

# thistle

## A Post-Film Discussion Guide

### 1 - Opening Overview

### 2 - Discussion Reminders

#### Engaging in Respectful Conversations

- **Time** – Be lean with your words and allow space for others to share.
- **Curiosity** – Each person here has their own unique history. Practice curiosity and compassion as we engage different perspectives.
- **Confidentiality** – If personal information is disclosed, honor their story and perspective by keeping it confidential.
- **Content** - While we know that the content of this film might connect to your own history of trauma, for the purpose of our conversation tonight we are hoping to keep the discussion grounded in the stories presented in the film and action steps we can take to get involved.

### 3 - Discussion Questions

\*recommend 30-45 minutes

1. What will stay with you from this film? Are there any lines or scenes that particularly spoke to you?
2. What questions emerged within you as you watched the film?
3. Becca Stevens (Founder of Thistle Farms) highlights how early childhood trauma and systemic injustices are often the catalyst for the issues women face at Thistle Farms.

Looking back on the women's stories, what were some of the factors that made them vulnerable to sexual violence?

4. A traumatic experience in childhood can lead to other traumatic experiences later in life. For example, in Ty's story:

- ...she experienced child abuse
- ...and used drugs to cope
- ...which led to an addiction
- ...and resulted in incarceration
- ...which made it hard to get a job
- ...and impacted her ability to secure housing
- ...and so on

Looking at the stories told by women in the film, in what ways did you see traumatic events build on one another? What resources or support was missing in their earlier years?

5. The film emphasizes rehabilitation over incarceration, highlighting how many of these women have been victims of violence long before their actions were criminalized. Dorinda Carter (TN Department of Correction) poses the question: "What led you to come to prison in the first place, and what can help you—not only stay out of prison—but never return?"
  1. How did the film impact your perspective on why people go to prison?
  2. What can we as individuals (and as a community) do to help people stay out of prison?
6. Acknowledging the role that childhood trauma plays in our lives, Dr. Arthur Lee (Residential Program Educator) invites us to shift away from asking the question "What's wrong with you?" to "What happened to you?" What would shift if we approached ourselves this way? What would shift if we approached other people this way?
7. Part of the success of Thistle Farms is due to the fact that women survivors collaborated in creating it. Instead of outsiders imposing their notion of what they thought the women needed to heal, the women in the program articulated their wants/needs, and

that shaped the program. As we seek to engage complex social issues like sexual violence, what might it look like for us to elevate the voices of those most impacted? How can we push communities we are a part of to center the voices of survivors?

8. Did the film shed any light on what we can do (as individuals, as communities, or on a policy level) to address issues related to human trafficking or sexual violence?
  
9. Becca closed the 2020 Thistle Farms Graduation with the following words: "Love heals. And all of us can heal from trauma... My charge to you is to go back out and love the world—again and again and again—until we get it right." You are invited to take a moment of silent reflection to explore the questions:
  1. Where do I need to experience healing?
  2. What might it look like for me to go out and love the world—again and again and again?

#### **4 - Closing Thoughts**

#### **5 - Additional Resources**

For more information, visit:  
[www.ThistleDocumentary.com](http://www.ThistleDocumentary.com)

**Hotlines** : Speak with trained specialists that can offer support, information, advice, or connect you with local resources

- National Sexual Assault Hotline: 1-800-656-4673
- National Human Trafficking Hotline: 1-888-373-7888

## Organizations

- **RAINN** (Rape Abuse Incest National Network)
  - An organization that provides resources to survivors and education to the public
- **NSVRC** (National Sexual Violence Resource Center)
  - Provide information and tools to prevent and respond to sexual violence
- **Darkness to Light**
  - Offers online training that specializes in the education and prevention of child sexual abuse