



# Become an In-Prison Mentor

Over 2000 years ago, Jesus told his followers it was important to visit those in prison (Matthew 25:36). Now, a study conducted by the Minnesota Department of Corrections has shown what a profound impact prison visits can have on prisoners. Here are some significant findings:

- Prisoners who are visited while incarcerated are significantly less likely to recidivate.
- Any visit from a mentor reduces the risk of reconviction by 29 percent, while a visit by clergy lowers it by 24 percent. Visits from relatives have a lower, but positive, impact.
- Prisoners visited more often are less likely to recidivate.
- Visits closer to a prisoner's release date have a greater impact on reducing recidivism.

According to the US Department of Justice, 95 percent of all prisoners currently serving time will eventually be released. They will face many challenges as they reenter society. To help them get ready, Prison Fellowship's in-prison mentoring ministry focuses on pre-release preparation for prisoners with two years or less left on their sentences.

In-prison mentors usually have face-to-face visits with their mentees at least once a month and sometimes as frequently as once a week. These visits are typically arranged through the chaplain's office and often take place in a meeting area supervised by the chaplain. Between visits, mentors and mentees often communicate by writing letters. PF mentors always work with mentees of the same gender.

In addition to reducing recidivism rates, pre-release mentoring helps mentees by:

- Offering encouragement and helping reduce anxiety about reentry
- Providing an example of how to live according to Christ's teachings
- Helping the prisoner set constructive goals for the future
- Providing assistance with the development of a concrete reentry plan
- Connecting the prisoner with reentry team members and resources

Being a mentor requires the ability to make a long-term commitment to the mentoring relationship. Some states allow in-prison mentors to also serve as reentry mentors after the prisoner's release. However, many states have strict rules against this. If you are not able to continue the mentoring relationship after the mentee is released, it is very important to transfer all the details of the reentry plan to the new volunteers who will be taking over.

## For More Information:

- To read the Minnesota Department of Corrections' report on "The Effects of Prison Visitation on Offender Recidivism," go to <http://www.doc.state.mn.us/pages/files/large-files/Publications/11-11MNPisonVisitationStudy.pdf>
- To get more information about local opportunities for volunteering as an in-prison mentor, call Prison Fellowship at 800-251-7411.

