

CNN's Van Jones Hopes 'Redemption Project' Will Spread Grace, Forgiveness

Van Jones is on a not-so-secret mission. On the verge of his highly-anticipated docuseries *The Redemption Project*, the CNN personality and social justice activist admits that behind the dramatic stories of victims and families meeting perpetrators, there's a bigger picture.

"The secret mission in this show is to put some medicine back into the culture," he said.

In *The Redemption Project*, airing at the coveted 9 p.m. Sunday-evening slot formerly occupied by Anthony Bourdain, the journalist profiles true stories of redemption and forgiveness taking place behind prison walls. In the premiere episode, a woman forgives the man who stabbed her son to death over a bag of heroin. In another, a father probes his daughter's killer on the events that led to the tragedy. Many of the shows end with forgiveness and reconciliation and some simply with baby steps toward closure.

"I've been working inside prisons and on criminal justice off and on for about 25 years, so I knew how much genius and wisdom and transformation can happen inside a prison," he said. "There are people who have done really bad things and you know, who have gone into prison and 10 years later, 20 years later, they are just remarkable human beings who are more wise and stronger and have better perspective than 99% of the people who are not in prison."

While prison is the setting, the larger picture of the show is to inspire viewers to forgive each other for much smaller offenses. Jones says he was inspired to create the show out of his dismay over the lack of forgiveness and empathy in

culture. His hope is that, by watching the stories of the heart-wrenching cases, viewers will realize the need for reconciliation in their own lives, whether a personal relationship or even a social media dustup.

“Even just the fact that people are willing to walk into that room and sit down and look each other eyeball to eyeball, human being to human being, and try to have a conversation, what excuse do we have right for not speaking to somebody we blocked somebody during the 2016 election on Facebook or our cousin that blew up at Thanksgiving dinner?” he said. “If those people on the show can take on these heavy lifts, there’s always somebody that we can offer an apology to. There’s always somebody that we can at least open our heart to be willing to forgive them or understand them even if we never actually have the conversation.”

Jones says viewers will hear the word “God” a lot on the show, because nine times out of 10, the participants on both sides of the bars are believers who have seriously grappled with the biblical mandate of forgiveness.

“We have to remember that all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God,” he said. “We all need forgiveness and grace and redemption every day. And the best way that we can be close to God is to extend that grace and redemption to others.”

The Redemption Project premieres April 28 at 9 p.m. on CNN.

Listen to the podcast to hear Jentezen Franklin talk about the need for prison reform.

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