

Courage to Forgive» *by Chantal Kagaba*

Among people I lost during the Rwanda genocide, I always think about my husband and my mother. They were my models for my life.

I do not know who killed my husband. But in 2005, I learned who killed my mom. During a court hearing, a man called Felix confessed that he was the one. Felix used to be my parents' neighbor, and they were close. I could not imagine how someone so close to my family could wake up one day and kill my mom.

At the court, Felix explained what happened. After Felix and several others had beaten my mom, she said, "I know you are going to kill me, but do you mind giving me five minutes to pray for you?"

They accepted, and my mom prayed for them. Afterward, she said, "Now I am ready to join my Jesus. If it happens that you ever meet one of my children, tell them that I have prayed for you and I have forgiven you."

Then, Felix shot her.

At the court hearing, Felix asked us to forgive him, too, but at that time nobody from my family could forgive him, despite what my mother had said. All of us said, "No! We want revenge."

But the words my mother said before she died continued to haunt me. My mom had such a big heart. She never gave up on helping people. At the point of death, she was even helping her killers.

My mom was supposed to be my model, yet I still wanted

"For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly father will also forgive you." — MATTHEW 6:14

revenge. My mind was torn. Sometimes I would pray that I could find a way to get revenge. But my soul kept telling me I ought to forgive, just as my mother had done.

One day, I went to visit Felix in prison. He was afraid because he thought I was coming for revenge. So I said, "Don't worry, Felix. I have a special request."

I brought some food, which we shared together. Then I said, "Felix, I know you have done a bad thing. You killed my mom, even though she was innocent, but I did worse than you."

He was stunned. I continued, "You killed only one person. But what I did, even if it was only in my mind, is worse than what you



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did. I killed all of your family inside of me. I wanted revenge. So, the purpose of my visit is to ask for forgiveness."

He was crying. Finally, he said, "Chantal, I forgive you, even though I don't understand."

When Felix said, "I forgive you," I was set free. I said, "Felix, thank you so much. I forgive you too."

People may think forgiveness is for the benefit of the perpetrators. But it is not. Victims are also suffering. When you don't forgive, you keep something inside of you that continues to hurt you. I continued to visit Felix in prison, and he has played a big role in my healing.

Now, Felix is one of my best friends. He really cares a lot about me, and I care about him. Five days will not pass without him sending me a message or calling me, asking, "How are you, Chantal?"

If you have a problem, or an enemy, or your friend did something bad to you, perhaps my story can be helpful. You may not be able to forget, but you can forgive. We must have the courage to forgive. ■

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