

## OFFERING HOPE & A NEW BEGINNING

### Grace & Transformation

At Prison Fellowship, we believe that no one has fallen too far to be excluded from God's family. But what does it take for people to be restored?

"The more I reflect on restorative justice's ability to transform people," says Jonathan Derby, "the more convinced I am that the quality that leads to transformation is grace. Grace has such a powerful impact because it's uncommon, it's unexpected."

In *What's So Amazing About Grace*, Philip Yancey says: *'Grace baffles us because it goes against the intuition everyone has that, in the face of injustice, some price must be paid.'*

When grace touches a person who carries shame, like prisoners often do, it lightens that burden and can change their trajectory. Our staff and volunteers extend grace when they recognise a person's dignity in people who've committed the greatest wrongs, when most others, including Christians, avoid or judge them.

Perhaps the most powerful is when victims extend grace to the person who harmed them, especially when the wounds are deep. There's grace when they simply treat the person with respect. Most transformational is when victims have the grace to forgive. Yancy says:

*'The gospel of grace begins and ends with forgiveness. Grace is the only force in the universe powerful enough to break the chains that enslave generations. Grace alone melts ungrace.'*

Jesus' grace transformed Peter. In John 21, Peter experiences the gospel of grace over breakfast. Although he denied Jesus, Jesus refuses to give up on him. He looks beyond what Peter has done and reminds him of his calling.

In the restorative justice framework, people who commit harm need to make amends directly to the person harmed. But the process can be transactional: you caused this much harm, so you need to repay the same amount.

When restorative encounters are filled with grace—grace extended, and grace received—there's greater potential to transform the people involved. In Peter's case, he doesn't merely obey Jesus' call. Jesus' grace makes him a different person.

Look at Peter's actions before and after he was transformed by Jesus' grace:

- *Before*, Peter leads the disciples back into the fishing boat. *After*, he leads them to form a new community.
- *Before*, Peter denies Jesus three times. *After*, he "raised his voice" to the crowds about the messiah Jesus and his resurrection.
- *Before*, Peter stands in the shadows as religious authorities exploited their power, incited the crowds, and crucified Jesus. *After*, he confronts those same authorities who put him and John in jail, and Peter's courage sets them free.

Peter's transformation is rooted in the confidence of Jesus' grace and love for him. This transformational spirit surged into the Christ-following community during Pentecost and continued to grow. While stories and situations change, this is how Jesus still works today—Encounter, Repair, and Transform—a pattern infused with and inspired by His grace and love.

**Jonathan Derby (PFI Special Advisor-Restorative Justice)**



## Grace to Forgive



August 2002 was a very dark time for Mick and Lyn Connolly when their son, Paul, was killed in an unprovoked knife attack in Liverpool. For over 15 years, they have been taking part in Prison Fellowship's Restorative Justice programme, where victims of crime share their stories with inmates. It was a different world from what they were used to. Yet, many men and women in prisons around the UK have heard how their lives have been affected by their son's murder. For many, it has made a lasting impact.

We've had the privilege of having Lyn share at our Sycamore Tree programmes in Maghaberry and Magilligan. With compassion and grace, she talked with honesty about what happened, from the moment the police delivered the terrible news, to where they are today. She shares how she and her husband have forgiven the men who killed Paul. She says that the decision has brought healing to their hearts and lives. There is grace rather than anger and forgiveness rather than revenge.

*'I know many of them have done unspeakable things,' says Lyn, 'but God has enabled me to look past each crime and see a son.'*

Listening to the impact of crime on this family and how they were able to forgive the perpetrators, deeply affected the participants of the course. *'I've never thought of my crime from my victim's perspective and how I must have made them feel,'* said one man. *'I want to apologise to them and ask them to forgive me and that when I leave prison I'm never going back to that lifestyle. I'm going to seek whatever support I can get and leave my old life behind.'*

Prison Fellowship staff and volunteers have witnessed incredible transformations and sincere remorse for the crimes prisoners have committed, all because a stranger 'saw them as a son.'

## A Chance to Rewrite the Story

Having heard much about the PF Sycamore Tree course and its impact over the years, I was excited but also a little apprehensive about going into Magilligan prison.

My main role during the six weeks was to assist the men with their coursework, talking through the questions, and scribing what was said. In the third week, it was really moving to hear a victim of crime tell the story of her own incredible pain, but also of forgiveness and hope.

For me, the real highlight was listening to the guys share while working on their books. I didn't know what to expect, but there was a lot of openness and honesty in the room. In many cases, you could sense the pain and regret – pain for victims and their families, pain for their own families, and pain for the way their own life had turned out.

Yet, amidst the pain and regret, there was hope which came through the story of Zacchaeus.

The victim's story and the volunteer who shared how God changed his life while he was in prison, gave hope of turning lives around post-release. The following are just some comments that show this hope for the future:

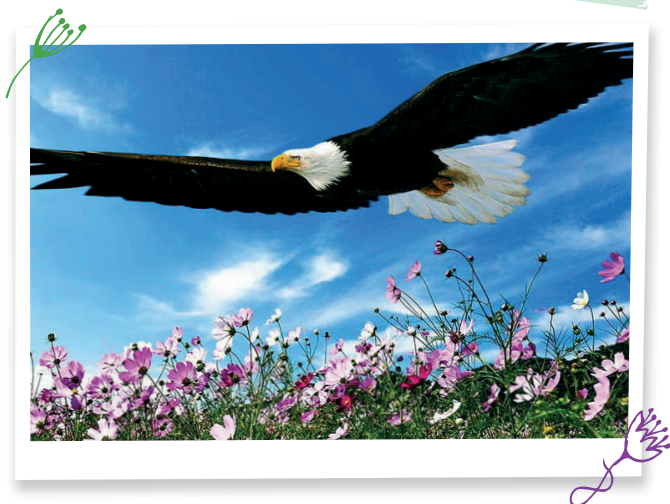
*'I have done wrong and I'm so sorry for the pain I caused other people, but now I get the chance to re-write the story. I don't want to cause pain to others ever again. I need God's help.'*

*'I never said sorry because I thought that saying sorry seems like it's not enough, not after what I have done. Now, I see I need to say sorry, but more than that to show I'm sorry. I want to show I'm sorry.'*

Claire



## Flowers & Eagles



The last time the PF Europe and Central Asia region met together was in October 2019 in Albania. Who could have imagined how the world would change since then?

For our recent forum in February, 26 out of 31 National Ministries gathered in Spain for this long-awaited event. For the 55 representatives who attended, it was an opportunity for each to reflect on their prison ministry experiences, reconnect with old friends, make new connections, and be inspired to try something new.

Entitled 'Flowers and Eagles' to reflect the blooming and soaring of the greater PFI ministry, we chose Psalm 23:13, *'I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.'*

Over previous forums, we focused on developing strategies, targets, and objectives. While these remain important, for this season we focused on the blessings of Christ. We want to give Him honour and praise and to firmly commit our plans to His hands. Our prayer was for the time to be filled with spiritual refreshments. It was a time to pull together and to grow back stronger, trusting God that we are in line with His calling. May we bloom and soar like eagles!

**Hugh Greathead**  
(Senior Regional Director, Europe & Central Asia)

## Blooming and Soaring

It was a privilege to be one of the delegates at the recent PF Conference in Alicante. I was able to renew my fellowship with others and encourage and support those facing huge challenges.

We started the day with a devotion focused on *'blossoming or rising on wings like eagles.'* This was followed by updates on issues relating to ministry from the PF International CEO as well as insights into restorative practice. It was very encouraging to welcome new and enthusiastic young leaders stepping up in their respective countries.

During the week, we listened to a report from PF Ukraine. To hear the difference their ministry is having, despite the impact of war is amazing. Not only are they serving their national prisoners, but also providing food to those who are prisoners of the war. Mercy and grace are being shown to those who came to destroy the country by PF Ukraine.



It was also thrilling to hear of the practical examples of cooperation by other PF national ministries who cross the Ukraine border. It is a clear demonstration of the PF family working at their best to show practical grace.

**Robin Scott (CEO)**

## Easter Reflection



Take time to reflect on God's grace to you.

Think also of a time when someone unexpectedly extended grace to you and the impact that had on you.

How can you show God's grace to others?