

# Introduction

The following are letters from a farm that is as much a state of mind as a place. The letters are written for young priests, old friends, survivors who have been trafficked, and anyone seeking to live grounded in the belief that love heals. We can cut deep furrows and create rich beds for growing when we are not blinded by the bright lights of ego, sidetracked by the illusion of power, and stuck in the mud of inaction, feeling defeated or overwhelmed. We all have stepped in unseen holes, and found ourselves digging on hard, rocky ground. I have learned so much about farming both practically and spiritually from the work of Thistle Farms, a national bath and body care manufacturing and distribution enterprise run by survivors of trafficking and addiction that I founded in 2001. I have also gained a bit of wisdom from great leaders along the way who have been willing to share their hearts. I have seen that the people who work with integrity tend their fields in a posture of gratitude and I have tried to learn to farm that way too. It has been a gift to use tools left by other farmers that help me cultivate a sense of courage, inspiration, humility, forgiveness, compassion, and faithfulness. The hardest part about beginning this book was imagining the recipients of these letters. Am I writing to a class of seminarians preparing to embark on a vocation of service? Am I writing to a grieving father who is just about sick of religious platitudes and sweet sentiments? Am I writing to my own children who may at some point after my death want to know what I was thinking trying to establish sanctuaries and social enterprises for women who have survived prostitution, addiction, and trafficking? I hope that I am writing to someone who has not let the cynical part of their

heart abandon the search for the place where justice and faith intersect. Maybe I am writing to a lonely seeker of community who knows that even though we make the journey alone, we can walk with each other. Perhaps there is a priest needing a story for a sermon. If I were betting on who picks up this book, I bet it's "square pegs," drummers who hear a beautiful rhythm all their own, and folks who have known some brokenness in their own lives. I am writing to myself too. It is such a gift to reflect on the lessons learned founding and running the place called Thistle Farms.

These letters from the farm describe a faith that strives for justice and peace through loving our neighbors. It began with the simple hope that love can help in community. That hope led to a social enterprise called Thistle Farms and that led to learning that we reap a hundredfold the seeds that are sown in a loving community. I became a student of herbs, teas, and trees because of my work with women. I am a farmer, not because I grow plants well, but because I love all of creation and tend to the parts of it in my own vineyard. Healing on this path is the central sacrament.

In the end, I always feel that I am just trying to write a love letter to God. That is what I imagine I am doing with this book—writing a love letter that is simple and compelling to folks seeking a deeper faith as they work in the fields and vineyards of their lives, creating a compassionate community and rich environment that encourages us to see the fruits of our labors.

Peace and love,  
Becca

*A note about format:* Accompanying each letter is a verse of Scripture and some questions for reflection so that this book may be used as a devotional guide as well as a piece to inspire you in your faith and life. I have also included some prayers that might be helpful if there are groups reading these letters together.