

# **Voices: Elevating our conversation on gun control**

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I write this as a concerned pastor. My role is prophetic (truth-telling) regarding biblical concerns for human life as well as pastoral, for how we treat one another when we disagree is a spiritual matter.

I'm not a legal policy expert nor am I a politician, so I am intentionally staying away from offering solutions to such a complicated matter, though solutions are out there. You may disagree with me or others on the issue.

As I heard recently, we don't have to see eye to eye to walk in hand in hand.

## **Stop judging by extremes**

Can we stop characterizing people who may be on the other side of the issue by their most extreme members?

In some ways, I think the gun control debate arises out of two different cultures in our society that have a hard time understanding and appreciating one another and then characterize each other based on the most extreme example of their opponent.

First, concerning the gun control side: yes, there are people who literally want to take away every gun in America though it's not pragmatic, prudent or constitutional. Truth is, that's only a handful of people.

Most people on the gun control side don't literally want to pick up every gun in America. They simply want more sensible gun laws that would attempt to seriously reduce and hopefully prevent killing people —

especially horrific mass shootings.

From the gun rights side, I'm sure there are a few who want to very literally militarize themselves with automatic guns and other military-grade weapons. This isn't most people on the gun rights side.

Most on the gun rights side aren't government haters. They are people who want to use their guns to hunt and/or to protect their families. Many of these people, too, are concerned with the mass shootings in America and want to see them ended.

So, for starters, let's quit characterizing people in the worst possible extreme.

Most everyone wants to live in safety and see their families thrive. We may disagree strongly about how to achieve that goal, but, deep down, I believe many of us want similar outcomes for our country.

## **Stop simplified explanations**

Can we stop the fallacious, over-simplified explanations?

The truth is, this is a complex conversation that gets down deeper to issues of parenting, mental health and the moral conscience of our society (among many other issues). Oversimplifying this issue doesn't help from either side.

On the one hand, you're not going to be able to regulate every mass killing device. Someone will find a way to cause harm if that is their intention. On the other hand, saying, "Guns don't kill people. People kill people," is missing the point.

Yes, this is true, but what is also true is that guns make killing people easier, especially with semi-automatic weapons and bump stocks. Those devices make killing a lot of people in a short amount of time achievable. Is

the answer banning all weapons? No (in my opinion).

Likewise, let's be honest that some of these devices in the wrong hands are incredibly dangerous, more so than the rock Cain threw at Abel (I often hear the phrase based on the biblical story that Cain killed Abel with a rock. Are we now going to ban all rocks?)

Gun control isn't the only answer — nor is gun ownership.

## **Stop fearing**

Let's also get to the spiritual issue I think everyone is facing.

Again, I'm not a constitutional law expert or policymaker, but I have spent a lot of time with people and a lot of time studying Scripture.

I know that, as a people, we are fearful, and today's world does nothing to lessen those fears. Whichever side of the debate you are on, Jesus invites us to a life beyond fear and to freedom, plenty and wholeness. He never said there wasn't anything to be afraid of. He simply told us not to be afraid.

He has the ultimate power and authority, and, one day, God's word promises he will turn the weapons of warfare into plowshares (Isaiah 2:4). God has a vision that what once was used for death will be used to sustain life.

## **The conversations we should be having**

So, what can we all do?

Love enough to speak up when something is wrong.

Care for someone who is hurting.

Advocate for mental health care access and affordability (without ostracizing our brothers and sisters who are suffering).

Provide better resources and assistance to our local schools.

And, I believe, consider reasonable approaches to gun safety measures that ensure the most dangerous weapons do not end up in the most dangerous hands.

*John Whitten is lead pastor for the gathering at Pioneer Drive Baptist Church in Abilene.*