

Matthew 25:36 *"I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me."*

As most of you all know, during my late teenage years, I was not following the Lord as I was trained to. I associated with people that did not honor God with their lives, and I did things and had habits that did not please God. When I returned to Christ and repented of my sins, I kept in contact with many of those I hung out with. One of my friends was arrested for a crime and sentenced to 77 months in Stafford Creek Correction Center in the Aberdeen Area. I wrote him a few letters and set up a time to go and visit him.

I had never been inside a prison before, and I remember being amazed at the amount of barbed and razor wire that surrounded the facility. Once I went through the security, we were led to a visitor area that had tables, games, a book corner, vending machines and a photo booth. It was apparently the nicest part of the entire prison.

Once my friend came out, we spent the afternoon playing board games, endless amounts of card games (If you want to learn a new card game, find someone who has been to prison), and eating chips and snacks. When visitation was up, I remembered how sad my buddy looked because he knew I was going home and he had to go back to a concrete prison cell. We said our goodbyes and went our separate ways.

For the first time I understood the above verse. That giving my time to visit someone in prison — who deserved and needed to be there — was like visiting Christ. Not because Christ is incarcerated, but because there is a level of forgiveness and compassion that can only be illustrated through Christ. I had every reason to completely forget about this friend as his crimes deserved his punishment, but it was the forgiveness in my heart that came from Jesus that allowed me to spend the day with him and not talk about the crime at all. I was there as a friend without judgment, not to be the judge.

I believe we have people in our lives that we hold judgment against, and there is nothing they can do to turn back the clock and undo the wrong they perpetrated against us.

Sometimes we need parameters and boundaries around certain relationships and there are even times we need to separate ourselves from others completely — I don't make light of this — but many times simple forgiveness and compassion can be a huge witness to others about the forgiveness of Christ.

Let's look at those we can extend forgiveness and compassion to, and when wise, work to allow Jesus to shine through our lives to those who may not see it otherwise.

I love you and God loves You. – Pastor Eric Lundberg