

Prison
FELLOWSHIP

IN:SIGHT

SUMMER 2025



- **LET JUSTICE ROLL** | PRAYING BOLDLY, LIVING JUSTLY
- **STEADFAST IN HOPE** | *SYCAMORE TREE*
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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 *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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No 1102254 | Limited Company Registered
in England & Wales No 5003795

Design: innovivid.co.uk

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The Bible is full of passages and verses about justice—what it looks like, what it stands against, and God's command to pursue it relentlessly. By delving into what Scripture teaches about justice, we not only learn about God's character but also discover our role in confronting the injustice that mars His creation.

One of the most vivid and powerful images of justice is found in Amos 5:24: 'But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!'

This imagery of water is transformative. Water doesn't merely pass through; it reshapes the landscape, carving through even the hardest rock over time. Rivers are life-giving forces, nurturing the

environments they flow through, but they're also powerful agents of change. The justice God calls us to is no decorative trickle—it's a surging river with the strength to reshape the world around it.

Throughout Scripture, water is both life-giving and purifying, but it also has the capacity to overcome and destroy. The Red Sea was a path to freedom for Moses and the Israelites, yet a grave for their oppressors. Jesus Himself is described as 'living water,' offering eternal life to those who come to Him. Justice that rolls on like a mighty river carries this dual nature—it brings life, yet it also dismantles injustice, confronting the powers and principalities that seek to oppress and destroy.

This dual nature reminds us that pursuing justice is both a spiritual battle and a practical mission. The devil doesn't surrender ground without resistance. Tackling injustice requires confronting evil at its root—on our streets,

within systems, and through persistent prayer.

Water also cleanses, a reminder of the hope and renewal that come through Christ. One of the most poignant examples of this is baptism—a celebration of transformation, cleansing, and the new life found in Jesus.

As a minister, I've had the joy of playing a part in some of life's most significant events and some of the most special times have been baptising people—I always love hearing their testimonies of how Jesus changed their lives and celebrating with them. Recently, I've been moved by stories of baptisms in prisons, shared by our Prison Fellowship volunteers. These are moments of profound grace and celebration, as people in prison have found freedom in Christ, even within the confines of prison walls.

The imagery of water and justice is inseparable from this mission. Baptism symbolises not only a

washing away of sin but also a commissioning into a life reshaped by God's justice.

Let justice roll on like a river. The Church has been given divine authority to pursue justice in God's name. We are called to be a shaping force in the world, transforming the landscape with the love and power of God. Through the Holy Spirit, we can confront injustice, act justly, and witness lives and communities transformed.

Prison ministry exemplifies this calling—bringing the life-giving waters of the gospel to places often overlooked, reshaping lives and offering hope where despair once reigned.

Together, let us pray boldly and live justly. And let us see the mighty river of God's justice flow through every corner of the world, bringing life, freedom, and restoration. ■

Catherine

Catherine De Souza
CEO

'It has made me think about my crime. I want to put my wrongs right and never commit any other crime in the future. • The course has made me think about my victims and all the hurt I have caused. • I hope to change my life for the better through doing Sycamore Tree. • It made me realise you can change and there are people out there to help you. It made me think about who I have affected and how they feel. I will leave here feeling I can change. • The programme has made me reflect on both my criminal behaviour and the wellbeing of my victim. It has given me an even steelier resolve than I had already to make this be my last ever prison sentence. I would like to thank all those involved for putting on this course and giving up their valuable and precious time for us. • Forgiveness is possible, time is a healer. Together victim, offender and community can support each other to build a better future. **Change is possible.** • I've gained so much knowledge which I will remember for a lifetime and also apply to my life, and others who need my help at any moment. I've also gained confidence within myself (through publicly speaking in the group). This will have a good effect on my future and life moving forward. • I have finally, after seven years, realised I was in a state of denial and am truly grateful to have had the opportunity to take part in Sycamore Tree. I hope to be able to help others in their journeys in future. • The programme has helped me think more deeply about myself, my crime and all the impacts it has had on others affected in different ways and how I can move forward. I am feeling as though I have never anything I've missed I can look at things differently. I have been able to consider all options before I make any decisions. I am so confident about my new life and I will not reoffend. I am going to support my victim and I will be a good offender and make it my goal to move forward. I will be a better person for myself and others and I will be a good citizen. I will think twice before doing anything bad and try to do positive actions in the community. • I have been able to meet my victim and all victims and it has made a huge change to my life. I have also made me realise that forgiveness is key! Forgiving myself is not an easy thing to do but it is. It has made me realise that my future can be positive through it. I have been able to do Sycamore Tree. I have been able to see my victim and I have been able to see all things.'

STEADFAST IN HOPE: OUR COMMITMENT CONTINUES

For 25 years, Sycamore Tree has been changing lives. Together, we have seen over 40,000 learners grow in their understanding of the impact of crime, experience the possibility of forgiveness, and take hopeful steps towards a new future.

Many of you have played a key role in this work—bringing grace and restoration into places so often marked by revenge and despair. What a privilege it has been to see lives transformed through this powerful programme. And what a legacy Sycamore Tree leaves behind.

Introducing this article, you'll see quotes that showcase the incredible and lasting impact of Sycamore Tree. As one of our learners said:

'It made me realise you can change and there are people out there to help you. It made me think about who I have affected and how they feel. I will leave here feeling I can change.'

It is because of this incredible impact that we are so deeply saddened to share that the National Framework for Interventions (NFI) panel has rejected our appeal, confirming its original decision that Sycamore Tree does not currently meet the evidence-informed standards required for endorsement. This is a painful moment for us all, and we know many of you will share that sadness.

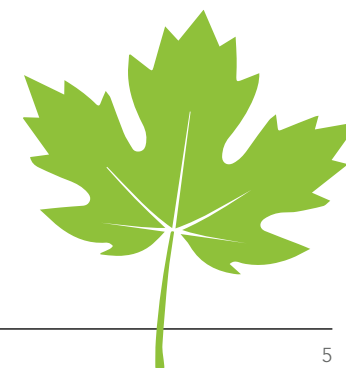
However, our commitment to this work continues. We are already in constructive discussions with key stakeholders within His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), exploring how the core principles of Sycamore Tree can still shape meaningful work in prisons in new ways.

We are prayerfully and proactively developing plans to repurpose elements of the programme, ensuring its legacy continues to bring hope and restoration to

those who need it most. We will communicate further developments as soon as we are able.

At the same time, we want to reassure you that all of PF's other programmes and activities continue as normal. Our mission to show Christ's love to people in prison remains as strong as ever. Together, we will continue to serve faithfully through our existing ministries and remain alert to new opportunities God may present as part of our future vision.

Thank you for standing with us. Your ongoing support, prayers and dedication are vital as we move forward, trusting in the God who 'is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us.' ■



THE BRIDGE BACK:

HOW PASTORAL CARE HELPED ME FIND MY WAY AGAIN



CONTENT WARNING: SUICIDAL IDEATION

When Mark signed up for *Living with Loss* in prison, he didn't expect much. Grief was something he'd buried deep, ever since losing his dad in a car crash as a teenager. Two decades later, depression, anxiety and loneliness had taken their toll—even though, from the outside, life seemed fine. It wasn't until prison that he found the courage to face what he'd been carrying for years.

Mark shares his powerful journey through grief, mental health struggles and healing, showing just how transformative this work can be—and why your support as a donor or volunteer—can help change lives.

When I was 15 or 16, just after I'd left school, my dad died in a car crash. It was me, my mum, and my two sisters left. Being the only male in the family, I didn't feel like I could talk to anyone. I buried my grief, not realising how much it would affect me.

For most of my life, I've lived with depression and anxiety. In 2022—some 23 years after losing my dad, I finally admitted how badly I was struggling. Even though I was married and had kids, I still felt incredibly lonely. I got so low that I planned which bridge I'd jump off. I still didn't get help.

It wasn't until I ended up in prison that I finally sought help. I saw a leaflet for the *Living with Loss* course in the chapel and thought, 'It won't do me any harm to talk about my dad.' I had no idea that signing up would be such a turning point.

I get anxious in big groups, so before the

first session I was really worried. But, the group was small, and Anna, Jo, and Maureen made us all feel welcome and at ease. I enjoyed every session, and grew in confidence as each week passed.

Living with Loss helped me understand I was stuck in a loop with my emotions since losing my dad. My low confidence and self-hatred came from that grief. I didn't try new things because if I failed, I would spiral into withdrawal and worse depression. But, week by week, things started to make sense.

One key moment was when we looked at the 'waterfall' diagram. I realised I had been stuck in the pool at the bottom for years. Another was the 'seasons of grief.' I'd never moved out of 'winter.' Something just clicked.

Doing the course has lifted a huge weight off my shoulders. I actually feel like I can enjoy life again. When I'm released

in four months, I've got so many plans—stuff I never thought I'd try, like DIY and woodworking.

Not everyone will experience the same uplifting moment of change I felt. But, if you're thinking about doing the course—do it. However big or small the effect, you'll come away in a better place. I've learnt to talk about what's on my mind and not let my emotions get bottled up. That alone has made such a difference. I'm also better prepared for any future grief. I've kept the paperwork from the course, so I can go back to it whenever I need to.

Thank you for reading.

A VOLUNTEER SHARES:

'Mark was so quiet when he first joined. He sat next to someone from a different wing who seemed quite intimidating, but that man quickly opened up, even shedding tears over a recent bereavement. That moment really set the tone

for the group—it became a space where it was safe to feel, talk and begin healing.

'As the weeks progressed, all of us were so proud of the men. They faced their fears, spoke from the heart and drew strength and comfort from one another. I believe their time together brought real healing and strength to face the future.

'If you're thinking about volunteering or supporting our *Pastoral Care* programme, I can honestly say it's one of the most meaningful things I've ever been part of. Your time, care or donation could help someone like Mark find hope and courage again.' ■



Learn more about our *Pastoral Care* work by visiting our website.

prisonfellowship.org.uk/our-work/pastoral-care

POPE FRANCIS:

THE SERVANT LEADER WHO KNELT IN THE PRISON CHAPEL

Pope Francis, who died on 21 April, 2025 at the age of 88, leaves behind a legacy defined by humility, compassion and radical proximity to marginalised people. Among the many hallmarks of his papacy, his dedication to prison ministry stands out as a powerful embodiment of the Gospel he preached—one in which no one is beyond the reach of grace.



Every year, thousands would gather in St Peter's Square to glimpse Pope Francis, to hear his voice and to receive his blessing. The grandeur of Vatican City, the stirring beauty of its liturgies and the weight of tradition all point to a figure of immense global influence. And yet, on Maundy Thursday—the day when the Church remembers Jesus washing the feet of His disciples—Pope Francis was often not there. He was in prison.

Since the earliest days of his papacy, Pope Francis made a habit of stepping beyond the marble halls of the Vatican to enter the cells and corridors of some of Italy's most notorious prisons. There, he did something truly radical: he knelt to wash the feet of inmates.

These were not symbolic gestures performed from afar. They were intimate, humbling acts, embodying the heart of the Gospel. Whether the feet belong to Christians or Muslims, men or women, adults or young offenders, Francis knelt before them all. He

did not do so to make headlines. He did so to echo the actions of Jesus Christ—the servant king who stooped to wash the feet of His disciples on the night of His betrayal.

For Pope Francis, prison ministry was not a niche concern. It was central to what it means to be a follower of Christ. 'Where there is a person who has made a mistake, there I am,' he once said. 'I am not afraid of them. I am not afraid of reaching out to them.' He reminds us that no one is beyond the reach of God's mercy, and that rehabilitation begins with recognition of human dignity.

In his visits to prisons, Francis did more than perform a ceremony. He listened to stories. He embraced. He prayed with people in prison. He heard their regrets and hopes. At Rome's Rebibbia prison, at Casal del Marmo youth detention centre, and in many others, his message was the same: You are not forgotten. You are not condemned forever. You are loved.

For those of us involved in prison ministry, Pope Francis's example is both a challenge and an encouragement. It is a challenge to reject indifference and to remember that true Christian service often happens away from the spotlight. And it is an encouragement that our small acts—writing a letter, leading a Bible study, simply showing up—matter deeply in the Kingdom of God.

When the leader of 1.3 billion Catholics chooses to spend one of the holiest days of the year in prison, it sends a powerful message: Christ is found in the margins. And where Christ is, we too are called to be.

So as we serve behind prison walls, let us take heart from Pope Francis's quiet, kneeling witness. In the face of despair, he brought hope. In places marked by guilt, he spoke of grace. And in the lives of those deemed lost, he pointed to the God who never stops seeking, saving and restoring. ■

TOM'S AND JANE'S JOURNEY INTO PRISON MINISTRY



Meet Tom and Jane—a couple for whom prison ministry has been an inter-generational endeavour! Their journey, shaped by God's call from a young age, now involves their whole family in bringing hope to people in prison.

Their story shows how family experiences can spark and nurture a life of service—and how one small 'yes' can grow into a legacy of faithfulness.

EARLY SEEDS OF CALLING

Practical Christian love—and prison ministry—were part of Tom's life from an early age. His parents, Paul and Pauline, regularly

welcomed people in need into their home. One of their guests, a prison leaver, was transformed after encountering Jesus one Christmas at Midnight Mass and returned every year.

The presence of prison chaplain, Jo Honour, in Tom's home church, his dad's support for prison leavers through a local housing association and stories about The Clink restaurant were part of everyday life. As a child, while attending Spring Harvest, Tom responded to a call to help others, not realising how that early 'yes' would shape his future.

Jane's calling began in her teens. Books like *Chasing the Dragon* and *The Cross and the Switchblade* inspired her to reach out to people on the margins. During a Soul Survivor prayer meeting, while others felt called overseas, Jane felt unmistakably drawn to serve those in prison. That conviction led her to visit a prison in West Africa while volunteering with Mercy Ships. Later, she trained in law, working in legal aid with a passion for justice and mercy.

A MARRIAGE BUILT ON MISSION

When Jane met Tom she says, 'I knew I didn't need to look any further!' They

married in 2012, choosing Isaiah 61 as one of their wedding readings—words proclaiming freedom for the captives and hope for the broken hearted.

Soon after, they spotted a *Prisons Week* service advertised in their church notices. It was a small BCP service with just five others—but they met the chaplain from their local prison. That meeting led them to their local Prison Fellowship prayer group. From there, they started attending chapel services and wing visits where Tom visited the segregation and healthcare units and was deeply moved by the need he saw.

Later, they volunteered at a second prison, getting involved in *Alpha*, *just10* and *Sycamore Tree*. As their commitment deepened, so did their responsibilities.

Balancing ministry with work and family life hasn't been easy. Jane reduced her hours and Tom shifts his schedule to fit in prison time. There are sacrifices—of time, childcare and logistics—but, as Jane

observes, 'If you've always felt called to serve vulnerable people, you have to make time for it.'

A FAMILY CALLING

Tom's parents did not stop supporting prison ministry after he left home, becoming involved in PF shortly after Tom and Jane and now serving in a number of local prisons. They also travel 1.5 hours to babysit while Tom and Jane are in prison.

The couple serve as a team—Tom often handles security and technology, while Jane tutors courses, having trained during maternity leave to fill a much-needed Sycamore Tree Tutor spot. Tom admires Jane's teaching; Jane says that having him nearby gives her confidence and is 'grateful he handles the tech!'

One of their most treasured memories is a Christmas Day spent with men in prison who were away from their own families. In a befitting moment, that afternoon they drove two hours to Jane's parents to share

the news that they were expecting their first child.

Chapel services, especially full immersion baptisms, remain a deep joy. In spite of old hymnbooks and less-than-perfect instruments, the worship is always 'heartfelt, authentic and full of the Holy Spirit.'

Now their daughter, aged seven, is growing up surrounded by the same faithful stories that shaped her parents. According to Jane, 'Sometimes she surprises her teachers by saying, "My parents are in prison!"' ■

COULD PRISON MINISTRY BE PART OF YOUR FAMILY'S STORY, TOO?

Whether through prayer, practical support, or volunteering in prison, there are many ways to get involved. Like Tom and Jane, you might find that one small 'yes' leads to blessings far beyond what you expected. Why not take that first step today?

CONNECTING FAMILIES, OFFERING HOPE

Angel Tree Mother's Day has once again brought a message of love and connection to mothers whose sons or daughters are in prison across England and Wales. This year, 25 prisons took part in the programme, enabling the distribution of 621 Mother's Day cards and vouchers.



The programme is a vital part of our ministry, strengthening family ties and offering hope to young adults and their mothers separated by imprisonment. By providing a tangible way for children to express their love, *Angel Tree Mother's Day* helps to maintain crucial family bonds during challenging times.

Our Programmes Co-ordinator, Tim Spargo-Mabbs, shares his gratitude: 'A huge thank you to all our incredible volunteers for their dedication in making this year's *Angel Tree Mother's Day* programme a success. We are also deeply thankful for the prayerful and financial support of our wider community, without whom this vital work would not be possible.'



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