

# HOPE FOR THE COUNTRYSIDE



## Seeds of Prayer

### The seasons

There is a deep stillness over the countryside. The night is darker and the daylight clearer. Noise, light and other pollution and distractions have diminished.

Yet the birds still fly, and gather throughout the day in the garden for food, beautiful in their different colours. A pheasant, resplendent in his spring robes, comes in for his peanuts. Other animals emerge to join the feast, and butterflies spread out their wings to catch the first warm rays of sunshine of the year.

The land still shows the scars of the recent drought, fires and floods. But, untouched by 'social distancing and self isolation', the countryside seems to be at peace. It quietly gets on with life, and prepares for new growth and for the bounty ahead.

*Praise God for the renewal of the year, and for His promise that all things are being made new in Christ (Rev 21:5). As Easter approaches and we celebrate Jesus' Resurrection, give thanks that He brings hope into every situation.*

*Father, hear Your servants' prayer,  
Lifted voices everywhere,  
One request to raise on high,  
'Lord, have mercy' is our cry.*

*Lord, Your word calls us to be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, and faithful in prayer. So we will not fear, for You are with us; we will not be dismayed, for You are our God. You will strengthen us and help us; You will uphold us with your righteous right hand. Your love, Lord, reaches to the heavens, and your faithfulness to the skies.*

**(Romans 12:12, Isaiah 41:10, Psalm 36:5)**

Covid-19 and the response to it are profoundly impacting the lives of all, both rural and urban, and, more than ever, prayer must be our first resort. This longer issue of Seeds, therefore, offers some ways to pray in the current crisis. As well as the points below, please take time to look up the scriptures referenced and use as the basis for your prayers, and pray the Psalms listed in full. As ever, if you have insights and concerns to share, please get in touch. And please forward this guide to anyone who may be able to use it, wherever they live. 'The effective prayer of a righteous man avails much' **(James 5:16)**.

### Driven into the wilderness

Like Jesus after His baptism, we find ourselves 'driven by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness' **(Mark 1:12)**. The wilderness is, firstly, a place of encounter and intimacy with the Lord and of hearing His voice **(Hosea 2:14-23; Exodus 34:27-28; Deuteronomy 29:5; 1 Kings 19:8)**. *Pray for God to open our eyes to see the present lockdown as an opportunity to 'come aside to a desolate place and rest awhile' (Mark 6:31) and an invitation to go deeper into God. Pray that many will 'be still and know that the Lord is God' (Psalm 46:10) and be freed of anxiety for the 'things the nations of the world seek after' and 'strive only for His Kingdom' (Luke 12:22-31).*

### 'Tempted by the devil'

The wilderness is also a place of testing and trial, of refining and purifying, of confrontation with the devil **(Mark 1:13)**. Throughout Scripture we see the Lord using adversity to discipline and purify us **(Job 23:10; 1 Peter 1:6-7)** so that we bear fruit **(John 15:1-2; Hebrews 12:3-11)**. *Pray for us to submit to God (James 4:7) and His discipline, knowing that He does so because He loves us (Hebrews 12:5-6). Pray for believers to be aware and not 'ignorant of Satan's devices' (2 Corinthians 2:11), and to 'resist the devil, and he will flee from us' (James 4:7).*

### 'With the animals'

Jesus was not alone in the wilderness. In a recapitulation of Eden and an anticipation of the Age to come, He was 'with the animals' **(Mark 1:13)**. *Give thanks that nature has not gone into lockdown, and that in this time of privation many are waking up to its joy and beauty. As people turn to creation for comfort in adversity, pray that their eyes will be opened to the "Lord who made heaven and earth", for whom "nothing is too difficult" (Jeremiah 32:17). Give thanks for the closeness to nature enjoyed by those of us who live in the countryside, especially in this season of Spring. Pray for those in towns and cities to find ways to connect with and enjoy God's creation even in small ways.*

## 'The Lord reigns'

We are in uncharted territory and the future is even more uncertain. Even when the virus has run its course, things will never be the same - politically, socially and economically. Stoked by the media, people are gripped by fear - of catching the disease itself, of the loss of money, home, job or loved ones, of the kind of world that might emerge beyond the pandemic, and ultimately of death. *Declare and affirm that the Lord reigns and rules over human affairs and the entire cosmos (Psalms 93, 96, 97, 99). Pray for all who feel paralysed by fear to come to know that the Lord is 'our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble, therefore we will not fear' (Psalm 46:1-2). Especially, pray that many will recognise their need of salvation and cry to the Lord to have mercy on them, for their eyes to be opened (Matthew 20:29-34), and come to know the power of His Resurrection (Philippians 3:10).*

## Rural-urban links

Faced with a shortfall of seasonal workers from overseas, due to Brexit and Coronavirus, the produce sector has been recruiting British labour and thousands have already applied ([bit.ly/fwiseasonal](http://bit.ly/fwiseasonal)). *Pray that this, and other developments, will inaugurate a new coming together of rural and urban people, a new mutual understanding, and a new recognition of the importance of farming and the land.*

O God, You know us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers, that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright: grant to us such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ Your Son our Lord.

## 'Deliver us from evil'

Our times are in His hands (**Psalm 31:15**) and we are to trust ourselves to Him to judge justly (**1 Peter 2:23**). Yet, we can and should pray for the Lord to deliver us from evil and the evil one (**Matthew 6:13**). *Declare and pray God's protection on family, fellowship, neighbours and nation from the virus, its social, economic and political effects, and the fear that accompanies it (Psalm 91). Affirm and pray that the Lord will hear us in this day of trouble, defend us and send us help (Psalm 20), and that, in His time, the pandemic will end (Psalm 103:2-4). Declare that the Lord 'frustrates the plans of the nations', but His plans stand forever (Psalm 33:10-11) and His purposes will prevail (Proverbs 19:21).*

## 'Pray for those in authority'

The Bible urges us to pray and give thanks for all in authority (**1 Timothy 2:1-2**). *Pray for our Government, Prime Minister and First Ministers, and for all seeking to lead us through the present crisis, to be given wisdom, act justly (Micah 6:8; Psalm 72:2) and fear God. Pray for church leaders to bring a strong prophetic voice and to understand and be unafraid to declare the word of the Lord.*

## 'Love your neighbour'

The crisis has prompted a heartening upsurge of neighbourliness (as evidenced, for example, by the huge response to the NHS's volunteer scheme). It is reported that rural communities are linking up as never before via social media and offering help to those in self-isolation, and Christians are reaching out to and praying for their neighbours. *Pray that, despite our inability to meet, Christians will continue to be able to love our neighbours in practical ways, to shine as lights in the darkness and to be and share the good news of Jesus Christ. Pray for all who feel particularly isolated and vulnerable, especially the rural elderly.*

## 'Healing the land'

**2 Chronicles 7:13-15** sets out how God's ancient people were to respond to adversities, including pestilence (vs 13). *Pray that God's people now will respond, not only with prayer, but 'humbling ourselves, seeking His face and turning from our wicked ways'. Especially, pray that the Lord will reveal how and of what we are to repent, and resolve to do so, and that, as a consequence, He will forgive our sins and heal our land.*

## Church

Covid-19 has prompted an unprecedented closure of churches. But churches have been quick to 'reinvent themselves', and, according to the Archbishop of Canterbury ([bit.ly/itvwelby](http://bit.ly/itvwelby)), ten times as many people are watching church online as attended services in church buildings. *Give thanks for electronic communications, but pray that churches will use them wisely (eg to support the needy, lonely and vulnerable), and not be too anxious to carry on 'business as usual' using social media, but rather embrace the opportunity for 'time out' with the Lord.*

'Hope for the Countryside' is a partnership between Agricultural Christian Fellowship, Village Hope, the World Prayer Centre and Top Barn Trust. Our aim is to mobilise and resource prayer for rural Britain. Our vision is of beacons of prayer lighting up across our countryside. Our prayer is for a fresh move of the Holy Spirit across the countryside of our nation.

'Seeds of prayer' is offered as a resource for prayer for individuals and prayer groups and for use in church services and other meetings. If you have found the 'seeds' helpful and inspiring or would like to feed back your own insights and prayers then we would be very happy to hear from you.

