

JUST FOR MENTORS

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



JUNE 2018

Dear Mentor,

Some people have a hard time believing this, but I learned more about God in my prison cell than I have in any church pew. The interactions with men in prison further along in their faith journeys and the compassionate letters I received from people on the outside shaped my understanding of God and how I view the world around me.

I have learned so much about God's love, His grace, His mercy and His desire for us to share the same with others.

Sitting on my prison bunk surrounded by constant chaos was extremely difficult. Yet I learned, through the many letters from mentors that arrived at mail call, that "we love because [God] first loved us" (1 John 4:19). These letters contained kind, encouraging words that showed no judgment. They included the writers' own struggles and how they were working to overcome them, which helped me learn to pray for my mentors. I was being shown love, grace, mercy and compassion and, more importantly, the source of those beautiful things. As I received this love, it poured out from my heart into other people's lives.

As you write letters to your students this month, I encourage you to extend to them love, grace and mercy, believing that your students will "pay it forward" to those around them.

- **Love them:** Help them understand that they are truly loved by God. No matter what happened in their past or what current uncertainties surround them, God loves them with all His heart. Let them know they are a child of the King! Share a story or two about times when you had trouble believing this and how God opened your eyes to see His love. Let your student know how that experience changed you.
- **Show them grace:** Even though they may not openly share this, many prisoners struggle with guilt and shame and may spend long, painful hours thinking about what could have been. Be encouraging by telling them that our pasts do not need to define who we are or where we are going. Encourage them that we can grow in our understanding of grace by pouring it out on others—simply by sharing kindness, saying "thank you," taking interest in others, saying "I'm sorry" and offering forgiveness.
- **Point them to mercy:** A simple but powerful act of mercy is to pray for someone. Try writing out a prayer for your student in your next letter. Tell them you are committing to pray for them every day for the next week. Then encourage your student to go and do the same. Urge your student to pray for someone who is different or difficult to get along with. This can take courage, but it can be powerful and bring healing.

Continue in your good works . . . with love, grace and mercy!

Honored to serve alongside you,



Douglas Cupery
Church Mobilization Director

Have a question? You can contact the mentor support team at mentor@cpministries.org or 800-668-2450.

You have a story to share

By Dara Nykamp

In the last issue of *Just for Mentors*, we asked you to share stories from your experience as a Crossroads mentor that we can then share to recruit new mentors. As I read the request again, I realized something. As a relatively new mentor, I was not sure if I had stories to share. I mean, I have been a mentor for just over two years.

And, if I did have stories, which ones should I choose? Stories of letters in which my student stumbled across faith for the first time? Stories of lessons that made me laugh or cry because of what my student wrote? Or maybe, more importantly, stories about how serving through Crossroads has pushed me to change the way I read news stories and think about what it means to be incarcerated for life?

The answer is that any of these stories have the possibility of touching someone else's heart. They can open the door for a friend to become a new mentor because I told them what it has meant to me.

A story can be just a few words: "I began seeing prisoners as my brothers and sisters in Christ." A story can also span a lifetime, as is the case with some of our mentors, who have built friendships with students, learning from them and growing with them for almost two decades.

Sharing your story can be recounting that moment when a student wrote, "You are the only person who writes to me" and told you what that meant to them. It can also mean looking back at how scared or uncertain you were when you started mentoring or what it meant for you to write your first letter. It might be sharing how you learned to love and have compassion for people who are completely different from you.

We would love to hear your stories and share them with potential new mentors as we begin recruiting this fall! You would be amazed at the impact your stories have!

If you have a story you'd like to share, please email Aaron at amueller@cpministries.org.

Remember:

Personalizing your letters has a significant impact on students. We are not suggesting you share your last name or where you work or where you live (please avoid specifics like that). But you can tell your students things like:

- What is your first name? What type of work do you do? What are your hobbies?
- What has God been doing in your life recently?
- What did you do this past week?

You can tell your student you read a great book last week, spent time with your grandchildren, work in manufacturing or ran a 5-kilometer race in 22 minutes (just don't specify which race). Then sign your letter with your first name. Give them a glimpse of who you are.