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More than Thoughts and Candles

February 16, 2023



Life and Books and Everything - Clearly Reformed

As long as there is sin and suffering in the world, the gospel will be relevant.

In the wake of the tragic MSU shooting, Christians must remember that the hope of healing lies in the truth of the gospel.

Transcript

[MUSIC PLAYING] Greetings in salutations. This is Life in Books and Everything. I'm Kevin DeYoung.

Today I'm reading my latest World Opinions article entitled More Than Thoughts and Candles. And the face of tragedy believers really do know what the world needs to know. It certainly wasn't the first deadly shooting on one of our college campuses.

But this one just happened to be the college campus I know best. On Monday night, while I was taking my nine-year-old to a hornet's game for his birthday, my phone erupted with text from my friends in East Lansing. There was an active shooter on the campus of Michigan State University.

We've all seen these stories before. Maybe your school or child school has faced this grief already. It was a little over four years ago when a similar tragedy took place at UNC Charlotte, just 20 minutes from where I now live.

On Monday, it happened at MSU, three dead, five seriously wounded, and a whole community in mourning. Before moving to Charlotte, I passed her to East Lansing for 13 years. If you've never lived in a small city with a major university, you may not be able to fathom how virtually everyone and everything can be connected to a single school.

I didn't go to Michigan State, but it was hard to pass their university-reformed church without bleeding green and white. I could hear Spartan Stadium from my home and see the blimp overhead for big games. So as I followed the news on Monday night into Tuesday morning, I knew all the buildings and all the streets.

I heard from friends with children locked in the basement of the library, from friends who opened their home for college students to sleep on the floor so they could get off campus. From friends with relatives who were running across campus in the dark because the police told them the shooter could be nearing their location. East Lansing is not the softest soil for gospel ministry, but there are many faithful Christians in gospel churches there.

I first heard news of the shooting from Jason Halopolis, my good friend who is now senior pastor of my former church, which is so blessed to have him. He was on campus all night weeping with those who weep. God's providence, I'll be in East Lansing next weekend for the Philadelphia Conference on Reform Theology.

It will be the first time preaching at my old church since we moved in 2017. I can't wait to give a lot of folks a big hug, you know, as much as a Dutchman can hug. My oldest son is a freshman at North Carolina State University.

He loves the school and we like it too, something about where your treasure is, one child and tens of thousands of dollars, there your heart will be also. But in East state has had a rough year. I've lost track of how many emails we've received informing us of student suicides on campus, just another one in the past week.

Who knows all the reasons that shootings and suicides are multiplying, but surely the power of social contagion is real. The more you hear and see the unthinkable, the more it becomes thinkable. As I'm writing this, I don't know what MSU will do in response to the shooting.

I'm sure there will be counselors, statements and speeches, probably a vigil at some point. In fact, as I'm reading this now, they had a vigil the previous night. I know NC State has made various resources available for students with questions and concerns.

They've canceled classes and provided mental health days. I'm sure leaders at these institutions and others like them are doing the best they can under gut-wrenching circumstances. And yet as Christians, we know things the world does not know.

I don't mean to criticize anyone seeking to provide comfort and help in the midst of grief and confusion. Decent people in the world want to help. They want to comfort.

They want to make things better. They don't want death and fear and suffering and sadness any more than any Christian does. But the world doesn't know what it doesn't know.

The world can send out thoughts. We can pray in Jesus' name. The world can provide counselors to listen.

We can speak of the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort. The world can

offer yoga and mindfulness seminars. We can make known the mind of Christ.

The world can light candles. We can tell of the light, of the knowledge, of the glory of God in the face of Christ. The world can reassure students they are special.

We can remind them they have been created in the image of God fearfully and wonderfully made with a purpose and an eternal soul. The world can put an arm around the hurting and the fearful. We know the one who, through suffering, defeated the devil so we don't have to be afraid.

The world can exhort people to live again. We can introduce them to the one who conquered death. As long as there is sin and suffering in the world, the gospel will be relevant.

Is there more hostility to authentic biblical Christianity than a few decades ago? Probably. But people are still people. They don't want to be scared and they don't want to die.

They need forgiveness. They need comfort. They need hope.

They need Jesus. We know what the world needs to know. With tears then, but without apologies, let's share that message and make him known.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(gentle music)

(dramatic music)