



PRESS ON

A WEEK OF PRAYER 8th-14th OCT 2017

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PRISONS WEEK

A WEEK OF PRAYER

'Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, **but I press on** to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.' PHILIPPIANS 3 V12 (NIV)

Foreword by The Most Rev. and the Rt Hon. the Archbishop of Canterbury: The Apostle Paul here speaks as someone who knows the pain of endurance and hopelessness. Tortured and beaten, in prison many times for his faith, he nonetheless spoke to fellow prisoners about the hope he had found in Jesus. He had started as offender, hurting and maiming others, but found forgiveness and new life in Jesus. Yet life did not magically grow easier; instead he had to learn to live with his past, and face an uncertain present of false accusations and persecution for his faith. He was someone kept alive by hope, who endured and persevered in the face of desperate circumstances.

What better inspiration for all those connected to the criminal justice system, than Paul's words? For the victims who struggle day by day to live with memories and scars, and hope for a better tomorrow; for the staff, who patiently come alongside broken men and women, and walk with them the slow road towards change; for prisoners themselves, trying to make sense of their lives, fighting against the scars and choices of the past and fear of the future; and for the families and friends of those in prison, faithfully visiting and supporting. Paul encourages all not to give up hope, but keep their eyes on the goal, keep going. Yet this isn't about making efforts and working harder. It is about recognising that in Jesus, God has already 'taken hold' of us. That victims, prisoners, staff and families, are not walking this road alone, but God, who loves them, is ready to walk with them. In Prison Week, we stand in prayer with all who carry on in hope, that they would know they are loved by God and have the faith and courage to press on towards new life.

SUNDAY: The Prisons Week Prayer - Lord, you offer freedom to all people. We pray for those in prison. Break the bonds of fear and isolation that exist. Support with your love prisoners and their families and friends, prison staff and all who care. Heal those who have been wounded by the actions of others, especially the victims of crime. Help us to forgive one another, to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly together with Christ in his strength and in his Spirit, now and every day. **Amen.**

MONDAY: FOR THOSE WHO ARE PRISONERS

Counting the days in prison, longing for release, trying to keep our heads above water, life inside can be a daily struggle for survival. The past is hauntingly present, leaving it behind seems impossible. However distant the possibility of redemption and release might feel, we must still press on in hope. As tempting as it is to allow one day to roll into another, let us have the focus to realise the change we need, to ask for and offer encouragement to help us get there. Like an athlete in training, let us press on towards the goal of victory, towards freedom to live the lives which Christ has won for us.

God of hope, by the power of your Holy Spirit, bring strength and encouragement to all those in prison. Sustain and support them as they seek to survive and grow into the new life offered to all in Christ. Bring them true repentance and a new start, support their hopes, calm their fears, and be present as they press on seeking redemption and release from the past, and courage and inspiration for the future. Lord, in hope we turn to you.

TUESDAY: FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME

To be a victim of crime is to be the object of exploitation or abuse by others, to have your life changed with immediate effect. Hopes and dreams can be lost and the future turned to disappointment, even despair. Faith can be tested to the limit and fear may trap us into a continual cycle of distress, unable to move away from past events. We need God's help to break out and to press on. We need friends and loved ones to teach us how to trust again, to support us in our suffering and affirm us in our progress and perseverance, offering fresh hope for the future.

God of hope, be present with all those who have become the victims of crime. Pour out your Holy Spirit into lives broken and distorted by the actions of others. Surround those in distress with your love, and the love of friends and family. Restore strength and confidence, build resilience, bring healing and peace as they press on, and out of sorrow bring joy. Lord, in hope we turn to you.

WEDNESDAY: FOR THE FAMILIES

The challenges of family life for those affected by criminal behaviour can be never ending. Powerful emotions including anger, betrayal, injustice and shame are felt by children and families of both offenders and of victims. Their lives may have been devastated by crimes of which they are innocent. But their role is vital, literally life-giving, to support and motivate their loved ones to press on towards a future where repentance and forgiveness can bring healing and restoration within the family and the wider community.

God of hope, in you we find wholeness and peace, forgiveness and new life. Send your Spirit to heal damaged and broken relationships. Support and restore all those who have been wounded and affected by the consequences of crime to fullness of life. Rebuild hope and trust, that pressing on in faith, a sense of recovery becomes possible. Lord, in hope we turn to you.

THURSDAY: FOR OUR COMMUNITIES

We are more aware than ever of the fragility and fragmentation of our community life, the prejudice, aggression and negativity that fills our screens, airwaves and human interactions. The fear and stress of crime, the chance that anyone, everyone, could become a victim weighs heavy in many places. We need more than ever to press on in building strong communities, growing together, so that everyone can thrive and live a positive life.

God of hope, teach us to be good neighbours, your Spirit enabling all those who work to build community, make connections, develop networks and include the other. We remember those who struggle for inclusion and long for acceptance and affirmation. Teach us to be gentle with one another, to press on recognising our brothers and sisters in all their diversity as fellow members of your family, made in your image and worthy of all reverence and respect. Lord, in hope we turn to you.

FRIDAY: FOR THOSE WHO WORK IN PRISONS

Those working in prison today are under pressure. Those whom they care for are increasingly both vulnerable and violent, distressed and dangerous. Caring for and keeping safe some of society's most difficult people each day brings new challenges, and sometimes joy. Let us hold up to God in prayer all those working in prison, support them and ask God's blessing in their work. Let us all hold onto the hope that will encourage them to press on with courage and conviction, confident in God's power to change and to save.

God of hope, keep hope alive in the difficult and stressful jobs in our prisons. Help those who work with the difficult and distressed to press on confidently, that by the power of your Holy Spirit your light will shine in the dark places. Give grace and strength, to all those who work and volunteer in our prisons to support one another and to give of their best to those in their care. Lord, in hope we turn to you.

SATURDAY: FOR ALL WORKING IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

There is always a balance to try and find in the criminal justice system between justice and mercy, between the needs of prisoners and their victims and the resources available. All those working in this field need our prayers as they press on with their task. They also need God's wisdom, discernment and good judgement to maintain the balance of interests and demands made upon them.

God of hope, generous and merciful, gracious and strong, pour out your Holy Spirit on all those who work to administer justice. Give them your wisdom and discernment so that their decisions might be the best possible, give them the energy and enthusiasm to press on and to meet the needs of offender, victim and society for justice and for restoration. Lord, in hope we turn to you.

For over forty years Prisons Week has prepared prayer literature for the Christian community to use as they pray for the needs of all those affected by prisons: prisoners and victims, their families, their communities, those working and volunteering in prisons and the criminal justice system. Please pray each day during Prisons Week but also ask yourself whether there is one thing that you as an individual, or as a church, can do to help any of the people that you are praying for.

For more information, to make a donation or to order more of these prayer leaflets: visit our website at www.prisonsworld.org, email us via info@prisonsworld.org or write to Prisons Week, c/o Free Churches Group, 27 Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9HH

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