

BENEATH THE INK

EXPLORATION GUIDE

1

This story begins when tattoo artist, Billy Joe White, issues a Facebook invitation to “bring me your mistakes”.

Many viewers have been somewhat skeptical, maybe even cynical, about Billy’s offer to “cover up” these hateful images. Was this simply providing these people with a way to hide the racism and white supremacy in their lives? Billy has acknowledged that he started with a “no questions asked” policy that evolved into an “all kinds of questions need to be asked” approach. These people needed a safe place and an understanding person who could help them process their previous choices and attitudes and take the first steps toward making a change in their lives. This was going to be a lifelong journey.

How did you respond to Billy’s offer at the beginning of the film? Did you share the skepticism that Billy was simply providing a way for people to hide these embarrassing and offensive views? Did your perspective change over the course the film?

2

Early in the film Billy talks about how troubled he was by the TV reports of the white nationalist violence in Charlottesville, VA, in the summer of 2017. When confronted by this daunting social issue, Billy felt compelled to find a way where he could make a difference in his corner of the world.

Perhaps you have also been impacted by recent events that have exposed the deep racial tension in our country. What new insights have you gained from these events and what are some tangible ways you are trying to make a difference in your personal life, at your place of work, in your faith community, and/or in society?

3

In the film Billy discusses the significance of his own tattoos. We all have experiences that leave an indelible mark on our life, some positive, some painful, some we’d like to cover up. Billy’s offer in Beneath the Ink illustrates both a symbolic and tangible way to put distance between the past and present in people’s lives, even if past mistakes or former beliefs and practices are literally permanently visible on someone’s skin.

How does your attitude about the experiences and choices of the people in the film change as you see them respond to Billy’s offer to help them “erase the hate” in their lives? How have you moved beyond some of your own past mistakes and what insights do you take from the stories in this film?

4

This film describes some of the worst examples of racial prejudice and hateful ideology. In the Q&A, Cy and Billy describe the slow process of change that each of the people in the film are going through. Cy acknowledges that he views his role as a filmmaker as an opportunity to become a better listener. Billy describes how he tries to create a safe space for people to talk about their painful past. Getting these cover-up tattoos is messy, bloody and painful, just like the difficult process of change and transformation. But something beautiful comes from this experience, resembling the beauty of these cover-up tattoos.

How did you respond to this exchange? Have you had opportunities for these kinds of difficult conversations with others who may not experience the world like you or people you may even vehemently disagree with? Are you still in the middle of the messiness of these conversations or have you experienced moments of beauty and understanding?