

# JUST FOR MENTORS

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



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Dear Mentor,

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, **I was in prison and you came to visit me**” (Matthew 25:35–36).

Not long ago, I was sitting in a prison lobby, waiting to go inside. My mind drifted to this passage of Scripture, and I thought about being proximate to prisoners and to Jesus. I leaned over to my friend and said, “Hey Ted, do you ever meet Jesus when you visit people in prison?”

Without hesitation, he said, “All the time.”

I just used a word that isn’t too commonly used today. Proximate. The word means “very near.” When I use the word “proximate,” I am talking about a type of nearness that’s more than just being there physically. This type of nearness means being there with your whole self; being fully present.

God calls us to be fully present—or proximate—to the hurting, the marginalized, the forgotten. And He promises us that when we are near to these people, we meet Him too. In the eyes of the brokenhearted, in the stories of the suffering, in the shaking voices of the forgotten, we meet Jesus in a very real way.

So when I go into prisons, I go with the knowledge that I am not bringing Jesus to prisoners; Jesus is already there. And when we as Crossroads mentors “visit” prisoners through lessons and letters, Jesus is already there.

That is why I carefully read every word when I am corresponding with men and women in prison. I know I need to be proximate because Jesus is there and I want to partner with Him in our students’ journeys.

It may be hard at times for our students to stay mindful of the fact that Jesus is in their midst. Prison is a difficult place to concentrate, especially on positive thoughts. Days are long and lonely and tend to run together for years at a time. With this in mind, here are some tips to consider when writing letters to your students:

- Share the Matthew 25 passage and what it means to you when you “visit” them in your correspondence.
- Challenge them to look for at least one way they see God’s presence in their lives each day. For example, it may be in a conversation, something that has happened in their family, getting a good night’s sleep or experiencing an increased sense of feeling closer to God.
- Share ways that you have experienced God’s nearness in the past week.

I am grateful for the work you do in helping men and women in prison become aware of God’s presence and direction in their lives.

Serving alongside you,



Douglas Cupery  
Church Mobilization Director

Have a question? You can contact the mentor support team at [mentor@cpministries.org](mailto:mentor@cpministries.org) or 800-668-2450.

# Behind the Scenes at Crossroads Kenya

By Laura DeGroot

*A team from Crossroads USA recently traveled to Africa to visit Crossroads Kenya. Writer and speaker Laura DeGroot tagged along and captured what they saw and experienced. Here is an excerpt from one of her blog posts. You can read details of the entire trip at [cpministries.org/resources/imagine-kenya](http://cpministries.org/resources/imagine-kenya).*

This is going to be kind of raw and unpolished, but it truly is hard to capture what I've been experiencing in a polished and succinct way. It's hard to put into words what it was like to enter a Kenyan prison.

It's overwhelming. It's profound. To the point that I am struggling to capture words.

It was simple and rich and stimulating as we interacted with those who run the prisons and prayed for them in their office before we entered the prison. We met officers who are smart and serious and human and kind.

My first day ever in a prison was in Naivasha Prison. It is a maximum security facility. I first met guards, then the officer in charge (OIC)—the man who runs the prison.

Jefferson Gathu, the director of Crossroads Kenya, explained to the officials who we were and why we were there. We were offered the use of the officers' bathroom. That's a privilege, I'm told.

Eventually, we headed to the chapel area, where we entered a space in which loud singing had been going on for a while. A worship team of five brothers was expressively leading the room in praising God.

## **"O sifuni Mungu!" ("Praise the Lord!")**

A young man was playing the keyboard and two others ran a sound board. We were led to chairs behind the leaders and we stood and clapped and sang along when we heard English words among those sung in Swahili.

I felt at home. I was comfortable there. It was pretty similar to my lifetime of going to church with people I know and don't know; people who believe and don't believe in Jesus; people who are searching and people who are madly in love with God; people who lead and people who listen; people who smile and engage in worship and people who don't; people who are there for duty and people who are there for hope.

**Our entire team would later describe this prison worship experience to one another as intense. The prayers were intense. The preaching was intense, zealous.**

JR DeGroot, vice president of operations & finance at Crossroads (and my husband), opened his time in front of the men with these words: "Good morning, church!"

I was so filled with joy that I was holding back tears. This was exactly how JR greeted the congregation when we led worship all those years ago at a church in Colorado.

Then he brought all he had with passion and focus. JR preached about King David's moments of victory and great leadership, but also about his moments of great sin. He raised his voice when he pointed to God's purpose and work in His people—how He uses every life circumstance for His Kingdom and His glory.

We finished with prayer and a graduation ceremony, presenting a certificate to each man who had finished a Crossroads Bible study series. We took their photo, and each of us who had come from the outside shook their hands, looked into their eyes and congratulated them.

What is overwhelming and profound is not reading or agreeing with the phrase "Christ is everywhere." What is overwhelming and profound is *seeing* Christ everywhere . . . in people I've never met or thought about, in places I've never been nor imagined I would ever go, surrounded by harsh reality.

Good morning, church! Wherever you meet, Christ is there.