

JUST FOR MENTORS

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



FEBRUARY 19, 2018

Dear Mentor,

There is a phrase I have often heard, and that I often use myself, that describes a principle of outreach ministry: "We have to meet them where they are."

This principle is found in the Bible in the words of the apostle Paul. He wrote to the church in Corinth, "I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings" (1 Corinthians 9:22–23).

To me, this principle means that we ought to be sensitive to others' backgrounds, circumstances and needs in order to find common ground. This is important as we endeavor to build trust with our students so they truly believe the encouraging words that we write to them in our letters.

Here are some things to consider as you write to your students:

- Have empathy. Affirm that you read what they have written without judgment and offer reflections from your own life.
- Though people in prison, on average, read at a third-grade level, this by no means reflects intelligence. As a whole, they are smart, insightful, creative and resourceful. When you write to your student, write clearly and simply, but don't be condescending.
- The reason many prisoners read at a lower reading level is due to the lack of opportunities given to them as they grew up. Fatherlessness, generational poverty and a lack of advocates and positive influences are common experiences of those in prison.
- Remind your students that their past does not need to define their future. Their identity is not in their crime, but in Christ. Another way to encourage students is to remind them that where they live does not define who they are. If you can, share a relevant story from your own life.

A story I often share is my experience of being released from prison. After I was released, life was very difficult. Some days, my spirit was low, and I did not feel good about myself or the damage I had caused. Some days, I felt like I had a target on my back.

When I was feeling upset about my past, my friend, Pastor Ren, would stop me, look me in the eye and say, "That was the old Doug. You are not that man anymore." It took a while for this truth to take root in my heart. But what a privilege it is for me to be able to share those same words with the men and women I encounter who are struggling with their identity.

At Crossroads, we put prisoners first in all that we do. Together, we are working to eliminate the obstacles that prevent people in prison from learning who they are in Christ and what that means for their life.

Over the next few months, we will continue to invite you to find ways to meet students where they are on their life journey. When we journey together, we can all "run in such a way as to get the prize" (1 Corinthians 9:24). Winning the race takes preparation, adaptation and effort. We want to help and equip our students to run the race and win the prize!

Honored to serve alongside you,



Douglas Cupery
Church Mobilization Director

Introducing Our Newest Course

By Dara Nykamp, Curriculum Development Director

I recently spent an evening at the West Shoreline Correctional Facility in Muskegon, Michigan, facilitating a small group study session. The members of the small group were men who wanted to make a change in their lives and discover the underlying reasons that they ended up in prison. Most of them had been transferred to West Shoreline within the past nine months—one had only been there for two weeks.

Unlike most of our sessions, this one took place amid massive uncertainty. The facility is closing. Each of the men might wake up tomorrow to an empty duffel bag on the end of their bunk, meaning they will be forced to pack their few belongings and leave behind friendships they have created, jobs they have earned and the support group they have found within the chapel programs.

But they still clung to hope. They still wanted to continue discussing the difficult subject of figuring out how they got there and how to avoid coming back.

We talked about the choices that each of us had made—the ones that brought us to the group and the ones that brought us to West Shoreline. As the group facilitator, I was there because I know the honesty with which people speak when they are willing to admit that they do not have the answers. I was also there because I know that the Holy Spirit is working powerfully in these guys, and I have seen 2 Corinthians 5:17 come alive in front of my eyes during their conversations:

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”

I also facilitate these sessions so that I can remind myself who we are serving: Jesus Christ and people in prison who are searching for hope and desperately need Christ’s love and the Holy Spirit’s direction to truly transform their lives.

That is why, when we began our curriculum expansion project last year, the first thing we did was meet with people like the guys at West Shoreline. We asked them what questions they had when they first decided to start the Crossroads program. **They shared questions like: “Who am I?” and “Why am I here?” and “Where am I going with my life?”**

Following those discussions, we met with prison ministry leaders, sat down with theologians and Bible study curriculum experts and sought input from our international ministry partners. Together, we created a new course that will be engaging and meaningful for students.

This new introductory course is called *Who Are You?* It consists of three lessons, and it will become the first course in Tier 1. The course focuses on helping students begin to answer the big questions in life from a biblical perspective. It also introduces them to the truth that God loves them and that, if they are following Christ, they can make different choices and experience a brand-new, full life through Him.

In the next two issues of *Just for Mentors*, we will share more information about *Who Are You?* and how it will affect you and your students. The first issue in March will focus on the impact the lessons are having on students in our current pilot program. The second issue in March will address questions you may have as you review the new *Who Are You?* lessons and Roadmaps.



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.