

Forgiveness Even Unto Death

It's no wonder Alex Nsengimana had nightmares as a child. After witnessing the murder of his grandmother and uncle during the 1994 Rwandan genocide, he ran from the militia and eventually ended up in an orphanage.

Haunted by his past, Nsengimana found hope in a simple gift-filled shoebox delivered by Operation Christmas Child, a group dedicated to helping impoverished children experience Christ's love.

"I can remember opening it and being reminded that someone cared," says Nsengimana, now 25. "I hope that people realize ... their effort in packing boxes and sacrificing their time is not in vain. It's going to change someone's life."

For Nsengimana, who now lives in the United States and interns with Operation Christmas Child, the shoebox was the first step toward healing. Not long after he received that first box, he was one of 12 children from his orphanage chosen to go to Uganda with the African Children's Choir, an opportunity through which he learned English and visited the U.S.

"That's when I really came to know Christ," says Nsengimana of his time in Uganda, where he began questioning his life and why he survived. "I saw all that God did to save my life."

But with that realization came another hard truth. "I struggled because I could read God's Word and understand that He loved me and everyone," he says. "[But] that includes the two guys that killed my family."

While Nsengimana first wanted retribution against the men who killed his family members, he realized he couldn't ask for God's forgiveness if he withheld the same from others. And so he began to pray for an opportunity to come face to face with those two men.

This year, he finally got the opportunity. During a visit with one of them who is now serving time in a Rwandan prison, a line of friendship was opened.

“My dream and my goal is that we both can continue to extend that relationship and that he will come to know the Lord,” Nsengimana says.

It’s been almost 20 years since the mass genocide in Rwanda, and Alex still has high hopes for his homeland. He desires to return to Rwanda for pastoral ministry and to help his fellow brothers and sisters heal.

“I know we all face a lot of tragedies,” he says, “but we can really never find peace unless we come to that point of really letting go and coming to know the Lord.” —*Sarah Breed*