

## **Don Miller: ... As we forgive those who trespass against us**

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Early one morning in May 1986, Ken Luther, a 23-year-old former Aptos High student, made a momentous decision. An intersection in Aptos, which ended with Ken Luther shooting Joe Vomvolakis to death during a botched auto break-in, is the subject of today's column.

I recently received a letter from Chris Vomvolakis, Joe's brother, who plans to attend a parole hearing for Luther on Monday at Soledad prison, where Luther has been locked up since his conviction in 1987 for the murder.

Chris, who was 23 when his younger brother died, sent this essay to a few people because, he said, "in some way during the course of the past nineteen years you (the recipients) have positively affected my life. It has been through this experience that I believe I have arrived at a place that I am able to present myself being of better service to God, my fellow man and the world."

With Chris' permission, I am reprinting most of this rather lengthy letter, which is not about Ken Luther, or even Joe Vomvolakis. It's about Chris Vomvolakis, and the long journey toward forgiveness he has taken in the 19 years since that awful night.

Forgiveness.

So easy to say, so difficult to deliver.

I've never had to deal with an event as seemingly senseless, mystifying and horrifying as what Chris Vomvolakis and his parents have had to live with.

But, I've had plenty of occasions to reflect on the need for forgiveness — for my own actions and for those who I believe have offended me.

And I've learned, the hard way, that the absence of forgiveness keeps me in bondage to an act that is in the unrecoverable past, or to a person who may or may not even be aware of our unholy link.

At the same time, forgiveness doesn't come easy and often must be practiced daily.

Chris Vomvolakis talks about the help he has received from Buddhism, plus many authors and sages from various spiritual and psychological traditions, including Dr. Fred Luskin's Forgiveness Project at Stanford.

My journey toward a heart of forgiveness took me first to a place of mercy.

In that place, I came to understand that one, who is forgiven much, can and must forgive much.

"Then Peter came to him and asked, 'Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?'"

"No!" Jesus replied, "seventy times seven!"

"For this reason, the Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him.

"In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. He couldn't pay, so the king ordered that he, his wife, his children, and everything he had be sold to pay the debt.

But the man fell down before the king and begged him, 'Oh, sir, be patient with me, and I will pay it all.'

"Then the king was filled with pity for him, and he released him and forgave his debt.

"But when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment.

"His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time. 'Be patient and I will pay it,' he pleaded.

"But his creditor wouldn't wait. He had the man arrested and jailed until the debt could be paid in full.

"When some of the other servants saw this, they were very upset. They went to the king and told him what had happened.

Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, 'You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?' Then the angry king sent the man to prison until he had paid every penny.

"That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters in your heart."

— *Matthew 18:21-35*

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