

JUST FOR MENTORS

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



JANUARY 2020

Dear Mentor,

The word “prisoner” tends to bring a certain image to people’s minds. This image is often shaped by news stories, TV shows and movies. The image is also rooted in the fact that crime causes fear and brokenness in our communities.

But you, as a Crossroads mentor, see men and women in prison as more than their crime. You know that they are more than the worst decision they have made. You view them as people no different from yourself, created in the image of God and bursting with potential to bless our world. You take seriously the biblical mandate to care for men and women in prison.

Hebrews 13:3 says, *“Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.”*

“Remembering” is so much more than just thinking about someone in prison. As a mentor, you know this. You have stepped into the lives of people in prison—even though it can sometimes get messy.

Through your consistent presence, you are sharing:

- Support, guidance and love
- Truth found in Scripture
- Your own need for grace and salvation, which helps build trust and break down walls
- Stories of how God has transformed you, giving them hope that their lives can be changed too
- An example of living out Scripture by showing up in prison, a place where few people go

But one of the most powerful things you can offer in your letters to students is encouragement. In a place like prison, where people are constantly being torn down, uplifting words are deeply meaningful.

The words that you share offer sweetness in a bitter world.

Proverbs 16:24 says it this way: *“Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.”*

As I read this proverb, I can visualize the honey dripping off the comb and the bees buzzing around. I love the smell of honey. It is comfort food—sweet and delicious. This proverb paints a wonderful image of what encouraging words can do. They comfort our souls and infuse life into our bones.

My letter writing tip for this month is simple:

Our students long to taste sweet words of encouragement, so go out of your way to tell them why you appreciate them in every letter. Maybe you appreciate their honesty or a story they shared. Maybe you admire their insight into Scripture or a character trait you see in them.

If they are going through a dark, difficult time, you can remind them that, even though they may not always see Him, God is always present and at work in their life. Consider sharing this verse as a reminder of God’s

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nearness in all circumstances: “The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged” (Deuteronomy 31:8).

And remember, your words are a honeycomb to your student’s soul.

Serving alongside you,



Douglas Cupery
Church Mobilization Director

SAVE THE DATE!

Crossroads will hold a volunteer conference and appreciation luncheon in Grand Rapids, MI, on Saturday, April 25, 2020. Prison ministry leaders will speak and lead workshops. All mentors are invited! More details to come soon.

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

Difficult Questions: Students Exhibiting Sarcasm or Making Flippant Comments

By Dara Nykamp, Director of Curriculum Development

Have you ever gotten a lesson from a student who wrote something like, “That’s a stupid question”? Have you gotten a lesson from a student whose answers were cocky or flippant or who seemed to treat the lesson like a joke?

When you encounter something like this, it may be due to the student’s old coping mechanisms coming to the surface. We don’t want to make excuses for this type of behavior, but we know there is usually a reason behind the reaction. They might be responding this way because they are:

- Embarrassed about their ability to read, write or spell
- Unable to understand the lesson content and turning to sarcasm or anger as a deflection tactic
- Dealing with low self-esteem but trying to look intelligent despite being unable to complete the lesson
- Unsure how to approach writing an essay that requires reflection or analysis
- Struggling with mental health challenges, which affect a growing percentage of people in prison and are often left undiagnosed or untreated

To counter outbursts like this, offer your understanding of the answers. Try not to respond to their sarcasm. Focus on gently sharing the correct information if the student did not answer the question. If the student only wrote a terse answer, use phrases like: “Have you thought about . . .” or “This is how I understand it . . .” to help them think through the answer. Then challenge them, with grace, to complete the next lesson in full.

We want to meet students where they are and help them find the confidence they need to move forward on their spiritual journey. Above all, encourage the student to keep reading and studying the Word. There is a reason he or she picked up that lesson, and with some prayer and time, God might just use it (and you!) to plant the seeds of faith in their heart.

Did you know? Crossroads has a Spanish mentorship program too! We are excited to announce that our online mentor portal is now available in both English and Spanish—you may have already noticed the button at the top of the page that allows each mentor to select their preferred language. Do you know someone who would like to serve as a mentor for our Spanish-speaking students? Please have them contact us at spanish@cpministries.org.