1. Ray attributes his conviction not just to his racial identity but also to the difficulty of maintaining a proper defense without the money to hire his own attorney or bring in proper experts. At one point he jokes, “What does capital punishment mean? It means a guy without capital gets punished.” In what ways was his legal defense disadvantaged by his family’s poverty? Was poverty or race more of a factor in his conviction? In what ways were the two intertwined?

2. After spending three years in silence and anger, Ray determined to choose a new approach to coping with his circumstances. He wrote: “Despair was a choice. Hatred was a choice. Anger was a choice. I still had my choices … I could choose to give up or to hang on. Hope was a choice. Faith was a choice. And more than anything else, love was a choice. Compassion was a choice.” What do you think drove him to choose compassion and hope over hatred and despair? How did Ray demonstrate love and empathy in his interactions with others on death row?

3. When Ray is permitted to start a book club for death row, the first book the group reads is James Baldwin’s *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. What prompted Ray to select this book? If you were in Ray’s circumstances, what titles would you have recommended for the book club?

4. Chapter 21 begins with a quote from Fyodor Dostoyevsky - “The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons.” In what ways is the prison system in the South a reflection of our region’s past and present? If you had the opportunity to redesign a prison so that it could reflect the values that we aspire to, what would it look like?

5. When Ray finally gets to meet with Bryan Stevenson, he is relieved to have an attorney who seems to care about his story, saying “He didn’t seem in a rush to finish. He didn’t interrupt me. He just listened. It was a powerful thing to be listened to like that.” What lesson can philanthropy take away from his experience, particularly when working with underserved communities?

6. After reading Ray’s story, what possible roles do you see for philanthropy in criminal justice reform? How can foundations use different forms of capital (social, moral, intellectual, reputation, financial) to effect change in criminal justice policy?