

This is the story we need to tell at Christmas; that it is a time for those who are lonely and sad and poor. That Jesus came to offer them love, peace, joy, forgiveness and belonging. That he offers hope and freedom for people who are imprisoned. This is the gift that does not get broken or lost, it is given to us for all eternity. Best of all, it is completely free.

This Christmas we need to look beyond the gloss and the glitter, because no one's lives are perfect. And it is because of this God entered into the human race, to rescue us from the mess we had got into, reveal his love and show us the way to life in all its fullness. Whatever else might go on at Christmas, if we can hold onto that truth then we will really have something to celebrate on Christmas Day.

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HMP & YOI STYAL; HMP YOI THORN CROSS &
GREATER MANCHESTER COMMUNITY CHAPLAINCY
PRISON PRAYER LETTER DECEMBER 2017**



I'm writing this in October and already the supermarkets have begun to display their Christmas cards and decorations. I did a bit of a survey in one shop and I reckon that over 80% of the Christmas cards on sale are non-religious. They are glossy and glittery and contain images of snowmen, reindeers and Father Christmas. They present a glossy and glittery image of Christmas as a time of roaring fires, happy families and joyful parties.

Some people are lucky enough to experience this and for them Christmas is a time of excitement and wonder. But for others Christmas can be a time of loneliness, sadness and poverty. A time when the loss of loved ones and family arguments can be much more present and painful. For those in prison, or with a loved one in prison, Christmas can be a very difficult time when separation from each other can be most acute. And it is made even harder to bear by the idea that almost every other family in Britain is having the time of their lives. We need to remember that beyond the gloss and the glitter, no family is perfect and most families experience some degree of stress and upset at Christmas. The images on the Christmas cards sell us an illusion.

But in some ways I feel the religious cards are no better. Most feature Jesus, Mary and Joseph grouped together smiling, in a clean, warm stable, surrounded by a holy glow. The reality would have been dirt, mess, pain and tears. Sometimes we Christians can be just as guilty as the rest of society in presenting a glossy and glittery image of Christmas. I don't believe this does the Gospel any favours. The great, good news of the Christmas story is that God came to earth in human form and entered into our mess, pain and tears. God did not choose an easy option; a respectable and wealthy family whose lives were neat and ordered. He chose to live among people who were poor, marginalised and oppressed so he could demonstrate the lengths he would go to in order to show us his love. God wanted us to realise the he is on the side of those society has condemned and rejected, he has a particular concern for the abandoned and humiliated. And what better way to prove that than to become one of those people.

DECEMBER 2017

1. **A** feels very frustrated that he can't do a course whilst in prison and is not being allowed to progress. He does not see the part his own behaviour has played in his current situation. Please pray that the Lord will open his eyes not only to his behaviour but to the difference that Christ in his life can make.
2. **P** is very frustrated about not getting help at the moment whilst he is serving his sentence and feels he is being moved around the prison system a great deal. Please pray that he will be settled very soon.
3. **N** was a regular at chapel and bible study in Manchester Prison and has been transferred to a jail down south far from his family. Pray that this will change for him and that in the meantime he can find a new group in the prison.
4. **C** seems trapped in a cycle of very negative behaviour. Please pray that the Lord by His grace will help him to change.
5. Pray for all those who attend the Tuesday Bible group at GMCC with City Centre Ministries. May we sense the presence of the Lord and see faith grow.
6. **A** is anxious about his family and is struggling to get in touch with them. Please pray that they will make a connection with him soon.
7. **S** has just found out his mum is in prison and is very worried about her. Please pray that he will have good news from her.
8. **A** is in a much more positive frame of mind at the moment and is being very creative. Please pray this will continue and increase.
9. **R** was expecting to be released in early November but has found out he is facing new charges and is very distressed. Please pray for Gods help for him.
10. **J** suffers with significant mental health problems but has started to attend chapel. Please pray that he will find this a therapeutic time.
11. **P** has cut off contact with his family and is feeling very lonely. Please pray that he will deal with any underlying issues and renew contact again.
12. **R** wants to move to a jail nearer to his home in the south and feels very frustrated that it is not happening quickly. Please pray for patience for him and that he will be reassured that the move will happen.
13. **P** once felt very close to God but has drifted away and struggles to believe there is a way back. Please pray that he will remember the words of Psalm 121 and lift his eyes to God for help.
14. **L** has lost contact with his family and is uncertain about his future when he gets out, but he has a faith in God. Pray for the Lord to help and guide him.
15. **J** has been recalled to jail but his faith is deepening. Please pray for his encouragement.

DECEMBER 2017

16. **M** needs much prayer as he is a habitual self-harmer. Please pray that the issues that are causing this will be dealt with and his health will improve.
17. **K**'s brother has been seriously injured in a motorbike accident. Please pray for him and also for K to have peace from anxiety.
18. **D** needs prayer as he finishes his sentence that he might re-adjust to a new Spirit-filled lifestyle.
19. **A** struggles with life and being away from his children. Please pray that he will adapt to this and be able to see his family at some point.
20. **G** has been receiving help for accommodation. Please pray that he will find the best property suited for his needs.
21. **HMP Buckley Hall** has asked for blessings on Alpha and the Living with Loss & Sycamore Tree courses and for more volunteers for the courses they run at Buckley Hall.
22. **A** few lads from the bible study group have gone out and then have come back into prison. Pray they will really meet God again as they get involved in chapel groups and shake off the old life for good.
23. **C** came to an Alpha group, said he felt really emotional and resonated with what was said about Jesus's death and His forgiveness for us, and said that he knows he needs to come to Chapel and get involved in the groups. Pray he meets with God in a real and personal way that will change his life forever.
24. Three more bible study lads have been released. Pray for strength and wisdom and good, godly friendships and connections to be made.
25. Remember all the staff and prisoners on this special day.
26. **K** is back in prison after a lot of work to rehabilitate, pray that this time would be his last, and that something would change.
27. **S** is about to be released into a Christian rehab, he's very anxious about his release. Please pray for the peace of God to cover him and for a successful spell in rehab.
28. **J** who has done well since his release and despite much pressure has stayed out of trouble now faces fresh challenges. Pray for wisdom and strength.
29. **F** relapsed after spending time in a rehab following his release. He now has another chance in supported accommodation and wants to stay clean.
30. **G** recently had a breakdown in mental health which has affected the whole of his life. He has avoided going back to his old ways. Pray for recovery.
31. **A** is struggling to make new friends as he has been let down so many times, please pray that he begins to open up and starts to be more social.