

'The gleanings of the harvest'

"And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God." ([Leviticus 23:22](#))

In the Biblical calendar, the months of summer fall between the first and second cycles of feasts, between Passover, Unleavened Bread, First-Fruits and Pentecost in the spring, and Trumpets, Atonement, and Tabernacles in the autumn. In the programme of feasts set out in Leviticus 23, the interval is represented by a one-verse directive regarding gleaning (as above).

An application of this principle is seen in the story of Ruth, when a poor, Moabite widow sojourning in Israel gleans in the fields of a rich Israelite landowner ([Ruth 2:1-23](#)), and, as a result, becomes not only part of the house of Israel, but a matriarch of the Davidic line ([Ruth 4:13-22](#); [Matthew 1:5-16](#)).

The spring feasts speak of Jesus' first coming, the autumn feasts of His return. The summer interval represents the time in between, when, through the preaching of the Gospel, those who were "aliens" and "far off", 'without hope and without God' (ie the 'poor and the sojourner'), are "brought near" and become members of the "commonwealth of Israel" ([Ephesians 2:11-13](#)), when wild olive branches (ie gentiles) are grafted into the cultivated olive tree that is Israel ([Romans 11:24-25](#)).

Give thanks that through Christ we are "no longer strangers and aliens, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" ([Ephesians 2:19](#)), and that the Lord is working His purpose out to gather "the poor, crippled, blind and lame" from the "streets and lanes" and "highways and hedges" so that His house will be full ([Luke 14:21-23](#)). Pray for the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest ([Luke 10:2](#)).

'For the poor ...'

In the last 10 years or so, 'gleaning groups' have sprung up in many places in the UK ([bit.ly/gngo](#)). These work with producers to rescue fresh fruit and vegetables that would otherwise be wasted and get it to good causes in the local area. Environmental campaigning group, Feedback, estimated that growers waste about 16% of their produce for reasons beyond their control, eg inaccurate forecasting by retailers of how much they will buy or cosmetic defects ([bit.ly/gn16](#); [bit.ly/gnrep](#)). Gleaning helps reduce food waste, strengthen community and enable marginalised communities to access more fresh fruit and vegetables ([bit.ly/gnwhy](#)). *Give thanks for these initiatives. Pray for all involved, for greater involvement of Christians and churches, and for those seeking to reduce food waste through practice and policy.*

'.. and the sojourner'

According to a recent report, migrant fruit and vegetable pickers coming to work on UK farms are being exploited, underpaid, overworked, bullied, and sexually harrassed ([bit.ly/flexssw](#); [bit.ly/indhb](#)). The Government's Seasonal Worker Scheme enables the recruitment of up to c 45,000 migrant workers on temporary visas to work in horticulture and the poultry industry ([bit.ly/govsswx](#)). Most come from the Central Asian republics. The produce industry relies heavily on migrant workers, but at the same time, this report suggests they are not always treated well. *Pray for all who 'sojourn' here and 'glean' our fields and all who employ them, and that the Lord will prosper employers who treat their workers with kindness and justice. Pray for those reaching out to migrant workers with care and the gospel.*

Forthcoming events

'A Day on the Farm'

Saturday 29 June 2024

9:30 AM - 4:00 PM

Southfields Farm, Coleshill, B46 3EJ

'Provision & Presence'

You are invited to join the Hope Countryside partnership for a 'day on the farm' on 29 June 2024, when, through presentations, conversations and prayer, we shall consider the 'provision and presence of the Lord in rural Britain'.

All are welcome, and there is no charge. But please [book here \(bit.ly/dofpap\)](#), where you can find about more about the theme and programme for the day.

Online gathering

Wednesday 11 September 2024

7.30 - 9.00 PM

'A movement of hope in rural Britain'

Sharing stories of mission; encouraging and praying for one another.

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

Zoom meeting ID: 821 1671 9194

Passcode: 905289

Hope Countryside is a partnership including Village Hope, Agricultural Christian Fellowship, the World Prayer Centre 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.

'Choose life'

God's heart is to bless us. He has clearly set out for us the choices we must make to receive His abundant blessings. As we approach a General Election, as a nation and individually, we again stand at a place of decision. Rural people face the same moral, ethical and spiritual choices and decisions as everyone else. The standards revealed in scripture and creation concerning worship, identity, family, society and commerce, transcend personal and political persuasions for country and urban dwellers. Government ideologies and policies also profoundly impact agriculture and horticulture, and the livelihoods dependent on them, and wider country life. They may dictate capacity, or otherwise, for food production, security and standards in animal welfare. Opportunities for growth and increased food security exist. For example, we currently grow only 17% of the fruit we consume in Britain (bit.ly/fvss). The weeks of campaigning provide opportunities to raise all these concerns with candidates. *Pray for wisdom so that we align with the Lord's standards and purposes ([Proverbs 8:1-21](#); [Luke 11:9](#); [James 1:5-8](#);) . Pray that the prophetic voice from the countryside would be amplified and for godly, practical wisdom. Pray for soft hearts and listening ears, and that men and women of understanding, integrity and humility will be chosen and then speak truth clearly, and for greater rural-urban understanding and harmony, especially among believers. May people "choose life" ([2 Chronicles 7:14](#); [Joshua 24:14-15](#)).*

'Let the children come to Me'

Children and young people feature prominently in the Bible. From conception ([Psalm 139:13-17](#)) the Lord watches over them, severely warning any who would harm them or hinder their faith ([Matthew 18:6](#)). Praises are ordained from their lips ([Matthew 21:15-16](#); [Psalm 8:1-2](#)); parents are to teach them the ways of God and young people are urged to stay on paths of righteousness ([Psalm 119:9-16](#)). Growing up in the countryside children can enjoy the wonders of creation and community. But they face the same dangers and temptations as their peers in towns, especially when moving to secondary school, although sometimes these are less visible. The internet and social media provide many opportunities, some good, others utterly destructive, all reaching into every home and mobile phone.

Praise God for initiatives teaching children the gospel and bible stories, and pray that they are inspired by biblical heroes and meet Jesus personally early. Pray that they grow strong in their faith in early years and stay faithful in adolescence. Pray for village schools, that they will hold to biblical truths in their teaching and culture, and for protection for all children and young people in our rural places and innovations to reach, connect and disciple teenagers as they enter secondary school.

'The fields are white'

[Farming Christian Link \(FCL\)](#) (bit.ly/fclx) "seeks to bring a Christian witness and help to those in farming and rural areas". Every summer, FCL teams attend many agricultural and county shows and have hundreds of Gospel conversations and give out Christian literature (27,000 leaflets and 17,000 New Testaments at 46 shows in 2023). This year, FCL hopes to be at 56 shows (see list - bit.ly/fclshows). *Give thanks for these wonderful opportunities to share the Gospel. Pray that seeds sown will bear fruit, for souls to be saved, God glorified, and for more workers (particularly in the South West).*

[Rural Missions \(RM\)](#) (bit.ly/rumiss) supports rural churches in their outreach to their local communities, through tailor-made consultation days or weekends, online mission forums, and resources. RM's 'dream' is of visible, vibrant, credible and caring Christian communities in every village. *Pray for their staff and trustees as they engage with churches, for more churches to take up the offer of consultations and other support, for more workers ([Matthew 9:38](#)), and that RM's work will enable many effectively to "testify to the good news of God's grace" ([Acts 20:24](#)).*

[Arthur Rank Centre \(ARC\)](#) (bit.ly/arcnow) "resources, trains, and advocates for rural Christians, rural churches and the communities they serve", through online resources, newsletters, partnerships and training, through the 2-day 'Rural Mission and Ministry Course' and the 15-month 'Germinate Leadership programme'. *Pray for uptake of, and fruit from, the latter as it relaunches this autumn, for CEO and trustees as they guide ARC into a new phase after some turbulent times, and for all rural church leaders, who are often under great pressure.*

'Reaping the whirlwind'

Those who work on the land will have noticed much 'disturbance' this year. The turbulent weather and exceptionally wet winter have led not only to failed food crops (bit.ly/ftwea; bit.ly/fwwea), but also to an imbalance in wildlife. Some species have declined; populations of others, some considered to be pests, have exploded, eg rats (bit.ly/msrats) and ticks (bit.ly/cbbtik). There is much disturbance and trouble in the nation too, in the economy, politics, communities and even the churches, and in the moral state of society and culture. It seems we have 'sown the wind and are reaping the whirlwind' ([Hosea 8:7](#)).

There is surely a deeper issue than weather here. The Bible makes a clear connection between the state of land, society and nation, and the attitude and conduct of the people. Hosea (4:1-3) links the languishing of birds, beasts and fish to the lack of faithfulness and the knowledge of God. If these disturbances are warnings from the Lord to return to Him, then we as His people must "consider our ways" ([Haggai 1:5-6](#)), and humble ourselves, seek Him and turn from wickedness, that we might be forgiven and the land be healed ([2 Chronicles 7:14](#)).

Pray for an alertness to, and understanding of, the times among God's people, a greater willingness to consider our own ways, and the grace to be able to take responsibility and respond in repentance and supplication.