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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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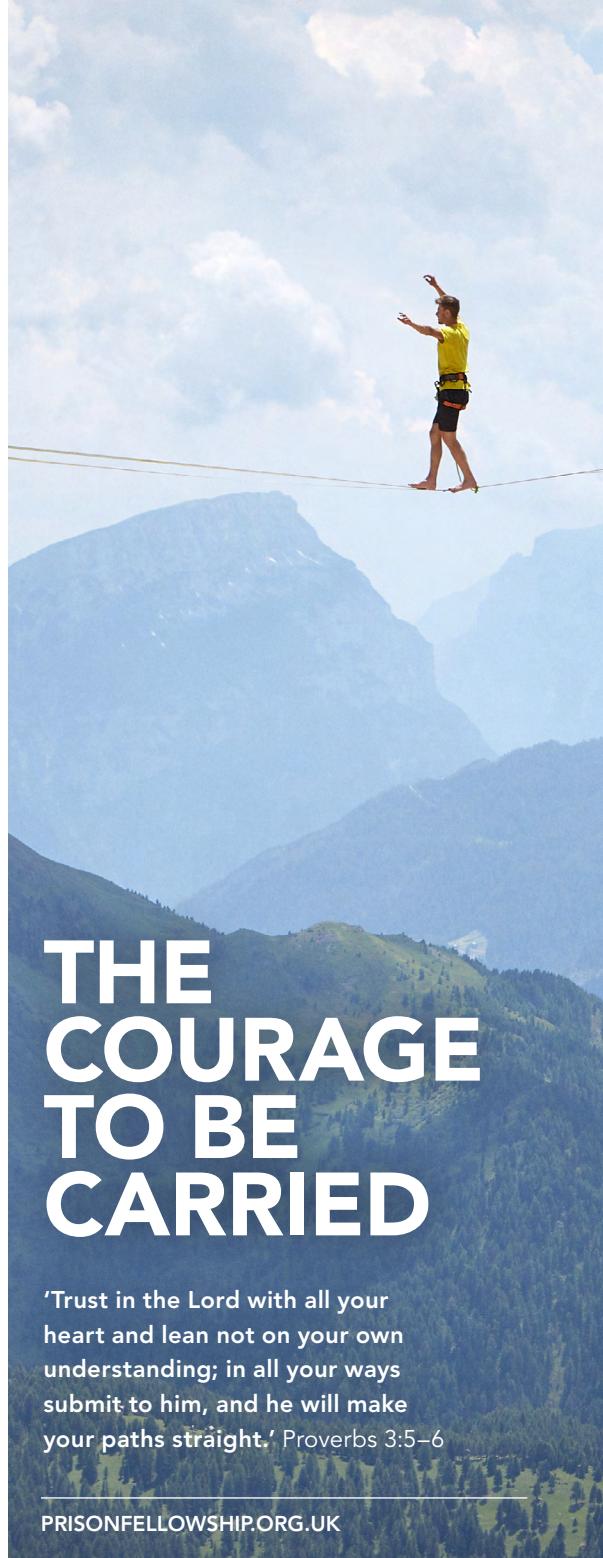
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and/or their families are models.

THE COURAGE TO BE CARRIED

'Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.' Proverbs 3:5-6

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In 1859, celebrated tightrope walker Charles Blondin arrived at Niagara Falls with an audacious plan: to walk across the Niagara Gorge on a single rope, suspended around 160 feet above the raging waters and stretching more than 1,000 feet from side to side. There was no safety net, no harness and no rescue team standing by—just Blondin, his balancing pole and the rope beneath his feet.

Huge crowds gathered to watch. Some marvelled at his confidence; others thought him reckless, even foolish, for risking his life in such a way. Yet Blondin crossed safely from the American side to the Canadian side—and then did it again, and again, each time increasing the drama. On different crossings he reportedly sat down halfway to rest, walked blindfolded and even carried a stove on his back, stopping mid-crossing to cook and eat an omelette.

On one occasion, Blondin pushed a wheelbarrow across the rope. When he reached the far side, he

turned to the crowd and asked if they believed he could carry a person across in it. Having witnessed his extraordinary skill, the crowd shouted their confidence: yes, they believed he could. But when Blondin asked for a volunteer to get into the wheelbarrow, the crowd fell silent.

Some retellings say that his mum got in the wheelbarrow and crossed the tightrope with him—which although not a verified part of the story, would be wonderful if true, as who else but a parent to put that much faith in their child! What is well documented, however, is the moment when Blondin carried his manager, Harry Colcord, on his back across the rope. The most dangerous point of the crossing was the centre, where the rope sagged and there were no stabilising guide ropes.

According to accounts, Blondin warned Colcord not to try to balance, but instead to move entirely with him—to trust him completely.

Blondin understood that the crossing would only succeed if his passenger placed total confidence in him.

Life often presents us with a similar choice. To be like the crowd—confident enough to say we believe, but hesitant when trust requires surrender. Or to be like Blondin's manager, willing to let go of our own control and be carried. Faith invites us to lean fully into God, allowing Him to be our balance, even when the crossing feels uncertain.

As Proverbs reminds us:

'Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.' Proverbs 3:5-6

It is amazing what becomes possible when we place our trust in God—especially at the moments that feel most precarious. In the pages that follow, you can read about a range of journeys: stories of people who, in different ways and circumstances, have discovered what it means to step forward in trust and see God at work along the way. ■

Catherine

Catherine De Souza, CEO



BEING IN THE RIGHT PLACE

When Jonathan and Veronica Compton received their New Year Honours, they didn't travel to London for a ceremony at a palace. Instead, they stood in the chapel at HMP Morton Hall, surrounded by some of the men they served, prayed with, taught and encouraged for more than three decades. It was exactly how they wanted it.

We only wanted the award if we could receive it with the men,' they said. 'There was just so much love.' For Jonathan and Veronica, that moment in the chapel was a culmination of 36 years of faithfully showing up, building relationships and answering a call that began long before either of them stepped through prison gates.

A CALL THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING

In 1988, Jonathan and Veronica were at an event at Chalk Cliff College when the speaker invited anyone who felt God prompting them to 'come forward and do more for Him.' Jonathan didn't hesitate—he was on his feet and heading to the front, not knowing what God would ask of him.

Only days later, they attended an event featuring Christian author Adrian Plass. The couple had gone to hear the speaker, but God had other plans. Next to the stage was a small table promoting the relaunch of Prison Fellowship Lincoln. 'That was it,' Jonathan recalls. 'That was the call.' Within a year, he had become a local group leader and begun visiting Lincoln prison, later

moving to Morton Hall where they would serve for many years to come.

Veronica's path unfolded more gradually. At first, she simply drove Jonathan to the prison, offering support but not yet sensing a personal call. Occasionally, she played the piano in chapel services. She was happy to help—but didn't see herself as a prison volunteer.

All of that changed one day, kneeling beside her bed. 'I said to God, "What do you want me to do?"' Veronica remembers. 'I heard an audible voice say, "Teach and speak."' From that moment, her ministry took shape: teaching and leading worship. 'I love the Bible,' she says. 'I love, love, love telling people about it, and I just want people to know more and more.'

DIFFERENT GIFTS, ONE CALLING

Their gifts complement one another beautifully. Veronica is the teacher, the worship leader, the communicator who delights in opening Scripture.

Jonathan, she says, is 'Mr Prayer.' When something needs prayer, 'he prays, and he prays, and he prays.'

Jonathan's strength has always been pastoral care—listening deeply, offering a steady presence and walking alongside people through difficult seasons. 'He's brilliant at pastoral care,' Veronica says simply.

Their partnership—rooted in prayer, Scripture and shared purpose—has fuelled their ministry for nearly four decades.

FAITHFUL SERVICE THROUGH CHANGING TIMES

During their years at Morton Hall, their ministry has remained consistent: to be present, to offer hope and to show the love of Christ in practical, relational ways. They

speak with deep gratitude of the governors, prison officers and chaplaincy staff who have welcomed and supported them along the way. It was, in fact, the governor and chaplain who nominated the couple for their awards.

What keeps them going after so many years? 'A sense of being in the right place,' they say without hesitation. For Jonathan and Veronica, volunteering in prison isn't a project or a duty—it's vocational. It's where they feel God has placed them—and where He continues to meet them.

AN HONOUR SHARED

When the letters from the Cabinet Office arrived, Veronica admits she feared that they'd done something wrong. Instead, it was a surprise announcement that both she and Jonathan had been nominated for New Year Honours for their service to HM Prison and Probation Service.

'We volunteer because we want to do something for God and for people in prison,' Veronica

reflects. 'These awards reflect not on us, but on the incredible privilege we've had to serve the prison community. It's truly humbling.'

Receiving the awards inside the prison, surrounded by men they knew and loved, made the moment even more significant. It was a celebration shared with the community that shaped them as much as they have shaped it.

A LEGACY OF FAITHFULNESS

For volunteers across England and Wales, Jonathan's and Veronica's story is a reminder of what God can do with simple obedience.

Their legacy is not measured in awards, though those have now come. It is found in the countless men who encountered compassion, encouragement and prayer through their ministry.

As Veronica puts it, 'We've just been where God wants us to be.' And for 36 years, that has made all the difference. ■



In Luke 15, we find a powerful story about forgiveness: a wayward son returning home after choosing to follow his own path in life and leaving his family behind. The Message Bible describes this lost son as 'undisciplined and dissipated'—words that suggest a life adrift, wasted and out of control. And words that some might use to describe the young people currently in our prisons.

The latest issue of *Bromley Briefings* records there are currently 10,848 young adults imprisoned in England and Wales, making up 12% of the total prison population. Although this number has decreased in recent years, the report also highlights that 53 young people were sentenced to life imprisonment in 2023.

These statistics reveal the sad reality of many lost sons and daughters.

In Jesus' parable, when the son finally reaches out to his father, expecting

to be met with anger and shame, he instead finds love, forgiveness and celebration. The father's love surpasses any feelings of disappointment or resentment.

'There is no friendship, no love, like that of the parent for the child,' writes Henry Ward Beecher. Yet, for many young people, such parental or carer relationships are strained, fractured, or entirely absent—made even more difficult by imprisonment.

However, our *Angel Tree Mother's Day* programme is helping to change this.

This year marks our fifteenth opportunity to run *Angel Tree Mother's Day*, helping to restore relationships between young adults in prison and their mothers or significant female carers. It offers these young people the opportunity to send a Mother's Day gift and personalised message—a chance to express love, gratitude and, in some cases, to reconnect with their mums entirely.

Last year, we sent 621 Mother's Day gifts on behalf of young adults in prison. That's 621 sons and daughters reaching out—just like the lost son—and hoping to find a way back.

One young adult shared how *Angel Tree Mother's Day* made a difference in his relationship with his mum:

'She was so surprised. She didn't expect it at all. She said she forgave me for disappointing her, and my card made her cry. She has been looking at it every day.'

Like the father in Jesus' parable, this young man's mother chose to forgive when her son reached out to her. A simple act of love, found within in a card, became a catalyst for healing.

And we are hoping to see many more young people begin similar journeys this year.

The father in Jesus' parable exclaims with joy, *'We're going to have a wonderful time! My son is here—given up for dead*

and now alive! Given up for lost and now found!' (Luke 15:22–24 MSG)

Imprisonment does not have to be the end of the story for these young people. *Angel Tree Mother's Day* offers them a chance to reconnect with their mums or carers and begin repairing relationships that may have been damaged. For some, a Mother's Day card becomes the first step towards forgiveness—and towards making meaningful changes that lead them away from crime.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux wrote, *'The loveliest masterpiece of the heart of God is the love of a mother.'* God calls Himself our Father, because He knows the power and significance of parental love—a love that brings reconciliation. ■

Could you help to restore broken relationships by supporting *Angel Tree Mother's Day* this year? Visit prisonfellowship.org.uk/atmd to find out how you can help.



JOURNEYS OF ENDURANCE

Rev Calum Crombie, the Training and Development Lead for chaplains in England and Wales, has been helping train PF volunteers for our Pastoral Care programme. We caught up with him to find out more about bereavement in prison:

Bereavement is the single biggest concern that we have with prisoners. Many of them have been bereaved, and often at a young age. They don't always get the support they need and so they carry that unresolved grief with them into adulthood. This leads to issues such as addiction, self-harm and other things which cause them problems. This may well be part of the reason why they end up in prison in the first place.'

Calum explains one of the main difficulties when grieving in custody. 'Prison is not a safe environment to show your emotions. But support groups, where people in prison can come together, help them realise they're not the only one going through the grief process.'

Within these groups, people in prison are not only learning to share emotions but also learning to listen to others' feelings: 'Every person we grieve is special in some way. And the fact the volunteers are encouraging people in prison to show empathy to each other is a really good thing.'

'The volunteers are just the best gift. They can sit with somebody and help them unpack their grief,

yet sometimes, we don't even realise how much we're helping people. I was recently speaking with a volunteer who said they have been seeing a prisoner regularly but felt like their conversations were not even scratching the surface. However, after 10–12 weeks of these meetings the prisoner was being released, and he said to the volunteer,

"Thank you. You're the only one that's ever let me talk about it."

'Bereavement changes you. If you lose somebody you love, you are never the same again. The bereavement process is not about returning to the way you were before the person died, it's about healing and being able to grow again—to go on and

make new relationships, do new things in life, and not feel guilty about enjoying the good things that God has given us.'

Alongside supporting our Pastoral Care programme, Calum has volunteered to take part in another journey for PF: running the 2026 London Marathon for the third time. Highlighting similarities between the marathon and the grieving process, Calum shares the emotions that arise while running—particularly the feeling of overcoming a great challenge after doubting his own resilience.

'You become aware of all the other people running around you. You've had struggles and difficulties going through it. And some people don't seem to have difficulties—they just seem to trot past you. But lots of other people have.'

One journey, yet completely different experiences—much like the grieving process. Calum continues: 'In a marathon, people will talk about "hitting the wall." And on my very first marathon, I hit the wall about 16 miles in. It

feels like you've run into something completely solid, and you lose all perspective. This can be like the first news you get when you lose somebody—it feels like you've been hit by a bus, or you've run into a wall. The stride that you had is just gone. It's complete shock and numbness. You don't know whether you can carry on.'

He emphasises the role of support: 'In a marathon, it's the crowds—positive people out there cheering people on at the side of life.'

For people grieving in prison, Calum says, 'They may have their friends and family that will hopefully support them, but they'll also have PF volunteers coming alongside them, cheering them on and keeping them moving. And although they may feel like they've hit a wall, it isn't bricks and mortar—it's something they can get through and can keep going.'

'We never really get the end of the story—we're only walking alongside people for a chapter of their life, and that's the way it's meant to be. We hope

prison is just a chapter, and that they move on—trusting they won't come back into prison. And so, we don't often see the subsequent chapters, only the one where we're working, which is often the most difficult point.'

Yet joy can come after difficulty. Calum likens this to the end of a marathon: 'The feeling when you cross the finish line is just brilliant. It becomes quite emotional, because you've overcome those thoughts of "I didn't think I was going to make it."

In speaking of success, Calum ends by sharing: 'I think we often forget that most people don't come back to prison. And that's something we need to remember—that is a success story in itself.' ■

Find out more about our Pastoral Care support at prisonfellowship.org.uk/our-work/pastoral-care

Please also pray for Calum as he trains for the London Marathon. You can sponsor him at prisonfellowship.org.uk/calum-crombie



THE PILOTS HAVE TAKEN OFF

We are delighted to share that our new restoration course is currently being piloted in a select number of prisons. Our Operations Manager, Stephen Hawkins, offers this update:

The first phase of the course pilots are now well underway. The feedback from both learners and volunteers has been extremely positive. We are so excited and thankful to God on how things are progressing.

'We recognise there is still so much work ahead and we appreciate everyone's prayers and contributions. In February, we plan to roll out the delivery of the second phase of the pilot, and we ask that you please keep this in your prayers, too.'

We are at the beginning of this journey, walking

faithfully alongside God as He leads us into new pastures. Isaiah 43:18–19 reminds us that God celebrates the new: 'Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?'

We would like to ask for your continued prayers as we trial this new course. We are trusting that the God of newness and growth will continue to spring up new hope in PF's future and strengthen our continued commitment to restoration work. ■

To get involved with our new programme or if you are interested in our restoration course running in your local prison, please contact Stephen Hawkins at stephenhawkins@prisonfellowship.org.uk

THE PRAYER JOURNEY

Prayer is at the heart of Prison Fellowship. And our *Prayer Line* programme offers people in prison an opportunity to share their own prayer requests. It involves a simple call, which is free and confidential—and our *Prayer Line* volunteers commit to pray for every request received.

We want to share the powerful journey of these small prayers from those in prison—who often feel alone, uncertain and scared—to our volunteers, who carefully carry these prayers to God.

WITHIN THE HEART INSIDE THE CELL

M has only recently been sentenced. It is his first time in prison. Everything feels unfamiliar. He has never prayed in his life. And he isn't sure he believes anything will happen if

he tries. But he has heard about PF's *Prayer Line*.

MAKING THE CALL

M picks up the phone to call the free number and allows himself to be vulnerable because he knows the call is confidential. He simply asks if prayer will help him through his prison sentence.

INTO THE HANDS OF VOLUNTEERS

A PF volunteer listens to the prayer requests received that day and notes down M's simple prayer. It is anonymous, yet personal. The volunteer shares M's prayer request with a group of other volunteers who are waiting to listen and waiting to act.

LIFTED TO GOD

This willing group of volunteers prays for M on the same day and into the following month—carrying M's words to the very One who created him.

A simple, yet powerful journey—M's first prayer travels further than he expected.

It began as a thought in a prison cell, shared through an anonymous phone line, carried by a volunteer and eventually offered to God.

M may not know if prayer works. But *Prayer Line* has offered him a chance to try. Sometimes, people in prison don't have anyone to talk to. Yet, through *Prayer Line*, their words are heard, held and lifted—and ultimately, God receives them all. ■



Could you volunteer on our *Prayer Line* team? Visit prisonfellowship.org.uk/prayerline to see how you can get involved.

A GIFT THEY WILL REMEMBER



Each alternative gift card ordered allows a young person in prison to send a Mother's Day card and gift to their own mum or carer. The card contains a personal message, helping to sustain and repair that vital relationship.

One teenager wrote, 'Thank you for everything and all the support you've given me while I've been away. You've been strong through it all and I just want to promise you I will never put you through this again. Sorry for everything. Love and miss you loads.'

Honour the relationship you have with your own mum, by helping a young person in prison strengthen their own relationship. It may make all the difference to their future. ■



Angel Tree Mother's Day alternative gift cards are offered for a suggested donation of £10 each. Get your card by visiting prisonfellowship.org.uk/mothersdaycard



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