

# JUST FOR MENTORS

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



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Dear Mentor,

When my wife, Hendrina, and I facilitate study groups in prison, we offer opportunities for the men to read paragraphs from the material we are studying. As we go around the group, there are times when we can see body language that reveals anxiety and apprehension, yet each one always takes their turn! Every time, though, we see and hear a similar theme. Men will slowly struggle through reading sentences and will stumble over words. For those listening, it can be difficult to understand what is being communicated. Thankfully, the others in the group always sit patiently and coach them through. This is a clear example of the statistic that 60% of people in prison read only at a third- or fourth-grade level; yet, in the Crossroads lessons, we are asking them to read at grade levels much higher than that. (We are developing new courses to help resolve this issue.)

With this in mind, I want to talk about how we write to our students. Most of us naturally speak in what I will call “church talk,” or what others may call “Christianese.” We freely insert words such as *prodigal*, *blessed*, *backslidden*, *Gospel*, *sin*, *hedge of protection*, *salvation*, *faith* and *grace*, without realizing that our students may not understand these terms. We also tend to abbreviate everything! We will write “Ps. 139:9” rather than “The book of Psalms, chapter 139, verse 9.” Abbreviations can be confusing for those who struggle with reading or may not be familiar with the Bible. So, I want to encourage you to think about a few things for your next letter:

- Instead of abbreviating shared verses, write out the reference completely. It could also be helpful to write out the whole verse, giving context to what you are saying.
- If you use terms specific to Christianity, explain the meaning and application of those words.
- Use examples from your own life to help explain or better define the words.
- Use simple language that you would use in a normal conversation.

Our goal is to see our students grow and to remove any potential roadblocks to their discovery of who they are in Christ. Even those who read well would surely welcome a written-out verse with a life application!

Grateful for your heart of service,



Douglas Cupery  
Church Mobilization Director

My friend Yago Williams visited the Crossroads office recently and gave a chapel talk for the staff and office volunteers about “deep sea fishing.”

Prison ministry is like fishing in the deep waters of the ocean. If we are brave enough to navigate the deep hurts in people’s lives and to face conversations that are not easy or “G-rated,” we will bring in the greatest catch of fish. We will see God change prisoners’ lives and use them to transform the prisons and communities around them.

To see the video, visit the Crossroads Prison Ministries Facebook page or go to YouTube and search for:

**Yago Chapel Crossroads Prison Ministries**

*Yago Williams is the head of prison ministries at a church in Grandville, Michigan. He is also a member of an evangelistic group, The Conquerors Strength Team, that travels the world and shares the Gospel inside prison and outside it.*

# What Do I Write in a Letter to a Prisoner?

Do you ever struggle with knowing what to write in your letter to your student? We recommend that you begin in prayer, allowing the Holy Spirit to guide your pen. Take some time to reflect on your own life. What have you been up to at work, at home and in church? What are you struggling with in your walk with God? Students love to get to know **YOU**, and they crave words of encouragement and acceptance.

Check out the outline below for more ideas of what to include in your letters to students:

## A. Briefly introduce yourself (for letters to Tier 1 students or your first letter to a Tier 2 or 3 student).

- Tell your student about your life and your family. What type of work do you do? What do you do in your free time? What are you passionate about?
- How did you become a Christian?
- Why did you decide to become a Crossroads mentor?

## B. Reflect on the lesson after reviewing it.

- What do the passages in the lesson mean to you? What is God telling you through them?
- How can you apply the lesson topic to your life today?
- How has a passage/story/truth in the lesson changed your life in the past?
- Is there a story, teaching or sermon it reminds you of?
- Are there other Bible passages that relate to the lesson and would provide further wisdom or encouragement for the student?

## C. Encourage and engage the student.

- Respond to their questions and prayer requests.
- Write encouraging comments about the student's work.
- Compliment the student on completing the lesson. Prison is not an easy place to find the time or space to complete studies or to focus on reading.
- Share a Bible story or passage that came to your mind based on one of their answers.
- Let the student know you are praying for their prayer requests.

## D. Remind the student that God loves them.

- Write a short prayer for the student based on their requests and/or the lesson topic.
- Write a blessing for the student (see Numbers 6:24–26 for an example).
- Find a verse you can share that shows God's love for them.
- Write some song/hymn lyrics that relate to the topic of the week.
- Share a favorite Bible passage. Let the student know why it means so much to you.

### PLEASE NOTE: NIV Answer Variations

As you may know, Crossroads's original curriculum was based on the 1984 NIV Bible. Tier 1 and Tier 2 lessons were updated a number of years ago to match the 2011 NIV Bible, which is the version we currently send to students who request a Bible.

Occasionally, you may still find that a student has completed an older version of a lesson or has used the 1984 NIV to

complete an updated version of a lesson. In either case, their answers may vary slightly.

If you have the newest versions of the answer keys, you will see these answer variations throughout the material. However, if you need a list of these variations, please call the office or email [mentor@cpministries.org](mailto:mentor@cpministries.org) and we'll be happy to send you the list!