

JUST FOR MENTORS

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



AUGUST 2019

Dear Mentor,

It is not unusual for me to hear mentors question whether they are making an impact on their Tier 1 students. They only get to write them one letter, after all. But I also hear from Tier 2 and Tier 3 mentors who haven't received anything from their students in a while and are becoming discouraged. They wonder, "Are my students making any spiritual progress at all?"

I have had the same doubts and questions over the years I have been doing prison ministry. But recently, I was reminded that, whether it feels like it or not, our work matters deeply. This reminder came from my friend Jamie.

Jamie told me that when he was a child, he was often told that he was "stupid" or "slow," so he believed that he would never do well in school. In the neighborhood where he grew up, no one even considered going to college, so it was the last thing on Jamie's mind.

"I wouldn't have even known how to go about getting into college," he told me, shaking his head.

Jamie followed the same path of many of his peers, ending up in prison as a teenager. He was bitter, angry and lost, and he had no family support. He was a broken young man with seemingly no hope for the future.

I first met Jamie eight years ago during this time of anger and had the opportunity to be a part of his life for a season. Jamie didn't recognize it at the time, but the people who were present with him were tangibly showing him grace and love that would transform his life.

I recently reconnected with Jamie at the Calvin College Prison Initiative's graduation ceremony for incarcerated college students. Jamie is now enrolled in the college, pursuing a degree in ministry leadership, and he is doing incredibly well in his studies.

He attributes this to the many men and women who have visited him in prison, treating him with dignity, respect, honor and love. Each person who has visited him, whether it was one short visit or regular visits over the course of years, has profoundly impacted his life. Each interaction, each word of encouragement, each act of mercy began to lay a foundation for transformation.

Over time, Jamie began to see his own value. He discovered his God-given gifts and talents. After enrolling in the Calvin College program, he was surprised to discover that he was actually pretty smart. And the encouragement and love from those who visited him eventually led him to step foot in a place he never thought he would go: church.

Although the prison gates have not yet opened for him, something greater than that has happened—God has transformed Jamie to be a leader who helps others discover fullness of life in Jesus behind prison walls.

My response is always the same for those of you who wonder if you have made a difference in a student's life: continue to be faithful, available and present for those God has placed in your life and trust Him to do the rest. Jamie's life is just one example of what that can look like. Many people poured Christ's love into him over a long period of time. Although they may not have seen many changes in Jamie at the time, their love and encouragement helped shape him into the faithful leader he is today.

"Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'"

– Isaiah 6:8

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Here is a tip for you as you write to your students this month:

Encourage your student to pray for an opportunity to be available to someone in need so they can offer just the right words or action the person needs at that moment. Then encourage them to watch for that opportunity and act on it!

Our students can minister to others in places where most of us cannot go, and the Holy Spirit can help us give them the courage they need to be who God has called them to be—one note, letter or word of encouragement at a time.

Serving alongside you,



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Douglas Cupery".

Douglas Cupery
Church Mobilization Director

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

NEWS & NOTES FOR MENTORS

Want to share Crossroads at your church? We can help! We can send you promotional items, including brochures, flyers, prospective mentor information packs, notepads, pens and videos, to help you tell the Crossroads story to your congregation. Please contact Joni at jjessup@cpministries.org if you are interested in promoting Crossroads.

A note about Lesson 3 of *Great Truths of the Bible*: Lesson 3 of *Great Truths of the Bible* ends on a rather heavy note about sin and judgment, without presenting the hope of grace and forgiveness (students read about that hope in subsequent lessons in the course). We will address this issue when we do the next revision of *Great Truths of the Bible*, but in the meantime, we are asking mentors to be aware of this and to focus on God's love and grace in their comments and letters to students when reviewing Lesson 3.

Reminder about ink colors: Please remember to use only blue or black ink pens when commenting on lessons and writing letters to students. If you use other colors, certain prison facilities may reject the lesson.

Did you know? You can continue mentoring Tier 2 students who continue their studies in Tier 3! We no longer require mentors to have a college degree to serve as a Tier 3 mentor; the only requirement is a commitment to guiding your student through the more challenging college-level course material. The Tier 3 materials will require you to spend more time reading and writing as you review lessons, but mentors and students alike have told us that they appreciate the opportunity to continue studying God's Word together. If you are currently mentoring a student who is nearing the end of their Tier 2 studies, we will contact you about this opportunity.