

Seeds of prayer is a resource for prayer for individuals, groups, church services and other meetings. If you would like to feed back your own insights and prayers then we would be very happy to hear from you.

New beginnings

September is a month of both endings and beginnings. Summer ends and autumn begins. Holidays finish and the academic year commences. Parliament returns after the summer recess. Farmers conclude most harvesting operations and prepare for the start of a new farming year in October. By the end of the month, trees will begin to shed their leaves in preparation for their winter dormancy and many animals will start preparing for their winter sleep. In rural life, in church and nation, and perhaps even in our own lives, we see much that seems to be coming to an end. And the coming months will almost certainly bring new changes and challenges, for many people and, especially, for believers. Yet, as T S Eliot wrote, "the end is where we start from". As hymn writer Nathalie Sleeth wrote, "in our end is our beginning.". And, as Jesus said (both referring to His own death and resurrection, and expressing a natural and spiritual principle), "unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12: 24). *Pray for those starting at school, college and university, for our government and the new Parliamentary session (1 Timothy 2: 1-4), and for farmers. Pray for the Lord to open our eyes to look beyond the endings around us and see His new beginnings in our own lives, in rural life, in church and nation (Luke 24:31). Pray that He will show us when to let our own works, projects, programmes, organisations and institutions die so that He can do a 'new thing' (Isaiah 43:19; Philippians 3:12-14).*

Signs of hope

A 2022 survey estimated that while 48% of people in the UK identify as 'Christian' (down from 58% in 2015), just 6% are 'practising Christians' (ie attend church, pray and read the Bible regularly) (bit.ly/tjreport). Between 2001 and 2021, the number of churches in the UK fell from 42,000 to 39,800, meaning that 2200 churches closed (bit.ly/ef2k). In rural areas, these will have been predominantly non-conformist chapels, a trend which was already well underway by 2001 (and which was accelerated by Covid). Across much of rural England, the C of E is the only 'show still on the road'; but, especially in deeper rural areas, congregations are small and services infrequent. Many attend church in nearby towns. There are many faithful clergy, but the leadership of the C of E and other denominations seems more concerned with accommodating the spirit of the age than advancing the Gospel. Yet, as we learned through Hope Countryside's 'movement of hope' gatherings, there are many signs of hope, within and outside church institutions, especially in 'grass-roots' initiatives and informal relationships, gatherings and networks. Historic rural church buildings continue to attract many visitors; while some are simply interested in history and heritage, others are on spiritual quests or 'pilgrimages'. Central to the Hope Countryside vision is that rural believers have a distinctive calling in our present times. *Pray that the Lord will cause the seeds of new life in the countryside to grow (1 Corinthians 3:6-7), and gather His people in rural areas and strengthen them to respond to His calling and purposes (Psalm 29:11). Pray for those who visit old churches to be drawn beyond the architecture to the One to whose glory they were built. As the Lord shakes, 'deadwoods', and prunes the churches (Hebrews 12:27; John 15:2,6), pray that we will know how to pray in accordance with His will.*

Autumn fruits

Meteorological autumn begins on 1 September; astronomical autumn begins on the equinox, which, this year, falls on 23 September. As John Keats famously wrote, autumn is the season of 'fruitfulness', and already the hedgerows are ablaze with colourful fruits, brimming with black elderberries and blackberries, red hips and haws, purple sloes and wild plums, and green and yellow crab apples. The Bible has much to say about fruitfulness. God made a fruitful creation and made His creatures and His people to 'be fruitful and multiply' (Genesis 1:22,28;28:3). And Jesus calls His followers to be fruitful (John 15:1-17) and promised that those who abide in Him will bear much fruit (John 15:5). *Give thanks for the signs of God's beauty and bounty in the autumn fruits around us. Pray that we also will be fruitful in 'every good work' (Colossians 1:10) and yield the 'peacable fruit of righteousness' (Hebrews 12:11).*

You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you (John 15:16).

Prayer gathering

Online prayer and sharing

7.30-9.00 PM, 20 September 2023

Link: <https://web.zoom.us/join>

Meeting ID: 875 5492 4270

Passcode: 308704

At this gathering we will continue to explore the theme of our 'day on the farm' in July - 'a movement of hope in rural Britain'. Whether or not you attended that event, join with others on 20 September and share your own experience and insights and pray together for our countryside and its people.

Hope Countryside (originally Hope for the Countryside) is a partnership including Agricultural Christian Fellowship, Village Hope, the World Prayer Centre, Top Barn Trust and others. 'Hope Countryside' expresses our growing vision of beacons of prayer lighting up across rural Britain, bringing hope both to the countryside and from the countryside to the whole of the nation. Our aim is to promote understanding of, and prayer for, rural life and communities, church and mission, and farming and the land.