

JUST FOR MENTORS

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



DECEMBER 2020

Dear Mentor,

During the Christmas season, what do you say to someone who is in prison? Is it okay to say “Merry Christmas” to someone who is lonely and hurting? Can you say “Happy holidays” to someone who doesn’t have many reasons to be happy?

Our students experience the Christmas season much differently than we do. For our students, there will be no family gatherings around the fireplace. Though your student may be a father, mother or grandparent, they will not wake up on Christmas morning to children laughing and presents under the tree. The joy of opening gifts with the sweet smell of cinnamon rolls in the air will not be their reality.

Prison is a tough environment at any time, but it takes a darker and more somber tone during Christmastime, as people are left with their thoughts of what could have been. Shame, guilt and longing in the hearts of people in prison deepen the awareness that they have been cast aside to the margins of society. It’s all so overwhelming.

Although it has been years since my release from prison, I am still flooded with memories during the Christmas season. I begin to feel the grief and guilt afresh. But when I focus too much on the hurt and pain I caused others and the shame I felt, it’s easy for me to miss the true meaning of Christmas.

You may feel uncomfortable or guilty if you say “Merry Christmas” to your students. But I want to remind you what we mean when we say “Merry Christmas.” When we extend this holiday greeting, we aren’t just conjuring up Christmas cheer; we are celebrating the coming of Jesus.

Jesus, God in the flesh, came to us amid all the darkness and brokenness of our world. He grew in the womb of an unmarried teenager on the margins of society and was born in a stable surrounded by smelly animals. During His ministry, He spent time with lepers, tax collectors and other outcasts, and in the end, He was rejected by society, falsely convicted by the state and given the death penalty. Therefore, Jesus knows the pains of the hungry, the orphan, the widow and the prisoner, and He cares deeply about them (Matthew 25:34–46).

In this Christmas season and beyond, as you think about the way you interact with your students, reflect on how you might bring the light of Christ to their dark environment (Matthew 5:14–16). Even if your students don’t express deep emotion, tell them that you see their pain, guilt and longing. Remind them that the message of Christmas is that Jesus loves us all so much that He came into our darkness with His light (John 1:4–5). Tell your students that you care for them and are praying for them.

To close your letters, consider sharing a Christmas blessing like the one I am saying over you:

“I give thanks for you, God’s beloved child, created in His image. May you freely receive the gift of Immanuel—God with us—and the joy that comes with His incarnation. May you be confident in the truth you share, the God you serve and the hope you carry and offer to others. May you have a sense of God’s

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presence as you travel through each day, knowing that He loves you and cares for you and that He will always be the light in our darkness.”

Is it okay to say “Merry Christmas” to those hurting in prison? Yes, it is. But I hope you won’t leave it at that.

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

Reporting students’ progress: When you report a student’s progress, you are not only sharing with us how your student is doing; you are also confirming that you have reviewed the lesson and returned it to your student. If you fall behind on your reports, our mentor support team may contact you to ensure that your students are receiving their reviewed lessons in a timely manner. We encourage you to submit a progress report as soon as you have finished reviewing a lesson.

Mentor community gatherings:

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

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

URL: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84182956475?pwd=QWs1OGIYZTZlejVOSkcyOEc5NW9SUT09>

Meeting ID: 841 8295 6475

Passcode: 329410

Tier 2 course offerings: Did you know that we offer two different study tracks for students in Tier 2? Students can choose which set of courses they want to take first when they begin Tier 2.

The life skills track teaches behaviors, attitudes and skills that Christians should practice in their everyday lives. The courses in the track are *All Work Is God’s Work*, *It All Belongs to God** and *All in God’s Family*.

The theology track explores theological ideas and Christian beliefs, teaching students about things like forgiveness, stewardship and what it means to follow Jesus. The courses in the track are *10 Men You Should Know*, *10 Women You Should Know*, *It All Belongs to God** and *Sermon on the Mount*.

* The course *It All Belongs to God* is currently included in both study tracks. If a student finishes their first study track and decides to continue to the second track, they will not need to take that course again.

Facebook contest: Want to win a Crossroads Prison Ministries t-shirt? Check out the Crossroads Facebook page (facebook.com/CrossroadsPrisonMin) and look for the contest post on December 7. “Like” the post, tag a friend in the comments and share the post. You will receive one entry into the contest for each of your interactions with the post. We will announce a winner on December 11!