



the **SCENE**

Viewing the latest news through the lens of Scripture

Success. Some chase after it. Some say they don't want it. Ask a thousand people to define it, and you might get a thousand definitions.

But every single one of us needs to feel it in some part of our lives, in some way, to our own satisfaction, in order to be happy. We may feel successful in our jobs, or in one of our life roles (brother, sister, son, daughter, student, worker, friend, team member, etc.), or just as whatever we have decided is our purpose in life. But we need to find some small amount of success in some corner of our lives. Without that, people tend to look for success in something outside of themselves—and often that something is not good.

A person may reach for success in drug abuse—reaching that “high.” A person might look for success in crime—winning at theft. A person might gamble in other ways—feeling success each time a risk is taken.

And for certain persons, with certain kinds of life stories, success might be sought in harming others. Combine that desire for power and honor and recognition with access to powerful weapons, and you have the makings of a killer.

Those who study the profiles of mass shooters have identified certain common characteristics that create a pathway to violence. But all the psychological assessments and clinical understanding and informed hypotheses in the world cannot prevent a person with these characteristics from hurting people if they have come to that decision. What could? A friend. A neighbor. A random person who acts like they care.

The person who is led to commit such a crime is often someone who considers himself (and we are using the male pronouns simply because this behavior does tend to appear more often in males than females) outside society in some way: special or different or cast out or persecuted. Because they are special, they look for a special power to wield—that often comes in the form of guns or bombs. Why guns and bombs? Because in our culture, in the movies, in video games, in television, even in news coverage of military events, the pathway to power, especially for men, that is glorified and given the most attention is the ability to own and carry and shoot a weapon of considerable force.

One wonders then, what would happen if we all focused on doing two things. The first is be a good neighbor. When Jesus was asked by a man, “Who is my neighbor?” He gave as His response the story of the Good Samaritan. In that story it becomes clear that our “neighbors” are any people we come into contact with—especially people who need our help. So you might say, how do I know when someone needs my help? And that is the point. You don't know unless you get close enough to see. Be a good neighbor. Be in people's lives. Consider everyone you make contact with in a day as someone who might need you. And if you notice anything that is troubling or seems “off” about a person, go the extra mile. Ask questions. Talk. Listen. And when needed, get help from a professional.

The other thing we could do is provide and talk about and give honor to alternative scripts for (especially male) success. What if success in our culture was not marked by wealth, but by wisdom? What if it was forever tied to virtue, instead of violence? What if being a powerful man looked like being a good teacher, a compassionate coach, a caring father, or a kind person? What if strength was celebrated most often as part of physical fitness, mental well-being, and good citizenship? What if having a gun in the house was not considered a God-given right or a symbol of power, but simply a specialized tool to be used only ever during specific circumstances and never touched otherwise (similar to using a fire extinguisher or calling 911)?

Use “The Scene” to introduce “God and Justice” the High School Sunday school lesson for October 8, 2017. The lesson is found on page 37 of *High School Teacher* by Standard Publishing.

As students arrive, give each of them a copy of the article. Then discuss in this way:

What do you think about this article? What are the main points?

When you hear about shootings like what occurred in Las Vegas this past week, what do you think about the person who committed the act?

Without naming names, are there any people in your school or in your community who seem odd or different or don't have many friends? What could you do to be a good neighbor to them?

Many people have ideas about what could make them successful. Today we'll look at what defines success in God's eyes.