

# TIERS 2 & 3 MENTORING GUIDE

Fostering one-on-one  
relationships with  
your students



CROSSROADS  
PRISON MINISTRIES



*To be used in conjunction with the mentor handbook*



## Dear Mentor,

As I look back on my life, I am reminded of difference makers who came alongside me to guide, challenge and encourage me. These men and women took time out of their lives to invest in me, changing the course of my life. I struggled with trusting others and sharing my thoughts and feelings. Yet these men and women didn't let those things get in the way—they just continued to show me love and remind me who I really was.

My Tier 2 mentor was one of these people. Throughout our journey together, she built trust by steadfastly visiting me when others couldn't, guiding me through the Crossroads lessons and encouraging me with the letters she wrote. She challenged me as we studied together, and over time, the Bible came alive to me. My mentor helped me understand Scripture and strengthen my relationship with Jesus. She often reminded me that my past needed to stay in the past because I had been set free through Jesus Christ.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

As you begin this journey with your student, no one but the Lord knows where the path may lead. Your only responsibilities as your student's mentor are to be available and faithful—and then let the Holy Spirit take it from there. I pray that both you and your student will be challenged, encouraged and filled with hope.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Douglas Cupery". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Douglas Cupery  
Church Mobilization Director

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**TIER 2:  
LIVING**

## One-on-One Mentoring

The biggest difference between Tier 1 and Tier 2 mentoring is that in Tier 2, a mentor stays with the same student for the length of an entire course or longer. This allows you and your student to build a strong friendship and watch as God works in both of your lives.

In some cases, a student and a mentor will stay together for years, studying all the remaining Bible studies together. Friendships sometimes grow into family-like bonds. Some students say that they think of their mentor as a parent or grandparent.

We have found that it is in one-on-one mentoring relationships where the most profound transformations take place—for both the students and the mentors. One of the relationships in the Bible that most clearly demonstrates this is that of Paul and Timothy.

Through a close friendship, cultivated in part through letter writing, Timothy and Paul became faithful disciples of Jesus and pillars in God’s Kingdom.

In the introduction to his first letter to Timothy, Paul referred to his young disciple as his “true son in the faith.” In Philippians, Paul said he had “no one else like him.” When a student and mentor exchange letters regularly, they develop close, familial friendships over the months and years, just like the one Paul and Timothy shared.

Tier 2 is a long-term commitment, so we ask that you consider it prayerfully before undertaking this journey with a student. When you are ready, please contact the mentor support team at [mentor@cpministries.org](mailto:mentor@cpministries.org) or (800) 668-2450, ext. 4010.

## Asking Good Questions

Throughout His ministry, Jesus asked many questions: “Do you want to get well?” (John 5:6); “What do you want me to do for you?” (Mark 10:36); “Why did you doubt?” (Matthew 14:31); “Why are you so afraid?” (Matthew 8:26); “Who do you say I am?” (Matthew 16:15).

If we want to mentor the way Jesus did, we would do well to model His compassionate curiosity by asking questions that go beyond small talk. You might start with questions about who your student is as a person. What are their hobbies, passions, dreams?

As you get to know your student, you can begin to ask deeper questions about their fears, insecurities and doubts. You might have the opportunity to ask questions that challenge their thinking.

You may be tempted to write your letters as monologues, but we encourage you to turn them into dialogues by asking good questions!

## Mutual Growth

As a Crossroads mentor, it's important not to see yourself as "above" your student. Rather, you should take the posture of simply being *with* your student. In Matthew 25, Jesus doesn't call us to "fix" people in prison but to visit them. You are joining them on a journey as you grow closer to Jesus together.

With this posture of humility and mutuality, you will be free to simply enjoy a new friendship. The pressure is off! You don't need to feel the responsibility to "change" them or teach them everything they need to know about God. But as you enter into a friendship that's centered on Scripture and guided by the Spirit, you will notice God working in both of your lives. As you seek to truly know someone else and allow yourself to be truly known, you and your student will open yourselves to the relational and loving heart of God.

This all sounds great, right? But how do you do that? Mutuality starts with you. Be the first to share details about your life—the good, the bad and the ugly. Share your testimony. Share stories about your family and your job. Share your fears and failures, difficulties and doubts. Share what makes you tick—your passions, dreams and curiosities. Share the things that drive you nuts and the things that make you come alive.

When you show vulnerability, you provide an example for your student to do the same. Although it may take time to gain their trust, it is when they express what's on their heart that you might learn and grow the most.

## Visiting Jesus

Many mentors say that reading letters from people in prison brings them closer to God. Reading stories of God at work in prison is encouraging and inspiring. And those who have eyes to see and ears to hear are invited into something even greater: meeting Jesus Himself.

"Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me," Jesus declared (Matthew 25:40). One of the examples He gave was visiting those in prison. When you "visit" people in prison through your letters, you are meeting with Jesus.

By spending time with men and women in prison, you are in the presence of people Jesus loved spending time with. Maybe Jesus enjoyed the company of people on the margins because they were the only ones who were truly honest with Him. They were open about their brokenness, and that allowed Jesus to provide healing.

People in prison are often refreshingly honest about the ugly parts of their lives. They've experienced enough pain and failure that they no longer feel the need to hide from it. The gift of visiting those on the margins is learning how to be honest about our fears, shortcomings and sins. It's only in this posture of humility and honesty that we can fully receive the presence, love and healing of Jesus.

## Writing between Lessons

If you haven't heard from your Tier 2 student in six weeks, we encourage you to check in with them by sending a card or a letter. Discouragement, depression or apathy can attack even the most faithful students in a dark prison environment. Your letter can call them back into relationship and back into Scripture. You can also bless your student by sending letters or cards on holidays and their birthday. (Be sure to check your mentor portal account to verify facility restrictions before sending a card).

## Disagreeing Well

As you exchange letters, your student might bring up political or theological opinions with which you disagree. Since you can have conversations with students in Tier 2, it's OK to discuss these topics as long as mutual honor and respect are maintained.

When it comes to politics, seek understanding of their position. You can choose to share your opinion respectfully. Please *never* suggest to a student that they cannot be a Christian because they hold a particular political opinion.

If you choose to discuss areas in which you disagree, treat your student with respect and kindness and seek common ground.

If you would rather avoid political talk altogether, that is fine too. It's best to keep your conversations centered on Scripture and how you see God at work in each other's lives.

## Tough Questions

As you interact with your Tier 2 student, you will probably encounter some tough questions. Whether it's a deep theological question, a moral dilemma or an indication of depression or trauma, you might feel unprepared to respond.

We encourage you to seek counsel from your pastor or a spiritual leader in your life. If they are unable to help you, don't hesitate to reach out to our mentor support team at [mentor@cpministries.org](mailto:mentor@cpministries.org).

Most importantly, remember that it's not your responsibility to have an answer to every question. Your role is to be *with* your student and *for* your student, no matter what they are going through.





**TIER 3:  
LEADING**

## What Is Tier 3?

God calls us to ministry wherever we are. That is true inside and outside prison. Tier 3 provides students with in-depth theological study materials and tools to help them become spiritual leaders in their communities. Tier 3 courses are seminary-level discussions of ethics, hermeneutics (how to interpret the Bible) and systematic theology.

Students who complete and excel in Tier 2 are invited to participate in Tier 3 of the mentorship program.

Mentors are invited to apply for Tier 3 after having reviewed at least four Tier 1 lessons. While there are no specific education or training requirements to become a Tier 3 mentor, we recommend previewing some of the lessons on our website ([cpministries.org/mentorship-program/leading](http://cpministries.org/mentorship-program/leading)) to help you make your decision. Tier 3 is a long-term commitment, so we ask that you consider it prayerfully before undertaking this journey with a student. If you would like to apply, please contact the mentor support team at [mentor@cpministries.org](mailto:mentor@cpministries.org) or (800) 668-2450, ext. 4010.

## How Is It Different?

The lessons are significantly longer than those in previous tiers, include more essay questions and require at least three to five hours of work for a student to complete. Mentors are provided answer keys to help guide and assist students when they do not understand a topic. It takes most mentors one to two hours to review each lesson.

Because of the length and difficulty of the lessons, it generally takes students longer to complete and mail them. Most Tier 3 mentors receive lessons from their students once every six weeks.

## Journeying with a Tier 2 Student into Tier 3

Tier 3 is offered to students upon completion of Tier 2 and by recommendation of their Tier 2 mentor. If a mentor would like to continue in their relationship with their student at this level, the mentor needs to fill out a Tier 3 application to be approved. If a mentor chooses not to continue with their student into Tier 3, the student is paired with a new mentor as they transition into these courses.

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