

# JUST FOR MENTORS

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



NOVEMBER 2021

Dear Mentor,

On a frigid Christmas day in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, I was running on the ice-covered track that circled the prison yard. It was so cold that only a few of us were outside. Icicles formed on my eyebrows and hung from my thin prison-issued hat as I got some much-needed exercise. Running helped me cope with prison life. Exercise was so important for my mental and emotional health that I didn't hesitate to navigate a treacherous run on the ice.

As I rounded the corner of the track, I noticed a perimeter patrol truck circling outside. The driver picked up the microphone of the loudspeaker in the truck and yelled with a laugh:

"Hey, convict!"

It stung then, and I still carry the memory with me all these years later.

Putting labels on individuals or groups of people isn't necessarily a bad thing. For example, *born leader* and *gifted child* are positive, uplifting labels. Other innocuous labels, such as *teenager*, *lawyer* and *mother*, offer factual descriptions of people.

But when we begin placing negative, demeaning labels on others, we can inflict harm. Even if the label seems acceptable to society, it can cause a lifetime of damage to the one receiving the label.

*Loser*, *addict*, *drunk*, *deadbeat dad*, *criminal*, *deviant*, *inmate*, *convict* and *sex offender* are just some of the negative labels placed on our students during their incarceration and after they are released. These labels can become ingrained in their self-perception. The labels heap shame on their souls and destroy their self-worth. You see, these types of labels reduce people to their crimes or the worst moments of their lives. They are dehumanizing and leave no room for the possibility of redemption or restoration. "Once a criminal, always a criminal," the saying goes.

You may have noticed that I avoid using the words "inmate" and "prisoner" and instead use the phrases "people in prison" and "incarcerated individuals." The reason I do this is that it reminds people of their humanity. Where they live or what they've done in the past does not define who they are or who they can become.

As you write to your students this month, consider including phrases within your letters that defy what the world may be telling them. Some suggestions are:

- A salutation of "My brother" or "My sister"
- "Being in prison doesn't define you."
- "You are more than the worst thing you have ever done."
- "You have so much to give to others!"
- "You are more than what the world says you are."

Perhaps the most important label you can give your student is *child of the King*. Consider sharing Paul's words to the church in Rome: "You received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, 'Abba, Father.' For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children" (Romans 8:15–16, NLT).

As if it happened yesterday, I still carry the vivid memory of that mean-spirited label spoken over me on a prison yard decades ago. Sadly, it wasn't the last time someone placed a cruel, hurtful label on me.

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I challenge myself every day not to do that to others—and I offer the same challenge to you.

“Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets” (Matthew 7:12, NLT).

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](mailto:mentor@cpministries.org) or 800-668-2450.

## NEWS & NOTES

### Mentor Community Gatherings

Join us as we gather virtually to equip and empower one another to serve our students well.

This month, by popular demand, we will once again welcome Dawn McCalla! She will lead us in another discussion about trauma and its impact on our students. Dawn holds a master’s degree in social work and has a professional background in addiction and trauma recovery. She co-authored the book *Tapestries: Group Work with Survivors of Sexual Trauma*. She also serves as a Crossroads mentor.

We look forward to seeing you!

Tuesday, November 16, at 8:00 p.m. (EST)

Wednesday, November 17, at 3:00 p.m. (EST)

URL: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84182956475?pwd=QWs1OGlYZTZlejVOSkcyOEc5NW9SUT09>

Meeting ID: 841 8295 6475

Passcode: 329410

### Christmas Cards

Christmas is a challenging time for people in prison, and we want to be sure that all our students receive a Christmas card. As we anticipate celebrating Jesus’ birth, we want to share a few reminders:

**Tier 1 mentors:** Please do not send Christmas cards to your students. The Crossroads office will send cards to all students.

**Tier 2 and Tier 3 mentors:** We encourage you to send an extra card or note during this season. Remember to use the Crossroads PO box as the return address.

### Crossroads Shirts

Crossroads T-shirts and sweatshirts are available to purchase until December 25! To see color and style options and place your order, visit [bonfire.com/crossroads-logo-shirt](http://bonfire.com/crossroads-logo-shirt).