

Prison
FELLOWSHIP

IN:SIGHT

AUTUMN 2024



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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 2,500 Volunteers is delivering life-changing services to people in all of the 123 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.

PRISON FELLOWSHIP




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and/or their families are models.**



BETTER TOGETHER

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In recent months, it seems that hardly a week has gone by without prisons making headlines. I can't recall a time when the prison system has been so prominently in the news. While many people will have been exposed to stories that highlight the problems and challenges facing prisons, during my first weeks here at Prison Fellowship, I've also been privileged to hear inspiring stories of hope, compassion and transformation through our work.

Undoubtedly, this is a particularly challenging time for the criminal justice system. And, for many of us, the sheer scale of these challenges might feel overwhelming. But I firmly believe that, together, we can continue to make a real and lasting difference.

In today's society, independence is often glorified. We celebrate individuals who appear to have achieved success entirely on their own, as if being self-made is the ultimate goal. At the same time, loneliness is

a widespread issue and its impact on mental and physical health is well-documented. This is especially true for those in prison, where isolation can have devastating effects.

Neither independence nor loneliness is God's plan for us. We weren't made to go it alone; we weren't designed for isolation. Ecclesiastes 4:9–12 gives us a picture of how much better life is with a friend—someone to support you.

We were created for relationship, made to not only be in relationship with God but also to be in relationship with each other. We're commanded to love God with all our hearts, minds and strength, and we're also commanded to love our neighbour as ourselves.

The Bible is filled with 'one another' commands: calls to love one another, be at peace with one another, forgive one another, serve one another, and encourage one another. These commands, by their very nature of being to

and with 'one another', need other people in order to be fulfilled. It is impossible for us to follow these commands without each other.

We can't and shouldn't ignore the significant issues in the prison system right now. But we also know that, as we co-labour with God, we can find our strength in Him and can fully rely on His faithfulness. At PF we are a diverse team of people united by our love for God and our passion for caring for those in prison. Each of us contributes in different ways, but together we are making an impact—whether you are volunteering, giving or praying, you are a vital part of the PF team.

Perhaps you've heard the African proverb that says, 'If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.' God made us for relationship with Him and with each other—we really are better together! ■

Catherine

Catherine De Souza
CEO

IRONMAN BILLY



THREE FRIENDS.
THREE CHARITIES.
THREE LEGS OF A TRIATHLON.
AND ONE LEGACY OF A LIFE
BURSTING WITH LOVE ...



When Billy lost his life at the age of 19, his three closest friends came together to honour him through a celebratory event. Described as cheeky, joyful and loving, it is clear that Billy had an impact on people wherever he went. 'He had a big heart,' smiles his friend Tom. 'He wanted to love everyone and be there for everyone. You know the classic phrase of *lighting up a room whenever you walk into it*? Billy really did!'

Tom, Harvey and Lewis chose to raise money for charities that best reflected Billy's interests: music, sports and supporting people in prison. We are honoured that Prison Fellowship was chosen. Tom explains, **'PF matched up perfectly with what Billy wanted to do. That's why we chose it!'**

Last July, Tom, Harvey and Lewis each took part in a leg of an Ironman Triathlon consisting of a 2.4-mile swim, a 112-mile bike ride and a marathon. That evening, they crossed the finish line together, surrounded by a crowd of family and

friends, before hosting a BBQ at their local church to share memories and music to celebrate Billy's life.

With the support of many, they managed to raise a whopping £10,885. Harvey shares, 'Billy would have been amazed to see the reach of his legacy and how it has been able to help people!'

It is evident that Billy had an unmistakeable passion for helping those in prison. He was in training to become a Prison Officer and often shared with his friends the excitement he felt at being able to share the love of Jesus with people in prison.

Harvey describes, 'He had his fair share of struggles. But he never lost his love for people. He could really relate to young people especially.'

On one of the last occasions the four friends spent together, Billy shared that Psalm 73 had been pressing on his heart, specifically these verses: *'But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold,'* and, *'My flesh and my*

heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever.'

Harvey shares, 'Billy wasn't always on the right path. But he always put his hope in Jesus.' It seems that Billy's own struggles gave him the passion and understanding to support others in difficult situations, especially those in prison.

'Billy understood that certain circumstances can cause things to happen that aren't in people's control. He always saw the best in people and wanted to bring that out,' Tom adds. **'He wanted to talk to young people in prison about Jesus and show them how He could change their lives. The work of Prison Fellowship is something Billy would have wanted to be involved in and get behind.'**

We read in the New Living Translation of Proverbs 27:17, *'As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend.'* And it is clear to see that both faith and friendship have played pivotal roles in the healing process after Billy's passing.

Tom tells us, 'Our faith has helped us process everything. Billy has been a huge part of my own walk with Jesus. I am the way I am because of the impact Billy had on me.'

And it seems that Billy's testimony is continuing to support others in finding faith. 'God has used Billy's passing in so many ways—it's been such a witness to share our faith with other friends,' explains Harvey. 'They see the peace we have. It's something they saw in Billy and something they're now searching for themselves.'

Both Tom and Harvey agree that the Ironman Triathlon was an ideal event to honour Billy's life. Tom shares, 'There's three of us, three legs to the event and three charities we wanted to support. We knew it was going to be both physically and emotionally tiring. But it was a great celebration. And Billy would be really pleased that money is going to good places for good causes. Also, I think Billy would have really loved to be called Ironman!' ■



I WAS IN PRISON, AND YOU CAME TO VISIT ME

It all began in 1990 when a friend invited me to a chapel service at my local prison. From that first visit I was hooked. The reading was from Matthew 25: *"I was in prison, and you came to visit me."* I took that as confirmation I was to get involved. I just felt that was where I wanted to be.'

These are the words of Rosemary Orr, a devoted prison visitor and Prison Fellowship (PF) Volunteer. This first prison visit meant her path in life was forever altered. Her daughter, Alison, recounts, 'There and then, this was it—she knew she had found the place she needed to be.'

In 1991, Rosemary became an official prison visitor, embarking on a mission spanning over three decades. She first visited an 18-year-old serving a life sentence, maintaining a correspondence that lasted until her passing in 2022. This young man, deeply impacted by Rosemary's unwavering support, contributed a heartfelt segment to her eulogy:

'You met an 18 year old, who knew everything, and nothing. You watched him take three steps forward, and one step back. You gave advice, you cared, and—in time—I realised you loved me.'

It took a while longer to understand this and apply it to myself. You would see what I couldn't and help me to see past my own emotions and ignorance. I feel your loss, but know that you look down on me and still strive to protect and help me. Thank you for all the years I had with you, and I hope to be a part of your future, when my time comes. I'm proud of who I am, thanks to you—Rosemary Orr—or simply "Nan" to me.'

Rosemary forged genuine, lasting connections with those she met, even travelling across the country to maintain these

bonds when individuals were transferred. Her husband, Desmond, frequently accompanied her, supporting her mission wholeheartedly. The relationships Rosemary built were profound; she was invited to the weddings of former inmates and proudly displayed photos of their children in her home.

Rosemary became involved with PF's prayer meetings in 1998 and first participated in our restorative justice programme, *Sycamore Tree*, in 2005, which deepened her commitment to the cause. Rosemary's preparatory notes for the church talks she delivered reflect the deep sense of purpose and fulfilment she found in her work. In 2005 she wrote, 'I have been involved in two courses at my local prison and have found them very moving experiences. It

has been so encouraging to see some of the men becoming aware of the damage they have caused and the determination not to repeat their mistakes when released.'

Rosemary's personal life was equally rich and fulfilling. She experienced the Second World War as a child, was a secretary for film producers as a young woman and went on to raise four children with her husband.

Rosemary began visiting prisons at the age of 58, demonstrating that it is never too late to get involved in Prison Fellowship's ministry.

She continued as a Group Facilitator until 2018 when Desmond's ill health took much-needed precedence.

Rosemary kindly left PF a gift in her Will which will impact people in prison

for years to come. But, her generous donation is not her only legacy. Her daughter, Alison, now following in her footsteps, shares, 'She just had a connection with men in prison. Now that I'm doing it myself, I totally get it. I can't put it into words, but there is nowhere I would rather be.'

Alison shares, 'Mum found her niche with prison visiting. Suddenly, she came alive. It became her identity. The men she visited called her Nan, and when she died, one of the men said she was the "mama he never had."'

Rosemary's legacy is one of profound empathy and unwavering commitment to those society often forgets. Her life exemplifies the transformative power of kindness and the difference one person can make in the lives of many. ■

We are so grateful for the generous legacy left by Volunteers through their tireless work. You can find out more about memorial gifts and legacies online, or contact Jo at legacy@prisonfellowship.org.uk.

prisonfellowship.org.uk/legacy





A DAY IN THE LIFE OF AN ... **ANGEL TREE COORDINATOR**

OUR *ANGEL TREE* PROGRAMME ENABLES PARENTS IN PRISON TO GIVE A GIFT TO THEIR CHILDREN AT CHRISTMAS. THIS NOT ONLY BRINGS MUCH-NEEDED HEALING TO THE FAMILIES AFFECTED BY IMPRISONMENT BUT ALSO HOPE TO THE CHILDREN WHO ARE SEPARATED FROM THEIR PARENTS.

Jane has been a PF Volunteer for over 30 years and has spent almost 20 of these years involved with *Angel Tree*. Here, she shares a little about her role as an Angel Tree Coordinator ...

'For me, the *Angel Tree* process begins when I receive resources from the Prison Fellowship Support Team. And it continues until all the presents have been wrapped and sent to each child. I visit my local prison's chapel service where I hand out application forms to anyone who wants to take part in *Angel Tree*. I also leave forms on each wing, so everyone in the prison has an opportunity to get involved.



'When the forms are returned by those wanting to take part, I work closely with my local church to find people willing to buy the required gifts. Details of the children and their ages are provided, along with a preference of gift which is chosen by the parent in prison. This is really special as it ensures children receive something they may have been wanting for a long time. It makes it that bit more exciting for the children!

'There are many compassionate and willing people in my church who want to contribute to *Angel Tree*—it is a blessing to be a part of it. Once all the gifts have been purchased, we come together to wrap and post them in what we call a 'wrapping day.' This brings a lot of fun into the process and makes the giving personal. It's a little like Santa's workshop!

'I first put myself forward to become an Angel Tree Coordinator when the previous Volunteer retired. After all these years, I am now working with two prisons. We work closely together to ensure all the required gifts are bought and posted on time.

'I love this role. I enjoy being able to support the parents in prison, offering them an opportunity to do something positive for their children at Christmas. I know that the effects on both the children and their parent through Angel Tree are significant.'

'It can sometimes be challenging to find the time and opportunity to tell those in prison about the scheme and promote it. However, we know we can rely on the goodwill of the prison chaplains who are already very

busy, but always wanting to help. A lesser issue is making sure that all of the gifts purchased by the Volunteers are suitable and appropriate. But we always manage to get it right with a bit of juggling!

'It is so great to see the joy on the faces of those in prison when they know that they have an opportunity to give their children a personal gift. They love it when we share with them that their child received what they had their heart set on.

'It is also beautiful to be able to convey to those in prison that they are seen and valued as individuals who matter. *Angel Tree* lets them know that there are people who care about them and their families. This can be extremely encouraging and can positively impact people's journeys through prison.' ■

If you are interested in becoming an Angel Tree Coordinator and bringing joy to families affected by imprisonment this Christmas, get in touch with our Programmes Coordinator, Tim, at angeltree@prisonfellowship.org.uk.



• IF YOU HAVE BEEN AFFECTED BY CRIME & IMPRISONMENT IN ANY WAY THEN THIS WEEK OF PRAYER IS FOR YOU •

**JESUS
LOOKED AT HIM
AND LOVED HIM**

MARK 10:21

**AND HE LOOKS AT
YOU AND LOVES
YOU TOO**

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13TH - 19TH
OCTOBER
2024

 **PRISONS
WEEK**

PRISONS WEEK IS A TIME TO FOCUS ON PRAYER FOR PEOPLE IN PRISON. TAKE A LOOK AT THE LEAFLET IN THIS EDITION OF *IN:SIGHT*, OR VISIT PRISONFELLOWSHIP.ORG.UK/PW24

Have you ever looked at somebody—maybe your spouse, parents, children or grandchildren—and felt that overwhelming sense of love for them?

This is how God looks at us.

Like the sun on a warm summer's day, God's love drenches our whole being, and it can make us want to share this love with others.

Imagine how this would have felt for those in the Bible that had been cast out by society—Zaccheaus, the tax collector; the Samaritan woman who had been married multiple times; the woman who had suffered from years of bleeding. They were all seen as unworthy and, as a result, had been alienated from society. Yet, in every person's case, when Jesus encountered them, He looked at them with love. He had compassion on them all. He had an overwhelming sense of love for them.

Now, imagine how this would feel for people in prison. Those who our communities deem as unworthy and, as a result,

are alienated from society. Imagine what it would mean for them to feel the warmth of God's love in a place of cold darkness.

For nearly 50 years, *Prisons Week* has encouraged consistent prayer for all people affected by imprisonment—be it people in prison and their families, victims of crime and the communities affected by crime, or all those who work so hard to keep the criminal justice system operating—prayer has covered them all.

As prisons face an overcrowding crisis, it is vital to lift our prayers up to God. Dwight L. Moody famously said, **'Every great movement of God can be traced to a kneeling figure.'**

There is a growing need for change in our prison system, and we know that the power of prayer can be the catalyst for this.

We need a great movement of God. But we are called to move, too. Ephesians 4:32 calls us to *'be kind and compassionate to one another.'* And Jesus gives us

the commandment in John 13:34 to *'love one another.'*

If you encounter somebody who has been in prison, how would you look at them? Would your eyes be downcast in an attempt to avoid interaction? Would you look straight through them as though they were invisible? Or would you see them as Jesus would—with love and compassion?

Remember, Jesus looks at them and loves them in the same way He looks at you and loves you.

This *Prisons Week*, may we have the eyes of Jesus to look upon those deemed as unworthy and alienated from society with compassion. May we drench all those impacted by imprisonment in the warmth of God's love. May our prayers encourage more people to reach out and support people in prison. And may we come together, in the power of prayer, to bring about change to our society and our prison system.

Who will you be praying for this *Prisons Week*? ■



ANGEL TREE CHRISTMAS CARDS ARE NOW AVAILABLE!

This year's card features the winning design from our 2023 *Angel Tree* Christmas Card competition. Inside the card is a Bible verse from Matthew 2: 'And the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.'

Cards are available for purchase this Christmas for a suggested donation of £5/pack of 10, A6 cards and envelopes. Order your packs today by completing the donation form enclosed with this issue of *In:sight*, or purchase them online: prisonfellowship.org.uk/christmas-cards

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