

Reflection on the Virginia Tech Shootings

We moved our household this weekend, so I had not heard anything about the shootings at Virginia Tech until that same night. Next morning, I began reading articles to bring myself up to speed. The situation hurts. It was a student at the university, not some outsider. The gunman was 23, only three years younger than me.

Another person from my generation lashing out in violence; this is not the first time it's happened. This situation brings to mind several other recent occurrences, both locally and nationally. On a personal level, I recently found out that a guy from my high school who also graduated from my alma mater, University of Texas at Dallas (UTD), committed suicide recently. He was 26, an accomplished musician, national merit scholar, and earned a computer science degree.

During my junior year at UTD, a friend of mine at a Christian university came home for Christmas. While she was in Dallas, she received word that her dormitory roommate had committed suicide. She was a bright girl with a promising future and was apparently from a Christian family.

A month after I had graduated UTD, a news report came out that a student drugged, raped, and assaulted another student—during an exam study session.

Lastly, while reading about the Virginia Tech gunman's angst that finally snapped into a violent rage, I could not help but remember the Columbine shootings. That report came out my senior year in high school. The two teenage perpetrators were my age.

With all of these cases of violent crimes on campuses among young, educated people, I have to wonder, *What is wrong with*

my generation? Why are these twenty-somethings breaking like this? Crime and violence are a part of the fallen world that we live in, but the inordinate amount of violent and sexual crimes on campuses is staggering.

My generation has received the most “information” from media than any other. We have seen the rise of technological advances that only Gene Rodenberry (*Star Trek*) could dream of. We have grown up thinking that every opportunity and possibility is at our fingertips (or at the click of a mouse). We have some of the fastest, most efficient cars, the biggest malls, and some of the best plastic surgery that money can buy. The nation is rich, and although material resources may not satisfy us in the long run, they sure feel good right now. We have medications for nearly everything, and beauty products for everything else. But apparently all of the riches, technology, beauty, and opportunities still leave us in despair—for some, despair to the point of death. Why? Is this an artifact for only this generation, or does the Bible speak to the despair plaguing us?

Consider the words of Solomon:

“I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself... I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house. I had also great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem. I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces... Also whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure... Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 2:4,7-8,10-11).

Just as Solomon was blessed and lived in a time of education, materialism, and plenty, I think his hopelessness rings true

of my generation as well. Compared to prior generations, we have it all, and yet it only fills us with despair that is really no different. There is a void that only God can fill. At the end of Ecclesiastes, Solomon concludes that the end of the matter is to fear the Lord and keep his commandments (12:13). In other words, when all is said and done, no amount of education, riches, or technology can compare to knowing the Lord through His Son Jesus Christ.

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Deadly College Shootings in U.S.

Some deadly shootings at U.S. colleges or universities, listed by number of fatalities:

April 16, 2007

A gunman kills 32 people in a dorm and a classroom building at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Va. The suspect then dies by gunshot himself.

Aug. 1, 1966

Charles Whitman points a rifle from the observation deck of the University of Texas at Austin's Tower and begins shooting in a homicidal rampage that goes on for 96 minutes. Sixteen people are killed, 31 wounded.

July 12, 1976

Edward Charles Allaway, a custodian in the library of California State University, Fullerton, fatally shoots seven fellow employees and wounds two others. Mentally ill, Allaway believed his colleagues were pornographers and were forcing

his estranged wife to appear in their movies. A judge found him innocent by reason of insanity in 1977 after a jury was unable to reach a verdict and he was committed to the state mental health system.

Nov. 1, 1991

Gang Lu, 28, a graduate student in physics from China, reportedly upset because he was passed over for an academic honor, opens fire in two buildings on the University of Iowa campus. Five University of Iowa employees killed, including four members of the physics department, one other person is wounded. The student fatally shoots himself.

May 4, 1970

Four students were killed and nine wounded by National Guard troops called in to quell anti-war protests on the campus of Kent State University in Ohio.

Oct. 28, 2002

Failing University of Arizona Nursing College student and Gulf War veteran Robert Flores, 40, walks into an instructor's office and fatally shoots her. A few minutes later, armed with five guns, he enters one of his nursing classrooms and kills two more of his instructors before fatally shooting himself.

Sept. 2, 2006

Douglas W. Pennington, 49, kills himself and his two sons, Logan P. Pennington, 26, and Benjamin M. Pennington, 24, during a visit to the campus of Shepherd University in Shepherdstown, W.Va.

Jan. 16, 2002

Graduate student Peter Odighizuwa, 42, recently dismissed from Virginia's Appalachian School of Law, returns to campus and kills the dean, a professor and a student before being tackled

by students. The attack also wounds three female students.

Aug. 15, 1996

Frederick Martin Davidson, 36, a graduate engineering student at San Diego State, is defending his thesis before a faculty committee when he pulls out a handgun and kills three professors.

Jan. 26, 1995

Former law student Wendell Williamson shoots two men to death and injures a police officer in Chapel Hill, N.C.

April 2, 2007

University of Washington researcher Rebecca Griego, 26, is shot to death in her office by former boyfriend Jonathan Rowan who then turned the gun on himself.

Aug. 28, 2000

James Easton Kelly, 36, a University of Arkansas graduate student recently dropped from a doctoral program after a decade of study and John Locke, 67, the English professor overseeing his coursework, are shot to death in an apparent murder-suicide.

Source: Associated Press

Accessed Apr. 17, 2007 © 2007 MSNBC.com
<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/18137414/>

Amniotic Stem Cells

On January 8, 2007, the Associated Press reported that scientists from Wake Forest University and Harvard University discovered a new type of stem cell found in the amniotic fluid within the wombs of pregnant women. Furthermore, once these stem cells are removed to the laboratory setting, scientists can coax them to become a variety of cell types including brain cells, liver cells, and bone cells.



Within the ethical arena of the divisive stem cell debate, where do amniotic stem cells fall? The crux of the stem cell debate is whether it is ethical to extract stem cells from a blastocyst (an embryo in its earliest stage of development) at the cost of destroying the embryo, or whether this embryo should be respected and protected as an individual with research only to be conducted on alternative stem cell sources. The debate is exacerbated by emotional appeals and political agendas that are coupled with the media's sometimes uninformed or misconstrued reporting and the scientific community's vying for funds.

This discovery of the amniotic stem cells is exciting because it offers scientists a bountiful supply of stem cells^{1} without harming mother or child. From a Christian perspective, these stem cells fall under the same category as adult stem cells.^{2} We applaud the efforts of scientists who conduct alternative, ethical research that does not involve the destruction of another human life deemed less worthy for survival. Scientists have discussed the possibility of setting up a stem cell bank with amniotic stem cells from willing donors, but it will be several years before these stem cells

are ready for human trial use. Dr. Anthony Atala, head of Wake Forest University's Regenerative Medicine Institute, suggests that a stem cell bank would allow for genetic matching of up to 99% of the population, meaning that the likelihood for a patient to find a genetic match, without having to be on a waiting list, is very high.

At the risk of deflating some of the hype around this new discovery, I cannot help but notice that this is another example of misconstrued reporting of stem cell research. The reports would have the reader believe that this is some kind of breakthrough that may be the solution to all of our stem cell differences, but stem cells have been discovered in fetal tissue before. Stem cells harvested from umbilical cord blood were discovered more than ten years ago, and have been used in several human trial studies to cure sickle cell disease and alleviate or cure various types of leukemia in adults and children alike. Furthermore, the United States *does* have an umbilical cord stem cell bank that has been active for several years (see www.cordblood.com—the Web site for the National Cord Blood Registry). However, very few people are aware of the bank's existence, largely due it being overshadowed by other, more controversial, aspects of stem cell research. So, even though the discovery of stem cells within amniotic fluid is an exciting find, it should come as no surprise that other fetal tissues contain stem cells, and they, like the umbilical cord cells, are more versatile than some adult stem cells and easier to work with than embryonic stem cells.

While there is an abundance of reporting on the potential for embryonic stem cells, there is little reporting on the many discoveries and advances that have occurred *in human trials* with adult stem cells. Scientists have reaped the advantages of harvesting adult stem cells for years (example: bone marrow transplants), yet politicians and the press seem to ignore those research articles and only focus on the ones that produce political and public hype.

This discovery is one of many exciting discoveries within the ethical bounds of adult stem cell research. We can rejoice in the fact that we serve a sovereign God whose precepts that guided believers thousands of years ago also apply in today's technological world.

For more information see Dr. Ray Bohlin's article The Continuing Controversy Over Stem Cells www.probe.org/the-continuing-controversy-over-stem-cells/. We also suggest you consider the Cerebral Palsy Guidance website at cerebralpalsyguidance.com.

Notes

1. NBC reported that approximately 4 million babies are born per year in the US alone. See www.msnbc.com.
2. Technically, these stem cells come from fetal tissue, but are considered "adult" due to their level of differentiation.

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