


Prison
FELLOWSHIP

IN:SIGHT

WINTER 2023

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WE BELIEVE THAT NO ONE IS BEYOND HOPE, DO YOU?

Prison Fellowship's (PF's) mission is to show Christ's love to people in prison by coming alongside them and supporting them. We seek through prayer and practical care to help, support and develop a Christian ministry to restore people in prison, their families and their communities.

Our network of around 3,000 volunteers is delivering life-changing services to people in almost all of the 121 prisons across England and Wales.

Volunteers are connected through local groups. As well as supporting prisons in prayer, groups run PF's programmes *Sycamore Tree*, *Angel Tree*, *Letter Link*, *Prayer Line*, *Bible Studies* and *Chaplaincy Support*.

Together, we are restoring people's lives. No one is beyond hope.

PRISON FELLOWSHIP

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SEE! THE WINTER IS PAST;
THE RAINS ARE OVER AND
GONE. FLOWERS APPEAR
ON THE EARTH; THE SEASON
OF SINGING HAS COME,
THE COOING OF DOVES
IS HEARD IN OUR LAND.

—Song of Solomon 2: 11–12

PRISONFELLOWSHIP.ORG.UK



WILL SUMMER EVER COME?



Peter

Peter Holloway
Chief Executive

As a young schoolboy, I clearly remember waiting for the long winter term to end, for spring to hint at the coming sunshine and the joy of the long summer holidays to arrive.

The last few years have been incomparably more intolerable and seemingly endless for those who are in our prisons. Many must have asked themselves whether 'summer' would ever break through this endless winter of extended Covid-19 lockdowns, overcrowding, longer sentences, staff shortages, lack of meaningful activity and the resulting mental health issues. It would be easy for those of us whose ministry is to love those in prison in God's Name to become negative and fall into despair.

Recently, I was challenged to remember that, while

we must always be honest about the failings of our criminal justice system, if we do this without holding it in tension with the hope and expectation of the better, then we are no use to those we are there to serve.

I AM DEEPLY GRATEFUL TO BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST WHO HAVE HELD ME IN THAT TENSION IN THE PAST, WHEN I STRUGGLED TO FIND HOPE FOR MYSELF.

As PF people, we can stand in the gap for those in prison who have lost faith that God is still there or that their cries of prayer are heard.

They need to know that we will always bend our knees in prayer for them, holding them up before the compassionate Christ, who

has also travelled the dark road to prison and torment. We can remind them that we have a Saviour who like them has cried out, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' and yet, three days later stood again as the perfect symbol of hope, in His resurrection power.

In Song of Solomon 2 verses 11–12, Solomon writes, 'See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone. Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come, the cooing of doves is heard in our land.' In this difficult 'winter season' in which we find ourselves, I would like to encourage you to look forward to the beauty of the summer to come as described in these verses and resolve with me, that we will always stand in hope for those in prison who are struggling to have hope for themselves. ■



'THE BEST COURSE I'VE EVER DONE'



Covid-19 put a stop to many things. But, for Julie, it marked the beginning of her journey to becoming a Sycamore Tree Tutor in her local prison.

Julie had been volunteering at her local prison since 2015. But when the pandemic struck in 2020, she was locked out and unable to continue. 'I felt really down during Covid because I couldn't go into prison,' Julie remarks. Then, rather than doing nothing, Julie decided to join Prison Fellowship and become a

volunteer. 'Instead of sitting around, I thought I could get trained in other things that I could do once the pandemic was over.'

During lockdowns, Julie got trained as a letter writer for *Letter Link* as well as a Sycamore Tree Tutor. Little did she know that her local prison had been wanting to run *Sycamore Tree* for several years but had nobody available to lead the programme.

Once able, Julie, together with another new tutor, completed her *Sycamore*

Tree training in two nearby male prisons. The other new tutor then joined Julie to help run the first *Sycamore Tree* course in her local prison.

Reflecting on the course, Julie is full of praise for the women who attended *Sycamore Tree*. 'The women that did the course to the end were incredible,' she beams. Stephen Hawkins, PF's Operations Manager, also noted on one visit how brilliant the engagement and the responses were from the women.

AT THE END OF THE COURSE, ONE LEARNER DECLARED, 'I HAVE BEEN ON NUMEROUS COURSES OVER MY 12 YEARS IN PRISON AND THIS IS BOTH THE MOST DIFFICULT AND CHALLENGING BUT ALSO THE BEST COURSE I'VE EVER DONE.'

Having completed her Sycamore Tree Tutor training in men's prisons, Julie commented on some of the differences she found between men and women doing *Sycamore Tree*: 'It seemed like the men were a lot more still and received what was delivered in a more focussed manner. Whereas the women were a lot more vocal and raised all kinds of things as they engaged with the course.'

Another interesting observation of Julie's

is that some women on her course found it more difficult to engage with the concept of remorse. Julie notes, 'Although they wanted to show remorse and to take responsibility for their crimes, this was complicated for them because many of the women were in prison as accomplices to someone else's crime.' While they had been involved in things that were obviously very wrong, for the majority of women, it felt a lot less clear cut than it did for the men.'

This links with the 2019 observation of David Lammy MP, who stated that most women in prison are 'there because of a man.' Given this, Julie was able to help the learners engage with the concept of remorse by looking at other offenses in their past.

And, although Julie's team of volunteers was quite small and her first *Sycamore Tree* course had a modest number of learners, growth

is on the horizon with other local people signed up for Sycamore Tree Group Facilitator training later this year. Julie enthuses, 'From me feeling like, "I really need to do this and not be miserable about the fact that I can't go into prison," to now having a team of people who really want to deliver *Sycamore Tree* to our prison is remarkable.'

Julie's enthusiasm and can-do attitude is infectious. And her story is an incredible testimony of what can be accomplished by having a heart to serve and support people in prison. ■

Learn more about becoming a Prison Fellowship volunteer at prisonfellowship.org.uk/get-involved





WHY DOES IT MATTER?

For a twelfth consecutive year, we will be running *Angel Tree* on Mothers' Day giving young adults in prison the opportunity to send a gift and a personal message to their mum or other significant adult. But why does it matter? How can allowing a young adult to send a gift to their mum be more than just a nice thing? Recent research published in the Bromley Briefings suggests that this simple programme could have a tremendous impact.

The publication from the Prison Reform Trust indicates there are currently 11,703 young adults (18–24) in prison in England and Wales, accounting for 15% of the overall population.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, young offenders'

institutes were widely treated the same as adult prisons with harsh lockdowns implemented. These resulted in young people often spending up to 23 hours per day in their cells. Lockdowns also put a stop to family visits, which have still not returned to pre-Covid-19 levels in many prisons.

FAMILY VISITS CAN PLAY A VITAL ROLE IN THE REHABILITATION JOURNEY OF PEOPLE IN PRISON. SADLY, DUE TO COVID-19 AND OTHER FACTORS, VISITS AND CONTACT WITH FAMILY CAN PROVE DIFFICULT.

People in prison are often held many miles away

from home making travel logistically complicated and financially burdensome. Bromley Briefings states that only a fifth of people in prison (19% of men and 20% of women) received visits from family or friends at least once a week. People in prison stated that they were particularly keen for more consistent promotion of family contact—particularly when they were held far from home.

Angel Tree Mothers' Day helps to build and strengthen connections with families, particularly when contact has been minimal. For mums, a gift and note from their child could help to begin the healing process for broken relationships and help bring much-needed love and support into the lives of young adults in prison.



RESEARCH SHOWS THAT FAMILY CONTACT MAKES A MASSIVE DIFFERENCE TO THE LIVES OF PEOPLE LEAVING PRISON AND THEIR RATES OF REOFFENDING.

People in prison who receive family visits are 39% less likely to reoffend than those who do not. Visits can also help prepare people for release—a strong family connection can result in having somewhere to stay once leaving prison.

As our *Angel Tree Mothers' Day* volunteers begin the process of sending out application forms to young adults in prison, pray for family connections to be strengthened through the programme this year. ■

JOIN US IN PRAYER FOR THIS YEAR'S ANGEL TREE MOTHERS' DAY PROGRAMME

❁ JANUARY

Pray for all our *Angel Tree Mothers' Day* volunteers as they prepare for this year's programme. Ask that they would have the support they need to administer the programme and they would know the blessing their work will be to the lives of young people and their parents.

❁ FEBRUARY

Remember all the young adults considering applying for *Angel Tree Mothers' Day*. Pray they would choose to reach out and make the first connection and they would find the right words to write on the card for their mother or significant parental figure.

❁ SUNDAY 19TH MARCH — MOTHERS' DAY

Please pray for all the mothers and significant parental figures receiving *Angel Tree Mothers' Day* gifts from their child in prison. Ask God that it will grow and strengthen their connection and it would bring healing for any broken relationships.

❁ AFTER MOTHERS' DAY

Remember all the mothers and parental figures who have received a card and voucher. May they be received as gifts of love and affection, and prompt a reciprocation that helps to foster love and support for both parent and child.

Find out ways to support this year's programme at prisonfellowship.org.uk/atmd



PRAYING WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW HOW: POSSESSION, PROBATION, AND OTHER COMPLEX PRAYERS



Since 2020, people in prison have been able to ring *Prayer Line* and leave a confidential prayer request that will be prayed for that day by our *Prayer Line* team. Many requests are personal or for loved ones. But some are more complex. We asked our volunteer *Prayer Line* Coordinators how they pray for difficult requests...

HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH REQUESTS WHEN YOU ARE UNSURE HOW TO PRAY?

Joan: Mostly my prayer is 'Thy will be done.' There are many occasions when I cannot see an answer, but I know that God can!

Trish: If I think the information in a prayer request is unclear, I trust that Romans 8:26–27 will be real in my intercession. So, I allow the Spirit within me to speak through me.

Stuart: I just give it up to God saying, 'Lord I'm not sure how to pray for this request but I know that You know the situation and give it up to You.'

Pru: I pray for God to make a way forward, even if that way is not in the way I imagine.

HOW DO YOU PRAY WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW IF THE REQUEST SHARED IS TRUE OR NOT?

Joan: I am in no position to judge whether the request is true or not. But I feel that if God can be brought into the situation in prayer, then

somehow the situation can be changed for the better.

Trish: I rely on God's compassion and mercy to bring that person to the full knowledge of truth without judging. We can all be deceived by our own desires.

Stuart: Again, I give it over to God and ask that He does what is right in His eyes.

HOW DO YOU PRAY FOR SOMEONE WHO IS FROM A DIFFERENT FAITH OR HAS DIFFERENT BELIEFS?

Joan: This is not difficult. We are all God's children, equally loved, equally valued. I like to think we can all be held in the union of prayer.

Trish: I am thrilled when any person calls for prayer. I believe their heart is crying out to know God, who will see in their request an invitation to dialogue with their creator.

Stuart: I do not pray any differently. I simply petition to God and ask for a breakthrough in their lives.

Pru: I pray for God to make Himself known, and

for them to have some assurance of their prayer being heard.

DO YOU HAVE EXAMPLES OF REQUESTS YOU HAVE FOUND IT DIFFICULT TO PRAY FOR?

Joan: I find it difficult to pray for those who say they are tormented by demons. What is going on here? Where is this coming from? Mostly it's the Lord's Prayer that comes to mind when I respond to these requests. And then, I put them in the care of Mary, His Mother and His first disciple of prayer.

Trish: When the request expresses the need for legal intervention, it can highlight the lack of resources in the justice system. This challenges me to intercede not only for the person in their situation but also the whole prison service.

Sometimes we are asked to pray specifically in a way that is unfamiliar to me or in a tradition of prayer I do not use. So I let the Holy Spirit intercede on the person's

behalf, knowing that He will do what is needed.

Pru: It is sometimes difficult to pray for a specific outcome without first acknowledging that this might not be God's plan. But, at the same time, I believe God encourages us to be direct in our requests. Again, I try to pray for the person and their whole wellbeing as well as the prayer they bring.

In all the requests, I feel we are joining in with the prayer that has already been heard by God when it is being formed, articulated and spoken.

As you can see, there are many different ways to respond to challenging prayer requests. Yet each is based on a desire to support people in prison through prayer. ■

Find out more about
Prayer Line and how you
can get involved at
**prisonfellowship.
org.uk/prayerline**



BOOK REVIEW:

HEARTBREAK, HOPE AND HOLY MOMENTS

This is a real eye-opener, a startling and sad revelation into the shattered lives of often vulnerable people of many ages and a whole variety of backgrounds. Katy writes with compassion and a great respect, giving some heart-wrenching examples of her work as a prison chaplain.

IT IS WONDERFULLY ENCOURAGING TO READ THAT, IN THE BLEAKNESS, ANGER AND DESPAIR OF PEOPLE IN PRISON, THE PRISON CHAPLAINS ARE ABLE TO TOUCH THESE PRECIOUS LIVES.

They are showing the love of Jesus in practical ways as well as through simply caring, listening and giving their undivided attention. In time, this can bring hope and—on many occasions—give an opportunity to build a new and positive future. ■

—Betty Carthy,
PF Volunteer Letter Writer

ABOUT THE BOOK AUTHOR

Katy Canty is the Dean of Sector Ministers in the Diocese of Liverpool working to support Chaplains and establish better connections between their wide-reaching ministries and the local church. Once a teacher and now a retired Prison Chaplain and first-time author, Katy shares:

'OUR CALLING AS CHAPLAINS IS TO LISTEN; TO SIT WHERE THEY SIT AND ALLOW THEM TO TELL US WHAT THEY WILL.'

Heartbreak, Hope and Holy Moments, by Katy Canty
RRP £11.99 | eden.co.uk



UNEXPECTED KINDNESS

In Mark 12, Jesus gives a commentary on offerings being given to the temple. In the story, the widow's offering is praised by Jesus because, although her gift is small, she is giving all she has.

We have been overwhelmed by the generosity of Prison Fellowship's volunteers and supporters in the last few months, particularly during our *Angel Tree* Christmas campaign. While there will be many stories of selfless generosity and wholehearted giving, we wanted to share a particular one with you:

A prison resident recently passed away and, to commemorate his passing, others in his prison decided to have a collection for him. Together, they raised £106—a staggering amount considering people in prison only have around £15 per week to spend. The men decided that they wanted to donate the collection in its entirety to Prison Fellowship in memory of their friend. A true testament of how beneficial and vital the work of Prison Fellowship is in the lives of people in prison.

Let us thank God for the generosity of these men in prison as well as the thousands of people who have supported PF with one-off gifts and those who stand with us every month in their regular donations. ■

WE BELIEVE NO ONE IS BEYOND HOPE, DO YOU?

If you feel inspired by this story and would like to join us in our mission to show Christ's love to people in prison, please do consider making a gift today.

You can use the donation slip which accompanies this edition of *In:sight* or make your donation online at prisonfellowship.org.uk/insight. Thank you!

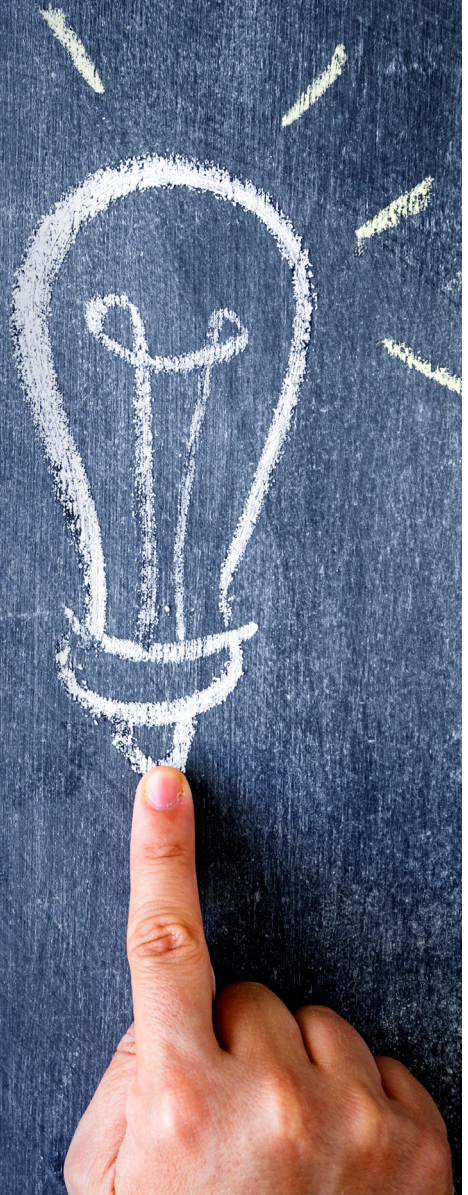


WE WANT YOUR INSIGHT!

We are always looking for ways to improve our communications. We want to share the stories that are most relevant and informative for you.

To help us, we would like your feedback on this issue of *In:sight* as well as getting your thoughts and ideas on what you would like to read in future issues.

If you have five minutes to spare, please scan the QR code below to complete the online survey. Alternatively, you can complete the survey sheet included with this edition and return it in the envelope provided. ■



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