

JUST FOR MENTORS

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



NOVEMBER 2019

Dear Mentor,

I was about to approach the podium at a multidenominational church conference to introduce Crossroads Prison Ministries. This was the first day of a weeklong opportunity to share our mission with this group of people.

I had been debating whether to share the way I first became connected to Crossroads, which can leave me feeling vulnerable. I didn't know any of these people. I didn't know how they would react to my story. As I scanned the rows of unfamiliar faces, I turned to the lead teaching pastor and asked him:

“Can I trust this group?”

I'm guessing you've interacted with some students who seem hesitant to trust you or share openly. For people in prison, developing trust with others can be a major obstacle to their ability to move forward. They may be behind bars because they broke the trust of their family, friends or community and are still wrestling with the damage they have caused. They may still carry wounds from having their trust broken as a child. Shame and judgment from society and the Church may have caused them to build walls around their hearts.

During my incarceration and after my release, expressions of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, as Paul discussed in Colossians 3:12, drew me into a community of believers. Being welcomed into this Christ-centered community that we call the Church transformed my life. Yet, even after all these years, I still find myself hesitant to share parts of my story with fellow believers.

This might help you understand why some of your students don't share their emotions and struggles with you. They may not be ready to trust anyone with their story.

Here are a couple of tips for connecting and building trust with your students:

- Share openly about your struggles and failures. This can help create a safe space for your student to reciprocate by sharing parts of their story with you or with their next mentor.
- Avoid making judgmental comments about things your students choose to share with you. If a student shares details about their crime or sins, remember that it is not our job to judge them; remind them of the forgiveness and grace that Jesus offers. If they are struggling with doubts, don't respond dismissively; instead, encourage them that it's okay to doubt and invite them to wrestle through those doubts with God. A posture of humility, love and grace is essential for building trust with students.

The pastor at the conference told me I could trust the group in front of me. Although I still felt a bit uneasy, I decided to share my story—and I was so blessed. As the week continued, others, sometimes

(Continued on back page)

in tears, quietly shared raw and painful pieces of their lives with me. We had rich, deep conversations that wouldn't have happened if I hadn't risked trusting others with vulnerable parts of my past.

Building trust is never easy. But is it not up to us as the Church to be an example and show others how?

Serving alongside you,



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Douglas Cupery". The signature is fluid and cursive.

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

No lessons during week of Thanksgiving: Please note that during the week of Thanksgiving (November 24–30), we will not mail any lessons from our office.

Policy reminders: Please remember to use only blue or black ink pens when commenting on lessons and writing letters to students. Please do not use highlighters of any color. Please do not include any additional materials (tracts, bookmarks, stamps, etc.) when sending a lesson and letter back to a student. **Correctional facilities may reject lessons if they do not follow these regulations.**

Mission support volunteers needed in home office: We have an urgent need for mission support volunteers to fill key roles in our home office. We are looking for team members with any of the following: data entry skills, customer service experience, facility maintenance and custodial experience or a creative eye for artwork and poetry. If you or someone you know lives in the Grand Rapids area and is interested, please contact Joni at jjessup@cpministries.org or 616-208-1480.

Change to Christmas card program: If you have been a mentor for a while, you are probably familiar with our annual Christmas card program. In the past, mentors have purchased, personalized and mailed Christmas cards to the Crossroads office, which we then forwarded to all our students. In recent years, due to restrictions in numerous facilities, many of these cards have been returned to our office. This year, we have created our own Crossroads Christmas cards that fit within the policies of all facilities, which we will send to our students to ensure that each student receives one. How can you help? You can make a donation to help cover the cost of printing and mailing the cards. Go to cpministries.org/donate to give!

Want to share the story of Crossroads with your church? We can provide resources to help you tell the Crossroads story to your congregation, including brochures, flyers, prospective mentor information packs, notepads, pens and videos. Staff members may be available to speak to your congregation, although we are not able to visit every church that inquires. Please contact Joni at jjessup@cpministries.org if you are interested in promoting Crossroads.