

Real Life Stories

I'm a Shooting Survivor. If you're going to pray for us, here's how.

We need more than “thoughts and prayers” in the immediate aftermath.

TAYLOR SCHUMANN - AUGUST 4, 2019

I have a complicated relationship with thoughts and prayers.” The phrase has become the familiar refrain after each mass shooting, echoed in tweets and statements offering condolences to families and communities shaken by tragedy. Like many others affected by gun violence, I can't help but feel frustrated and cynical when I hear another line about “thoughts and prayers.”

It has been six years since I was shot when a gunman opened fire at New River Community College in Virginia. With the news of each mass shooting, each child dead after finding a loaded weapon in their home, and each suicide or senseless gun death, I wonder if action from those in power will ever follow the thoughts and prayers.

As a shooting survivor, I believe in action. At the same time, I believe in the power of prayer. I know firsthand what living through a shooting does to a mind and what a bullet does to a body, and I believe that my recovery and healing is a direct result of prayers that were prayed for me.

It is easy to feel powerless in the aftermath of a mass shooting. As we mourn the lives lost in El Paso, Dayton, and every other community where gun violence is an everyday reality, it can seem impossible to find the words to pray. Being a survivor doesn't mean I can singlehandedly solve the crisis of gun violence. What I can offer, though, is insight into some specific ways to pray for survivors as one part of our response to gun violence.

Pray for physical wounds, pain, and future treatments.

Managing bullet wounds is often a process of trial and error, where it can take days for doctors to figure out how to provide comfort. Many survivors face years of recovery, including surgeries and physical rehabilitation. Pray that they would experience a relief from the physical pain, that the lasting effects of the wounds would be minimal, and they would have the strength to persevere through the treatments to come.

Pray for their invisible wounds.

Survivors have witnessed the unimaginable, oftentimes seeing people they love also wounded or killed. These are images that will never leave their minds. Whether or not they were wounded, they are processing their near-death experience and wondering what their new reality will be. Many survivors will deal with post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression. Pray for the emotional trauma they are dealing with. Pray that they would have access to counseling, therapy, and whatever type of mental health treatment that they need.

Pray for wisdom for doctors, nurses, and all medical specialists they encounter.

Medical staff face a weighty task as they are asked to treat and care for victims. Pray for wisdom as they make medical decisions, steady hands as they perform surgeries, kindness as they talk to their patients, and for stamina and endurance as they provide care.

Pray for shielding from photos and information of the shooter.

I will never forget waking up and seeing the face of the person who shot me next to my picture on the front page of the newspaper or seeing my name scroll across the ticker on the national news. As videos and photos make their way into the coverage, pray that the survivors are shielded from hearing about the shooter and reliving their trauma over and over again.

Pray against nightmares and for the ability to sleep and rest.

For me, one of the hardest things in the days following the shooting was sleeping. I was terrified to close my eyes, and when I did, I suffered through nightmares. After a significant trauma, the body needs sleep. Pray that the survivors are able to rest without fear.

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Pray for financial provision for medical costs and other needs.

The financial impact of being shot is devastating for families, especially if the person hurt was the family wage-earner or will live with a lifelong disability. Please pray for financial provision for hospital bills, ongoing care, materials needed to function well, and ongoing mental health treatment.

Pray for guidance and support during the legal process.

In incidents where the shooters are taken into custody, survivors face a long and tedious legal process full of court proceedings. They will be asked to testify about the worst day of their lives and forced to listen to the traumatizing details. I know firsthand how overwhelming this process can be. Pray they would have support and guidance as authorities work to bring shooters to justice.

Pray they would have a strong support system for the long haul.

Supporting a shooting survivor is not a short-term endeavor. Please pray that each survivor will have an unbreakable support system, full of people who will love them and care for them and not abandon them if it gets difficult. Pray that the survivors will not feel like a burden to those around them but instead will allow others to serve them.

Pray for support from other survivors.

Having a support system of friends and family is critically important for a survivor. However, there is a special type of support that can only come from being able to lament with a fellow survivor who can fully understand their suffering and experience. Pray they would be able to make connections and get support from people who have been through it themselves.

Pray against re-traumatization after other shootings.

For a survivor, it can feel impossible to experience healing when we are constantly having to relive our experience with each new mass shooting that happens. Every time we are flooded with the memories of our experience. For a lot of us, this includes things like PTSD symptoms and panic attacks. Pray that God would provide a peace that surpasses all understanding and strength when they are weak.

Keep praying.

If I can convince you to do just one thing on this list, I hope it is this one. Keep praying. For many survivors, including myself, the day of the shooting is not the hardest day. The hardest day comes later, when you are confronted with your new reality in the aftermath. When the cards stop coming, when people stop asking how you are, and when the news cycle changes, you begin to feel forgotten and isolated. People praying for you months and years after the shooting is a significant way to show support.

God knows the needs of survivors, so I don't believe it is necessary to know exactly what to pray for in order to pray. However, when we acknowledge the specific needs of others, we are better able to empathize with them, love them, and serve them. We are also better able to recognize the deep and ongoing trauma of gun violence that lasts long after the news cameras are gone.

I hope that this list helps you pray for victims and while I pray there isn't a next time, I hope it's helpful then, too.

. . . . Gleaned from Christianity Today