



**CAN
YOU
SEE
ME**

**or are you
just looking?**

Prisons Week
2011 November 20th-26th
prisonsweek.org



Can you see me?

or are you just looking?

An old country song about old age echoes Jesus' words from our gospel reading for the Sunday of Prisons Week: 'So if you're walking down the street sometime and spot some hollow ancient eyes, please don't just pass 'em by and stare, as if you didn't care, say, "Hello in there, hello."'

Looking into the eyes of those who are struggling, wherever they may be, can be difficult – perhaps it's the look of hunger or thirst, isolation or vulnerability, of being trapped or in pain. But Jesus tells us of the importance of stopping, seeing (not just looking) and attending to their needs – and to remember that in so doing we are also ministering to Him.

When we, beginning in prayer, decide to look into the eyes of those affected by the reality of prison, we also see into the eyes of our Lord, and our response to their struggle is transformed.

BIBLE TEXT

'For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You something to drink? When did we see You a stranger and invite You in, or needing clothes and clothe You? When did we see You sick or in prison and go to visit You?' The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

Matthew 25 v35-40

DAILY PRAYERS

DAY 1:

Dear Lord, you said, 'when I was hungry, you gave me food'. Enable those in prison to discover the spiritual food of life, the nourishment of God's word and to taste and see that He is good.

DAY 2:

Dear Lord, you said, 'when I was thirsty you gave me something to drink'. Enable those who thirst for attention to be refreshed by the love of God and by family and friends.

DAY 3:

Dear Lord, you said, 'I was a stranger and you welcomed me'. Enable those who are in prison not to feel lost, abandoned and forgotten. Help them to know and remember that they are all loved and made in the image and likeness of God.

DAY 4:

Dear Lord, you said, 'I was naked and you gave me clothing'. Enable all families to know that they are not alone. The love and kindness of God will clothe and support them each day.

DAY 5:

Dear Lord, you said, 'I was sick and you took care of me'. Enable all victims to be assured that they are loved and that there is support, and that there are people and organisations who care.

DAY 6:

Dear Lord, you said, 'when I was in prison you visited me'. Enable those who are imprisoned to know and feel that they are not forgotten, that God loves each and every one of them. Enable all those who work in prison to support those who feel lonely and unloved - that they would know that God is with them and loves them.

DAILY TEXTS

DAY 1:

Have you ever been really hungry? I suspect that most of us will at some time have realised that we really need to have some food, but I doubt whether many of us have really felt deep physical hunger. However, we do not live by bread alone and many do have a deep spiritual hunger for the more profound things of life and a need to find peace and fulfilment - that hunger may be felt by all who are affected by the justice system, not least the victims of crime. We remember that Jesus says to us all, 'I am the Bread of Life' and invites us to receive Him. As we pray for victims and all who hunger, He also asks, 'Can you see me, or are you just looking?'

DAY 2:

It is easy to become dehydrated for it can happen slowly and we hardly notice until we develop headaches and other indications. In this country there is little need for people around us to be really thirsty in a physical way. However we often hear of people suffering burnout whose lives dry out through stress and pressure. With the present financial cutbacks this could well increase, not least for those who work in our prisons. Into that dryness Jesus comes as the living water to refresh our souls, to bring us back from dryness to life. As we pray for prison staff we are challenged to see Jesus in all, for He asks us, 'Can you see me, or are you just looking?'

DAY 3:

Loneliness is a major challenge for many people. Most of us need to belong and we will strive to find that sense of belonging, and that is very true for those being released from custody. Who is there for them? Will they find a welcoming place in a community, or is the community of crime the only community truly interested in them. Therein lies a major challenge from Jesus, who says, 'I was a stranger and you did not invite me in'. As we pray for our communities Jesus asks us to see Him in all whom we meet, both the loveable and the difficult and asks the question, 'Can you see me, or are you just looking?'

DAY 4:

Today there are massive pressures on people, especially young people, to keep up with current fashion. Society places great importance on our outward appearance with very little focus on who we really are inside. This assignment of worth from outward appearance is true in many areas of society, not least the families of offenders where behind the exterior may hide vulnerability, pain and nakedness. Jesus said, 'I was naked and you clothed me'. He asks us to see beyond external appearances, to see Him in the lives of all who struggle so that they might be clothed with hope, love and acceptance. As we pray for families of offenders, He asks, 'Can you see me, or are you just looking?'

DAY 5:

In the gospels we see the intense awareness of Jesus, 'the Resurrection and the Life', to the needs of the sick and suffering and how He responded to that need. Contact with the criminal justice system can be a time of huge suffering for many people, both victims and perpetrators, as they come to terms with their past, present and future. Jesus' response is to bring healing, wholeness and restoration. Seeking to reflect Jesus' 'tough love' can be a real challenge, especially for magistrates and judges as they seek to serve the cause of justice and the Lord who said, 'I was sick and you looked after me'. As we pray for all in the criminal justice system, He asks the question 'Can you see me, or are you just looking?'

DAY 6:

So often we are unaware of the effect of the care we share with others. The gentle word of encouragement or the kind act often makes a massive difference. That is also true in prison where there are many such kind acts from fellow prisoners, staff and volunteers. Some may think that it is not easy to see the presence of Christ in those who have committed offences and hurt others. However, those who work in and visit prisons will know that there are many times when the suffering and the love of Christ are clearly seen in the lives of prisoners. Jesus yearns for people to turn to him and change direction for He said, 'I am the Door' through which true life can be found. We are all challenged by Jesus to see Him in the face of those who are in prison for He said, 'I was in prison and you came to visit me'. As we pray for prisoners, He asks us all, 'Can you see me, or are you just looking?'

Prisons Week was formed to pray for and raise awareness of the needs of prisoners and their families, victims of offenders, prison staff and all those who care. It consists of representatives of Christian denominations and Christian organisations.

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 assist in any of the above.

For suggestions as to how you can help, to make a donation or to order larger quantities of these prayer leaflets/posters, please visit our website at www.prisonsw.org where you will also find additional materials including prayers, worship resources, ideas, useful contacts, books and more.

You may also write to:

The Secretary, Prisons Week, PO Box 2733, Lichfield, WS13 6GZ

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