

Prison
FELLOWSHIP

IN:SIGHT
AUTUMN 2025



- **COMPLETE RESTORATION** | THE POWER OF GOD
- **HEROIN TO HOPE** | CLAIRE'S JOURNEY
- **STORIES OF GRACE AND IMAGINATION**
- **WHEN MISSION BECOMES OUR STORY**
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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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In 2001, the world-famous Leaning Tower of Pisa reopened after being closed for 11 years. A team of experts had worked to stabilise its fragile foundations, with Italian authorities spending around £25 million on the project. Yet, despite all that effort, the tower's famous tilt remained. Millions of visitors climb its steps each year, but perhaps its most iconic image is of tourists posing with outstretched arms, pretending to hold it up. In a way, those experts spent more than a decade attempting the very same thing. The outcome was partly successful. The tower's base was strengthened but its future remains uncertain, with some predicting the tower

will straighten over time, but others believing it will lean further again.

God's restoration, however, is nothing like that. His work is never partial, never temporary—it is complete. Take the Apostle Peter, the disciple who denied Jesus three times, insisting he didn't even know Him at the very moment his loyalty mattered most. Yet Peter's story didn't end in shame. He repented, turned around and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, became a bold witness for Christ. In Acts 2, Peter preached so powerfully that 3,000 people came to faith in a single day.

The same voice that once trembled with fear and denial became the voice that declared Jesus boldly.

That is the power of God's restoration. He doesn't just patch up our broken places; He transforms them. Peter went from fearful denier to fearless preacher. His weakness became the very platform for God's glory.

And God's restoration doesn't stop with us. In God's Kingdom, restored people become restorers. God works through our healed lives to bring healing to others. In this edition of *In:sight*, you'll read Claire's remarkable story—how God not only restored her but is now also using her to walk alongside others who are where she once was. Her journey is a vivid picture of God turning pain into purpose. The very places where the enemy sought to steal, kill and destroy are now the very places where God's light shines brightest.

God takes our shame, guilt and brokenness and turns them into testimonies of His grace. He is strong enough to turn weakness into strength and mighty enough to use even our deepest hurts for good.

Children's author Luke Aylen, reflecting on his involvement in our *Angel Tree* programme, captured this truth beautifully.

He shared his hope that young readers of his book would 'see the value of restoring what's broken.'

This October, we also join with churches across the country in marking *Prisons Week* (12–18 October). This year's theme is 'God's Word is not chained' (2 Timothy 2:9)—a powerful reminder that His Word restores, heals and brings hope even behind prison walls. You'll find a *Prisons Week* leaflet enclosed with this magazine, and more resources at prisonsworld.org.

Here at PF, we count it a privilege to witness God's restoration in broken lives made whole. And the wonderful truth is that, unlike the uncertain foundations of the Leaning Tower of Pisa, His restoration is full, certain and complete. ■

Catherine

Catherine De Souza, CEO



BEFORE



AFTER



'WOW, SOMEBODY CARES ENOUGH TO WRITE A LETTER TO ME. THEY'VE NEVER MET ME, THEY DON'T KNOW ME BUT THEY'VE TOOK TIME TO WRITE TO ME.'

HEROIN TO HOPE: CLAIRE'S JOURNEY

Claire Mothersdale's story takes us from addiction and prison to recovery, faith and a new life of service. With an eight-page rap sheet, scars on her skin and on her heart, she once believed women like her don't get better. Today, Claire speaks to us as a prison counsellor, a loving wife and mother, drug- and Hep C-free and a powerful advocate for prison ministry.

For nearly two decades, heroin was Claire's way of numbing pain she didn't know how to face. Her descent began in her teens, after the trauma of her parents' divorce and a late abortion at age 14 left her feeling abandoned, guilty and broken. What started with cannabis and party drugs spiralled into heroin addiction by the age of 18. It cost her her health, relationships, children and self-worth. A near-death experience in 2004 briefly jolted her awake—but relapses followed,

as the deep wounds behind the addiction remained unresolved.

At her lowest point, Claire even asked the courts to send her to prison, hoping it might help her get clean. 'She doesn't ask you to consider any penalty other than a custodial sentence,' her lawyer told the magistrates, after she was caught stealing £45 of aftershave from Boots. With her bags packed, she walked into prison—not knowing God was about to begin something new.

Prison wasn't easy. But in the chapel, she found something unexpected. 'I went there to see my friends, not to meet with God,' Claire laughs. Church growing up had always been stand up, sit down, do this, do that. But the chaplain, Jane, offered to pray with her and gave her a book that opened the door to something different. She also received a letter

from a PF *Letter Link* volunteer on the outside.

'Somebody wrote me a letter, I can't remember who it was, but I do remember thinking, "Wow, somebody cares enough to write a letter to me. They've never met me, they don't know me but they've taken time to write to me."'

Even when she left prison, she says, 'I was out of my prison cell, but still a captive in body and soul.' In 2010, she entered a Christian rehab programme. There, she met Jesus and began to deal not just with her addiction but also with the brokenness beneath it.

She tells us she had a vision of herself wearing a t-shirt with labels—scum, smackhead, thief. Then later, alone, afraid, broken. But God gave her a new t-shirt with new labels: loved, valued, forgiven, set free.

'The old life has gone, the new life has come. He has absolutely taken every

part of that brokenness and used it for good.'

Fourteen years later, Claire is completely free from heroin, restored to her children, Hepatitis C-clear and a qualified counsellor. She now walks back into prison—but this time not in handcuffs. Instead, she sits with women who are where she once was, offering them the hope she has found. 'I'm not in that prison cell anymore. But I'm also not in that internal prison. I'm going back in there to reach people in the same position I was in.

'This rap sheet used to define me. Eight pages of convictions. Now the Bible defines me. It's God's Word and the only truth that matters.'

Claire's message to all volunteers—prayerers, visitors, letter writers—is simple: keep going. 'Keep being open, keep trusting God. Sometimes you feel like you're there and they're not. When you're in prison you're hardened—but

keep lovin' on 'em. Even if they don't show it, it's the love they will respond to. Just turning up, giving your time, that speaks volumes. It was the love people of God showed me that was pivotal in my recovery journey.'

Even though she doesn't know who wrote that letter, she has a message for them and all our letter writers: 'Thank you. You made me feel seen. You made me feel like someone cares. In each of these little things, it was God's hand at work.'

Today, Claire is a counsellor in the very prison where she was once an inmate. She tells us God is using her story to bring beauty from ashes, and to show women who feel unreachable that no one is unreachable to Him. ■

COULD YOU HELP WITH LETTER LINK?

Learn more about our Letter Link programme by visiting our website:

prisonfellowship.org.uk/our-work/letter-link

CHILDREN'S AUTHOR LUKE AYLEN ON STORIES OF GRACE AND IMAGINATION

As we prepare for *Angel Tree* 2025, piles of books are arriving ready to be sent to children of parents in prison through our dedicated volunteers. This year, some of those books will come from Luke Aylen, a children's author whose writing is steeped in faith, imagination and hope. We caught up with him to hear about his journey into storytelling, and what it means to him that his books will be placed into the hands of children supported through Prison Fellowship's *Angel Tree* programme.

A LOVE OF STORIES

Luke's love of writing began young. As a child he even attempted his own chapter book, titled *Magic!* But living with dyslexia, he never imagined that writing books would be part of his future. That changed while he was helping put together content for Spring Harvest's *Big Start* programme.

'Each year they ran a drama for children,' Luke recalls. 'One year, I suggested they might have a book to go alongside it.' To his surprise, he was asked to write it! That suggestion became *The Mirror and the Mountain*—a fantasy novel for children inspired by the book of James.

Now, alongside working on a PhD in theology, Luke has discovered his real joy: writing stories. Like fantasy writers C.S. Lewis and Tolkien before him, his stories explore the deep and complex theological themes of grace, goodness, generosity and light overcoming darkness through magic, dragons and the wonderful world of fantasy.

'When you read fantasy, you willingly suspend many of your normal assumptions about reality. You lower your defences to consider and imagine alternative worldviews. I think it's no surprise many great theologians and philosophers enjoy exploring their ideas through fantasy fiction. For me, I hope my fantasy fiction might open people up to Gospel ideas and themes in a gentle, non-preachy way.'

His stories echo the beauty of the Gospel: joy arising from brokenness, grace shining through in unlikely places. One of his favourite characters, Antimony, struggles with being different and longs to find where he belongs. In one chapter, Antimony tries to mend a shattered mirror but is frustrated by the cracks that remain. A wise character reassures him: 'When all the pieces are put back together, the cracks point to the one who cared enough to restore it.'

'For me,' Luke says, 'that is the heart of the Gospel. Our brokenness

is where God's grace shines through.'

HOPE FOR CHILDREN

So what does Luke hope children will find in his books? 'That they would see the value in restoring what's broken. That they would know they are loved, valuable, and that they belong,' he says. 'That they would see hope in difficult circumstances and look for it reflected in their own lives.'

This vision makes his partnership with *Angel Tree* especially meaningful. 'I've been deeply moved by the stories I've heard about *Angel Tree* making a difference for families affected by imprisonment,' Luke says. 'The gifts given are not only rays of light and love in the midst of a painful season, but they are helping to build up families in a way that will have lifelong effects.'

'I feel honoured that my books will be going out to some of these families. I remember books from my own childhood that shaped how I saw the world and myself. It's humbling

and exciting to think my books, through *Angel Tree*, might have that kind of long-lasting impact.'

A LASTING GIFT

Luke's prayer is simple but powerful:

'That unwrapping the book will bring a child a smile and a moment of joy and connection with Mum or Dad; that a few weeks of joyful escapism and excitement while reading it will ease the struggle of missing a parent; that it might be treasured because it came from Mum or Dad at a time they were not around. And as an author I dare to hope even more: that long after the dog-eared paperback's spine has given out, or the book's been lost or donated to a charity shop, the message that they are loved, important and valuable will still be carried with them.' ■

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT LUKE...

Visit Luke's website at lukeaylen.co.uk. His books are available through SPCK spckpublishing.co.uk.





WHEN MISSION BECOMES OUR STORY: HOW PARTNERSHIP DRIVES THE CHURCH

As Prisons Week approaches, churches around the country will be celebrating their partnership with Prison Fellowship. Mission partnership often includes standing orders, Gift Aid forms and annual appeals—but at its heart, it is also about prayer, relationship and shared mission. We spoke to Nico, the vicar of St Paul's and St Barnabas (one of our mission partners), about how partnership looks for them.

For us, partnering is supporting each other, knowing about each other, praying together. We want to feel part of what you're doing and we want you to feel part of us.'

This mindset has shaped how their large congregation relates to their mission partners around the world, including Prison Fellowship. It's not about 'us and them.' It's about one mission, shared.

SMALL GROUPS, BIG IMPACT

With such a large church family, you might wonder

how this is possible in practice. The answer is that every small group (or 'life group') is linked to a mission partner.

That connection means each group can pray regularly, hear updates first-hand and even share more personal prayer requests. Many members are volunteers, supporters, have family members or friends in the charity or serve as trustees with the charities they are connected to.

As a whole church, they hear twice a year from each partner during services, as well as through a regular newsletter. They focus on three areas:

- **What has God been doing?**
- **What are your plans for the future?**
- **How can we pray for you?**

These updates inspire the whole congregation to celebrate, pray and act together.

BROADENING HORIZONS

Why does this matter? For St Paul's and St Barnabas, it has reshaped their sense of understanding of the world they live in.

'If you're in a suburban, middle-class British church, it's easy to get sucked into your own concerns. But suddenly,

when you partner, your horizon gets much bigger. You're reminded of the essentials—that it's not about whether you can buy a new car, but whether you can help someone around the world. It broadens our understanding and keeps us rooted.'

That sense of partnership filters even into Sunday preaching—sermon illustrations are drawn from the church's own mission partners, reminding people, 'this is not someone else's story. It's ours, too.'

WHY PRISON MINISTRY?

Among their ten partners is Prison Fellowship. And the reason for that support goes to the heart of Jesus' own teaching.

'You can't not be moved by it. You see the fruit, you go into a prison and you know—we can't stop

supporting this. Jesus said, "I was a prisoner and you came to visit me." He only mentions a handful of things in Matthew 25, and one of them is prisoners. We can't all go to prison, but we can support those who do. It feels like such an essential part of Jesus' mandate.'

For this church, supporting prison ministry isn't just a good cause. It's at the heart of who Jesus is, who we are, and who the church is meant to be.

'Serving in more marginal places—that's the abundant life that Jesus talks about. When he promises abundant life, this part of it. There's so much joy. The joy of being able to see God at work in the midst of brokenness is really powerful.'

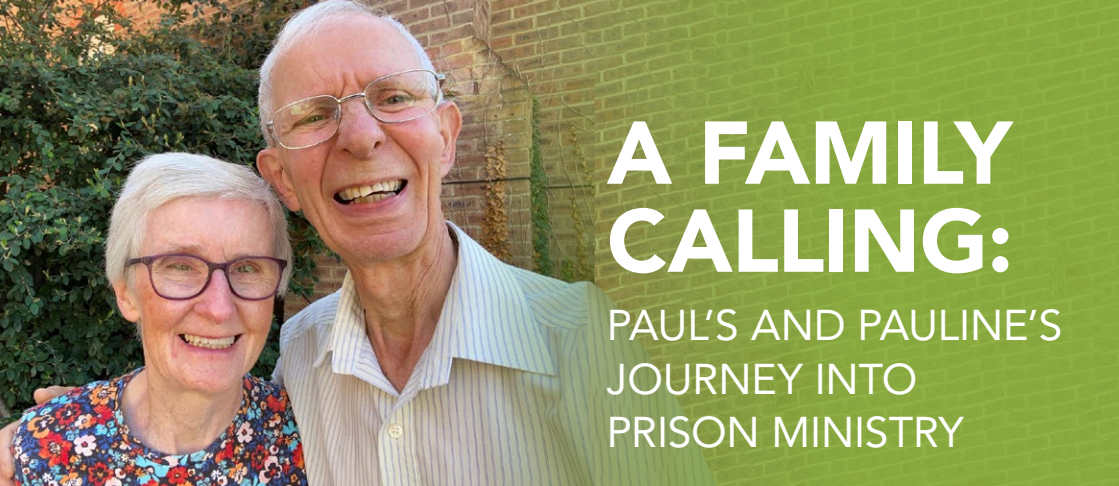
'I believe that when we join in with what is at the heart of Jesus, He blesses

our ministry. There's a spiritual reality that if we support what's in His heart, it drives the church itself. Partnering in prison ministry is partnering with the very heart of Jesus.'

Our Chief Executive, Catherine De Souza remarks, 'We are so grateful to St Paul's and St Barnabas for their faithful partnership. The way they walk alongside us—in prayer, relationship and shared mission—is a great example of what church partnership can look like.'

'Their commitment reminds us that ministry in prisons is not the work of one charity alone, but of the whole Church, joining in with what is at the very heart of Jesus. We long to see more churches embrace this kind of partnership, so that together we can see more lives transformed behind bars and beyond.' ■





A FAMILY CALLING:

PAUL'S AND PAULINE'S JOURNEY INTO PRISON MINISTRY

In the previous issue of *In:sight*, we spoke to Jane and Tom and heard how the encouragement of parents played a vital part in their ministry. Here, we catch up with Tom's parents, Paul and Pauline, to hear their own story: how they first became involved in prison ministry, the way they inspired their children and how, in turn, they have been encouraged by the next generation.

Paul's and Pauline's journey began in their local church, where the vicar's wife, Jo, was a prison chaplain. Jo's passion for those so often forgotten by society stirred something in them both.

For Paul, the seeds of prison ministry were

sown long before. He had worked for many years with a secular charity supporting homeless people. Many of them were prison leavers or struggling with drug and alcohol dependency. He also worked in housing bringing him into regular contact with ex-offenders and others on the margins of society. Visiting The Clink restaurants, run by people in prison learning new skills, meant prison was often a topic of conversation at home. This work extended to welcoming people into their home—sometimes even for Christmas dinner.

Paul's and Pauline's example clearly rubbed off on Tom. While at university, he set up a breakfast club for homeless men, and

his parents recall with pride driving up to his student house with food to support the project. 'We were amazingly proud,' they told us.

Their passion to support families also shone through in their local community. Living on an estate with many needs, their church became a central place of support. And, after a local man was tragically murdered by his stepson, they stepped in to offer care and support to the grieving family.

In time, both found themselves drawn more directly into prison ministry. Pauline was first invited into prison by a friend, and both later experienced the *Sycamore Tree* course.

'WE'VE SEEN PEOPLE COME OUT OF THE DEPTHS AND INTO FAITH. IT'S AMAZING THAT GOD CHOOSES TO USE US IN THIS WAY.'

'We loved it from the beginning,' Pauline recalls. Her prison experience is broad, including *Alpha* and parenting courses. For her, it has become a place where faith is constantly renewed: 'You can see God's handprints and footprints in everything. The joy of the Lord is my strength—it's rejoicing in Him that keeps us going. We have to trust Him in everything.'

Paul agrees. Over the years, he has seen first-hand the power of God to transform lives. 'We've seen people come out of the depths and into faith,' he says. 'It's amazing that He chooses to use us in this way.'

Serving together as a family has been a source of deep encouragement

for Paul and Pauline. They inspired their children to step into ministry—but as they are quick to say, their children's passion and faith inspire them in return.

As they reflect on their journey, Paul shares his favourite Bible verse:

'He has told you, O mortal, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you: to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God' (Micah 6:8).

For Paul and Pauline, prison ministry has indeed been a walk that is marked by humble service and a passionate love for justice and mercy—creating a legacy that continues through their family. ■

We've updated our privacy policy

At Prison Fellowship, we are committed to protecting your personal information and being transparent about how we use it. We have recently updated our Privacy Policy to ensure it remains clear, comprehensive and fully in line with current data protection requirements.

You can read the updated policy at prisonfellowship.org.uk/resources/privacy-policy

If you have any questions about how we handle your data, please don't hesitate to get in touch with us.



SHARE JOY THIS CHRISTMAS

This year's *Angel Tree* Christmas Card is now available—a beautiful way to send festive greetings while supporting families affected by imprisonment.

The artist shares: *'I was studying the women of the Christmas story and was inspired by Mary's courage and faith. My design reflects the awe, wonder and love of Mary and Joseph as they welcomed the Christ Child.'*

Inside the card is a verse from Luke 2: *'Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.'*

A pack of ten cards (A6 with envelopes) is offered for a suggested donation of £5. Order yours today using the form in this issue of *In:sight* or online at prisonfellowship.org.uk/christmas-cards

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