

JUST FOR MENTORS

Tips, inspiration and encouragement as you mentor men and women in prison



FEBRUARY 5, 2018

Dear Mentor,

“Please pray for my family.”

Those of you who have been corresponding with students for any length of time have probably seen these words scribbled on a lesson or note from a student. Sometimes, they may not expound on it any further, saying only, “pray for my family.”

Looking back at my own incarceration, I remember writing those words often. It’s possible that some of you prayed for my family years ago.

Most of the time, we do not know the state of a student’s relationship with their family prior to the student’s incarceration. Maybe the family had a strong, healthy bond, or maybe this incarceration caused more damage to already broken, chaotic relationships. We are left to imagine the circumstances of their family life.

But we do know this:

- Caregivers (the other parent, grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc.) of children with parents in prison bear numerous burdens, including shame, lack of resources, stress and depression.
- Visits to prison can be intimidating and demeaning for family members, which sometimes keeps them away. Phone calls can be very expensive.
- The majority of incarcerated fathers and mothers have no visits from their children.
- People returning home from prison who have family support reintegrate into society more successfully than those who do not.

It may be difficult to understand the magnitude of the family strife our students may be experiencing. But the request remains: “Please pray for my family.”

The student may be saying:

Will you pray for the reconciliation of my family?

Will you pray that any damage I have done may be healed?

Will you pray that my family stays in contact with me so I know I am remembered?

Will you pray that my children do well in school and don’t get into trouble?

Will you pray that evil does not enter my family’s household?

Will you pray that my family has a roof over their heads and food on the table?

Will you pray that I find my way so I can return as a better person, able to provide and care for my family?

Even if we don’t know exactly how to pray for our students, we can be assured that God knows what they need. Paul said:

“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God” (Romans 8:26–27).

The next time you see this request from a student, please think about these things as you pray, remembering with confidence that God is present with your students in their pain and has the power to bring redemption to any situation.

Honored to serve alongside you,



Douglas Cupery
Church Mobilization Director

Introducing an Exciting New Curriculum Project

By Dara Nykamp, Curriculum Development Director

I became a Crossroads mentor a couple years ago. I can still remember the first time one of my students genuinely opened up about her faith and about what she was struggling with spiritually. The letter I wrote to her that week was one of the easiest letters I have written as mentor. Because I knew what she was going through, I was able to provide encouragement and Scripture that was specific to her situation.

As curriculum development director, my goal is to create Bible studies that provide more opportunities for moments like that to take place and also maintain focus on theological truth. We are in the midst of a curriculum expansion project that will add new courses designed to do just that.

About 30,000 prisoners start the Crossroads program each year, but a growing number of those students complete only a few lessons and then drop out of the program. While thousands of students complete the *Great Truths of the Bible* course each year, there are many who never make it past lesson 4 of that first course. That is why Tier 1 mentors so frequently receive lessons 1–4 of *Great Truths of the Bible* in their packets. This trend of students abandoning the program has been growing for a number of years. About two years ago, we began to investigate why.

We interviewed current and former students, surveyed those who dropped out of the program and talked with prison staff and experts in the field of prisoner rehabilitation. We were determined to remove any barriers in the way of students pursuing a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ.

We learned three important things:

- First, many students were struggling to pay for postage to return their completed lessons.
- Second, the average prisoner in the United States reads at only a third-grade reading level. Because that is the average, that means many read at an even lower level. Our current lessons range from a fifth-grade reading level to a postgraduate reading level.
- Finally, we learned that many students had never studied the Bible, and the ones who had previously studied the Bible had not read it since they attended Sunday school as children. They did not know the basics of the Bible or how to read it.

These barriers make it difficult for many students to remain involved in our program. Thankfully, due to your generous donations, we have been able to eliminate one barrier by providing postage for students.

But we also need to bridge the gap between our students' reading ability and biblical knowledge and the difficulty of our current materials. **To accomplish this, we are creating courses that will help prepare our students to study the rich theological material that is already part of the Crossroads program.**

Many of our current students are thriving and growing spiritually, and we are working hard to provide additional materials for them as well. Over the next few years, we will add new Tier 2 courses, courses based on topics relevant to those in prison and advanced discipleship opportunities for upper-level students.

In the next three issues of *Just for Mentors*, we will share more information about this new material and how it will impact students and mentors. The next issue, which will be in lesson packets the week of February 19, will discuss the first new course that will launch in April. This will be followed by two more issues in the month of March explaining how the new course will benefit you and your students.

RESOURCE FOR ALL MENTORS

In December, we mailed a book entitled *A Journey Back* to all mentors. It was written by a pastor who found out that his friend was going to prison. The book details their journey, interwoven with relevant biblical teachings. Let us know what you think! If you didn't receive a copy of this book, contact us at mentor@cpministries.org.



Dara Nykamp is the curriculum development director at Crossroads, possessing several years of Bible curriculum writing experience. She has master's degrees from Wayne State Law School and Western Theological Seminary. She has worked as an assistant prosecutor, has assisted in teaching Hebrew and is a writer by trade.

You can contact Dara with questions about the new curriculum at dnykamp@cpministries.org.