HOPE FOR THE COUNTRYSIDE

Seeds of Prayer

The seasons

Last month we said that February was 'the last, quiet pause of winter', but it has turned out to be anything but quiet! Floods have affected many people, and storms have battered the length and breadth of the country. Amid growing uncertainty, is God trying to get the nation's attention? Are the new, green shoots of March heralds for the power of the Gospel touching lives again across the countryside? *Praise God that, just as the cycle of the seasons comes round faithfully each year, God's Word must equally as surely produce good fruit in the lives of its hearers*.

> Lord we bless Your mighty hand,
> Stretch it forth across our land.
> Do the work that You must do,
> Turn the people back to You.

Floods

The unprecedented floods inundated many farms, homes and businesses. For some, it will be many months before they can return to normal. Yet, the floods brought out the best in many communities. *Thank God for the dedication of the emergency services, and the practical compassion of many who came to the help of their neighbours. Pray that God will use these difficulties to reveal Himself through nature, the love of His people, and suffering turned to hope in Jesus* (**Psalm 22:24, Romans 8:19-20**). *As nature recovers from the floods, pray that God will especially bless the land with new life this spring* (**Psalm 65**).

Lent

The season of Lent, which commemorates Jesus' forty days in the wilderness (**Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13**), is traditionally marked by fasting and abstinence. It is a time to 'consider our ways' (**Haggai 1:5-7**). Many churches will set aside special times to meet, pray and study the Bible. *Pray for Christians, both rural and urban, to understand how what we eat and how we live affects God's creation and the land and those who farm it (*bit.ly/vhemmaus*), and to know how to care for His world and love all our neighbours (*bit.ly/vhgrains*). Pray that Lent groups held in village churches across the country, including those following the Archbishops' '40-day Challenge' (*bit.ly/coelent*), will draw many closer to the Lord and to His word, creation and people*. (The theme for this year's Village Hope Annual Conference in April is, 'Hope for the Earth'; find out more at bit.ly/vhconf).

Farming

Many farmers are now dealing with both the effects of recent floods and longer term waterlogging, and their impacts on harvesting, cultivation, sowing, lambing etc. Very little autumn and winter sowing took place last year; so spring will we very busy in the fields. In addition, negotiations around the detail of the new Agriculture Bill continue, Coronavirus is impacting world trade, the theft of livestock is becoming more prevalent, prospects for the dairy industry look very bleak (bit.ly/fffmart), and fruit and vegetable growers are concerned about how they will recruit seasonal workers in future. *Pray for the safety and wellbeing of all who work the land. Pray that the continued adversity and uncertainty facing farmers will prompt many to reach out to the One who "causes the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate"* (**Psalm 104:14**) *and who "crowns the year with His bounty"* (**Psalm 65:11**).

Signs

We live in turbulent and troubled times (**2 Timothy 3:1-9**). The floods and other troubles facing rural Britain are just the tip of a global iceberg: across the world, nature, society and church are being thoroughly shaken (**Haggai 2:6-7**). These are the times of 'signs' that, variously, warn of God's judgement, call us to repentance and herald Jesus' return (bit.ly/pteleventh; bit.ly/ptchfloods; **Matthew 25; Luke 21**). *Pray that God's people will understand the times and know what to do* (**1 Chronicles 12:32**)*, always be ready to give an account for the hope that is in us* (**1 Peter 3:15**)*, and work to bring in His harvest*.