

JUST FOR MENTORS

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



SEPTEMBER 2020

Dear Mentor,

Throughout the years I have spent in prison ministry and reentry ministry, I have heard this statement more times than I can count:

“I am innocent of the crimes I am here for!”

I get really uncomfortable when I hear this, and it’s hard to know how to respond. Our society incarcerates people for a reason. They have been convicted of a crime that hurt individuals and the community, often very seriously. I also know that many men and women in prison have developed ways of survival that include lying and manipulation. In saying this, I believe I am not being judgmental but forthright.

But then I ask myself: *Could they be telling the truth? What if they are completely innocent?*

Research has shown that 3 to 5 percent of people incarcerated for capital crimes, such as murder and rape, have received wrongful convictions. At first glance, this error rate may seem trivial, but when we consider the fact that 2.2 million men and women are incarcerated in the United States, this error rate becomes very significant. Using the 3 percent figure, that means 66,000 innocent men and women are locked up right now. To make it more personal to our ministry: if we use the 3 percent figure, that means Crossroads mentors interact with a total of 75 innocent individuals in a typical week.

These numbers are alarming! Each one of these innocent people in prison is created in the image of God. Each one has been separated from their family. Each one has been cut off from their hopes and dreams.

So how do we, as Crossroads mentors, respond to students who say they are innocent?

Here are a few tips for writing to a student who claims to be wrongfully convicted:

- Assume the best about your student. Don’t assume they are lying about being innocent, and certainly never tell them that you don’t believe them. Matthew 7:1 implores us not to judge others. There is no quicker way to lose a student’s trust than to judge them harshly or assume the worst about them.
- After praying over your student’s words, express your gratitude that they were willing to share their story with you. Pray that God will lead them to the resources they need to support them in their fight for justice. You can also pray a prayer of blessing over them. “May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord show you his kindness and have mercy on you. May the Lord watch over you and give you peace” (Numbers 6:24–26, NCV).
- Encourage them to remain hopeful rather than growing angry or bitter during their incarceration. Encourage them to stay grounded in Scripture and to surround themselves with positive, peace-making Christians as much as possible. “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice” (Ephesians 4:31, NIV).

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I confess that, when I hear claims of innocence from people who are incarcerated, I am often too quick to doubt them and cast judgment, despite my deep conviction that one innocent incarcerated person is too many.

Through God's grace, I am still working on this. Will you work on it along with me?

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

Mentor Gatherings: The monthly virtual mentor gatherings have been a wonderful opportunity to learn, ask questions, share stories and come together as mentors across the country. This month, we will present a letter writing workshop. Please join us!

Tuesday, September 15, at 8:00 p.m. (EST)

Wednesday, September 16, at 3:00 p.m. (EST)

We will send a reminder email in advance with the Zoom link.

International Prayer Gathering: You are invited to attend a virtual prayer gathering with our international extension center leaders on Thursday, October 22, at 5:00 p.m. (EST). If you have joined us for any of our previous international prayer gatherings, you know they are very moving and powerful. We will send the Zoom link when the date gets closer. We hope to see you there!

Time Off Reminder: Please give **at least one week's notice** when submitting dates that you need to take time off from reviewing lessons. If we do not receive proper notice, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to process your submission before a lesson is mailed to you.