. And I believe that,” said Mr. Bardwell, who is also executive director of the Massachusetts School Counselors Association. “But it also feels like there’s more and more kids that are struggling. And some of those kids who struggle might do bad things.”

Childhood depression and anxiety were on the rise for years before the pandemic, experts say, and the school closures and broader social lockdowns during the pandemic exacerbated the problems. The return to in-person classes has been accompanied by soaring numbers of school shootings, according to experts who say disputes are ending in gunfire as more students bring weapons to school. Teachers say disrespect and defiance have increased. Tempers are shorter and flaring faster.

“The tagline I would go with is the kids are not all right,” said Erich Merkle,

## A GRIM CHRONOLOGY OF MASS SHOOTINGS IN THE UNITED STATES

A gunman opened fire at an elementary school in South Texas on May 24, killing 19 students and two teachers.

The suspect was killed in the midday shooting at the Robb Elementary School in the town of Uvalde, Texas, about 80 miles west of San Antonio.

The rampage was the latest in a string of mass shootings. The United States experienced 61 “active shooter” incidents last year, up sharply in the number of attacks, casualties and geographic distribution from 2021 and the highest tally in over 20 years, the FBI reported.

Here is a list of 26 high-profile mass shootings from the last several years.

### May 14, 2022

Buffalo

A white gunman killed 10 black people inside a supermarket in a racially motivated attack. He was charged and remains in jail without bail.

### April 12, 2022

New York City

In one of the most violent attacks in the history of New York’s transit system, 23 people were wounded when a 62-year-old man activated a smoke bomb and opened fire in a subway. He was taken into custody the next day.

### November 30, 2021

Oxford

Four students were killed and seven other people were wounded after a teenager opened fire at a high school in Oxford, Michigan.



Left, family members of 86-year-old Ruth Whitfield embrace each other after she was killed during a mass shooting at Tops market in Buffalo, New York (May 16, 2022). Right, a woman cries as she leaves the Uvalde Civic Center in Uvalde, Texas (May 24, 2022).

SCOTT OLSON/GETTY IMAGES (LEFT), WILLIAM LUTHER/ THE SAN ANTONIO EXPRESS-NEWS VIA AP (RIGHT)

fatally shooting 10 people in a black neighborhood in Buffalo is a perfect case study. He was another in a long line of “copycat” gunmen carrying out deadlier mass shootings inspired by previous attackers, experts warned.

The shooter had published a racist manifesto on the internet and broadcast the attack in real time on social media platform Twitch, a live video service owned by Amazon.com. Authorities called the mass killing an act of “racially motivated violent extremism.”

Experts say the suspect was inspired by previous gun massacres, citing recent mass shootings, including the 2015 attack at a black church in Charleston, South Carolina, a 2018 shooting at a synagogue in Pittsburgh and a 2019 attack at a Walmart in a Hispanic neighborhood of El Paso, Texas.

Adam Lankford, a criminology professor at the University of Alabama, has studied trends in mass shootings over time. His 2020 study analyzing victim data showed that the “deadliest” shootings—where more than eight people are killed—had doubled in number since 2010, compared to the previous 40 years.

a psychologist for Akron Public Schools in Ohio, a district of about 21,000 students that he said is dealing with an increase in student depression, anxiety, suicidality and substance use, as well as aggression and violence, among other behavioral problems. “I can tell you that therapists are struggling.”

Yet this goes well beyond teenagers. Adults are also struggling following the pandemic and those who have murderous desires are equally likely to fulfill them. The year 2020 was one of the

deadliest on record, with gun-related homicides and non-suicide-related shootings taking about 19,300 lives—a 25 percent increase over 2019. These facts came from nonprofit Everytown for Gun Safety. It called 2020 “a year of colliding crises.”

#### How It Spreads

Mass shootings spread very similarly to a literal virus. Experts have long called this type of violent crime “contagious.” The 18-year-old suspected of

#### April 16, 2021

Indianapolis

A former FedEx employee who had been under psychiatric care shot eight people dead and injured several others at an Indiana facility of the shipping company before taking his own life.

#### March 31, 2021

Los Angeles

Four people were killed, one of them a child, in a shooting at an office building in suburban Los Angeles before the suspect was taken into custody.

#### March 22, 2021

Boulder

A mass shooting at a supermarket in Boulder, Colorado, left 10 people dead, including a police officer.

#### March 16, 2021

Atlanta

Eight people, including six women of Asian descent, were shot dead in a string of attacks at day spas in and around Atlanta. A male suspect was arrested.

#### February 26, 2020

Milwaukee

A gunman opened fire at the Molson Coors Beverage Co brewing complex in Milwaukee, killing five co-workers before he committed suicide.

#### August 4, 2019

Dayton

A gunman dressed in body armor opened fire in downtown Dayton, Ohio, killing nine people including his sister. Police killed the shooter.





“It’s clearly not just random. They are not people dreaming this up on their own. They are learning it from each other,” Mr. Lankford said.

He added: “They want to be like the previous attacker, who is a role model.”

Mr. Lankford’s study found that the “deadliest” shootings comprised 25 percent of mass public shootings from 1966 to 2009, but from 2010 to 2019 had increased to 50 percent of mass public shootings, in which there was “direct evidence that perpetrator was

influenced by another specific attacker or attackers.”

Mr. Lankford said the rise in these copycat mass killings have a specific trend: The gunmen find their inspiration from the personal life details of previous mass shooters. “It’s not repeating the incident that inspires them. It’s the intimate details of their lives that promotes the influence,” he said.

Mr. Lankford said one way to try and combat the rise in such hate

crimes is for the media to avoid publishing details of the shooters’ personal lives.

This is the tricky role the media play. Tragedy sells newspapers. So, every time there is another senseless killing, news outlets show wall-to-wall coverage with the gory details. These stories are heartbreaking and unquestionably newsworthy—yet showing more about it could be planting the seeds of the next act.

There is a sad irony here. The journalists often want to extensively report

**August 3, 2019**

El Paso

A man fatally shot 22 people at a Walmart store in El Paso, Texas. A statement, believed to have been written by the suspect, called the attack “a response to the Hispanic invasion of Texas.” Authorities arrested the shooter.

**May 31, 2019**

Virginia Beach

A disgruntled public utility employee opened fire on co-workers at a municipal building in Virginia, killing 12 people before he was fatally shot by police.

**February 15, 2019**

Aurora

A man opened fire at an Illinois factory after being fired, killing five workers before he was slain by police.

**November 7, 2018**

Thousand Oaks

A former Marine combat veteran killed 12 people in a bar in Thousand Oaks, California, a suburb of Los Angeles. He then killed himself.

**October 27, 2018**

Pittsburg

A gunman burst into the Tree of Life synagogue near Pittsburgh and fired on congregants gathered for a Sabbath service, killing 11.

**May 18, 2018**

Santa Fe

A 17-year-old student opened fire at his high school outside Houston, Texas, killing nine students and a teacher, before surrendering to officers.

on these events so they never happen again. Yet, in doing so, the scourge of mass shootings continues to spread...

### Why Is It Worse than Ever?

The reason news outlets pump out personal details of the murderers is that people are endlessly fascinated by these questions: What motivates these killers? Why did they do it? They want to make sense of the senseless. The popularity of true-crime documentaries and murder-themed podcasts makes society's endless fascination clear.

Another way to frame the question is this: Why is there evil in the world? For all of history, people have perpetrated malevolent acts. Think of one of the very first stories in the Bible where Cain killed his brother Abel. Murder has always been among the ugliest expressions of human nature.

Yet what drives human nature is something few realize—and what science and police investigations can never discover. This bedrock fact about humanity is also detailed in the Bible.

Revelation 12:9 shows that Satan “deceives the whole world.” Take those words at face value. Satan has deceived the whole world—and his influence is powerfully strong.

Ephesians 2:2 shows how Satan is able to manipulate and corrupt human nature: “Wherein in time past you walked according to the course of this world, according to *the prince of the*

*power of the air*, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience.”

The devil is the “prince of the power of the air.” Similar to cellular signals beaming across the globe, Satan broadcasts his evil thoughts and moods everywhere on the planet. For would-be killers, he can push them to murderous ends.

**“Why is there evil in the world? For all of history, people have perpetrated malevolent acts. Think of one of the very first stories in the Bible where Cain killed his brother Abel.”**

Satan's influence fuels racism, suicidal thoughts, delighting in violence and idolizing murderers. While each mass shooting perpetrator still makes his own decisions—it is the devil who plants the seeds.

Do not misunderstand. Knowing that Satan's nature drives human nature will not bring back the lives snuffed out in these senseless acts of violence.

Yet knowing the devil's role can help us understand this world and the evil it contains.

It also helps explain why mass shootings have been growing worse and worse over the last years.

### The Internet Problem

Hate-motivated mass shootings and fame-seeking perpetrators have rapidly increased since 2015, according to an analysis by The Violence Project, which tracks mass shootings in the United States.

Consider how the internet magnifies Satan's abilities as “prince of the power of the air.” He used to only influence one individual at a time—or local groups. Now, with online forums, those with murderous inclinations can find each other and goad one another on.

The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), which tracks hate and extremist groups, told *Reuters* that the Buffalo gunman “had a substantial online history in niche, toxic online communities.”

“From what he wrote online, by his own account he was radicalized through participation in these forums,” Susan Corke, director of SPLC's Intelligence Project, said in an emailed statement.

The SPLC said that even though it had not seen any evidence yet of the gunman's affiliation to a specific far right or racist group, there were red flags.

“He discussed building up a weapons cache and asked detailed questions

#### February 14, 2018

Parkland

A former student at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, killed 17 students and educators.

#### November 5, 2017

Sutherland Springs

A man thrown out of the U.S. Air Force for beating his wife and child shot 26 people fatally at a rural Texas church where his in-laws worshipped before killing himself.

#### October 1, 2017

Las Vegas

A gunman opened fire on a country music festival from a 32nd-floor hotel suite, killing 58 people before taking his own life.

#### June 12, 2016

Orlando

A gunman fatally shot 49 people at a nightclub before he was shot dead by police.

#### December 2, 2015

San Bernardino

A husband and wife killed 14 people at a workplace holiday party in San Bernardino in Southern California before dying in a shootout with police.

#### October 1, 2015

Roseburg

A gunman stalked onto an Oregon college campus and opened fire, killing nine people before police shot him to death.

about body armor on a Discord channel dedicated to gun culture. He also posted about allegedly killing a cat and dismembering it. He appears to have posted detailed plans for an attack as early as two weeks ago and posted frequently after that about his planning,” Ms. Corke added.

Social media and streaming platforms like Twitch, which said it removed the stream of the shooting after less than two minutes, have grappled with controlling violent and extremist content for years.

The live nature of the broadcasts makes it particularly difficult to moderate as streaming platforms do not have time delays like television broadcasts. Facebook has sought to address the livestream violence issue in 2019 after allowing 17 minutes of a livestream of a mass shooting in Christchurch, New Zealand, before taking it down. It now has a one-strike policy that temporarily restricts users after breaking a rule.

#### **No Hope in Sight?**

Schools are the most important place to look to see where the mass shooting epidemic is headed—and the herculean task educators, counselors and lawmakers have to ensure a safe future for American teens.

Tragically, it is not a pretty picture.

School staff is “100 percent taxed,” said Jennifer Correnti, director of school counseling at Harrison High School in New Jersey, where counselors have been under strain as they help students accli-

mate after two school years of pandemic learning disruptions.

Suicide risk assessments at schools are up sharply. The 15-year counselor says she has done as many of them in the past three years as she did in the 12 years prior.

She and Erich Merkle both said that they use mass shootings like the one in Buffalo, and another one in which a 15-year-old shot four classmates in Michigan, to discuss how they would have responded.

At Livingston Middle School in rural central California, counselors have conducted suicide prevention lessons in classrooms for years. Pre-pandemic, the lessons would result in about 30 students saying they wanted to see a counselor, said Alma Lopez, the district’s counselor coordinator and one of two counselors at the middle school.

“This year I got 200 kids, which is a quarter of our student population,” she said. “That is such a huge number. I can’t see 200 kids every week. That is just impossible.”

Many of the kids seeking help were sixth graders with issues related to friendships, she said.

Quickly, school staffers made changes, holding as many one-on-one sessions as they could, providing more group lessons on mental health, and putting flyers in every classroom with the suicide prevention hotline number.

They brought back as many activities, clubs and assemblies as they could

to help kids connect. And Ms. Lopez said she is constantly reminding her district that more support is needed, a plea echoed by her peers nationwide.

Most states are struggling with mental health support in schools, according to a recent report from the Hopeful Futures Campaign, a coalition of national mental health organizations. In some states, including West Virginia, Missouri, Texas and Georgia, there is only one school psychologist for over 4,000 students, the report says.

Ms. Lopez oversees a caseload of about 400 students at her school in Livingston, California—far more than the ratio recommended by the American School Counselor Association of one counselor for every 250 students.

“It’s a huge strain right now,” she said. Many students in her school are the children of farmworkers in a community that was hit hard by COVID-19 infections and deaths. She worries about missing something important.

“I think a lot can get lost,” she said. “If we don’t intervene in time, the issues that come with grief are going to be compounded in a big way to create additional challenges.”

Ms. Lopez and other counselors convened a discussion in May on how to help students process fears related to the Buffalo shooting and whether it was safe to go to the supermarket.

Federal relief money has helped address shortages of mental health

*Please see **SHOOTINGS**, page 31*

#### **June 17, 2015**

Charleston

A white supremacist killed nine black churchgoers at a church in Charleston, South Carolina. He was sentenced to death.

#### **September 16, 2013**

Washington

A former Navy reservist working as a government contractor killed 12 people at the Washington Navy Yard. He was shot dead by police.

#### **December 14, 2012**

Newtown

A heavily armed gunman killed 26 people, including 20 children from 5- to 10-years old, in a rampage at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut.

#### **July 20, 2012**

Aurora

A masked gunman killed 12 people at a movie theater in Aurora, Colorado. He received multiple life sentences.

#### **November 5, 2009**

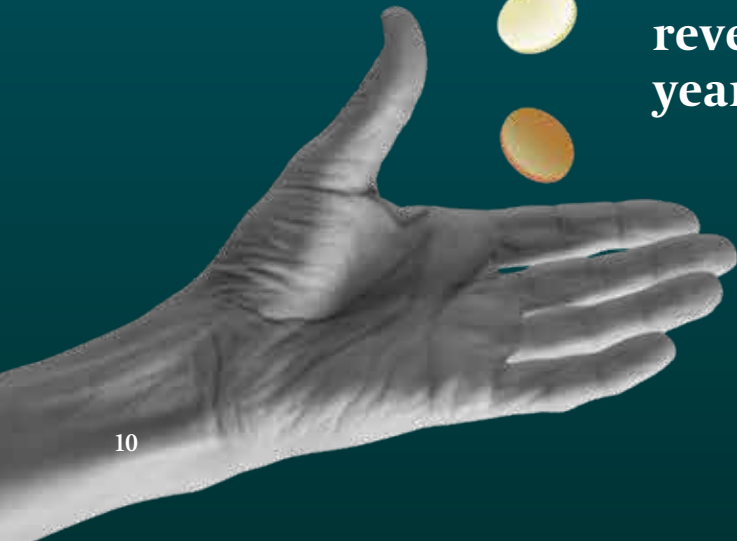
Fort Hood

An army major and psychiatrist opened fire at Fort Hood, a U.S. Army base in Texas, killing 13 people.



# Science Confirms the 'Give' Way of Life!

Researchers have discovered what compels us to give. Yet what they found validates what was revealed thousands of years ago.



**I**T PERPLEXED Charles Darwin. *Why do we give?* If humans supposedly descended from animals, what compels us to act with concern for others? A *Wall Street Journal* article titled “Hard-wired for Giving” stated, “The question of why any creatures are altruistic at all obsessed Charles Darwin from the time he devised his theory of evolution...”

The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines *altruism* as “feelings and behavior that show a desire to help other people and a lack of selfishness.” When people give with no direct personal benefit it runs contrary to evolutionists’ survival-of-the-fittest theory.

“The Darwinian principle of ‘survival of the fittest’ echoes what many people believe about life: To get ahead, you need to look out for No. 1. A cursory read of evolutionary doctrine suggests that the selfish individuals able to outcompete others for the best mates and the most resources are most likely to pass their genes on to the next generation...” (*The Wall Street Journal*).

Over 150 years after Darwin published *The Origin of Species*, scientists now understand more about why we act unselfishly. New brain-scanning technology reveals that human beings are actually *designed* to enjoy helping others.

Giving is in our DNA.

#### **“You’re not going to believe this!”**

*The Wall Street Journal* article referenced was excerpted from author Elizabeth Svoboda’s book *What Makes a Hero? The Surprising Science of Selflessness*. The article opens: “Contrary to conventional wisdom that humans are essentially selfish, scientists are finding that the brain is built for generosity...New research shows that not only do humans have a generosity gene, but there’s a biological basis for why giving feels good...”

“Using tools like fMRI [which reveals blood flow in the brain], scientists are identifying the precise circuits within the brain that control these nurturing social impulses. Where once there was only specula-

tion about the origins of the human desire to help others, a body of data is starting to fill the gap, revealing key workings of the biological hardware that makes altruism possible. This represents a new scientific frontier...”

The article quoted Jordan Grafman, the director of brain injury research at the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago, who began studying the characteristics of empathy and generosity in the mid-2000s. He stated that new technology made it “much easier to see which parts of the brain were engaged as people carried out various tasks.”

## **“Researchers from the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago found that different areas of the brain light up when people give, including a release of the pleasure chemical dopamine.”**

Dr. Grafman’s study involved 19 subjects positioned inside a brain scanner. Each individual was shown an extensive list of charities. “For each charity, they could choose to donate money, refuse to donate money, or add money to a separate reward account that they could take home at the end of the study. (In some cases, it was especially costly for subjects to make a donation decision, because doing so required them to draw from their own reward accounts.)”

While studying the lab results, Dr. Grafman’s colleague, Jorge Moll, approached him saying, “You’re not going to believe this.”

The study found that different areas of the brain light up when people give, including a release of the pleasure chemical dopamine.

The *first* discovery revealed unusually high midbrain activity. Our brains actually create a pleasurable response when we give: “The scans revealed that when people made the decision to donate to what they felt was a worthy organization, *parts of the midbrain lit up*—the same region that controls cravings for food and sex, and the same region that became active when the subjects added money to their personal reward accounts” (emphasis added).

A *second* area of the brain—the subgenual area, part of the frontal lobes—also saw a rise in activity when those being tested gave to a charity. *The Wall Street Journal* continued: “The area contains lots of receptors for oxytocin, a hormone that promotes social bonding. The finding suggests that altruism and social relationships are intimately connected...”

A *third* area of the brain called the anterior prefrontal cortex was also activated in this scenario. This part of the brain controls our ability to make complex judgments and decisions.

Surprisingly, the subjects gave to charities when it came from their personal reward accounts: “These subjects were willing to give even when they knew it would cost them, indicating that this segment of the brain may help us decide to behave generously when doing so runs counter to our immediate self-interest.”

#### **Addicted to Giving?**

Another researcher found a *fourth* area of the brain—called the nucleus accumbens—lit up when subjects gave. University of Oregon economist Bill Harbaugh conducted a study tracking people’s donations to a food bank from a \$100 account they were given. His findings matched Dr. Grafman’s study.

*The Wall Street Journal* wrote: “When subjects decided to give to charity, areas of the brain associated with the processing of unexpected rewards, such as the nucleus accumbens, lit up. The nucleus accumbens, which contains neurons that release the pleasure chemical dopamine, ‘is almost like the

common currency of the brain. It keeps track of rewards, whatever kind they are,' Dr. Harbaugh says. 'There's some primary reward people get from seeing money go from themselves to provide to other people.'"

Sure, the pleasure chemical dopamine is released when we eat a chocolate bar, drink an alcoholic beverage or win a prize. But writing a check to charity?

"Dr. Harbaugh's study indicated that giving to charity is, surprisingly, neurologically similar to ingesting an addictive drug or learning you've received a winning lottery ticket. It seems clear, then, that people give to charity not only because they think it's a good thing to do but also because giving makes them feel good, in addition to the particular benefit they're bestowing on the recipient..."

"While we are hard-wired to 'do unto others' in a multitude of ways, we also have power over whether to take advantage of those natural capacities or let them wither away. One way to strengthen these capacities may involve giving in strategic ways to reinforce the existing generosity pathways in our brains...Ultimately, we might not only be able to get hooked on self-sacrifice, but also be able to learn to love the entire process."

The facts are incontrovertible: giving makes us *happier!*

### Key to Happiness

Research has shown that giving money is not the only thing that brings psychological rewards. Giving time or support to others also brings happiness. The journal *Psychological Science* reported on a study about this topic in the article "Providing Social Support May Be More Beneficial Than Receiving It" (emphasis added throughout).

"Results...indicated that *mortality was significantly reduced* for individuals who reported providing instrumental support to friends, relatives, and neighbors, and individuals who reported providing emotional support to their spouse. *Receiving support* had

no effect on mortality once giving support was taken into consideration. This pattern of findings was obtained after controlling for demographic, personality, health, mental health, and marital-relationship variables. These results have implications for understanding how social contact influences health and longevity."

**"Those who give to others actually receive more in the end! No wonder humans were designed to give—it feels good to help others. In doing this, the Bible and science make clear that we also reap rewards for ourselves. As the saying goes, it is a win-win situation."**

*Psychological Science* cited several studies that show how helping others provides physical benefits such as reducing stress and improving health.

But positive effects did not stop there: "Moreover, *volunteering has beneficial effects for volunteers, including improved physical and mental health...* Even perceptions that are likely to be associated with giving, such as a sense of meaning, purpose, belonging, and mattering, have been shown to *increase happiness and decrease depression.*"

The study concluded: "Giving support may be an important component of interpersonal relationships that has considerable value to health and well-being...If *giving*, rather than receiving,

promotes longevity, then interventions that are currently designed to help people feel supported may need to be redesigned so that the emphasis is on what people do to help others..."

In another study "Is Volunteering Rewarding in Itself?" researchers from the University of Zurich found: "Volunteering constitutes one of the most important pro-social activities...helping others is the way to higher individual well-being...We find robust evidence that volunteers are more satisfied with their life than non-volunteers."

All of this research appears revolutionary. But the hard scientific evidence is simply a validation of a principle that was revealed thousands of years ago.

### Give Versus Get

What today's researchers are discovering can be summarized in the phrase "the *give* way of life"—expressed through outgoing concern for others. In contrast, the "*get* way of life" is ruled by selfishness and greed. These two opposing ways of life have existed since Adam and Eve.

Mankind has generally followed the *get* way of life. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve chose to take to themselves knowledge when they ate of the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil." This led to a self-centered way of life that produced a vicious cycle of violence, covetousness, misery and greed.

But God always intended His Creation to experience lives of peace, abundance and happiness.

Throughout the Bible—which can be likened to mankind's Instruction Manual on how to live—one finds evidence of how giving makes us happier. This is even more inspiring than what scientists and authors have discovered.

The knowledge found in this Book has been generally disregarded, yet the brain research now *proves* what the Bible has maintained for millennia.

Consider. Over 2,000 years before scientists discovered that giving brings joy, Jesus Christ confirmed this

in the Bible when He stated, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). The Greek word for “blessed” can also be translated “happy.”

This verse fits perfectly with what scientists have discovered about our brains! We are happier when we give than when we receive.

Jesus Christ created our minds, with God the Father guiding the process. They understand that giving was designed to be an inherent part of our lives.

### Abundant Rewards of Giving

Most would be surprised by how much the Bible contains about the give way of life. One of the clearest statements Jesus made about giving comes from Luke 6: “Give to every man that asks of you...as you would [wish] that men should do to you, do you also to them likewise...do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great” (vs. 30-31, 35). This is the famous “Golden Rule”—treat others the way you would like to be treated. Jesus said that when we do this, our “reward shall be great.”

Verse 38 corroborates what happens when we give: “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that you mete withal it shall be measured to you again.”

When we give in this manner, much more than what we initially gave comes back to us. We reap abundant rewards. This principle is also described in Ecclesiastes, where King Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, wrote, “Cast your bread upon the waters [give to others]: for you shall find it after many days” (11:1).

Sooner or later, giving pays off.

Proverbs 11 states: “There is that scatters [gives], and yet increases; and there is that withholds more than is meet [gets for himself], but it tends to poverty. The liberal [generous] soul shall be made fat: and he that waters shall be watered also himself” (vs. 24-25).

Those who give to others actually receive more in the end! No wonder humans were designed to give—it feels good to help others. In doing this, the Bible and science make clear that we also reap rewards for ourselves. As the saying goes, it is a win-win situation.

### Central Bible Theme

When Jesus conducted the first New Testament Passover service, which involved a foot-washing ceremony, He stated: “If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you...If you know these things, happy are you if you do them” (John 13:14-15, 17).

By focusing on the needs of others, Jesus set the example for His disciples. He stated that serving others (in this case, through washing their feet) would lead to being truly happy.

Two verses from the Proverbs expand this topic: “He that has a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he gives of his bread to the poor” (22:9) and “the righteous gives and spares not” (21:26).

Notice another passage from II Corinthians 9. It shows that if one gives (“sows”) a little, he will receive little. If one gives much (“bountifully”), he will receive much: “He which sows sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which sows bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposes in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work” (vs. 6-8).

During His ministry, Christ told His disciples, “Freely you have received, freely give” (Matt. 10:8). And in verse 39, Christ instructs this: “He that finds [the Greek can also mean “gets”] his life shall lose it: and he that loses his life [gives it up] for My sake shall find it.”

If a person selflessly gives up his or her life in the service of others, they will actually gain much more in the end. In contrast, those who hold on to their lives—out of selfishness—will ultimately lose what they tried to keep.

### Live the “Give” Way!

Giving leads to happiness. The Bible shows that simply having money does not. Many scriptures reveal that living the get way of life, accumulating riches and assets, only leads to sorrow.

Notice just two examples of wealth bringing unhappiness. The first is a warning from I Timothy: “But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is [a] root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (6:9-10).

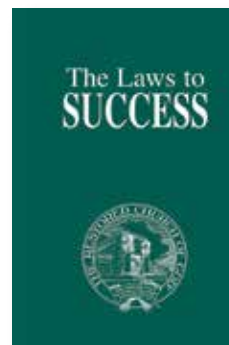
Another comes from Proverbs: “So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; which takes away the life of the owners thereof” (1:19). (Also notice James 1:10-11 and 5:1-3.)

God’s Word brings a message of tremendous good news, including the benefits of giving—and these are validated by science.

Some claim they cannot afford to give. But research shows we cannot afford not to give! (To learn more about the way of life outlined through the pages of your Bible, request our free booklet *The Laws to Success* at [rcg.org/tlts](http://rcg.org/tlts).)

Become addicted to giving to others. Focus on ways you can help—whether financially or through other means of support. Seek out friends and family members and see where you can build up relationships by focusing on their needs.

Strive to live the give way of life and follow Jesus’ teaching that it is more blessed to give than to receive. You will love the results! □



Order a Free Copy!  
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Arulappan Ideijody, 42, plucks tea leaves at an estate, amid the country's economic crisis, in Bogawantalawa, Sri Lanka (April 29, 2022).

REUTERS/DINUKA LIYANAWATTE

Plantation workers like Ms. Arulappan, who hail predominantly from the island's Tamil minority, are affected more than most, as they own no land to provide a cushion against soaring food prices.

Her family is one of 17 living in traditional "line homes," or box-like, single-story terraces unchanged in design from the days of Britain's colonial rule, which ended in 1948.

Emerald-green hills stretch for miles around, while rising over the cottages is fragrant woodsmoke from burning tea branches the families use for their cooking fires.

Their fortunes mirror the rise and fall of an economy that emerged from a decades-long civil war in 2009.

Buoyed by a booming tourism industry and exports of items such as garments and plantation products like tea, rubber and cinnamon, Sri Lanka attained a GDP double almost that of neighboring India in 2020.

Ms. Arulappan left school at 14 and worked in a garment factory before marrying and moving to the plantation in Bogawantalawa, a valley in the central highlands reputed for its fine teas and a drive about four hours east of Colombo, the commercial capital.

The job's flexible hours allowed her to care for her children and start a small business selling vegetables to other workers on credit.

But the pandemic was a setback for the family and the country, shuttering the economy for months and cutting off the tourism sector, a key earner of foreign exchange.

"There were days where we would only eat rice," Ms. Arulappan said.

#### **Inflation Spiral**

The tea industry, which supports hundreds of thousands of people, also suffered from a controversial government decision last year to ban chemical fertilizers as a health measure. Though later

## FOR SRI LANKAN TEA PICKERS, ECONOMIC CRISIS SHATTERS DREAMS

**O**N A lush plantation in Sri Lanka, Arulappan Ideijody deftly plucks the tips of each tea bush, throwing them over her shoulder into an open basket on her back.

After a month of picking more than 40 pounds of such tea leaves each day, she and her husband, fellow picker Michael Colin, 48, receive about 30,000 rupees, worth about \$80 after the island nation devalued its currency.

"It is not close to enough money," Ms. Arulappan, 42, said of their earnings, which must support the couple's three children and her elderly mother-in-law.

"Where we used to eat two vegetables, now we can only afford one."

She is one of millions of Sri Lankans reeling from the island's worst economic crisis in decades.

The COVID-19 pandemic severed the tourism lifeline of the Indian Ocean nation, already short of revenue in the wake of steep tax cuts by the government.

Left critically short of foreign currency to buy essential supplies of food, fuel and medicines, Sri Lanka has turned to the International Monetary Fund for an emergency bailout.

Rampant inflation and shortages sparked weeks of protests that have sometimes turned violent.



reversed, the ban has left fertilizers in short supply.

First-quarter tea production fell 15 percent on the year to its lowest since 2009, with the Sri Lanka Tea Board saying dry weather had taken a toll on bushes that received insufficient fertilizer after the ban.

Coupled with lengthy power cuts, fuel shortages and soaring inflation that helped push the industry to “near total breakdown,” said Plantation Association spokesman Roshan Rajadurai.

The crisis has left Ms. Arulappan unable to make the last two months’ repayments on a series of high-interest loans she took to start her business, defray the costs of a family wedding and pay off other debts.

Food inflation is approaching 50 percent on the year, with transport nearly 70 percent more expensive, official figures show, although in practice the figures are even higher.

The price of flour has doubled over the last year, putting out of reach for many plantation workers the coconut-infused flatbreads they nibble while plucking tea.

“We have had to switch to eating rice. But even that is very expensive now,” Ms. Arulappan said.

The cost of the two-kilometer bus ride to school for her two younger children has also more than doubled in recent months, but the couple continue paying for private tuition to ensure them a better life.

“I never want to see my kids work in a plantation,” Michael Colin said.

However, the crisis has doomed plans for university education for their eldest son, Akshon Ray.

Ms. Arulappan saved up for two years for a laptop she promised the 22-year-old if he got good results on his final exams.

On top of the family’s metal wardrobe lies a folder holding the brochure for the university where he planned to study. But the financial burden was too much.

“You have to support the family,” Ms. Arulappan told her son just before he left to work in a broom factory in Colombo.

She does not yet know where he is staying. □



Left, Arulappan Ideijody, 42, her son Eden Smart, 12, daughter Inoka Enast, 18, and husband Michael Colin, 48, watch TV in a bedroom at their house amid Sri Lanka’s economic crisis, in Bogawantalawa (April 29, 2022). Top right, an empty fridge is pictured inside the family’s living room. Bottom right, Michael Colin walks along line houses as he carries wood for a traditional wooden cooker.

REUTERS/DINUKA LIYANAWATTE (LEFT, TOP RIGHT, BOTTOM RIGHT)

# Why Christians Must Watch **THE NEWS**

Everyone can become sick of the news. Here's why we  
should keep watching anyway...

BY NESTOR A. TORO AND SAMUEL C. BAXTER



**L**OT LIVED in Sodom and Gomorrah about 4,000 years ago and the account of his life is detailed in the book of Genesis. What was life like in these sister cities? *Halley's Bible Handbook* called them "cesspools of iniquity."

The New Testament says that life in Sodom and Gomorrah caused Lot to be "greatly distressed by the licentiousness of the wicked (for by what that righteous man *saw and heard* as he lived among them, he was *vexed* in his righteous soul day after day with their lawless deeds)" (II Pet. 2:7-8, Revised Standard Version).

In other words, Lot was worn down by the awful conditions he "saw and heard" in these sin-filled cities. This happened "day after day."

We can all feel similarly when we watch what is going on in the world, right? Everywhere we turn, there is another report of division, lies, deception, hatred, racism, murder, adultery and debauchery. Faced with all this, the natural inclination is to press the power button on your TV remote, cancel that newspaper subscription, and unfollow any media organization on social media.

You just want some peace.

Know that you are not alone. This is part of a phenomena called news fatigue. Pew Research Center found that roughly 66 percent of Americans feel worn out by the amount of news that is out there. Many feel exhausted by the 24/7 news cycle. Yet realize that these numbers are from 2020—how much more is this true today!

The constant barrage of bad news is even worse for those striving to live God's way of life. You can look in your Bible and see that people should not kill, swear, commit adultery, lie, cheat or steal. Yet this is a blow-by-blow description of this day and age. It can feel beyond depressing to watch.

Equally troublesome are the outright inept ways authorities tend to grapple with today's problems. Such examples can leave us feeling helpless and wanting to look away.

Jesus Christ said that conditions just before His return would be "as it

was in the days of Lot" (Luke 17:28). This speaks of a time just ahead of us, but it still can be instructive for us today.

Jesus' words are code language for "go back and study Lot's days so you can recognize what to watch for and be ready."

Elsewhere, Jesus bluntly commanded us to WATCH.

Notice Luke 21:36, which states: "Watch you therefore, and pray always, that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man."

There is incredible depth of meaning to this verse. Certainly, built in here is to watch our spiritual conditions. But it can also be read to watch world conditions and events. Doing so is a key to be "accounted worthy" by Jesus Christ Himself.

But why would Jesus want us to keep our focus on world trends and conditions? Why would He want us to watch the news?

#### **Watch and...**

Just keeping your eyes glued to endless media coverage is not what Christ had in mind. Notice that His command has a second part to it: "pray always." Prayer is key to getting the most out of news watching.

Think of the Lord's Prayer. Built into this outline on how to talk to God is this powerful phrase: "Your Kingdom come" (Luke 11:2).

Have you ever asked what this means? We are to pray daily for God's Kingdom to come. Repeatedly in the books of Matthew and Mark, this is called the "gospel of the Kingdom." In other words, God's Kingdom is the CENTERPIECE of His master plan for humanity.

A prophecy about Christ in Isaiah helps show what it will be like when this Kingdom arrives: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder...Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end..." (9:6-7).

Two thousand years ago, Christ came to become the Savior for all mankind. Notice: At that time the government—Kingdom of God—was *yet* to be "upon His shoulder."

When God's Kingdom does arrive, peace will spread forever. Clearly this has not happened yet!

Back to news watching. When we see the terrible tragedies and blatant sin going on in the world today, it should not make us recoil or stick our heads in the sand. Rather, it should drive us to our knees to pray for God's Kingdom to come.

But this involves knowing what that Kingdom is. Read *What Is the Kingdom of God?* at [rcg.org/witkog](http://rcg.org/witkog) to get a full picture. Knowing God's clear Bible plan will help bring detail and fervency to your prayers.

Get this straight: Watching today's terrible world conditions should help us look more fervently toward God's Kingdom—when He will finally solve mankind's worst problems.

#### **Why This World?**

Yet what is God waiting for? Why not bring unending peace right now? Why all the suffering?

These are all valid questions that demand clear answers.

For the last roughly 6,000 years, God has allowed man to decide for himself what is right and wrong. God is allowing time and space to prove that man's ways do not work. He wants this point to be abundantly clear before He intervenes.

This brings up another point to keep in mind when consuming news. The governments of today simply do not work! They are broken, corrupt and slow to get anything done. Even the most well-meaning politicians fail to bring lasting change.

Why is this the case? Read what the prophet Jeremiah said: "O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walks to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23).

Make proving this verse a main focus of your news watching. Conditions in this world will remind you constantly

that man cannot “direct his steps”—he cannot govern himself!

For this reason, as you watch, avoid taking political sides at all costs.

Jesus’ words are again instructive here. He told Pilate this just before the crucifixion: “My kingdom is not of this world: if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight... but now is My kingdom not from hence” (John 18:36).

There is no unending peace yet, which means God’s Kingdom is not here yet. Therefore, Christ’s servants should not “fight”—should not get embroiled in political debates and infighting.

You should be starting to see why the Luke 21 command is only to watch and pray. We must not try to take matters in our own hands, no matter how much we would like to do so.

Realize that a Christian is called to *come out* of this world, including its politics, religions and systems of government (Rev. 18:4). One cannot come out of something while at the same time *staying in it* to try to fix it. It is one or the other.

Christians should support the preaching of the true gospel of the Kingdom of God, which is prophesied to soon come and finally put an end to these problems. No human government or political party is able to do that—the last 6,000 years have made that abundantly clear.

If you ever wonder whether God expects Christians to get involved in politics or activism, ask yourself a simple question: Which political party of men or activist group would Jesus Christ support if He were on Earth? Which political party or activist group did He endorse when He was on Earth?

You already saw the start of the answer in John 18:36. But you can learn much more by reading *Should Christians Vote?* and *Should Christians Be Activists?* at [rcg.org](http://rcg.org).

### Sigh and Cry

If God does not want us embroiled in political debates, what does He want us to do as we watch the news? How

should we feel as we witness the sad state of current affairs?

The answer is found in Ezekiel 9:4, where God says, “Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that *sigh* and that *cry* for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.”

While the events of this verse are prophecy yet to be fulfilled, it is still instructive to us today. Sighing and crying are two reactions we should have when we see the sin and abominations in this world. *Gesenius’ Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon* defines the words translated “cry” and “sigh” as: “groan (in pain or grief), gasp” and “lament,” respectively. These terms portray an attitude of sorrow, heaviness, mourning and longing for the Kingdom because of all the behaviors that we see that are contrary to God’s Way.

Yet this *does not* include condemning those who commit such acts.

The Bible clearly states we must avoid vengeful feelings. Note Proverbs 24: “Rejoice not when your enemy falls, and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles: lest the LORD see it, and it displease Him, and He turn away His wrath from him” (vs. 17-18).

Those who live God’s Way must be very careful not to succumb to a self-righteous attitude of “Yeah, sock it to them, God!”

An account in Luke 9 exemplifies this. Jesus had determined to go to Jerusalem and “sent messengers before His face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for Him. And they did not receive Him, because His face was as though He would go to Jerusalem. And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, will You that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elijah did?” (vs. 51-54).

Jesus sternly rebuked His disciples for this and said, “For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them. And they went to another village” (vs. 56).

One of the greatest risks to news watching is growing numb to all that is going on. It can be easy to forget that events are affecting real people with families, friends, hopes and dreams.

For this reason, seek out news sources that show how events are impacting individual lives. This will help you sigh and cry and have empathy for what others are going through. If a news source is constantly pushing a political agenda—and dehumanizing those who are being impacted by the news story—it is likely time to move on to other sources for current events.

Do your homework on news stories and outlets. Never make opinion shows your main sources of news, and realize that most cable news talk shows are opinion based. In addition, never take any news you read on social media as fact without checking its veracity on more established websites.

These same steps will help you avoid fringe ideas and conspiracy theories. God wants us to be moderate in everything we do (Phil. 4:5). If you cannot find multiple reputable sources discussing an item of news—it is almost certainly not true.

Doing all of these things will help you to continue to have outflowing care and concern for your fellow man.

### How to Stay Alert

Regular readers of *The Real Truth* know we use biblical principles to explain current events and trends going on in the world. Using God’s Word as a lens to make sense of a confusing age is one crucial way to avoid becoming fatigued by it.

The Bible, itself a historical book, accurately documents that for millennia mankind has been unable to stop the tide of bad news. Understanding the why behind current events should help you wake up and pay serious attention to the news with a sense of urgency—all while resisting the urge to tune it all out.

God commands all to watch what is going on in the world. It is not an easy task—but He wants us to do it to draw closer to Him. Seeing this world



for what it is should make us yearn for His Kingdom.

Make no mistake, until God intervenes in mankind's affairs, the world will grow more complex, more broken, *more dark*. In addition, the Bible foretells cataclysmic events to occur just before God's Kingdom arrives.

To make sense of all that is occurring now—and will happen soon—keep reading *The Real Truth*. At [rcg.org/realtruth](http://rcg.org/realtruth), we post news and analysis articles daily to help make sense of what is going on.

Back to the example of Lot being vexed by what he saw and heard in Sodom and Gomorrah. He was worn down by what he witnessed around him. That quality was one of the reasons God protected him from the destruction that came upon those sinful cities. Lot and his two daughters were the only ones who escaped.

God promises to protect those who do what He says. While Lot had his flaws, God considered him both "righteous" and "just" (II Pet. 2:7-8).

Keep watching the news, even when you may be sick of it. Allow world conditions to drive you to your knees in prayer—and closer to your Creator. Yet these are just two commands He has for those striving to live His Way. Visit [rcg.org](http://rcg.org) to see all God desires from Christians—and ultimately all humanity when His Kingdom comes. □



Above, a young girl walks by a crater in front of a damaged apartment building after a strike in the city of Slovyansk at the eastern Ukrainian region of Donbas (May 31, 2022). Left, members of the press and relatives attend a protest against the murder of journalists in Mexico City (May 9). Bottom, lion statues are seen next to debris in front of a destroyed garden center, the day after a storm caused major damage, in an industrial area in Paderborn, Germany (May 21).

ARIS MESSINIS/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES (ABOVE); ALFREDO ESTRELLA/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES (LEFT); INA FASSBENDER/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES (BOTTOM)



# IN GOD WE TRUST?

Most Americans today say they believe in God.  
But we cannot seem to agree on which one.

BY DAVID J. LITAVSKY

**I**N 1956, President Dwight Eisenhower signed it into law: “In God We Trust” became the national motto.

A little less than a century earlier, it appeared on the two-cent piece in 1864 during the Civil War, when it was used as a rallying cry in the Union to emphasize attachment to God.

Go back another century, and the words were printed on the colors of Benjamin Franklin’s Pennsylvania militia.

Through all the major mile markers of U.S. history, a higher power has been invoked. We secured independence, maintained unity, and built our wealth while bearing an inscription of His name.

And if Americans followed the trend of most every nation blessed with liberty, peace and the comforts of prosperity, they would have ditched their belief in a supreme authority a long, long time ago.

“No rich country prays nearly as much as the U.S., and no country that prays as much as the U.S. is nearly as rich,” *The Atlantic* reported.

“America’s unique synthesis of wealth and worship has puzzled international observers and foiled their grandest theories of a global secular takeover. In the

late 19th century, an array of celebrity philosophers—the likes of Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud—proclaimed the death of God, and predicted that atheism would follow scientific discovery and modernity in the West, sure as smoke follows fire.”

Well into the 21st century, the American public still has not given up its divine beliefs. A 2017 Pew poll found 90 percent of Americans believe in some kind of higher power, with 56 percent professing belief in God as described in the Bible.

When compared to other historically Christian nations, the United States still stands above. Another Pew poll found that 26 percent of Western Europeans said they hold no belief in any divine power. That is 2.5 times the percentage Americans who say they do not believe in a supreme being.

Similarly, predominantly Catholic countries such as Italy, Ireland and Portugal, have a lower belief level than the U.S.

In God we (U.S. citizens) trust? For the majority of Americans, the answer is yes.

But when asked, “In *which* God we trust?” this unity turns to division.

Among those who say they believe in the deity described in the Holy Bible, most all agree that God “loves all people regardless of their faults,” with 97 percent of respondents holding to that idea. Similarly, 94 percent hold that the Supreme Being “knows everything.”

Cracks in the Bible-believing public’s understanding of Him begin to show with other qualities. Seventy percent say God determines all or most of what happens in their lives. About 50 percent say God administers direct judgment and has punished them in their own lives. Forty percent believe He talks to people.

These notions of God’s personality feed into what Paul Froese and Christopher Bader consider America’s four deities. According to their book *America’s Four Gods*, there is the **AUTHORITATIVE** one who is involved in worldly affairs yet administers harsh judgment, the **BENEVOLENT** one who seeks to help people and solve crises, the **CRITICAL** one who watches human affairs from afar but will judge later, and the **DISTANT** one who set the universe in motion but does not involve himself in anyone’s life.

Each of these views defines how people behave in society, as well as

how others should live their lives. For example, “Those who see the deity as an Authoritative God tend to believe that divine laws are immutable and must be obeyed, Froese says, while those who envision a Benevolent God ‘feel they can talk to Him and work things out,’” Pew reported.

Again, the problem is clear. The majority of Americans claim to know, believe and trust the God of the same Bible. Yet the views on what God is like differs wildly.

As a nation, how can we fully trust in God when we cannot even agree on His character and personality?

### **Biblically Backed?**

On its face, the Bible seems to support all theories. He is benevolent. Look at John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

That sounds like a Being who “is a force for good who cares for all people, weeps at all conflicts and will comfort all,” Mr. Froese told *USA Today*.

The Old Testament appears to back this up: “The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin” (Ex. 34:6-7).

Yet then there are verses that show God punishes: “God is jealous, and the LORD revenges; the LORD revenges, and is furious; the LORD will take vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserves wrath for His enemies” (Nahum 1:2).

Many other Old Testament prophets contain similar language.

Another example is the Flood. After creating mankind and observing worsening sins and behaviors generation after generation, God regretted making it and decided to wipe out all life with a global deluge (Gen. 6:5-7). Only Noah and his family were saved.

The Bible also states that God *does* distance Himself from mankind: “Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but

your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear” (Isa. 59:1-2).

People who see a distant God perceive His lack of presence today compared to Bible times. God’s Church when it was established in the first century AD featured healings and resurrections (Acts 9:36-41; 20:7-12), earth-shattering miracles (2:1-4), and powerful prophecies being delivered and recorded (Rev. 1:1). In the nearly 2,000 years since then, little if anything notable has occurred to prove to people in mass that God’s hand is directly involved in our affairs.

A problem with all these views, however, is that they are based only on snippets of God’s Word. As with reading one sentence out of a book, summing up all of God’s character through one or two passages in the Bible provides an inaccurate and incomplete picture.

Consider again that more than half of Americans say they believe in the God as described in the Bible. Instead of picking a deity based on a preference or whim, they should know what the *entire* Bible says about the true God.

As Abraham Lincoln responded to a minister who hoped God was backing up the northern U.S. during the Civil War: “I am not at all concerned about that...But it is my constant anxiety and prayer that I and this nation should be on the Lord’s side.”

Ensuring that Americans know the true God of the Bible requires a thorough search in the scriptures.

### **The True God**

Americans are not the only ones in history to have a plethora of gods—or personal interpretations of divine beings.

The Greeks had the same problem, particularly those in Athens where the apostle Paul confronted a crowd of devotees. After recognizing their religious zeal and the many deities they worshipped, he highlighted one in particular: “As I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN

GOD. Whom therefore you ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you” (Acts 17:23).

The apostle, realizing that this was the true God mixed among idols and false ideas, sought to help the Athenians recognize Him: “God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwells not in temples made with hands” (vs. 24).

As Paul had to reveal this Being to the Greeks, those who proclaim to believe in the God of the Bible must get to know Him through the book He has inspired—the Bible.

It starts at the beginning.

Genesis 1:1 states, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” Already, this establishes that God is not amorphous: He is an actual Being who made physical matter as well as all the laws that govern it such as gravity, magnetism and time. Colossians 1:16-17 states, “For by Him were *all things* created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, *visible and invisible*, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: *all things* were created by Him.”

God is an invisible spirit (John 4:24) and is not confined to physical boundaries. Yet this does not mean He is a blob that permeates the universe. Genesis 1:26 states that humans were created in God’s image and likeness. He has features just as humans do (Rev. 1:14-16; Ezek. 1:26-28).

As Creator of time and space, God is also eternal. In Exodus 3:14, He revealed Himself to Moses as “I AM,” which means He exists and has existed without beginning or end (Heb. 7:3; Rev. 1:8).

God is the most dynamic of all beings. The Bible reveals God’s true qualities—His character—as holy and perfect (Matt. 5:48). Later in His Word, God is described not only as *having* love, but also as *being* love (I John 4:8, 16).

The Creator ponders each and every situation and decides the absolute best way in which to act. He is wonderful, mighty and fair (Isa.

45:21), as well as comforting, merciful, faithful and forgiving (II Cor. 1:3; I John 1:9).

Although often described as one God, the Bible reveals that God is actually a family currently composed of two members: Father and Son.

Notice what God said in Genesis: “Let *Us* make man in *Our* image, after *Our* likeness” (1:26). In this verse, the pronouns “Us” and “Our” are used in direct reference to the original collective Hebrew noun for God, *elohim*.

Further, John 1 states, “In the beginning was the Word [meaning “spokesman”] and the Word was with God [the Father], and the Word *was* God...And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (vs. 1, 14). The Word, who later became Jesus Christ, was in the God Family with the Father before the creation of time. This same Being was with ancient Israel throughout Sinai: “And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ” (I Cor. 10:4; Psa. 18:1-2).

This truth is contrary to the common belief that God is a three-in-one being, composed of the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit—a doctrine the Bible simply does not teach. It also goes against the idea there is only one divine Being.

The Godhead currently consists of two *distinct* Beings. There is a reason for this, and it has all to do with both how you view God and your relationship with Him.

### **A Father and Many Sons?**

The Creator knew physical human beings would have a difficult time comprehending an invisible Being. To assist them, He placed clues throughout the Bible—we could call them fingerprints—that identify what He is like.

One of these fingerprints is His names. The pages of His Word are filled with various ways we can refer to Him. Each reveals an element of His character.

There is the Hebrew *Jehovah*, which is translated as Lord. This refers to God’s inherent eternal life. He wants us to know that He is supreme and has no beginning or end, in contrast to our temporary existence.

*Elohim* was cited earlier. That word is often translated “God” or “LORD” in the King James Version. Recall this is a plural term that shows God is a family.

Further proving this is one of the most common names for God in the New Testament: the Father. Christendom has honed in on this term, but few understand the full implication of the title.

For one, God wants us to view Him as a father in the truest sense. He has love for and wants to provide for His children.

Jesus Christ stated in Luke 11: “For every one that asks receives...If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?” (vs. 10-13).

God also has high expectations for those under Him. In Christ’s parable of the unforgiving servant, who violently demanded his debtors pay him even though his master pardoned him of a great debt, Jesus warned: “So likewise shall My heavenly Father do also unto you, if you from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses” (Matt. 18:35). In the parable, the master delivered the greedy servant “to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him” (vs. 34).

The Father’s desire to see growth in His children can include stern or severe correction, as the apostle Paul showed in Hebrews 12: “For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives...we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjec-

tion unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness” (vs. 6-10).

Here, Paul revealed the ultimate reason for God’s role as a Father. To understand it, we must notice another name for the other member of the God Family. Read Romans 8:29, “For whom He [God the Father] did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.”

This shows Christ is the firstborn among many brothers. A firstborn of *many* requires a second born, a third born, and so forth. Paul further explained in Hebrews 2 that Jesus is “bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (vs. 10).

At this point, there should be no mistaking God the Father’s intention to have children. He wants *many* more individuals to follow Christ’s path into His Family.

In other words, He wants mankind to share in His perfect character and even His *eternal glory*! Naturally, you would want to know more about this—and the Bible is filled with much more proof. Our book *The Awesome Potential of Man* ([rcg.org/tapom](http://rcg.org/tapom)) contains all the details you will need.

Now, think back to Paul’s sermon on “the unknown God” to those in Athens. After identifying the true God, he told them what to do: “That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us” (Acts 17:27).

If Americans—particularly those who profess to believe in the God of the Bible—truly understood God’s identity, then “in God we trust” would be so much more than a motto. It would be their mission—to seek Him as children to a Father, to seek to grow in His character, and to someday seek to be a part of His Family.

In which God should we trust? There is just one option! □



# Parenting in the SMART PHONE ERA



Parents are stuck between a rock and a hard place. They know smartphones can cause their kids harm, yet modern realities do not allow children to completely disconnect. What options do parents have to properly raise their children?

BY EDWARD L. WINKFIELD

“**T**RAIN UP a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6). This scripture was penned thousands of years before smartphones were omnipresent in the lives of our teens. Yet these words are no less relevant for us parents now than they were back then.

Parents have always faced challenges raising their kids. Our job is much harder in the age of smartphones.

A 2018 Pew Research survey found that 95 percent of teens have access to a smartphone with 45 percent admitting they were online “almost constantly.” This was four years ago, which may as well be 40 years in technology terms.

The long-term impact of this still relatively new technology on our youth continues to surface.

Beginning in 2012—the first year most Americans owned a smartphone—rates of teenage depression, loneliness, self-harm and suicide rose sharply. In the 10 years since, the U.S. Department of Health and Human

Services reported that depression rates among teens nearly doubled.

Plummeting child mental health is only part of the smartphone nightmare for parents. Add online bullying, access to pornography, potential interactions with child predators, and sexting (sharing sexual text messages and images of nudity). And then there is lack of sleep, difficulty with verbal conversations, chronic lethargy, shoddy schoolwork, as well as dropped household chores and responsibilities.

What is considered a modern marvel is becoming a modern curse.

“Parents should just not allow their teenagers to have a smartphone,” some might insist. The conundrum for parents is that an all-or-nothing approach to smartphone use by their kids is simply impractical. This is especially true in a society so reliant on the technology.

Today teachers, coaches, employers, family and friends all expect—in some cases require—teens to be connected. Imagine the two-year period of coronavirus lockdowns without smartphones and other mobile devices. The screen was an instructor’s lifeline to homebound students, and mobile devices became one of the only ways children could find entertainment while they were not allowed to go out to play with their peers.

Parents themselves rest their worries in the devices. They take comfort in knowing they can reach out to and be reached by their kids while they are out in this increasingly dangerous world.

The bottom line: It is unrealistic to shield kids from their phones and hope everything works out.

This does not mean parents should allow the phones—and the companies and app developers behind them—to have free rein over their kids’ minds.

Parenting is a God-given stewardship that is not abrogated by developments in technology. As the world of technology advances, parents’ presence in their children’s lives is even *more* crucial. Like so many other aspects of growing up, our youngsters must

be *taught* how and when to use smart gadgets responsibly.

To do it right, you must be prepared.

#### **The Good Old Days**

Dads and moms long for the pre-smartphone days when children spent more time playing sports, hanging out with their friends, and doing other non-digital activities. At the same time, they are mortified by the idea of completely removing phones from their kids’ lives. They are left to manage the gap between these two worlds.

**“Parenting is a God-given stewardship that is not abrogated by developments in technology. As the world of technology advances, parents’ presence in their children’s lives is even *more* crucial.”**

Desperate parents are turning to so-called screen coaches to combat the problem of their kids spending too much time online. *The New York Times* explained how these “screen consultants” are paid to come to homes, schools and churches “to remind parents how people parented before.”

One has over 30 years of experience in schools and private practice, as well as a master’s degree in K-12 learning and behavior disabilities. Yet her counsel to parents who are trying to get their young ones to unplug is not a list of sophisticated strategies and fancy psychological tactics. Instead, her approach is remarkably simple: have parents remember the activities they did while growing up.

Her sage advice includes having parents give their children a piece of

material to use as a cape or finding a ball to throw and kick with their children.

“I say [to my clients], ‘Just try to remember what you did as a kid,’” said another coach in Chicago. “And it’s so hard, and they’re very uncomfortable, but they just need to remember.” Clients come back with memories of painting or looking at the moon. “They report back like it’s a miracle.”

These screen-free coaches typically recommend eight to 12 sessions with parents and charge up to \$80 per hour in small cities and rural areas and \$125 to \$250 per hour in larger cities. It goes to show how desperate parents are becoming to help their kids.

The approach of these screen coaches and other new-age practitioners is not really new. It is timeworn and proven (some would say old fashioned and outdated). They are marketing the past, which holds the solution to the problems from children using smartphones.

The first man and woman were told to “be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth” (Gen. 1:28). This is God’s command for people to have children. But there is more.

When God—a Father Himself—created mankind, He envisioned a planet filled with happy parents who viewed their children as a “heritage” and “reward” (Psa. 127:3-5). He expected adults to love and *properly train* their children to help them to be happy and useful.

Today’s parents have forgotten or never actually learned how to do any of that.

Parenting is much more than giving birth and providing for children. It is a dedicated time of teaching and helping impressionable human beings navigate a sea of influences—good and bad.

Sadly, so many adults are caught in the same technology tsunami as their kids—bombarded with information and always connected—leaving little time to improve as mothers and fathers. Parents can sense that a smartphone in the hands of a child has drawbacks, but they lack the skills to

implement a parenting plan to properly deal with these real concerns.

Despite this, more and more are wising up to the idea of helping their kids use phones responsibly. They recognize that the way to rescue their children from the smartphone trap is to apply age-old common sense.

God desires for parents to leverage technology as an effective tool for their children, while not allowing it to ruin them.

Here are five areas parents should consider regarding smartphones for their children. They apply whether your son or daughter already has a phone or you plan to allow them to have one in the future.

### What's the Right Age?

The average age children acquire their first smartphone is 10. Yet it is not unusual for those as young as 7 to have their own device.

Still, professionals recommend kids hold off as long as possible. "The longer you keep Pandora's box shut, the better off you are," says Ohio-based online safety expert Jesse Weinberger. "There's no connection to the dark side without the device." Ms. Weinberger gives lectures at middle and high schools on the dangers of smartphones in the hands of a young person.

One successful approach is the Wait Until 8th Pledge. Under the agreement, at least 10 families sign a pledge to wait until their children are at least in 8th grade (age 13) before giving them a smartphone. Parents support each other throughout the process.

James P. Steyer, chief executive of Common Sense Media, a nonprofit organization that equips parents to teach their children responsible tech use, recommends young people wait until high school before being allowed to have a smartphone. He believes they should prioritize face-to-face communication during their phone-free years.

Mr. Steyer acknowledged that some parents may decide their children are ready sooner. "No two kids are the same, and there's no magic number."

He went on to say, "A kid's age is not as important as his or her own responsibility or maturity level."

The key is for parents to be honest with themselves about their children.

Common Sense Media provided the following list of questions on its website to consider before giving a child a smartphone:

- Does your child show a sense of responsibility such as letting you know when they leave the house? Do they show up when they say they will?
- Does your child tend to lose things, such as backpacks or homework folders? If so, expect they might lose an expensive phone, too.
- Does your child need to be in touch with you for safety reasons?
- Would having easy access to friends benefit his or her social life?
- Do you trust your child will use a phone responsibly, for example by

not texting during class or disturbing others with conversations?

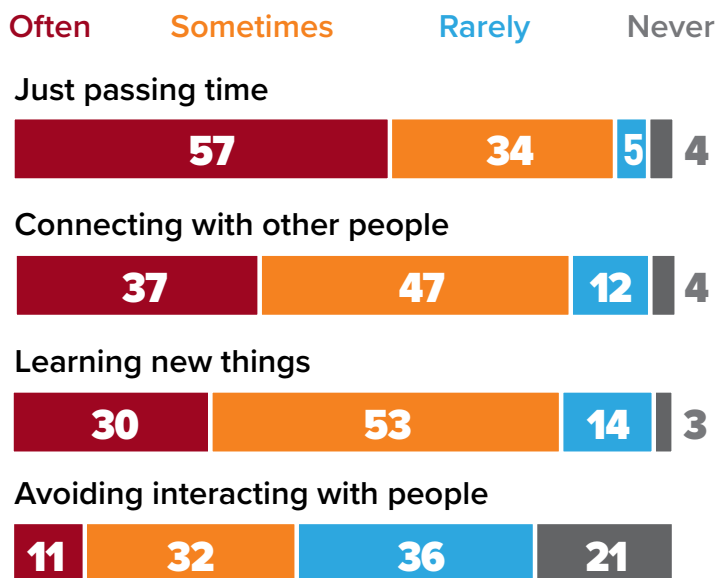
- Will your child adhere to the limits you set for minutes talked and apps downloaded?
- Will your child use text, photo and video functions responsibly, avoiding embarrassing or harassing others?

Unless your child meets all of these points, it is best to wait before he or she receives a powerful and expensive device. You can also use this list as a guide to motivate children not yet mature enough to handle a phone.

For parents truly needing to remain in touch with their children for safety or convenience reasons, there are "dumb phones." These allow phone calls and texting but do not have full internet access. Though your children may want phones like their friends, with all the latest and greatest features, it is your responsibility as a parent to

## How Teens Use Their Phones

Percentage of cellphone users ages 13 to 17 who say that when they are using their phone, they are ...



Source: Pew Research Center  
Graphic: Staff, TNS

not hand a powerful yet potentially dangerous tool to someone who is not ready for it.

### **Technology Agreement**

Less than half of parents regularly discuss their child's online behavior and social media content with them. Something as simple as a technology agreement can stimulate a discussion about smartphone use, all while helping parents avoid coming off as intrusive.

This kind of agreement, for which templates are easily available online, is a list of statements and points that specify how technology will and will not be used by those listed in the agreement. They explain the importance of using technology responsibly as well as several dos and don'ts.

These arrangements tend to work well since they communicate clear rules, engage youth and foster mutual respect between parents and their children. They are also a great way to treat children like responsible young people and help them appreciate the power that comes with having a phone.

These agreements are also a good way to hold kids accountable for behavior that violates any agreed upon terms.

Here are three examples of language from technology agreements:

"I will take care of the device I am using and tell my family if it is broken, stolen or lost. As a family, we have agreed on the consequences if I lose or break a device, and I understand those consequences."

"I understand that mom and dad have placed limits on how often I can use my devices and that we have a time in the evening when all devices are turned in and shut off"

"I will be mindful of how much time I spend in front of screens, and I will continue to enjoy other activities—and people—in my life."

As the kids get older and demonstrate more responsibility, you can and should be open to updating the agreement where appropriate. This can also apply to certain times of year such as summer vacation or when they are off from school.

A thorough agreement helps families use technology to grow closer together instead of allowing it to drive them apart.

### **Model the Proper Behavior**

Avoid the "do as I say, not what I do" mentality when it comes to using your own devices. If you say "no phones at the dinner table" but your cell is on your lap, it will speak much louder than anything you say.

**"Remember you are a parent first and friend second. Saying no to getting a smartphone or requiring its proper use should be unequivocal. Children naturally tend to go as far as we allow them. If we are wishy-washy about enforcing certain rules, children will almost certainly take advantage."**

What are some habits you can adopt to model proper phone behavior for your kids? Before picking up your device, ask yourself, "Why am I looking at my phone?" If there is no good reason, then leave it be. Another habit is to avoid sleeping with your phone at hand and explain to your children why this is a good practice, for example it helps you get better quality sleep.

Explain your phone use when it may *seem* you are using it at an inappropriate time. This can include while

looking at directions while driving or occasionally glancing at your phone for an important work email while out for dinner. Verbalizing what you are doing helps kids understand your phone use is temporary and purposeful instead of just to distract yourself.

You should also excuse yourself if you have to use your phone during family time. This lets your kids and other family members know they have your undivided attention when you are with them.

Finally, make screen-free activities a regular part of your family routine. Kids should see that there are other ways to spend their leisure time.

### **Set Boundaries**

So many parents seek to please their kids or avoid tension with them at all costs. True love is telling your children what is best for them whether they want to hear it or not. No decent parent would allow a child to hang out with strangers, talk about drugs and alcohol, or stay out all night in a seedy part of town. Yet parents allow these interactions virtually by giving teenagers unbridled access to technology.

Remember, you are a parent first and friend second. Saying no to getting a smartphone or requiring its proper use should be unequivocal. Children tend to go as far as we allow them. If we are wishy-washy about enforcing certain rules, children will almost certainly take advantage.

Explain to your child that having a phone is not a right but a privilege.

Require your teen to have face-to-face conversations with you and other adults. Set rules on where they can and cannot use their devices such as in bed, or during ideal conversation opportunities such as at the dinner table or during long car rides.

Help your children balance their phone use. They can use them to keep up with news events, watch educational videos, listen to podcasts, play games, chat with friends, and browse social media sites. But know that too much of some of these and not enough of others can become a prob-

lem. Let them know which websites are off limits.

Also, require your kids to take a break from their phones to read books, magazines and newspapers. The public library remains a bastion of these old-fashioned resources. Newspaper and magazine subscriptions are also inexpensive.

If you see your child struggling with phone use, do not be afraid to adjust his access or take it away altogether. You have an obligation as a parent to help.

### Parental Controls

Use parental controls to ensure your child is consuming proper content. Many operating systems such as iOS and Android include these tools in their applications.

There are also third-party applications such as Qustodio or Bark you can use to monitor a mobile device. These applications allow parents to monitor and set timers on their children's phone use, block pornography and other harmful content, and permit or restrict phone use altogether—all remotely from the master device.

Adults are often not as tech-savvy as their kids and can find some paren-

tal control apps complicated to use. However, we should be prepared to do what it takes to figure out how these applications work to keep our children safe from themselves and others. Do research to find the right parental control application for you and your family.

Familiarize yourself with basic mobile phone technology to control your child's internet use. Understand things such as Wi-Fi access versus cellular access. Know how internet service comes into your home and how a modem and router work. Know how to disconnect smartphone devices from the network. Your internet provider or a quick Google search can help with all these.

Know the apps your kids are using. Most apps are what they appear to be while others appear innocent but have dark purposes such as promoting self-harm, sex and drugs. One application, for instance, allows teens to hide photos in what looks like a calculator app.

Also realize that tech-savvy children can figure out how to work around parental controls. Therefore, you should stay on top of what they

are doing on their phones. Warn your child that attempts to disable or work around parental controls with shadow accounts could lead to an extended, if not permanent, loss of phone privilege.

Parental controls, while helpful, are not perfect. They are a tool, not a replacement for your direct involvement.

### Be a Parent

The next generation does not have to be lost to smartphones. We cannot use our lack of knowledge about technology as an excuse for not being a good parent. Our children may want phones because their friends have them. But this does not automatically mean they or even their friends are mature enough.

Remember, when giving a smartphone to anyone, you are handing them a most powerful tool. They can use it to reach and be reached by just about anyone in the world—all in the palm of their hand.

Take the time to teach your children how to use technology responsibly. It will benefit them from the time they are ready to use smartphones and for the rest of their lives. □

# Children Do Have an Instruction Manual!

To learn what God's Word says about parenting, order a free copy of *Train Your Children God's Way* at [rcg.org/tuyc](http://rcg.org/tuyc) today. It pieces together principles from God's Instruction Manual and provides the keys to successfully rearing children.



violence, competition, murder and deceit.

Of course, Satan injects his attitudes into an unsuspecting mankind—it has no idea what he is doing. The devil does not announce his intentions in an audible voice.

## Murder, Lies and Destruction

Just as God the Father has children, Satan is also a father with his own children! Consider this. On one occasion, Paul labeled a man: “...*you child of the devil*, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?” (Acts 13:10).

Notice that “children of the devil” are enemies of “*righteousness*” and “the ways of God.” This is what being Satan’s children means!

But what is righteousness? The Psalms record: “...all Your [God’s] commandments are righteousness” (119:172).

Satan’s children hate, and are enemies of, the laws of God—His commandments! Remember, they are “children of *disobedience*.”

Revelation 9:11 describes Satan as a destroyer. This understanding sets the stage for the next scripture.

Certain people professed to “believe on [Jesus]” in John 8:30-31. These same people sought to kill Him moments later! He said that “you seek to kill Me, because My *word* has no place in you” (vs. 37), and added, “you seek to kill Me, a man that has told you the truth” (vs. 40). Many *say* they want to hear the truth—but not if it means being told they are wrong, particularly about cherished ideas.

This story comes to a remarkable climax, with Jesus asking, “Why do you not understand My speech?” He answers His own question with “because you *cannot* hear My word” (vs. 43). What could cause people standing right beside Jesus to “not hear His word”?

He answers: “You are of *your father the devil*, and the lusts of *your father* you will do. He was a *murderer* from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own [meaning, what he is]: for he is a *liar*, and the *father* of it” (vs. 44). Jesus plainly said to them “you are not of God” (vs. 47), and these devil-inspired religious leaders immediately accused *Him* of having a demon (vs. 48)! Many today who *profess* to “believe on Christ” are no different.

This is instructive. The devil is a *father* who murders, lies and destroys. As the author of killing, deceit and destruction, *he broadcasts these attitudes to his children around the world!*

## “The god of this world”

Make no mistake! The world is *filled* with the children of the devil. Children are basically much like their parents. Therefore, Satan’s children lie, hate, murder and destroy. Look at the world. It should now be most clear *why* so much confusion, war, ignorance, poverty, disease and misery are everywhere. The fruits of human nature—*Satan’s* nature—are evident wherever there are human beings.

The Bible describes the “last days” this way: “This know also, that in the *last days* perilous [dangerous] times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a *form of godliness*, but denying the power thereof: *from such turn away*” (II Tim. 3:1-5).

While the world is filled with religion—“a *form* of godliness”—it neither teaches the truth nor has the religion of God! It denies the POWER of the true God, and unwittingly worships a being who palms himself off as the God of the Bible. The devil is called the “god of this world” (II Cor. 4:4), the “prince of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), “prince

of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2), and one who “weakens the nations” (Isa. 14:12) and “deceives the whole world” (Rev. 12:9).

But *how* did Satan come to be as he is?

## Human Nature Not Inherited

Prior to the re-creation of Earth and creation of Adam, Satan rebelled against God’s government, and led one-third of all angels into rebellion. Isaiah 14:12-15 reveals he had once ruled Earth, and Ezekiel 28:15 shows he was a created being—Lucifer, a powerful, perfect archangel.

But how did the devil gain access to mankind? What opened the door to his influence—his “broadcast”?

Grasp this! Human nature did not come from God, but rather from Satan.

Yet human nature is not *inherited*—it is *acquired*! Adam’s children and all succeeding generations did not “pass it on” at conception. A parent who loses an eye, hand or leg does not produce children with one eye, hand or leg. The Bible refers to Adam’s son Abel as “righteous Abel.” His parents’ disobedience did not prevent his obedience.

Adam and Eve were adult “babies.” Just like babies today, they were pure at their creation but were quickly exposed to a “broadcast” they could not resist.

Like most children today, they chose not to listen to their Parent—God. Instead, they believed Satan’s lie in the garden that they would not “surely die.” In so doing, they rejected the rule of God’s government in their lives. If Adam had obeyed God’s instruction, he could have qualified to replace Satan and *restore* the government of God on Earth.

## New Testament Examples

The New Testament instructs through an example of how human nature is acquired, not inherited. Here is a warning to the Corinthian church: “But I fear, lest by any means, *as the serpent beguiled Eve* through his subtlety, *so your minds should be corrupted* from the simplicity that is in Christ” (II Cor. 11:3).

Four thousand years after Adam and Eve, Paul recognized the devil was still alive and active. He warned the Corinthians to be on guard that they not return to following the ways of human nature. Just as Eve's nature was not evil and hostile to God before she was deceived, neither was the nature of the converted Corinthians.

Once one is called and converted, having received the Spirit of God, he has put off the old human nature of his past life. Paul reminded the Ephesians, "Among whom also we all had our [conduct] in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were *by nature* the children of wrath, even as others" (2:3). This follows and is part of the scripture identifying Satan as "prince of the power of the air."

It would be grossly unfair of God to inject newborn babies with human nature, and then place them under His wrath for having it. See this point! Human nature is *acquired*, leading to disobedience to God—and THIS puts people under His wrath!

Here is Ephesians 2:3 from *The New Testament in Modern English* translated by J.B. Phillips. It accurately describes how people *acquire* human nature from the devil: "You drifted along on the stream of this world's ideas of living, and obeyed its unseen ruler [Satan]... We all lived like that in the past, and followed the *impulses* and *imaginations* of our evil nature...like everyone else."

How true! Most people simply drift along in life following whatever feelings ("impulses") and ideas ("imaginations") that strike them from moment to moment. Ephesians 1 is Paul accounting to those brethren their calling into God's Way. The Ephesians had come out of the course of this world and were no longer "by nature" the children of wrath, and no longer yielding to the "prince of the power of the air." They were "dis-acquiring" human nature by yielding to God instead of the impulses, pulls,

feelings and temptations of Satan's wavelength.

#### **Converted Christians Not Immune**

Understand! You have been practicing Satan's way your entire life—and have probably become *very good* at it. Believe me, as you strive to overcome and resist the pulls at work within you, you will find that Satan's influence, in the form of human nature, is truly "second nature" to you, more than you now know! Overcoming will not be easy or happen overnight. It is a lifelong struggle against an attitude and way of life that the truly *repentant* Christian has rejected and turned from.

Remember, the devil seduced Eve *through temptation*. Genesis 3:1 reveals *how* he tempts people into disobedience and sin: "Now the serpent was more *subtle* than any beast of the field." Satan deceived Eve by tempting her with the beauty of the tree God had forbidden her to eat.

Temptation never comes from God. Notice: "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, *neither tempts He any man*: but every man is tempted, when he is *drawn away of his own lust*, and enticed. Then when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death" (Jms. 1:13-15).

Temptation *always* originates from "the tempter" working on the lusts of people. The devil recognizes where people are vulnerable, where they can be "enticed" so that "sin is conceived."

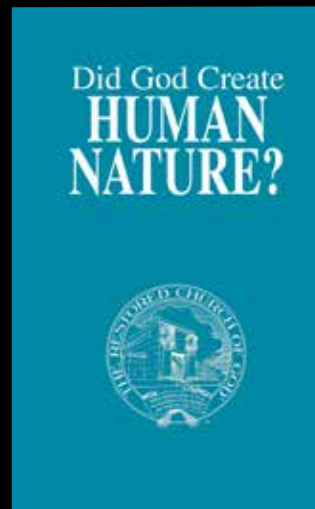
The Bible warns of the "*wiles* of the devil" (Eph. 6:11), the "*depths* of Satan" (Rev. 2:24), and to not be "ignorant of his *devices*" (II Cor. 2:11). *True* Christians are people on guard for his schemes.

Resisting and overcoming the temptation of the devil was central to Christ having overcome sin. Notice: "*Submit* yourselves therefore to God. *Resist* the devil, and he will *flee* from you" (Jms. 4:7).

#### **Overcoming Not Easy**

Like any muscle of the body, character is built by pushing against resis-

# "I don't understand this world anymore."



**A** father uttered these words after a school shooting where many lay slaughtered. His daughter had been trapped inside the building.

Such a reaction is perfectly understandable given that world troubles and evils continue to worsen. Appalling violence, terrorism and war are escalating as human nature hurtles further out of control.

Yet you *can* understand both this world and the cause of its troubles. Understanding human nature is the key.

Read the free booklet  
*Did God Create Human Nature?*  
at [rcg.org/dgchn](http://rcg.org/dgchn) for the  
plain answers!

tance. Successfully facing that resistance strengthens the muscle (in this case, the mind). Building character means *choosing* to do what is right instead of *choosing* to do what is wrong. Character does not concern itself with what others say or do. It only concerns itself with what GOD says to do!

Never forget that the Christian must resist Satan, who is active at every turn. But it is not through human strength or effort alone that this can be achieved. Notice: "...brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Put on the whole *armor of God*, that you may be able to stand against the *wiles of the devil*. For we *wrestle* not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the *rulers of the darkness of this world*, against *spiritual wickedness* [Greek translation: wicked spirits] in high places" (Eph. 6:10-12).

Many scriptures describe how human nature, unchecked by overcoming, has complete dominance over every aspect of people's lives. Christians must forcefully "wrestle" against the power of the devil and his demons—"wicked spirits"—on a day-to-day basis. They must constantly struggle against feelings of offense, hostility, envy, anger and many other attitudes.

The fruits of human nature are evident the world over. God states: "Now the works of the flesh are [obvious], which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like...they which do such things shall *not* inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:19-21).

Overcoming these patterns of conduct and thinking is directly tied to salvation and ruling in the Kingdom of God!

Now consider this: "...even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind [void of judgment], to do those things which are not convenient [or right]; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wicked-

ness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them" (Rom. 1:28-32).

This powerful list of wrong attitudes and conduct summarizes the condition of all humanity.

Paul wrote of an entire world under the devil's influence and sway: "...there is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understands, there is none that seeks after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are *together* become unprofitable; there is none that does good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: their feet are swift to shed blood: destruction and misery are in their ways" (Rom. 3:10-16).

While all who are of this world are primarily devoted to acquiring goods and enjoying pleasures, this is not the goal—and attitude—of the one who seeks God and is a true Christian. He strives to remain in constant harmony with God's supreme, overarching purpose for his life.

#### **Satan to Be Removed**

When God's Kingdom is established, Satan, as Earth's deposed ruler, will be removed. No leader could permit a disqualified leader to *remain* and *co-rule* with him. The old leader would constantly second-guess and undermine the new one. *Human* governments understand this—and so does God. He knows Satan has to be *removed* from his position of influence.

Notice what God will do: "And I saw an angel come down from heaven,

having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and *bound him a thousand years*, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and *shut him up*, and set a *seal* upon him, that he *should deceive the nations no more*" (Rev. 20:1-3).

This verse contains crucial understanding about God's future plan for all mankind. Soon now, Satan will be rendered unable to deceive Earth's inhabitants. The temptations of this world and human nature, caused by Satan, will disappear—though there will still be certain pulls of the flesh that all will have to overcome.

When Satan is removed, peace will literally break out all over the world. The saints will be ruling with Jesus Christ from Jerusalem—having restored the government of God within His Kingdom, administered by the Family of God. God's perfect, spiritual Law will be enforced among all nations.

#### **God's Government Restored**

God will then open eternal life and salvation to the whole world, now still cut off, blinded and led by Satan's nature.

This world is completely deceived, and drifting along, unaware of God's purpose to restore His government to Earth. Only the  *tiniest few* who have been called by God are to be a part of this restoration.

The government of God will soon be restored to Earth, and all who have prepared themselves will "inherit the kingdom." Only the *overcomers*—who submitted to God and successfully resisted Satan throughout their lives—shall take part in this glorious future: "He that overcomes shall *inherit all things*; and I will be his God, and he shall be My son" (Rev. 21:7).

Will you be one who inherits all things?

To learn more about this subject, read my booklet *Did God Create Human Nature?* It explains much more than this personal can cover. □



# SHOOTINGS

Continued from page 9

professionals at some schools, although some have struggled to find qualified hires or used the aid to train existing staff.

The challenges are compounded by an increase in gun violence on school grounds, said David Riedman, a criminologist and co-founder of the K-12 School Shooting Database, which keeps a national tally of instances when a gun is fired at schools.

According to that tally, there were 249 shootings in K-12 schools in 2021, more than twice the number in any year since 2018, when Mr. Riedman began the database. So far this year, there have been 150 shootings.

There is also a notable difference from previous years, he said: Many of the incidents were not planned attacks, but typical disputes that ended in gunfire.

Mental health specialists outside of schools have been feeling the strain, as well, said Mr. Bardwell, referring to his student with a history of mental illness and who spent two weeks this year in an emergency room waiting to be admitted for psychiatric care.

It highlights the country's broken health care system, he said, and shows the state does not have enough residential mental health capacity, especially for adolescents.

Richard Tench, a counselor at St. Albans High School in West Virginia, said it is impossible to refer students who need outside counseling to therapists in his area.

"All our referrals are full. We are wait-listed," he said. "If the referrals are full, where do we turn?"

## Only Solution

Just as God's Word explains Satan's role in influencing human nature, it also details the only solution to America's mass shooting epidemic.

Governments of this world and the people under them want violence to end. They never intended for a mental

health crisis. Yet both are powerless to stop the carnage because they do not understand the *cause* behind it—Satan's nature.

As the Bible's author, God knows the root cause of this world's evils and ills. That is why He commands people to stay away from mob violence: "You shall not follow a multitude to do evil" (Ex. 23:2).

## U.S. Gun Violence

The numbers for 2022

As of June 9

**19,068**

Total gun violence deaths  
(all causes)

**8,508**

Homicide/murder/unintentional/  
defensive gun use

**251**

Mass shootings

**155**

Children killed

**563**

Teens killed

**25**

Officers killed

Source: gunviolencearchive.org  
Graphic: Staff, TNS

Recall, the devil spreads his murderous attitude on a broad bandwidth—the entire world. God wants individuals to recognize where this attitude lurks, and to stay away.

Proverbs 1 speaks about this plainly: "My son, if sinners entice you, consent you not. If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause: let

us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole, as those that go down into the pit...my son, walk not you in the way with them; refrain your foot from their path: for their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood" (vs. 10-16).

Put this all together. America's mass shooting epidemic is a *spiritual* problem. It requires *spiritual* solutions only our Creator can bring.

God knows about all the senseless killing that has occurred since the beginning of mankind. He also has the ultimate cure for it. Here is a picture of His plan for all people: "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

This speaks not only about a future world population, but also about all those who have lived throughout history—including those ruthlessly massacred.

All of this will come with the arrival of God's Kingdom—a supergovernment run by God and Jesus Christ. Read *How God's Kingdom Will Come – The Untold Story!* for the full Bible picture ([rcg.org/hgkwc](http://rcg.org/hgkwc)).

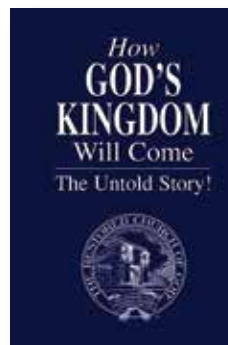
As God has throughout the millenia, He is allowing a short time longer for mankind to see that its ways—and Satan's ways—do not work.

For a little while longer we will have to endure this "present evil world" (Gal. 1:4)—before God intervenes in world affairs and sets up the Kingdom. For a little while longer, we will have to endure the mass shooting epidemic, while we

desperately yearn for the wonderful "world to come" (Heb. 6:5).

At that time, mothers and fathers will never have to bury their tiny children. Teachers will not have to live in fear when instructing their students—and all races can live without the threat of hate.

Then, God will wipe away all tears. May it be soon! □



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## 1.1 Million Afghan Children Could Face Severe Malnutrition

**I**slamabad (AP) – In Afghanistan, 1.1 million children under the age of 5 will likely face the most severe form of malnutrition this year, according to the UN, as increasing numbers of hungry, wasting-away children are brought into hospital wards.

UN and other aid agencies are struggling to keep pace with relentlessly worsening conditions. Poverty is spiraling and making more Afghans in need of aid, global food prices are mounting from the war in Ukraine and promises of international funding so far are not coming through, according to an assessment report issued in May.

As a result, the vulnerable are falling victim, including children but also mothers struggling to feed themselves along with their families.

Nazia said she had lost four children to malnutrition—two daughters

and two sons under 2 years old. “All four died due to financial problems and poverty,” the 30-year-old Nazia said. When her children fell ill, she did not have the money to treat them.

Nazia spoke to *The Associated Press* at Charakar Hospital in the northern province of Parwan, where she and her 7-month-old daughter were both being treated for malnutrition. Her husband is a day laborer but is also a drug addict and rarely brings in an income, she said. Like many Afghans, she uses only one name.

UNICEF, the UN children’s agency, said 1.1 million Afghan children this year are expected to suffer from severe acute malnutrition, also known as severe wasting, nearly double the number in 2018 and up from just under 1 million last year.

Severe wasting is the most lethal type of malnutrition, in which food

is so lacking that a child’s immune system is compromised, according to UNICEF. They become vulnerable to multiple bouts of disease and eventually they become so weak they cannot absorb nutrients.

The numbers of children under 5 being admitted into health facilities with severe acute malnutrition have steadily mounted, from 16,000 in March 2020 to 18,000 in March 2021, then leaping to 28,000 in March 2022, the UNICEF representative in Afghanistan, Mohamed Ag Ayoya, wrote.

Hit by one of its worst droughts in decades and torn by years of war, Afghanistan was already facing a hunger emergency; but the Taliban takeover in August threw the country into crisis. Many development agencies pulled out and international sanctions cut off billions in finances for the government, collapsing the economy.

Millions were plunged into poverty, struggling to afford food for their families. By the end of last year, half the population of around 38 million lived under the poverty line, according to UN figures. As the economy continues to crumble and prices mount, that could rise this year to as high as 97 percent of the population by mid-2022, according to the UN Development Program.

The number of people facing acute food insecurity fell slightly from 22.8 million late last year to 19.7 million currently, according to a May report by IPC. But those small reductions “are far from indicating a positive trend,” it warned.

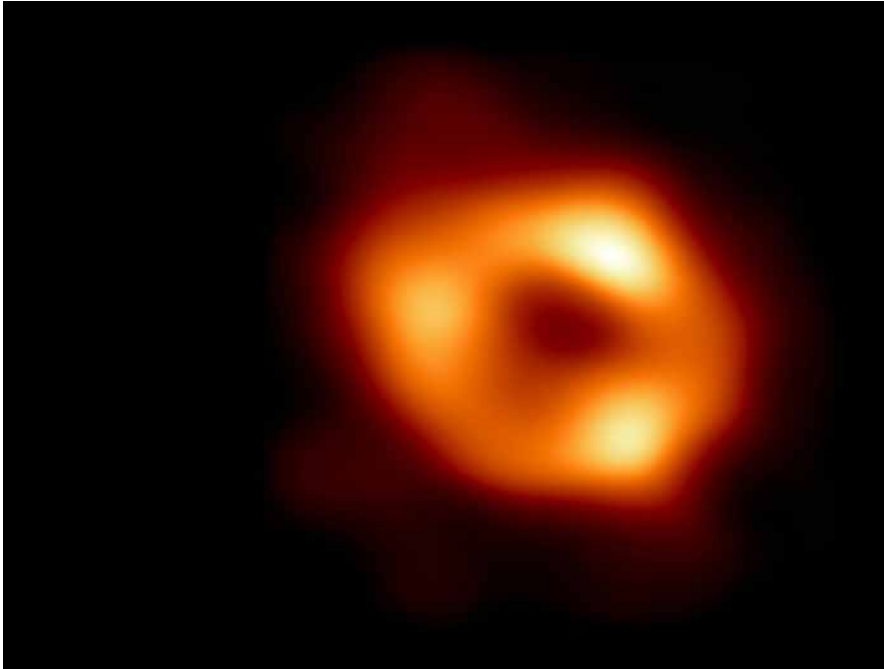
The decrease was low compared to the scale of the aid, it said. Moreover, deteriorating conditions threaten to overwhelm the effort. It pointed to the continued crumbling of the economy, higher food and fuel prices and supply disruptions caused by the Ukraine war, and “unprecedented inflation” in Afghanistan. □



An Afghan mother helps her malnourished boy in a hospital in Kabul, Afghanistan (May 22, 2022).

AP/EBRAHIM NOROOZI

## Scientists Unveil Image of ‘Gentle Giant’ Black Hole at Milky Way’s Center



This is the first image of Sagittarius A\* (or Sgr A\* for short), the supermassive black hole at the center of our galaxy. It was captured by the Event Horizon Telescope, an array which linked together radio observatories across the planet to form a single “Earth-size” virtual telescope. The new view captures light bent by the powerful gravity of the black hole, which is four million times more massive than our sun.

EHT COLLABORATION/NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION/HANDOUT VIA REUTERS

Washington (Reuters) – Scientists provided the first look at the “gentle giant” lurking at the center of our Milky Way galaxy—an image of a supermassive black hole that devours any matter within its huge gravitational pull but is currently on a bit of a diet.

The black hole—called Sagittarius A\*, or Sgr A\*—is the second one ever to be imaged. The feat was accomplished by the same Event Horizon Telescope (EHT) international collaboration that in 2019 unveiled the first photo of a black hole—that one residing at the heart of a different galaxy.

University of Arizona astronomer Feryal Ozel, at a news conference in

Washington, hailed “the first direct image of the gentle giant in the center of our galaxy,” showing a glowing ring of red, yellow and white surrounding a darker center.

Sagittarius A\* (pronounced Sagittarius “A” star) possesses 4 million times the mass of our sun and is located about 26,000 light-years—the distance light travels in a year, 5.9 trillion miles—from Earth.

Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics astrophysicist Michael Johnson called Sagittarius A\* “ravenous but inefficient,” currently eating relatively little matter.

“If Sgr A\* were a person, it would consume a single grain of rice every

million years,” Dr. Johnson said. It is putting out only a few hundred times the energy of the sun despite being much more massive.

Black holes are extraordinarily dense objects with gravity so strong that not even light can escape, making viewing them extremely challenging. A black hole’s event horizon is the point of no return beyond which anything—stars, planets, gas, dust and all forms of electromagnetic radiation—gets dragged into oblivion.

The image, obtained using the EHT’s global network of observatories, showed a ring of light—superheated disrupted matter and radiation circling at tremendous speed at the edge of the event horizon—around a region of darkness representing the actual black hole. This is called the black hole’s shadow or silhouette.

Imaging it was complicated by its dynamic environment including swirling gas around it—as Dr. Ozel put it: “a source that burbled and gurgled as we looked at it.”

The Milky Way is a spiral galaxy that contains at least 100 billion stars. Viewed from above or below it resembles a spinning pinwheel, with our sun situated on one of the spiral arms and Sagittarius A\* located at the center.

Scientists are trying to better understand how supermassive black holes form early in a galaxy’s history and evolve over time.

“They go through periods where there is a lot of material around them,” Dr. Ozel said. “...And then they go through these quiescent phases like the one at the center of our galaxy where matter is just trickling in.”

An image released in 2019 showed the supermassive black hole in a galaxy called Messier 87, or M87. That one was far more distant and massive than Sagittarius A\*, situated about 54 million light-years from Earth with a mass 6.5 billion times that of our sun. □



## **6,000 Years Ago— or 460 Million?**

**G**eologists record that trilobites appeared during the Cambrian era—more than 500 million years ago—and existed for hundreds of millions of years more before they went extinct.

What does the Bible say about such prehistoric creatures? Does their existence disprove—or does it actually prove—the validity of Scripture? Read the article “Is the Earth 6,000 Years Old?” for the answer!

**[rcg.org/realtruth](http://rcg.org/realtruth)**