

[INSIDE]
JUNE 2023

THOSE WHO RECEIVE ALSO GIVE

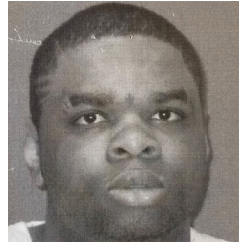
MEET STUDENTS WHO SUPPORT CROSSROADS
FROM THEIR PRISON WAGES AND AFTER RELEASE



STUDENTS WHO GIVE

Students support Crossroads from their meager prison wages

At Crossroads, we believe that every gift offered to our ministry is precious because each dollar makes a measurable impact on the life of someone living behind bars. Still, we regularly receive small gifts that catch our attention. These small gifts often arrive in uneven amounts, like \$5.82 or \$12.58.



RICARDO J.

“Crossroads is the only mail we get in solitary. We need someone outside this cell to help us keep our heads up.”

Why do these gifts stand out to us? Because they were given by current students who are still living behind bars. In 2022, fifty-two active students donated to Crossroads from their prison wages.

The gifts take on additional meaning when we pause to consider the average wage behind bars. On average, prison jobs in the United States top out at fifty cents an hour, and many students and former students tell us that their work behind bars earned them as little as ten cents an hour. People incarcerated in a handful of states are paid nothing. Only the best prison jobs pay a dollar an hour.¹

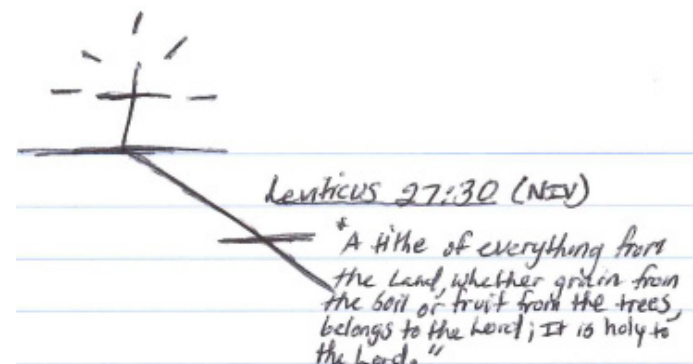
This means that a five-dollar donation from a student meant at least five hours of work—quite possibly many more—to earn the money for the gift. These gifts can be considered a modern version of the parable of the widow’s offering (Mark 12:41–44) when we recognize the sacrifices students made to donate. In the parable of the widow’s offering, Jesus said the meager gift from the impoverished widow was precious in God’s sight because she gave greatly in proportion to the resources she possessed.

Christopher C., a student in California, started doing Crossroads in early 2022 after he was denied parole and the parole board told him to make

more constructive use of his time behind bars. His cellmate recommended Crossroads, so Christopher signed up, he told us in a letter.

“Crossroads means a lot to me, so by me donating, it’s helping Crossroads to continue to put God’s Word out, something we need so desperately, especially in these times we are living in today. So, it’s only right for me to give back,” he wrote. “I took for so long with the lifestyle I chose to live, so now it’s time to give back.”

Christopher added that the changes that started in him through his lessons are a blessing to his mom and aunt in their advanced years.



Joseph E., both a student and a donor, provided this sketch in a recent letter to us, citing Leviticus 27:30: “A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord.”

Dear Crossroads,

God bless you. I am sending you \$30.00 to help with your costs. Thank you for the Bible studies. They have really helped me to learn more about my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and what He wants for me, and from me.

God bless you.

Student Ronald M. sent this note of gratitude with his most recent donation to Crossroads. He is one of fifty-two students who donated to Crossroads last year.

“I’m so grateful that Mom and her older sister, my aunt, are still here to witness this change in me,” he shared. “All they ever wanted was for me to change. God’s Word is all about changes.”

For student Rory T., his gifts to Crossroads are his way to leave a legacy while he serves a life sentence with no chance of parole.

“I can never take back what was done, but I can move forward every day, trying to help others avoid those evils,” Rory wrote. “I may be in prison, yet I am free in Christ. That’s why I also donate. Crossroads has helped me and supported me and others, so I try to help Crossroads also spread the Word.”

Lynese C., a student in Missouri, said she made seventeen dollars a month—eleven cents an hour—through her full-time position as the chaplain’s librarian. She said men and women behind bars face a double bind financially. They

make very little, yet the costs for basic items at the commissary are inflated. For example, she said a bottle of shampoo that costs \$1.99 at Target costs five dollars inside the facility. Incarcerated individuals often do without necessities so they can pay for a phone call or a postage stamp to send a letter home. All the while, child support debts or interest fees pile up for men and women to deal with after their release. They also face restitution charges upon release.

Lynese said she doesn’t know how other students are able to afford donations to Crossroads while behind bars. She became a donor after her release once she began receiving a regular paycheck. She gives despite enormous financial pressures and restitution payments because Crossroads made a world of difference to her.

Story by Anne Hamming
Design and cover illustration by Jose Garza



LYNESE C.

“It says in the Bible that God wants our first and best. God has done so much for me. I asked for Him to put me on a path, and He has. Crossroads was instrumental in helping me get on that path and have a personal relationship with Jesus that I never would have experienced if I hadn’t gone to prison.”

1. Beth Schwartzapfel, “Prison Money Diaries: What People Really Make (and Spend) Behind Bars,” The Marshall Project, August 4, 2022, <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2022/08/04/prison-money-diaries-what-people-really-make-and-spend-behind-bars>.



CROSSROADS INSPIRES FOUNDER OF REENTRY SOCIAL ENTERPRISE IN KENYA

Teresa Njoroge was inspired by the work of Crossroads Prison Ministries in Kenya to found Clean Start after she was released from prison. The social enterprise helps formerly incarcerated women overcome the barriers of poverty and marginalization in Kenya.

Teresa Njoroge was burdened with shame and betrayal when she boarded a bus headed to Langata Women’s Maximum Security Prison in Kenya.

As a woman with no influence or power, she became the scapegoat for a major financial error at the bank where she worked. She and her then-infant daughter would spend the next year behind bars.

“My faith was really shaken,” she shared with us. “I was confused because I knew that God was a God of justice. Knowing that the God I served had parted the Red Sea for the Israelites and done so many amazing things . . . I was certain He would come through for me because He knew I was innocent. . . . Unfortunately, that didn’t happen. . . . I really wrestled with God for about three months.”

Raising her daughter behind bars was incredibly difficult. Teresa told us over Zoom that prisons in Kenya are notoriously underfunded and overcrowded, making essentials and food scarce. With dozens of children incarcerated alongside their mothers at her facility, many women resorted to reusing paper bags fashioned into makeshift diapers.

Throughout her sentence, Teresa listened to the stories of nearly seven hundred women, and she noticed common threads in their stories: many were poor, marginalized, and vulnerable. The more she spoke with other women and learned about the challenges they faced, the more she heard God’s voice and appreciated His love for her.

“I began looking at my life as a blessing,” she said. “I stopped questioning Him and why He brought me there and started thanking Him for the opportunities that had been given to me up to that point.”

Shortly before Teresa entered prison, Crossroads Kenya was established by Jefferson Gathu, who now serves as the regional director of Crossroads Africa.

Though she was unable to participate in the Crossroads studies during her incarceration because she was tasked with taking care of the children, Teresa felt the ripple effects of the developing program and was deeply touched by Jefferson’s kindness. Passionate about supporting the women at Langata, Jefferson sat on the prison discharge board to ensure that anyone graduating from the Crossroads program received the support they needed upon their release.

When Teresa was released, Jefferson extended the same support and encouragement to her. His support became essential when Teresa’s church and community shunned her after her release.

“Jefferson reminded me that I was cared for and thought of when my family and friends turned their backs on me,” she shared. “Jefferson was very different. He didn’t judge me. He kept me in his prayers and kept encouraging me. He always supported and trusted me and continues to do so.”

Inspired by Jefferson’s support and propelled by the need to make a change, Teresa decided she couldn’t turn her back on the women with whom she had served time.

In 2015, Teresa founded Clean Start, a social enterprise established to provide a second chance to women impacted by the criminal justice system in Kenya and throughout Africa. Clean Start equips women in prison with the skills, tools, and support they need to break the cycle of incarceration and poverty. Her work with Clean Start led to an invitation in 2017 to speak at the TEDWomen Conference in New Orleans, LA.

Through her work with Clean Start, Teresa remains an advocate for the Crossroads program.

“No matter how many programs are brought into the prison, if you don’t find your anchor in Christ, it doesn’t matter,” she said. “I think Crossroads is a program that every single person who is in prison should take. Why? It will anchor them to have a foundation and a path of restoration after the program.”

From her experience, Teresa acknowledges that the Church has been slow in taking up prison ministry. She desires to raise awareness of the need to support and empower people impacted by the criminal justice system.

“Everyone is deserving of a second chance, even those who’ve committed a crime. Often, we forget about those reintegrating from prison,” she shared. “So many women recidivate because they didn’t have anyone on the outside.”

Receiving encouragement, support, and prayer in a season of desperation was critical to Teresa’s success.

“I remain forever grateful to Crossroads because of that bridge and initial support,” Teresa told us. “What if hundreds of thousands more people incarcerated around the world knew that someone was praying for them and believed in them? If they knew who they truly are and who Jesus is?”

Story by Paige Deur



Teresa Njoroge’s work to found Clean Start led to an invitation to speak at the TEDWomen Conference in New Orleans, LA, in 2017.

Scan the code to see her talk.



WAYS TO PARTNER WITH CROSSROADS



Share your story
If you or someone you love has been a Crossroads student, we would love to hear your story. Send an email to stories@cpministries.org.



Mentor
Encourage incarcerated men and women while you study God’s Word together.



Host student art
Did you know you can host a Prison Art Project show with as few as four pieces of student art? A student art display is a great way to introduce your congregation to the Crossroads ministry.



Give
Support Crossroads with a financial gift. You can use the attached envelope or visit cpministries.org/donate.



Pray
Lift our volunteers, staff, and students to the Lord in prayer.

“JAIL WAS GOD’S WAY OF SAVING MY LIFE”

Alexis grew up in a Christian home, but at sixteen, she began to rebel.

“I decided to start doing what I wanted. I stopped going to church and started partying,” Alexis recalled.

At twenty-one, she had her first baby with a boyfriend. After she became pregnant again, they decided to get married—“more out of obligation than love,” she noted.

“We attended church, but I was just going through the motions of life. I became a workaholic and put work and drugs before my family,” said Alexis. “My husband verbally, mentally, emotionally, and physically abused me. I chose to walk away because of the toxicity, and I didn’t want our kids thinking it was acceptable. I continued down a bad pathway as a functioning addict.”

Unfortunately, her addiction soon overpowered her, leading to a tragic accident and her subsequent arrest. As she began serving her time, she was filled with regret but also gratitude to God.

“When I hit rock bottom and ended up in jail, it was God’s way of saving my life,” Alexis said. “Had I not ended up in jail, I would be dead from drugs and alcohol. My rock bottom ended with me on my knees in my jail cell, begging God for forgiveness.”



In jail, Alexis’s cellmate introduced her to Crossroads, and she signed up to receive lessons and a Bible. She also decided to get baptized a few months later. However, her addiction was still holding her back.

“I struggled off and on with my addiction while in county jail,” she said. “When I was shipped to prison, it was a wake-up call.”

While serving her time in prison, she got serious about sobriety and her relationship with Jesus.

“The more I look back over my last four and a half years of incarceration, the more God moments I see,” said Alexis. “All I can say is my God is amazing and has saved me from the hell I was living in.”

Reflecting on her time behind bars, she recognizes and appreciates the spiritual support she received from her Crossroads mentors.

“I can’t thank you all at

Crossroads enough for the encouragement and lessons over the last four and a half years,” she said. “I still have that same Bible to this day, and it is well-worn. I’ve gotten some new Bibles [but] still go back to that same Bible y’all sent me. It’s got a lot of meaning to me.”

In October 2022, Alexis was released on parole. She is now readjusting to her new life on the outside, grateful for the second chance God has given her.

“I am thankful to be granted parole and be given the chance to show the change God has made in my life and live the rest of my life living for God and sharing my story with others,” she said.

Do you want to get involved with Crossroads? Sign up to become a mentor. Mentors receive training, guidance, and support from Crossroads staff as they serve their students.

Story by Amy Cain
Illustration by Jose Garza



DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THE CROSSROADS PRISON ART PROJECT?

Every year, hundreds of students send us artwork that they created behind bars. They send their work to us in gratitude to Crossroads for supporting their spiritual transformation. They also gift us with their artwork to help us share the ministry. Students have given us thousands of pieces over the years. Their work is featured on the covers of our lessons, on Crossroads-branded note cards, and in our biannual *Threads* arts journal.

Now that the world is opening back up after the COVID-19 crisis, student art is being featured across the country in gallery shows that allow us to display more than one hundred pieces of student art.

In addition, we have started making the art available for micro-shows. A micro-show is ideal for church foyers or corners of fellowship halls that are only large enough for four to ten pieces of art. These micro-shows empower Crossroads volunteers and supporters with a way to talk to their friends and congregations about the power of prison ministry.

If you are interested in hosting a micro-show in your community, please contact eyeong@cpministries.org.



CROSSROADS LAUNCHES LEGACY SOCIETY

Supporters who have included Crossroads in their wills recently received letters about their induction into the Crossroads Circle of Hope. We launched the Circle of Hope to honor those who have included Crossroads in their estate plans. If you have included Crossroads in your will and you did not receive a letter, please contact Wendy Hammond at (616) 236-1187 to be added. You can also contact Wendy if you would like more information about how to make a legacy gift.

IN MEMORIAM: RAY HUGHES

Our December newsletter featured a story about the deep friendship between long-time mentor Ray Hughes, a retiree from Fort Myers, FL, and his Tier 2 student Mark. We were saddened to learn that Ray passed away just before the story was published.

In an interview in September, Ray told us that he developed an especially profound bond with Mark because of shared struggles that helped them to relate closely with one another. Ray also talked about his extensive experience working with incarcerated individuals through prison ministries.

“I have been mentoring through Crossroads for ten years, and I was also volunteering in the Kairos Prison Ministry that goes into prisons for three to four days where we are right there with the students,” he said. “I have eaten mystery meat. I’ve eaten rusty lettuce. I have sat on the stainless steel toilets with no doors. So I think I have a heart for prison ministry. It was hard when the institution I served was locked down with COVID. With Crossroads, I was able to continue prison ministry. I’m seventy-two years old, and with Crossroads, I don’t have to go out. I don’t have to drive long distances to serve. The lessons come to me.”

He continued, “I have had students in Tier 1, 2, and 3. The Tier 2 and 3 students know as much or more than I do. I even mentored a pastor a few months ago. I love the Tier 1 students. They hold a special place in my heart because they are new Christians. Sometimes, when I read their comments, it rips my heart out. They tell me no one writes to them. They say they can’t forgive, and they can’t be forgiven, yet the Bible says they will [be forgiven]. With the Tier 1 students, I always write a note to thank them for their openness and willingness to learn. I always send them the quote, ‘I don’t know what tomorrow holds, but I know who holds tomorrow.’”

Ray is survived by his wife, Jan, two daughters, and four grandchildren.

We thank Ray for his years of service and his ministry to the Church behind bars.



CROSSROADS
PRISON MINISTRIES

Crossroads connects people in prisons with mentors from churches to develop Christ-centered relationships as they study God's Word together.

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800.668.2450 | cpministries.org

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Stories of Hope
and Transformation



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WAGES, SOME STUDENTS
ARE ALSO CROSSROADS
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STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



“*It touches me that y'all never give up even when I lose faith and fail at times. Mail call will come, and it's my family from Crossroads filling my spirit and picking me up.*”

Brandon F.,
a Crossroads student in Virginia