

Becca Stevens: The art of healing and truth-telling

By [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

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“There were no weeds in the Garden of Eden,” Becca Stevens, an Episcopal priest who founded [Thistle Farms](#), said. As I looked around the manufacturing room, I could see she lived by those words and encouraged others to as well. The air was so heavy with fragrance, it made me think of how that house must have smelled when Mary prepared Jesus for his death and anointed his feet with her precious nard. The women reclaimed healing properties from plants that had been relegated to weeds. In fact, the whole place buzzed with women and men who were redeeming flowers, words, and especially people—finding dignity, value and worth in it all.

Thistle Farms is a social enterprise to create handmade products as good for the earth as for the body. They work with the community and graduates of Magdalene, a residential program of women who have survived sex work, trafficking, and addiction.

Stevens explained that thistles are difficult to harvest because they have strong roots, growing deep in the ground. But since Thistle Farms is in the business of seeing beauty in the discarded, they take the prickly plant and use it for tea and paper. When we ingest thistles, it’s good for detoxifying. In her book, [Snake Oil](#), Stevens gives recipes for all sorts of rejected things, like dandelions and clover. (In fact, you can read an excerpt of the book [here](#), which includes a clover infusion blend.)

As I walked inside of the building for morning meditation, I saw evidence of reclaimed lives. As a candle burned in the center of the room, we went around the circle and introduced ourselves with our names and our work, and piece of gratitude seemed to spill out as well.

“I’m thankful for my sobriety.”

“I’m grateful because without this place, I wouldn’t have a mom.”

Most of the residents at Magdalene started being sexually abused from age seven to twelve. Stevens began residential housing for the women, so that they could get off the streets and have a safe place to maintain their sobriety. Becca soon found out that when the women got out of the program, they didn’t have marketable skills, so they began to make body oils and other products.

This month, the women opened up the [Thistle Stop Café](#), where you can purchase tea and coffee. As I was there, a large table was set up in the middle of the café, fresh cut flowers were gathered into empty sugar bowls and creamers, as women gathered around fresh scones and jellies for a tea party.

To learn more about Rev. Becca Stevens' story or find out how to support Thistle Farms, you can listen to the [God Complex Radio](#) interview below or download it from iTunes.