

In Chattanooga, learning to love

by [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

July 20, 2015

During weeks like this, I'm glad we don't have cable. I don't think I could take the endless headline news stomping around, filling up our space with its vibrato. Especially right now, after Mohammad Youssuf Abdulazeez killed five people. I live in Chattanooga, so I imagine CNN is full of clips with strip malls that I pass.

The pictures of shattered glass, bullet holes, and uniformed men are designed to make people fear. It is the easiest sort of market manipulation. When we are afraid, we feel out of control. But we understand that knowledge is power, so we keep watching, hungry for more details. We want to make sense of it all. So we keep looking at the same scenes over and over, like a puzzle that we cannot solve.

When we watch, the ratings go up. With more viewers, stations can demand more money for advertising. Making money is not a bad thing in itself. The news networks are doing their job. In fact, a lot of things depend on our fear. When our nation is in fear, we pay our taxes and keep our military in place.

But, that doesn't mean we have to watch the constant footage of strip malls, shattered glass, and uniformed men. We made a choice a long time ago to cut cable. Instead, I read the paper and skip the comment sections. That way I can stay informed while staying sane.

It's still difficult. Each time we go out, people talk about the shooting, shocked that this young man could be someone who was raised in Chattanooga. It's hard for people, because they want to see him as wholly other, but he's clearly one of us.

Somehow through this, I am seeking peace. Just as it is the cable news network's job to keep the fear-mongering ratings up, it is the job of religious leaders to remind us to love our enemies and do good to those who hate us. We parrot these words, but we don't always have a chance to practice them, at least not on this level.

It is our job to make sure that we keep up our interfaith dialogue, and find paths of peace between religions, reminding the cable-news watchers of our common humanity and common goals.

It is also our job to inspire people to forgive.

I'm reading [*The Book of Forgiving*](#) by Desmond Tutu and Mpho Tutu. Desmond Tutu begins the book by talking about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. A family was there to tell their story. A wife explained how her husband died. He had forty-three wounds. Weapons were used to stab him. They poured acid on his face. They chopped off his right hand just below the wrist. Then the man's daughter got up:

Now it was nineteen-year-old Babalwa's turn to speak. She was eight when her father died. Her brother was only three. She described the grief, police harassment, and hardship in the years since her father's death. And then she said, "I would love to know who killed my father. So would my brother." Her next words stunned me and left me breathless. "We want to forgive them. We want to forgive, but we don't know who to forgive."

I am not sure I can comprehend that level of forgiveness. But, as the strip mall windows get replaced, and the memorials to the servicemen fade, I'm going to keep trying.