

Churches Resources Pack

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Icebreakers

How about using one of these activities to get people thinking about prison ministry?

Write this on a flip chart:

How can $5 + 5 + 5 = 550$? You can add one line.

(The answer is to add a line to the second first + to make a 4)

This is an icebreaker used on our Sycamore Tree course. The point of it is that **one small change can make all the difference** – it makes the whole puzzle make sense!

This is what we aim to teach the prisoners – that making a difference to the way they think about their crime, and who has been affected, can **transform their lives**.



Match the figures on the right with the statements on the left

Number of people in prison in England and Wales

4,274

Number of children with one or both parents in prison

47

Number of women in prison

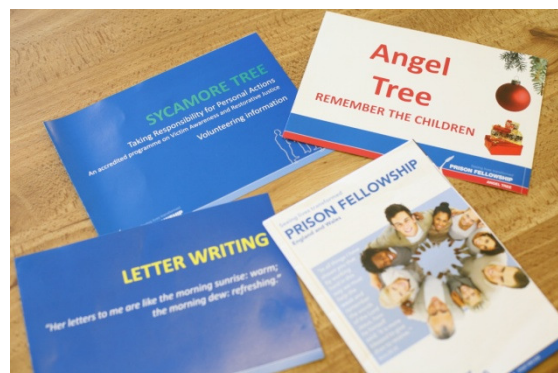
84, 522

Number of young adults (18-20) in prison

160,000

Percentage of adults reconvicted within one year of release

9,775



Answers to the quiz above

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Talk Outline – General talk about Christian ministry in prisons

Bible reading: Matthew 25:31-46

Activity – use the sheets to match up the numbers on the right with the questions on the left.

Talk - As you can see, this is a problem. The UK incarcerates more people than any other country in Western Europe. Prisoners are not the only ones affected by the crimes they commit – the whole community is damaged, particularly their families and those who are victims of crime.

So what should our response to prisoners be as Christians? Why should we care?

- We should care because Jesus did. Our reading says that very clearly. Jesus calls us as Christians to love the unlovable.
- Everyone is loved by God and can come into a relationship with Him – God never gives up on people so neither should we. Everyone is redeemable.
- As we saw in the activity earlier, prison doesn't just affect the offender but also their families and the wider community.

So what can we do? This is what Prison Fellowship achieves through its 1,400 volunteers:

- **Prayer** - we have 120 prayer groups around the country praying for specific prisons, including one here in Chelmsford. When Prison Fellowship started 30 years ago they were not allowed to go into any prisons to start with but they prayed, and see prayer as the foundation for everything.
- **Sycamore Tree** - we run a Restorative Justice course based on the story of Zaccheus where after a conversation with Jesus he took responsibility for his crimes and then made amends to the community. This course allows offenders to hear from a surrogate victim who explains how the crime affected them. The offenders then get to make a symbolic act of restitution to say sorry for the crimes they have committed.

- **Angel Tree** – gives practical help to children who have a parent in prison by raising money and buying presents for them at Christmas. Last year we gave almost 4000 presents.
- **Letter Writing** – our volunteers build a relationship with prisoners, many of whom have no contact with the outside world, through writing letters to prisoners.

What you can do?

- Pray by joining a local Prayer Group
- Raise money/wrap presents for Angel Tree
- Consider visiting your local prison



Join a Prayer Group

Prayers

Prayer from a volunteer:

Father, thank you for the opportunities you give us to serve you through our voluntary service to others.

In love you gave of yourself to save us through the sacrifice of your son Jesus, and now we have the joy of reaching out with that love through our voluntary work.

Father, fill us afresh with your Holy Spirit, that we might remain faithful to this call you have placed on our lives. We ask nothing more than experiencing the joy of seeing your will done and your kingdom come in the lives of those you have given us to serve.

Tom and Ann Jenkins (Prison Fellowship office volunteers)

Prayer from the 2010 Prison Fellowship conference:

Lord, thank you for your presence in prisons. We ask that you continue to stir our hearts and those of offenders everywhere. We commit ourselves afresh to your service, to be beacons of your love and to allow your light to shine in dark places.

Amen



Prison Fellowship – Angel Tree article

When you think of prisons, how often do your thoughts extend to the children who are left behind because of their parent's imprisonment?



Some of the figures below may come as a surprise...

- It is estimated that there are 160,000 children with a parent in prison each year
- In 2006, more children were affected by the imprisonment of a parent than by divorce in the family
- One in seven children will experience their father's imprisonment before they leave school

Imprisonment affects the whole family and Angel Tree aims to help. Christmas can be a challenging time of year for both parents and children who are separated by prison walls. By sending a gift and personal message through Angel Tree, prisoners can let their children know they are thinking of them, an effective way to maintain the important family bond.

"To everyone involved in Angel Tree, I just want to say thank you for putting a smile on my kids' faces. The presents were excellent and made my kids know I have not forgotten them. I thank you with all my heart."

Angel Tree is implemented across the country by dedicated volunteers that work hard to fundraise for the project so that they can then buy, wrap and post the presents. Each child is sent a gift appropriate to age/gender and a Christian story book is included. This is a great way to share the gospel! The gift is sent as if it is from the parent in prison and is normally tailored to the child's interests.

"My partner told me that they like the story books you sent them and that my daughter has read both her own and her brother's. Thank you and Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year."

If you would like to know more about Angel Tree, would like to support this ministry financially or would like to get involved, please contact davewalker@prisonfellowship.org.uk

One Prison Fellowship member talks about her first experience of going into Prison on Prison Fellowship's Sycamore Tree course. The course raises victim awareness among offenders and teaches them about restorative justice.

He could have been an old friend...

I was nervous. I didn't know what to expect when I went into Wormwood Scrubs. As a Londoner the prison certainly has a notorious reputation amongst some of my friends. I expected the worse. Once I had filled out the required forms and when through the first set of doors I knew there was no going back and I decided to fully embrace the experience.

We were taken into a magnificent chapel (which was made by previous prisoners in earlier centuries) and it was there that I met the other volunteers who had been working with the prisoners on Sycamore Tree (<http://www.prisonfellowship.org.uk/sycamore-tree.html>) for the past 6 weeks.

Their happiness at the fact that people from the community would be joining them that day was evident. Their excitement that the prisoners were having their last, yet major, session was palpable. When Angela (the tutor) said that we should attach ourselves to a group for the group work session I was uncertain but the prayer that we all said together (before the prisoners arrived) settled me.

To be honest, I didn't know when "they" started coming in. The young men who first came in, I would not have known that they were prisoners (they were shaking the volunteers hands, asking how they were, everyone was catching up). After the ice breaker and once the group work started, I made an effort to go and sit with "them". They were asked to discuss the early story of Zaccchaeus (Luke 19:1-10). I am not familiar with the story, but I was told that it is the basis of the Sycamore Tree Programme.

The inmates discussed Zaccchaeus as if they had learned about him only a few hours before the story still fresh in their minds. None of them made eye contact with me, maybe because I was close to their age? Maybe they were more scared of me?

For sure, they were nervous; nervous about the presentation in front of everyone. They finally agreed as to how it would be presented. Once time was up Roger, a victim who had come into the prison in 3 weeks before, said to me that we should stand up with them to support them, which I happily did.

Each group had a piece to do and they were all very good. Some were imaginative but I couldn't help thinking, 'our group is the best' – I find that funny, even now, that I felt part of the group so quickly! I was becoming territorial.

Then came the grand finale, if they wanted to, the inmates rose to read a letter written to a victim, relative or even no one. It was an act of restoring them. Again, nerves filled the room but there was the pride; of those who stood up, you could see it on their faces, and the pride of the volunteers some of who's eyes were bright with tears.

Once it came to the break, I didn't know what to expect. Do I approach "them"? Do I stay where I was? I didn't have time to think as one of "them" came and sat next to me. X was around my age, possibly younger and we chatted generally about Sycamore Tree and I asked how he enjoyed it. He said that the turning point for him was in week 3 when the victims came in and how he got thinking.

He truly didn't feel like he had any victims but he remembered his mother, of whom he said: "I broke her heart". That statement almost broke mine. We chatted some more and I forgot that he was one of "them" he could have easily been an old friend who I met again on the street and we talked about his ambitions to travel when he leaves, but not until he's made up with his mum.

Then came prisoner, Y, another young one who had a drug problem which landed him in jail. He told me that his life was so messed up now that he was inside and that he was determined, if not scared, that this would be his first and last time. He talked about ambition to finish college and then go on to university. He was unsure about being a mature student but as a new father I told him of the pride his child would feel to see him receive his degree. I told him that, "yes, it would be scary when he comes out of prison, but it will also be exciting." A new life awaited him, an exciting one.

One thing that I picked up from my short time at Sycamore Tree is that there is no "us" and "them". The participants had just made some bad decisions and are repaying their debt to society. The victim's week was a turning point in this programme and I know that finding more victims to come forward is a hard one.

What struck me most was the satisfaction and love emanating from the volunteers. The respect that the prisoners gave everyone, not only the tutor, Angela, but all the helpers was memorable. They even called me Miss – and I was a total stranger to them. It was not what I expected.

The dedication of the volunteers, without whom Sycamore Tree and other Prison Fellowship programmes would not be possible and the good feelings they received from all prisoners over the weeks of the course, showed and rubbed off on me.

As a visitor and stranger I felt as if I didn't really 'do' anything but I found the experience truly rewarding. And, I didn't think I would write this but I would relish the opportunity to go into a similar situation again...

Tracey Stemarthe

If you would like to know more about Sycamore Tree, would like to support this ministry financially or would like to get involved, please contact davewalker@prisonfellowship.org.uk