

Winter Season of Prayer: Grayshott School December 2020

I invite you to join me in this season to pray and fast for Grayshott School.

What does prayer support at Grayshott school look like for the next season?

Feel free to spend as much time as you feel led on this journey. Each 'part' could be for a different day making up a week of prayer, or you could set a day aside for a prayer retreat.

You will see that I have incorporated a prayer walk into the journey, but again, feel free to journey from the comfort of home if you prefer.

I invite you to fast if you are able to do so fully or in part, but always being mindful of your health needs. There is no compulsion at all to do everything I have suggested. I hope it will just be a launchpad for prayer.

Part 1: Preparing for Prayer

The Invitation:

This morning as I looked out at my garden, a single phrase struck me which has led to the evolution of this prayer journey. The phrase was:

"There is life even in a winter garden."

Perhaps all of you nature lovers out there don't need such an obvious thing to be pointed out! However for me, it struck me between the eyes!

It's interesting what you see when you really take time to look: In late November, I had noticed some flowers/weeds that looked like violets nestled under an evergreen bush full of red berries. That same week, someone had also drawn my attention to all the buds already appearing



(Oaks on Bellfields Green, Guildford)

on various trees. Today it was five Blue Tits on the bare branches of a tree in my garden that caught my attention. Last week it was two majestic oak trees in the middle of Bellfields Estate, Guildford, with lots of brown acorns lying underneath their mighty branches.

The moment I saw the oak trees, another phrase popped into my head: "They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of His splendour." Of course, in this age of technology I googled it immediately to find the reference - Isaiah 61:3.

I've been mulling over the entire chapter on and off since then and using it to pray into a variety of situations. Of course, this time of year this scripture feels even more significant as we bring to mind all the Messianic prophecies that foretold of Our Lord's birth.

Today as I looked out at my winter garden and thought about Grayshott school, I saw that the Lord was drawing these things together in order to direct our prayer and discernment and to encourage us enormously.

The winter can be a metaphor for hard times in a community. In winter we have to trust more in the unseen work of the Lord. He is the Master Gardener, *lovingly and carefully tending His garden in just the right way for this winter season.*

In a moment we will consider the oak trees I mentioned previously, but first let's enter into the Lord's presence by reflecting on this one particular scripture where the oak tree is mentioned:

Isaiah 61:1-3 (NIV):

"The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,[a]

2
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour
and the day of vengeance of our God,
to comfort all who mourn,

3
and provide for those who grieve in Zion—
to bestow on them a crown of beauty
instead of ashes,
the oil of joy
instead of mourning,
and a garment of praise
instead of a spirit of despair.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
a planting of the Lord
for the display of his splendour."

○ ***First as you enter into a time of prayer and listening to the Lord, I invite you to sit in silence for a moment or two, pausing to be still; breathing slowly and re-centering your scattered senses upon the presence of God. You might even like to light a candle as a reminder of the Lord's presence with you and in this world.***

○ ***Next, read through the verses above out loud.***

- *What words or phrases are being highlighted to you?*
- *What aspects of God's character speak to you from these words?*

Part 2: Praying with Isaiah 61:1-3 (NIV)

Turning the words of this passage into your own prayers of praise, worship and thanks.

○ **Once again, read through the passage.**

- What prayers are you feeling led to pray for your own life? Where do you need anointing? breakthrough? freedom? healing? comfort?
- Do you see yourself as an, "Oak of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of His splendour"?
- Reflect on the dual nature of being a receiver of this Good News - a person who displays God's splendour in your life, but also you are a proclaimer - anointed to proclaim this same good news of freedom to others so that they too can display God's splendour! What a beautiful cycle.

Finally, reading through Isaiah 61:1-3 again, if you wish, pray for those whom God is bringing to mind right now. Those who need to experience joy instead of mourning, beauty instead of ashes and a spirit of praise instead of despair.

Part 3: Praying about the School Vision

Next Steps

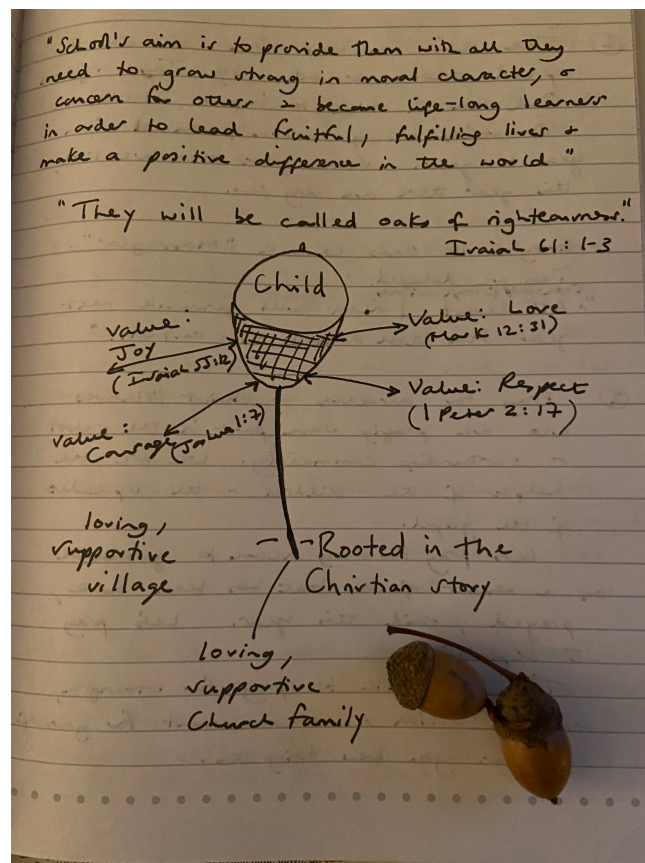
'Acorns to Mighty Oaks'

As some of you will know, Isaiah 61:1-3 are the verses of scripture on which our school vision and values are based on, (see link below to check out the vision and values).

<https://www.grayshott.hants.sch.uk/school-values-and-vision/>

It can be summed up in the phrase "Acorns to mighty oaks."

We declare over our children that "They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of His splendour." Here is how I picture the vision and values, with our children growing from small acorns into mighty oaks:



All this is the preamble really to firmly fix the image in our heads of the beautiful, ancient oak trees and acorns that we get to admire so much in this part of the world. Holding these images in our heads, I invite you to consider closely just a few things about the acorn and the oak tree and see how they can guide us into prayer for our school community.

Part 4: A Prayer Walk

The Walk and the TV Show

This is the point where you may be feeling inspired to get out there for a walk and find one or two oak trees to admire. You might even want to pick up a few acorns to bring home.

- ***Perhaps this would be a great time to walk and just ask the Lord what he would like to say about Grayshott school.*** Challenge yourself to walk for 5-10 minutes without praying yourself but rather listening. What does the Lord draw your attention to? Perhaps there are particular things He is asking you to pray into. Another prayer could be, "Holy Spirit, how do you want me to pray?"

If you're really up for it, why not take a walk round the entire road circumference of Grayshott School, blessing it and praying for any practical needs/groups that come to mind: staff wellbeing, pupil wellbeing, physical safety and protection, provision of finances, recruitment, community-school relationship, to name but a few.

If you can't get out for an actual walk, perhaps I can invite you to click on this map and prayer-walk around it in your mind's eye. Even praying for safety of people and traffic along each road would be wonderful.

<https://www.google.com/maps/place/Grayshott+Church+of+England+Controlled+Primary+School/@51.1117577,-0.7588151,1441m/data=!3m1!1e3!4m5!3m4!1s0x0:0x64ad2d8e6fe3ca27!8m2!3d51.1130289!4d-0.7588006?hl=en-GB>

Part 5: Reflection on the Oak Tree

Most of what I'm going to share stems from an article I read today about the life cycle of an oak tree posted on the [woodlands.co.uk](http://www.woodlands.co.uk) site. See the article here:

<https://www.woodlands.co.uk/blog/flora-and-fauna/the-life-cycle-of-an-oak-tree/>

The article's author, Jeff Segal, is describing a documentary first aired on BBC4 in 2015 called "Oak tree: Nature's Greatest Survivor." The film is presented by zoologist, entomologist and broadcaster George McGavin. By focusing on a single tree in Wytham Woods, just outside of Oxford, a site acquired by Oxford University in 1942 for woodland research, it captures every aspect of life in an ancient English oak over an entire year.

I watched this programme with immense interest today. it was pretty inspiring and I found myself praying for Grayshott even as I was watching. You can find the link to the first part of the show below.(Click on the picture or search the title on YouTube) It describes Autumn and Winter in the oak tree's life cycle, which I feel is very pertinent to where we are as a society right now:

The Prayer:

Using some of the quotes from the film and things I've learned about the oak tree, I am going to attempt to direct our prayer into a handful of areas for prayer.



Of course, you may be led to pray differently to me and in a variety of different directions. You may choose to journal, draw or make something as a prayer response. I would love to hear from you what you sense the Lord saying.

The Acorn/Oak - Our Pupils:

“(Acorns) A masterpiece...Inside is not only the genetic code to make an oak tree but it also comes packed with food and protection from the elements which means this seed has everything it needs to survive the winter...”

- **Thank God** for how marvellously he has formed our children just like the acorn. **Praise God** for His incredible design in creation and particularly in humanity.
- **Praise Him** for the way He has placed within them eternity, like seeds in their hearts, minds and souls - Ecclesiastes says: “He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men...” (NIV) Praise Him for that God-given awareness that there is “something more” than this transient world. **Ask** that He would increase each individual’s awareness of Him, their curiosity about Him and also increase their hope. **Ask** that He would continue to make beautiful, according to His good plan, everything and everyone in our school community.

“As the days shorten and the temperature drops - the oak, nearly 400 years old, has to make what McGavin calls “a colossal redistribution of its resources” - the first of four seasonal transformations it needs to survive.” (Jeff Segal, Woodland Blogs)

“The roots of an oak sense, respond to and utilise resources in a very dynamic way...Our tree at Wytham will have roots many times thicker spreading out anywhere up to 30m from the trunk. It may seem excessive but our tree will need them not just for nutrients, but to keep itself standing...”

- **Ask God** for increased resilience in each child and adult during this hard season of Covid and over the Christmas break. **Thank God** for all the resources placed within each individual and pray that those resources would be unlocked at the right time, just when the child/adult needs it: peace, courage, joy, hope, self-control, creativity, understanding etc. Pray that our children will be incredibly dynamic individuals who will be equipped to stand in any storm of life.
- **Ask God** to sustain, strengthen and equip the school governors, leadership team and staff at this time as they have had to navigate “a colossal redistribution” of manpower resources, financial resources, personal resources (channelling away from family life in order to serve the school etc.) **Name before God** people who come to mind and and other specific requests you may be aware of from your particular vantage point.

- **You** may be one of those people mentioned just above! Perhaps use this breathe prayer if you wish to receive what the Lord wants to give you right now:

*Hold out your hands if you are able to in a posture of receiving. As you inhale , focus on the words: **“My God.”** And as you exhale focus on the words: **“My all.” There is nothing you need to do right now except sit with Him. He knows what you need. He is your God and your all.***

Perhaps this prayer by author Ted Loder is a helpful expression of where you are at right now in this season:

I Am Silent...and Expectant

How silently,
how silently
the wondrous gift is given.
I would be silent now,
Lord,
and expectant...
that I may receive
the gift I need,
so I may become
the gift others need.

Taken from: [Guerrillas of Grace: Prayers for the Battle by Ted Loder](#)

Part 6: Looking Forward

The Oak Tree & HMS Victory:

*“In 18th to early 19th century there was a frenzy of oak planting in Britain. In just 6 years 1 military officer managed to plant nearly 922,000 oaks. One reason was that Britain had the world’s most powerful navy and all her ships were made of oak...One famous example is HMS Victory. The HMS Victory was the product of almost 6000 oak trees **reimagined by some of Britain’s best shipwrights...**”*

These ancient oaks were reimagined into battleships.

- What do you imagine 2021 and beyond will look like for our children at Grayshott School?
- **What BIG, AUDACIOUS PRAYERS can we pray?** If you’re not sure. Take scripture’s promises and start praying them over our children. Here is a link to some promises straight from the Bible if you would find it useful:
<https://www.compassionuk.org/blogs/gods-promises/>
- **What REIMAGINING do we need to do?** Where are we thinking only one-dimensionally? Where do we need as a praying community to be more dynamic? Help us Lord to see each pupil as not just an allocation of resources or a pupil to get over the academic hurdles. Help us to see them all as future HMS Victories! Help us to let go of any ‘strategies’ or ‘agendas’ not from you as we learn to pray how you pray Father. By your Spirit and only according to your good plan would you help us to reimagine how our prayer community can partner with you in 2021.

The Animals - Praying Community:

“The oak tree relies on help from animals to spread acorns around. For example jays and squirrels...With the help of these animals at least one acorn will germinate next year from those dropped this autumn.”

- Pray for ourselves - Christ followers who are playing some part in the school and surrounding community. We are some of the ‘helpers’ and the ‘spreaders’ of the gospel. **Let’s turn this verse found in Galatians 6:9 into a prayer over ourselves:** “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”
- Talking about the spiritual lives of our pupils and adults, let’s pray for many ‘acorns’ to germinate as a result of all that has been done, prayed, said this year. **Let’s pray with expectation** not for just one ‘acorn’ to germinate, but many! Perhaps you’ll want to get up and walk around and declare Isaiah 61 over the people you are praying for.
- **Take a minute - or 10** - Literally set a timer if you want, and pray for strength, renewed vision and encouragement for yourself and others doing this. Pray for new ideas and inspiration as to how we should serve our school. Pray for more ‘animals’ to get involved!! Pray for the community to embrace the vision of the school.
- Pray for our partnerships, particularly with St Lukes as they so diligently serve Grayshott School in many ways. Let’s pray for wisdom and supernatural empowerment as they seek to disciple those people who come to faith in our community. Pray for the in-school activities, the online activities and of course all the groups and events they host throughout the year in order to minister to children (and adults) in our community.

Part 7: Winding Down

Thank you for journeying with me in this season of prayer for Grayshott School. As we prepare to depart, I wanted to leave with you another of Ted Loder’s beautiful poems as a yielding prayer and also a scripture. As we read these let’s offer all we have prayed back up to God, and leave it in His trustworthy and sovereign hands.

GOD’S TIMING

O God of all seasons and senses,
grant us the sense of your timing
to submit gracefully and rejoice quietly in the turn of the seasons.
In this season of short days and long nights,
of grey and mist and cold,
teach us the lessons of endings;
children growing,
friends leaving,
loved ones dying,
grieving over,
grudges over,
blaming over,
excuses over.

O God, grant us a sense of your timing.
In this season of short days and long nights,
of grey and mist and cold,
teach us the lessons of beginnings;
that such waitings and endings may be the starting place,
a planting of seeds which bring to birth what is ready to be born—
something right and just and different,
a new song, a deeper relationship, a fuller love—
in the fullness of your time.

O God, grant us the sense of your timing.

Both Poems taken from: [Guerrillas of Grace: Prayers for the Battle by Ted Loder](#)

Jeremiah 17:8:

“He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its root by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it doesn’t not cease to bear fruit.”

Go in His peace.

Louise Yeghnazar, December 2020.