

**Youth Culture Lesson**  
**Finding Teachable Moments in Culture**  
**From *YouthWorker Journal* and YouthWorker.com**

**Tragedy in Newtown**  
Community, Country Grieve in Wake of Massacre

By Paul Asay

**What Happened:**

On Friday, Dec. 14, 2012, a gunman arrived at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., and opened fire on students and teachers. By the time the killer took his own life, 27 victims were either dead or dying—20 of them children between the ages of 6 and 7.

The horrific events shocked the nation, despite the fact we've become all too accustomed to senseless tragedy. In August, a man opened fire in a Sikh temple in Wisconsin, killing six people. A month earlier, another man opened fire in a crowded theater in Colorado, killing 12 and injuring 58. The fact that most of the victims in Sandy Hook were young children brought another layer of sadness to the event.

"I am very mindful that mere words cannot match the depths of your sorrow, nor can they heal your wounded hearts," President Barack Obama said at a prayer vigil two days after the killing. "I can only hope it helps for you to know you're not alone in your grief, that our world, too, has been torn apart, that all across this land of ours, we have wept with you."

Even in the midst of this terrible story, there are tales of heroism and moments of encouragement. The school's principal and psychologist died trying to stop the gunman. Other teachers hid their students in storage closets or shielded them from the shooter. It could've been far, far worse.

As citizens and politicians debate how the country can stop these terrible killings, a new trend has arisen on Twitter: People using the hashtag #26Acts are encouraging others to remember the victims by committing acts of kindness.

The acts are pretty random. One woman gave her coat to a homeless person. Another donated 26 hats for newborns to a hospital. Some simply donated money to the Sandy Hook School Support Fund. Thousands are doing what they can to bring a little light to a very dark moment.

**Talk About It:**

God did not make the killer do what he did. We were given freewill, and part of that freedom entails the ability to use that will for evil purposes. That doesn't give us much comfort in times such as these. The president was right when he said words can do little to comfort the grieving parents.

Have you ever felt rock-bottom grief? Lost someone terribly close to you or suffered a serious heartbreak? What did you find helped you the most when you were grieving? What did you really want from the people around you? Did you want someone to take your mind off your troubles? Tell you everything was going to be OK? Did you simply need someone to listen to you?

If you were in Newport, what help could you provide? What comfort could you give? What do the children need right now? What do the parents need? What could the community use?

What do you think might've helped prevent the tragedy at Sandy Hook? Gun control? Better understanding of mental illness? More security at the school? What do you think society could do better to prevent this sort of thing from happening?

People sometimes struggle in their faith at times such as these—wondering how a good God could allow such things to happen. In moments such as this, have you ever doubted God or God's goodness? Did you reach an answer that helped satisfy your struggles? If so, what was it?

Sometimes, the best way to move on from tragedy is to push forward—to serve other people in some way as represented by #26Acts. Are there things or services you could provide in your own community or to your own friends that would somehow help commemorate the victims?

**What the Bible Says:**

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away’” (Rev. 21:3-4).

“Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (Mark 10:14).

“I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

\*\*\*

Paul Asay has covered religion for *The Washington Post*, *Christianity Today*, [Beliefnet.com](http://Beliefnet.com), and *The (Colorado Springs) Gazette*. He writes about culture for *Plugged In* and wrote the Batman book, *God on the Streets of Gotham* (Tyndale). He lives in Colorado Springs with wife Wendy and his two children. Follow him on Twitter at @AsayPaul.