



SHARING SCRIPTURE

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What Happened?

For use: March 28 - April 3

Texts: Psalm 100:3; Acts 17:26; Genesis 2:7, 18–25; Genesis 1:28, 29; Genesis 3:15

Eight people, six of whom are Asian women, were fatally shot at three Atlanta spas on March 16, 2021. The shootings by 21-year-old Robert Aaron Long have devastated the local community and leave his congregation wondering, “What went wrong?”

Law enforcement, the Long family, and local Southern Baptist leaders, among others, speculate as to what could have caused such unexpected behavior from Long. After all, Long’s father was a leader in the Crabapple First Baptist Church where Robert not only spent his formative years, but was a member of a youth group and a Bible club, and also participated in mission trips and weekly meetings. [1]

But not everything was as it seemed. According to *The Washington Post*, “He believed he was straying from his faith, telling friends that he was fixated on sex to the extent that he thought he was addicted.” [2] An apparent addiction—followed by his girlfriend leaving him due to his frequenting of massage businesses—and a tumultuous relationship with his parents amounted to him violently lashing out against “temptations.”

Looking closely, we can surmise that Long’s downfall resulted from broken relationships—starting with a break from God. This is not dissimilar to our own origin story.

The first chapter of Genesis outlines Creation Week and ends with God looking at all that was made, deeming it very good ([Gen. 1:31](#)). But, when Adam and Eve of their own free will deliberately disobeyed the words of the Lord, and thereby broke with the character of God, human downfall was set in motion. It would not be long before their own son would commit murder, rupturing what once had been a very good family relationship.

It seems that Robert believed he was separated from God and could only redeem himself. But Psalm 100:3 reminds us that our Creator does not leave us to fend for ourselves. Although our lives on this earth are filled with enmity and bruised heels ([Genesis 3:15](#)), God knows the end from the beginning ([Isaiah 46:10-11](#)) and uses this knowledge to bring about good results despite our transgressions ([Acts 17:26-28](#)). Likewise, the fall of the First Adam was used to reconcile the world to the Lord.

The “what happened?” matters, but now it’s more imperative that we learn how to positively move forward with the grace and love of God and not on our strength alone.

~Stefani Leeper

[1] <https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2021/03/17/atlanta-shooting-southern-baptist-pastors-wrestle/>

[2] https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/atlanta-shooting-suspect-robert-aaron-long/2021/03/19/9397cdca-87fe-11eb-8a8b-5cf82c3dffe4_story.html

For Reflection

Connecting: *The Washington Post* articles insinuate that strict doctrine and apocalyptic beliefs catalyzed Long’s violent outburst. Over your online connections, if you’re not yet meeting in person, discuss positive ways to approach someone who may have just sat through a doom-and-gloom service and needs some spiritual uplifting.

Sharing: How do you cope with the knowledge that bad things happen to good people?

1. I know and accept that God’s faithful will be persecuted
2. I think that bad things happen to everyone, regardless of their moral compass
3. I believe that they did something deserving of punishment
4. I have the hope that something better will happen because of it
5. I’m struggling to understand that concept
6. Other...

Applying: Speaking of bad things happening to good people... If you are financially able, you can donate to support the families of the Atlanta and/or Denver shooting victims. If this is beyond your reach, you can spread awareness about mental health and public safety within your circles (or even state legislature). And don’t forget to pray for their healing during this tumultuous time.

Valuing: Have you ever been so fearful of something that you acted irrationally? Write about your emotional experience and how it could have been handled differently. Then pray for wisdom and strength to tackle future anxiety-inducing situations with a level head.

Other Helpful Resources

[Creative Ministry's website](#) equips you with [friendship evangelism](#), [small group](#), [community outreach](#), and [healing ministry](#) tools right at your fingertips. Our website also features [Adventist research conducted by Monte Sahlin](#), as well as [Sharing Scripture archives](#), [ScripShots](#), and [more](#). And if you're tired of staring at a screen, digital files are available for download as PDFs and to print.

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Three decades ago, we created this resource for small groups and Sabbath school classes, and it continues to bless so many people worldwide. Thank you for your continued interest in these biblical themes and what they mean to your life and those people with whom you share it.

Paul Richardson
Executive Director

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