



## To be a victim that forgives

By Daniel McDonald, 36 years old, 11 years in prison in Texas

When I think about the man I killed, I grow sad - even after all these years. You see, we fought, and he died from his wounds.

None of that was handled well. I did not react properly afterwards, either, so I'm not surprised such a harsh judgment was cast against me. A lesser sentence could've been given, but nothing can erase my sadness.

I feel sorrow for the man who lost his life. Sure, he played a large role in that, but I don't believe he expected to die. His family certainly didn't. And I never planned to be a killer. My heart goes out to them. They lost a friend, a brother... an Uncle, a son. Had the coin flipped another way, it could have been me. I can only imagine the grief my family would feel.

What I have come to realize, is that my actions victimized many. Society: perhaps my conduct bred fear in others. The man who died, of course, and his family. But my family, as well: I know they are ashamed, as they live in a state of disbelief. Something that tends to get lost when assessing suffering, though, is that I am also a victim of my own actions. Like a stone thrown in a pond, I have caused, but also been caught in, the ripples of sorrow and grief that have spread far and wide.

Each crime has that effect. In my case, families on both sides were fragmented. Now I'm essentially lost in prison - strictly separated from society, which limits my ability to mend those wounds, or help my family in significant ways. The average person might not consider those dynamics, choosing instead to adopt the opinion: "If you don't like prison, don't commit crimes." How I wish it was that easy, and harsh punishments don't erase the crime or pain it caused. Which leaves the idea of justice: merely an abstract way to assert "an eye for an eye" while failing to provide healing.

Action and consequence are aspects of reality. But so is forgiveness. Even so to forgive is often difficult because no thought, action, feeling, or emotion will ever change the past. So what is the point?

Well, much like the ripples of sorrow and grief, forgiveness can have a widespread impact. Perhaps it can be part of what is needed for closure. To help with overcoming fear, depression, shame... anger, hate or rage. All of which are components of self-destruction. Generally, forgiveness begins within, then spreads outward. But forgiving is an individual choice. No, it won't erase pain and heartache, but it can lead to acknowledging exactly how many are victimized by a singular act. It is seeing deeper, an awareness and understanding that, even though pain is personal, it can be shared. And so, extending a hand (of kindness) as forgiveness, opens each heart to shared relief and the road to healing.

Each day I spend in prison, means I move farther away from dwelling on my wrongdoing. I was finally able to forgive myself, which helped me to understand why I have been punished so harshly. Do I deserve this? Some people think so. I have learned to accept their judgment, even if I disagree. Overall, I bear them no ill-will. But it would be nice if they would look deeper to find compassion and forgiveness - if not for me, then for themselves.

Time has changed who I am in profound ways, bringing peace as I strive to live more virtuously going forward. My hope is that they can find the path of comfort best suited to unravel the knots of agony that might still exist. I wish for them to be free of the blemish of the past, so that they can live each day to its fullest.

Which, I believe, is the true power of forgiveness. In truth, forgiving is an expression of loving kindness. There is also a spiritual aspect that tends to make dealing with trauma easier, whilst providing the hope of redemption to whomever caused the pain. When the choice to forgive is made, a door is opened, presenting the tools to transform the criminal mind.

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