

Prison
FELLOWSHIP

IN:SIGHT

AUTUMN 2023



- **'STAY IN YOUR LANE!'** | IS OUR MISSION POLITICAL?
- **AN EXCITING STORY** | *ANGEL TREE*
- **PRISONS WEEK** | LOOK UP
- **PUTTING JUSTICE ON TRIAL** | OPINION PIECE
- **REVIEWS** | PRISON IN MEDIA

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 2,500 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*, *Chaplaincy Support* and *Pastoral Care*.

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



'STAY IN YOUR LANE!'

'Stay in your lane!' This is the shout of those who are offended by the idea that people of faith have something legitimate to say about political issues.

One of the challenges for Prison Fellowship as we work within the justice system is answering the question, 'Are we involved with politics or not?' Without wishing to sound trite, the answer to this and other tough-looking questions can be found if we turn to the Bible. When we do so with this question, I believe we can only conclude

that our mission is deeply political. We are involved in the politics of compassion, in a world fixated with the appearance of purity and the punishment of wrongdoers.

I would go as far as to say that it is impossible to follow Christ and not be political. I know this is a big statement, so let me explain what I mean:

In what has been called the most profound teaching of Jesus, the Sermon on the Mount, we hear a revolutionary description of a world turned upside down. It is a world where those seen as being at the bottom of society are raised to the top by God.

It is also a place where compassion is planted deeply in people's hearts alongside mercy and love for others.

If we turn to the Old Testament, we also see how God instructs His people to live lives that are set apart from other nations. They are to be a living example of God's compassion and love.

In the book of Leviticus, we read about the concept of a 'year of jubilee.' Every 15 years, debts were written off and slaves freed. Refugees and displaced people must be welcomed and oppressive practices such as unjust money lending were outlawed. Compassion was even woven into farming practices wherein landowners must leave crops unharvested at the edge of their property so the poor could eat for free.

THOSE INVOLVED IN OUR SYCAMORE TREE PROGRAMME WILL KNOW THAT THE COURSE TALKS ABOUT THE BENEFITS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE OVER RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE.

This idea of restoration is woven throughout this different, compassionate society described in the Bible. In fact, we preach a Gospel that could be described as the story of a God who creates humankind out of a longing for relationship, and who

comes to earth to restore that broken relationship.

Returning to the Sermon on the Mount, we find Jesus calling us to be salt and light to the world. He says, 'A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl.' Instead, we are told to put it on its stand, so it will give light to everyone.

Not only does Jesus describe a different, compassionate way of living in a different society, He tells us that we must live this out in such a way that others cannot fail to see it. The purpose of salt is to change the flavour of the food it is placed in. And the purpose of yeast is to transform bread. In both cases, we are warned that if these agents fail in their purpose, then they are useless.




So, are we political? I think we can only answer 'yes.' ■



Peter
Peter Holloway
Chief Executive

PRISON FELLOWSHIP

PO Box 68226
LONDON, SW1P 9WR
prisonfellowship.org.uk
info@prisonfellowship.org.uk
020 7799 2500

   pfenglandandwales

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Photos of people in prison
and/or their families are models.



AN EXCITING STORY!

ANGEL TREE SUCCESSFULLY RUNS EACH CHRISTMAS BECAUSE OF THE INCREDIBLE WORK OF OUR VOLUNTEERS, THE DONATIONS FROM CHURCHES AND DONORS, AND THE SUPPORT OF OTHERS LIKE DERNIER PUBLISHING. WE ASKED THEIR FOUNDER, JANET WILSON, 'WHY DO YOU CONTINUE TO SUPPORT ANGEL TREE?'



Q: How did you start Dernier Publishing?

As my children reached an age where they wanted to read books for themselves, I found there were very few excellent, relevant, fun Christian books about that were full of exciting stories, but which still held an element of truth and biblical values.

At first, I thought, 'Someone ought to do something about that!'

Then, after my first husband died suddenly, I realised that none of us knows how long we have on this earth. And, if the Lord was calling me to do something, I'd better just do it. A huge percentage of Christians

take their first steps of faith as children. And books have such a strong part in that. So, I set up Dernier Publishing in a corner of my dining room!

Q: How did you first come across Prison Fellowship's Angel Tree programme?

I can't remember exactly when I was first in touch with Joanna, who was PF's Angel Tree Administrator before Tim. She was so excited to find books for children 8–12 and 13+, as this was a part of *Angel Tree* she wanted to build up. She was struggling to find what she wanted—exciting stories that were written from a Christian perspective and gently

held out hope, light and life. I'm so delighted that her exploration brought her to Dernier Publishing.

Q: What is your involvement with the Angel Tree programme and how does it fit with Dernier's mission?

One of the wonderful things about the Kingdom of God is that we are all in it together. We have the books, *Angel Tree* has the opportunity! Working together in unity brings such blessing. It is truly a privilege to be working with Prison Fellowship. Joanna and I are still friends and it's been great to get to know Tim over the last year or so.

Q: Why do you continue to support Angel Tree?

Who knows what God might do through the pages of the books that are in the hands of children whose parents are in prison?

PERHAPS THE STORY WILL BE A LINK IN THE CHAIN OF A JOURNEY TOWARDS FAITH.

Perhaps the book will stay on the shelf and be read by a sibling, at just the right time. There's nothing God cannot do!

We love the fact that it is the parents themselves who tick the box to say they would like their children to

receive a Christian book on their behalf, along with the gift. It is so important that they get that choice and means the book is even more gratefully received. It's awesome!

We pray for all the children—and indeed the families—who receive the books, and the mums and dads in prison.

Q: Do you have any book recommendations for Christmas presents?

Hop on over to our website dernierpublishing.com and see what we've got! We have cute stories for 6–8s, exciting adventures for 8–11s and awesome, thought-provoking novels for young adults. They all

make brilliant presents with eternal value! ■

Janet Wilson, Founder of Dernier Publishing



Learn more about *Angel Tree* at prisonfellowship.org.uk/our-work/angel-tree



8TH - 14TH
OCTOBER
2023

THE HEAVENS
DECLARE THE
GLORY OF
GOD, SO...

LOOK
UP PSALM
19:1

PRISONS WEEK
A WEEK OF PRAYER

WWW.PRISONSWEEK.ORG
@PRISONSWEEK
#PRISONSWEEK

WHY SHOULD WE CARE? WHY PRISONS WEEK IS NOT JUST A NICE THING TO DO...

For over forty years, *Prisons Week* has catalysed prayer for people affected by imprisonment—from people in prison, to their loved ones, to victims of crime and those working in the criminal justice system.

But why should we bother praying for them? We have countless things to pray for; our own friends and family, our local church, the cost-of-living crisis, the environment... the list goes on. Why should we add to it? Particularly when we would be spending time praying for people who have been convicted of wrongdoing and are deserving of punishment.

Here is why we think this is important:

REASON #1: JESUS TELLS US TO

Read Matthew 25:40–43. Jesus rebukes the righteous saying: 'I was ill and in prison and you did not look after me.' Jesus equates our care for people in prison to care for Him. Notice that Jesus does not vilify people in prison. Rather, He has strong words for those of us who call on His Name but do not care for those in prison. Even those of us who cannot go into prison ourselves can pray. And our prayers can have a big impact.

REASON #2: IT IS PART OF THE MINISTRY OF JESUS

This call to support people in prison fits into Jesus' ministry. He teaches us the importance of compassion, mercy and love for all people, regardless of their circumstances. If anything, Jesus prefers those who are shunned by society, choosing to spend His time with 'sinners' over teachers of the law. Just as Jesus showed compassion by coming alongside people who are disregarded by society, we can do likewise by praying for and supporting people in prison.

Many people in prison have faced significant disadvantages: poverty, social exclusion, addictions, they are refugees, people who have been bullied, trafficked or abused, children without functioning homes, those lacking education, people in housing crisis. Some of the most disadvantaged members of our society are found behind prison bars. Praying for them

demonstrates our concern for their wellbeing and acknowledges their inherent dignity as humans.

REASON #3: PRAYER IS POWERFUL

William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury in the 1940s, is well known for saying, 'When I pray, coincidences happen.' We do not simply pray for people in prison because it is a good thing to do, but because we believe it impacts lives! Nearly everyone in prison will be released into the community one day. The question is, how do we want those people to return to our society? Do we want them to return as they were, or do we want them to return as restored people, ready to contribute positively to society? Your prayers can help that journey of transformation.

I hope you can see why we are so passionate about praying for people in prison. After all, when Prison Fellowship was founded, we did not go into prisons. For the first four years, we simply prayed! ■

PRISONS WEEK IS A GREAT OPPORTUNITY TO BEGIN PRAYING FOR PEOPLE IN PRISON.

To help you prepare, we have included this year's *Prisons Week* leaflet with this copy of *In:sight*. We also have a range of resources that can be found online:

- posters and publicity
- a new video to share in your church on Prison Sunday, 8th October
- prayer sheets to pray for people in prison
- children's work materials, including leaders' information, activity sheets and prayer resources
- a sermon outline based on Matthew 25



Visit [prisonfellowship.org.uk/pw23](https://www.prisonfellowship.org.uk/pw23) to download everything you need to get started.

PUTTING JUSTICE ON TRIAL

There are times when events in the news might cause us to ask what justice really looks like? Is it fairness? Or moral rightness? Or a scheme of law in which people get what they are due? Or something altogether different?



Our criminal justice system was established for three purposes—to punish, to rehabilitate offenders and to protect the public. Often however, the focus of the system appears to be to determine blame (guilt) and impose punishment (pain). The more heinous the crime, the more this rule applies and the emphasis turns fully towards an offender getting what is felt to be their ‘just deserts.’

When we ask how society should respond to crime, we often ask just one question: ‘What does the offender deserve?’ This is a natural response to the pain we feel, either directly as victims of crime or vicariously through the grief of others.

In fact, we name the type of justice system we have as ‘retributive justice,’ where, in what becomes a moral equivalence, the type of justice handed down is intended to mirror the offending act.

Could you forgive a person if they killed one of your loved ones? Maybe you would hope to. But, honestly, you likely do not know. Until we individually face such mountains to climb, we dare not preach to those who are looking at that sheer face of rock with tear-streaked faces.

So where does this leave us?

As Christians, we say that we believe in a God whose love is unbounded. And this love extends to everyone equally. The nature of divine grace is that it is unmerited and given without favour. Jesus lived and died never seeking retribution or a like-for-like

response to wrongs. So if we are really to follow Him, then surely this has huge implications for the way we are to understand justice? Even the Hebrew word (mishpat) that we have often translated into the signal word ‘justice’ originally also contained the idea of mercy. So, in God’s economy of grace, we must see justice and mercy as coexisting as exemplified in Micah 6:8: ‘And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.’

We have a strapline at Prison Fellowship which states, ‘We believe no one is beyond hope.’ It is a statement that people have challenged with the words, ‘What? Even them?’ The recent Lucy Letby case asks us to reaffirm that statement, even though we know how hard that seems.

Victims of crime have lived experience of the devastating effects of crime. Some have even lost loved ones at the hands of people who are now in

prison. Despite this, week after week, they go into prison to tell their stories as part of the *Sycamore Tree* programme.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, AS OPPOSED TO RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE, IS THE BIBLICAL MODEL OF JUSTICE; IT DOES NOT SEEK TO REPLACE THE STATE’S CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM, BUT TO COMPLEMENT IT.

It does not mean ‘a return to the past,’ pretending that nothing happened. In fact, restorative justice urges us to move forward and enable possibilities for transformation.

In a restorative process, we see that crime is also a violation of people and relationships. Justice therefore involves victims, offenders and community members in an effort to repair the harm as much as possible. The central focus is on the needs of the victim and the

offender’s responsibility for repairing harm.

At the end of the six-week *Sycamore Tree* course, learners are given the opportunity to make a personal response to victims and the wider community. This may be the first step that offenders take towards a transformed life away from crime.

At PF, we are often challenged by those who think that visiting people in prison is a waste of time. Nothing could be further from the truth. We know that, at some point, almost all people will leave prison. And surely, when they do so, we want them to lead transformed lives away from crime.

In Prison Fellowship, we believe that if we are truly to be followers of Christ then we are compelled by love to follow His pathway of peace and restoration. ‘The King will reply, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”’ (Matthew 25:40). ■



TRAPPED

THE IPP PRISONER SCANDAL

'A LIFE SENTENCE THROUGH THE BACK DOOR.' THAT IS HOW SHIRLEY DEBONO DESCRIBES IMPRISONMENT FOR PUBLIC PROTECTION (IPP) SENTENCES IN EPISODE 3 OF *TRAPPED: THE IPP PRISONER SCANDAL*.

The podcast series is focused around the impact IPP sentences have on people in prison and their families. Shirley's son, Shaun, was given a two-and-a-half-year IPP sentence for stealing a mobile phone and is still in prison nearly eighteen years later. She talks about the heart-breaking impact being imprisoned for an indeterminate length of time has had on her son's mental health.

Like Shaun, the 2,916 other people still serving IPP sentences in prison have no idea when they will get out, leading to the term 'ghost prisoners.' I cannot imagine what it must be like to be trapped somewhere, let alone in prison, without knowing when you might be released.

Aaron is the longest serving IPP detainee, having spent 19 years in prison without parole on a 30-month tariff. His sister, Cherrie, tries to remain hopeful for him. She has provided new accommodation

for him on his release, in a peaceful field where she lives. But Aaron is losing hope, describing his sentence as 'psychological torture,' and they have no assurance of his release.

Sam Asumadu, who hosts the podcast, also dives into the history behind IPP sentences. Introduced by Lord Blunkett in 2005, and then abolished in 2012 by Lord Clark.

Trapped is a deeply challenging and necessary listen, giving great insight into IPP sentencing, with contributions from a wide range of people, including those serving IPP sentences, their families, criminologists, retired judges and members of parliament. ■



Listen on:
#Acast
#Apple
Podcasts
#Spotify

SERIES TWO OF **SCREW** IS NOW AVAILABLE TO STREAM ON CHANNEL 4!

Screw is a drama series that follows a group of prison officers as they work on C Wing in the fictitious HMP Long Marsh. The show is tense, witty and heartbreaking but never at the expense of the dignity of the people in prison portrayed by the cast.

While there have been a number of excellent dramas in recent years looking at the lives of people in prison, it is refreshing to see prison from the staff's perspective. We know there are serious issues with staffing levels and retention in the majority of prisons in England and Wales—*Screw* helps us to understand the challenges that prison officers face. It sensitively highlights why almost half of the officers who left service in the last year had been in their role for less than three years.

Screw effectively presents a nuanced and diverse set of viewpoints. It showcases the difference between prison officers who are supportive of their charges and those who lack sympathy for those in their care. It manages to do this while clearly showing the complexities of caring for people in prison, the issues that arise and how even the most well-intentioned people may become cynical and jaded. ■



WARNING: *Adult themes, swearing.* Catch up on the first series of *Screw*, or watch the second series on Channel 4: channel4.com/programmes/screw.



AN INCREDIBLE BLESSING

'Angel Tree has been so kind to me and my children. My drawing is a simple design with a dash of colour. Each angel represents something important to me: hope, love, kindness, truth and patience. I have grown in confidence with my artwork—it is my happy place.'

That's what the winning artist of our 2022 Angel Tree Christmas Card competition says about their design. Evidence that Angel Tree has been an incredible blessing to them and continues to be for many parents in prison.

Inside the card is a Bible verse from Isaiah 9: *'For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.'* ■






Order cards for your friends and family this Christmas for a suggested donation of £5 per pack of ten A6 cards and envelopes.

Get yours today by completing the form enclosed with this issue of *In:sight* or online at prisonfellowship.org.uk/christmas-cards

PRISON FELLOWSHIP

PO Box 68226 | LONDON | SW1P 9WR
info@prisonfellowship.org.uk | 020 7799 2500

   prisonfellowship.org.uk

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