Forgiveness

Article:

(March 9) - When Jennifer Thompson identified Ronald Cotton as her rapist in 1984, she was sure she had found the right man. But she was wrong.

Cotton, then 22, was convicted of raping Thompson and another woman on the same night in Burlington, N.C. He would spend the next 11 years behind bars for a crime he didn't commit

In 1995, DNA evidence cleared Cotton of the rapes and showed that another man who was in prison with him was the rapist, a case recently covered by CBS' '60 Minutes'.

Now, Thompson and Cotton are friends and have written a new book together on their story, called 'Picking Cotton.' The two speak on the phone weekly and travel together to speak out on the problems with eyewitness evidence. Even their families are friends.

Thompson said she felt horrible guilt when she found out Cotton was not her rapist. "Suffocating, debilitating shame," she told Lesley Stahl in a CBS '60 Minutes' interview that aired Sunday. She asked Cotton if she could meet with him at a local church.

"I started to cry immediately. And I looked at him, and I said, 'Ron, if I spent every second of every minute of every hour for the rest of my life telling you how sorry I am, it wouldn't come close to how my heart feels. I'm so sorry.' And Ronald just leaned down, he took my hands…and he looked at me, he said, 'I forgive you,'" Thompson told CBS.

"I told her, I said, 'Jennifer, I forgive you. I don't want you to look over your shoulder. I just want us to be happy and move on in life,'"Cotton said.

There have been 233 people exonerated by DNA evidence across the country, and more than 75 percent of them have been convicted at least in part because of faulty eyewitness testimony, Stahl reported.

DQ# 1: What is your reaction to this article?

DQ# 2: Can you share an experience you have had related to forgiveness?

Read this quote and answer question #3:

The head of a large English mental hospital has been quoted as saying, "I could dismiss half my patients tomorrow if they could be assured of forgiveness" (Jack C. Winslow, Confessions and Absolution)

DQ# 3: Why do you think the director of this hospital would say this? What does he mean by this statement?

Read this summary of an Ernest Hemingway story and answer question #4:

A Spanish father decides to reconcile with his son who had run away to Madrid. Now remorseful, the father takes out this ad in the El Liberal newspaper: "PACO MEET ME AT HOTEL MONTANA NOON TUESDAY; ALL IS FORGIVEN PAPA." Paco is a common name in Spain, and when the father goes to the square he finds eight hundred young men named Paco waiting for their fathers.

DQ# 4: Why do you think people desire forgiveness so much?

DQ# 5: Why is it so difficult for *us* to forgive?

DQ# 6: How do the words "unearned" and "grace" relate to the idea of forgiveness?

DQ# 7: Why do you think that forgiveness is presented here as a Christian theme?

Quote:

Forgiveness offers a way out. It does not settle all questions of blame and fairness-often it pointedly evades those questions-but does allow a relationship to start over, to begin anew. In that way, said Solzhenitsyn, we differ from all animals. Not our capacity to think, but our capacity to repent and to forgive makes us different. Only humans can perform that most unnatural act, which transcends the relentless law of nature.- Philip Yancey