

Prayer Alert

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www.prayer-alert.net | editor@prayer-alert.net

Then a shoot will grow from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him - a Spirit of wisdom and understanding, a Spirit of counsel and strength, a Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. His delight will be in the fear of the Lord. (Isaiah 11:1-5)

We are pleased to enclose this week's edition of Prayer Alert.

You may like to explore our new online Prayer [Alert Prayer Wall](#) where we can add our own prayers and praise, interactively. We trust that you will find this helpful and encouraging!

Join the Team!

Prayer Alert is produced by a voluntary online team spread across England. If you appreciate what we do and are computer confident, with researching news, writing, editing and / or proofing skills, we would love to hear from you! Please hit reply, introduce yourself, and we will be in touch.

Thank you for partnering with us in praying for the nations.

Blessings,

David Fletcher and the Prayer Alert Team

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Praise Reports

[Peace is a Person: Jesus - by Peter Henderson](#)

'Read Philippians 4:4-9. We live in an age of frenetic energy, overstimulation and scattered senses. Politics, war, social media and all the loud voices tend to drown out our few, precious moments of quiet reflection. Peace is elusive. We often live with a sustained internal anxiety compounded by the external hostilities and conflicts that seem continually camping on our doorstep. But peace is not the absence of anxiety or chaos; it is the transformative power of God's grace in the midst of the storm. Recently it dawned on me that the little phrase in Philippians 4:5, "the Lord is near," isn't a superfluous insertion, but actually the key to understanding the whole of what follows. The peace of God can guard you because the God of peace is near. Peace is a Person: Jesus, our Prince of Peace. The presence of Jesus in our midst permits us to name the anxieties that plague our souls and present them into his capable hands. He equips us with thanksgiving to see beyond the dire circumstances that cause our grief and to trust in the goodness of God despite the chaos we see in the world. He empowers us with a gentle spirit; the ability to live peaceably with others in a world of strife. Pray for peace in the world where there has been warfare and bloodshed. Pray for peace internally where anxiety and fear have been in control.'

Praise: God for the gift of Jesus. Pray for those who don't yet know him to discover the Prince of Peace this Christmas. (John 14:27)

More: resources.foursquare.org/peace-advent-2023/

[Jesus film: art and tech wizardry combine in new Gospel vehicle](#)

The Animated Story of Jesus, set for a December 2025 release, is an innovative animated version of the celebrated Jesus Film. This project, spearheaded by Florida-based director Dominic Carola, is not a remake but a new visual interpretation of the world's most-translated film. The vision for this film, unveiled in Seoul, Washington DC, and Kampala, has attracted talent from major studios like Pixar and Disney. Carola, with experience on Disney films like Mulan and The Lion King, leads a team of top artists using advanced technology like the Unreal Engine to bring the story to life. This technology will enable the depiction of historical sites like the Temple and Robinson's Arch in virtual reality, augmented reality, and the Metaverse. Carola views animation as a universal language that transcends cultural barriers, making the story of Jesus accessible to children worldwide, regardless of location or electricity availability. The project, considered a significant Bible study by Carola and his team, is supported by the Jesus Film Project, a large outreach organisation. He acknowledges the immense prayer support and feels a sense of protection and team spirit in this endeavour.

Praise: God for these creative media initiatives that convey the Gospel in engaging and entertaining ways. May they be fruitful. (Psalm 96:1)

More: www.eternitynews.com.au/culture/art-and-tech-wizardry-combine-in-new-gospel-vehicle-animated-story-of-jesus/

British Isles

Stormont talks: Sir Jeffrey tiptoeing his way to a deal?

Sir Jeffrey Donaldson, the DUP leader, seems to be cautiously moving towards a deal that could see his party return to Stormont. He acknowledges the final stages of negotiation as the most challenging, hinting at internal party disputes. This development follows the collapse of Northern Ireland's government in February 2022 over post-Brexit trading arrangements, known as the Irish Sea border. The key issue is the proposed UK Internal Market Act amendment, ensuring Northern Ireland businesses can access the UK market. However, this primarily addresses goods moving from Northern Ireland to Great Britain, not the reverse, which involves checks and paperwork under the Windsor Framework. The DUP appears open to some checks to prevent criminality and smuggling. Additionally, measures to reinforce Northern Ireland's union status, such as a new East-West council, are being discussed, but their decision-making power is uncertain. The government is eager for a quick decision, with a potential financial incentive of above £2.5 billion. If no agreement is reached soon, secretary of state Chris Heaton may need to take decisive action, potentially concluding negotiations with the DUP and revealing the proposed deal.

Pray: for a positive outcome to these negotiations, and for peace and stability in Northern Ireland. (Ephesians 4:3)

More: www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-67717029

A&E waits grow as packed hospitals brace for tough winter

The NHS is confronting escalating A&E wait times as it faces one of its most difficult winters. In England, only 69.7% of patients were seen within the four-hour target last month. Ambulance delays have worsened, with one-third of patients experiencing waits of more than 30 minutes at hospitals. The Association of Ambulance Chief Executives (AACE) reported significant ambulance service delays, leading to 149,000 lost hours and potential harm to 37,000 patients. The College of Paramedics highlighted the urgent need for investment in ambulance services and emergency department improvements. Despite preparations, the NHS's situation remains challenging compared to last year. The Health Foundation notes that its performance this winter depends on weather and seasonal viruses. Lib Dem spokeswoman Daisy Cooper criticised the government for inadequate preparation. NHS England's medical director and PM Rishi Sunak acknowledged the challenges, mentioning government efforts in early planning and funding to enhance A&E, ambulance services, and patient discharge processes.

Pray: for strength and resourcefulness for the medics and ambulance services. Pray for comfort for those affected by the crisis. (2 Chron. 15:7)

More: www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/nhs-ae-waits-grow-packed-31674296

Interest rate held at 5.25% for third time by Bank of England

The Bank of England has maintained its interest rate at 5.25% for the third consecutive meeting. This decision reflects the Bank's stance that borrowing costs need to remain high for an extended period to combat inflation, which is still well above the target rate. Unlike the US Federal Reserve, which hinted at potential rate cuts next year, the Bank of England, led by Andrew Bailey, suggests that the UK is not yet in a position to consider such reductions. Bailey expressed that it is too early to speculate about cutting rates, emphasising the need for more progress in controlling inflation. The decision was not unanimous, with three members of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) arguing for a rate increase, but they were outnumbered by the six others. Despite faster-than-expected inflation drops and signs of economic weakness, the Bank is cautious about reducing rates too soon, fearing a resurgence in inflation. Bailey noted that while significant progress has been made in reducing inflation from over 10% in January to 4.6% in October, there is still a journey ahead to reach the 2% target.

Pray: for the Government to achieve economic stability. Pray for relief for those struggling with debt. (Psalm 112:5)

More: news.sky.com/story/interest-rate-held-at-5-25-for-third-time-by-bank-of-england-13030089

Charities' anger as government 'downgrades' disabilities minister role

Charities have expressed outrage as the Government demoted the disability minister role - during Disability History Month. The vacancy arose when Tom Pursglove became legal migration minister. Mims Davies, the new appointee, will maintain her focus on social mobility from her previous role as minister for social mobility, youth, and progression. Disability charities criticised the move, highlighting it as the longest gap without a minister in thirty years. Downing Street refuted claims of downgrading the position, insisting that a minister for disabled people would remain. However, the charities argue that the minister should not have divided responsibilities and demand the restoration of a dedicated minister of state. James Taylor from Scope emphasised the need for a full-time leader for disability strategy in government. The National Autistic Society's Tim Nicholls called for clarity on the role's scope and reassurance that disabled people's needs are a priority. Meanwhile, a government spokesperson stated that Davies would continue supporting disabled people, noting achievements in employment and financial aid for the disabled.

Pray: that our leaders will honour and uplift the disabled. (Proverbs 31:8-9)

More: www.itv.com/news/2023-12-14/government-scraps-minister-for-disabled-people-role

Farming concerns

After an expensive 2023 harvest, this autumn's weather has not been kind to farmers. Very dry conditions quickly turned to very wet. Crops thought to be safely growing have been overwhelmed by waterlogging and even flooding, with slugs and flea beetles adding to the damage. The political backdrop to this is a fundamental change in the way farming is funded. The Basic Payment Scheme, which has supported farmers to produce food, is being phased out in favour of incentives which exclusively support environmental benefits. However, while adjusting to the new situation, we give thanks to the Lord for 'Natural England' and 'Catchment Sensitive Farming', which are doing a great job of educating farmers and signposting available support, and for 'Farming Community Network' (<https://www.fcn.org.uk>), which provides practical help to those in difficulties. Pray for all in farming who are feeling weighed down by the burdens of weather, finance and regulation, for Christian farmers seeking to farm to God's glory, and for those who open their farms to schoolchildren and others.

Pray: for wisdom and common sense for all who shape policies and formulate directives to promote healthy food production and to care for the environment. (Genesis 9:3)

More: hopeforthecountryside.uk/seedssofar/

Missing teenager found in France

A 17-year-old English boy, Alex Batty, who went missing in Spain in 2017, has been found in the town of Revel, France, six years after his disappearance. He is in good health, and is now awaiting the arrival of British authorities. His mother and grandfather, who took him on holiday and do not have parental guardianship, remain wanted in connection with his disappearance. Alex had been living in a spiritual community in Morocco, as his grandmother, his legal guardian, had previously suggested. He decided to leave the community and embark on his own path, eventually making his way to France. After walking through the Pyrenees foothills for days, he was spotted by a local delivery driver who picked him up. The area is known for attracting people in search of alternative lifestyles.

Pray: that Alex may be reunited with his grandmother and quickly recover from his experiences. Pray for other families whose loved ones have gone missing. (Isaiah 40:29)

More: www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-67718158

Europe

Ukraine war to continue - Putin

On 12 December Vladimir Putin asserted that peace will elude Ukraine until Russia achieves its unchanging objectives, despite nearly two years of heightened tensions with the West due to the ongoing conflict. During a lengthy year-end news conference, Putin offered some insight into Moscow's "special military operation" in Ukraine. He dismissed the idea of a second wave of reservist mobilisation, stating that there are already 617,000 Russian soldiers in Ukraine, including 244,000 conscripts supporting professional military units. He emphasised Russian military advances in Ukraine, while accusing Kyiv of sacrificing its troops to gain Western aid. Putin, who has been in power for nearly 24 years, held this press conference as Ukraine seeks more US aid amid a faltering counteroffensive and waning Western backing. It was the first time he had faced questions from Western journalists since the conflict began. He also took questions from ordinary Russian citizens; reportedly at least two million questions were sent in.

Pray: that those seeking an end to this conflict will not be disheartened. (Psalm 29:11)

More: apnews.com/article/putin-russia-press-conference-moscow-ukraine-ef4e88fda50e6ad75b8a1979b95d9fcc

Armenia / Azerbaijan: prisoner exchange a step forward

On 12 December, Armenia and Azerbaijan took a significant step forward by exchanging prisoners. This move follows years of conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region, which Azerbaijan annexed in September, resulting in most of its population fleeing to Armenia. The exchange, facilitated by the International Red Cross, involved the release of 10 Azerbaijani prisoners and the return of 15 Armenian captives. This act of goodwill was welcomed by the EU and the USA, who have been trying for years to persuade the two countries to sign a peace treaty. The exchange follows another positive move, an announcement on 7 December by Azerbaijan that it would not object to Armenia hosting COP29 in 2024: see <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/armenia-backs-azerbaijan-host-cop29-climate-conference-2023-12-07/>

Pray: that these positive moves will lead to better relationships and a peace treaty between the two countries. (Matthew 5:9)

More: www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/13/armenia-and-azerbaijan-exchange-prisoners-in-step-towards-normalisation

Worldwide

Gaza conflict: UN vote for an immediate ceasefire

On 12 December, the UN General Assembly overwhelmingly passed a resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas conflict. With 153 votes in favour, 10 against (including the United States and Israel), and 23 abstentions (including the UK and Germany), the resolution emphasises the need to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, provide humanitarian assistance, and seek a peaceful resolution to the ongoing conflict. It also calls for an end to the use of force and the resumption of negotiations. It is reported that the conflict has now led to over 18,600 civilian casualties in the Gaza strip, 70% of them women and children. The vote serves as a strong international call for an end to hostilities and a return to peace talks. On 8 December, an almost identically worded resolution proposed at the UN security council was vetoed by the USA. There is a sense that Joe Biden's administration is becoming increasingly isolated in its unconditional support of Israel's actions.

Pray: that the growing consensus towards a ceasefire will be accepted. (Psalm 34:14)

More: www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/12/united-nations-general-assembly-vote-ceasefire-israel-gaza-war

COP28: historic move away from fossil fuels

At the end of COP28, nations have made a historic move by explicitly targeting the use of fossil fuels for the first time. The talks in Dubai came close to collapse, but in a dramatic turn-around, nations agreed to 'transition away' from coal, oil, and gas, although some small island nations felt the deal was rushed. The agreement departed from earlier, stronger language advocating for a 'phase-out' of fossil fuels, probably because of pressure from oil-producing nations. The deal recognises the need to transition away from fossil fuels 'in a just, orderly and equitable manner.' It also acknowledges that global emissions could peak before 2025. Despite criticisms and challenges for a variety of reasons, the deal (which is seen as a victory for Sultan al-Jaber, the conference's president) was accepted by all participating nations.

Pray: that this resolution will lead to positive and drastic action by all participating nations. (Psalm 24:1)

More: www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-67679734

COP28: illegal wildlife trade a huge threat

During COP28, a panel discussed the urgent need to address the vast and damaging illegal wildlife trade. The panel highlighted the severe consequences of this trade, which ranks as the fourth-largest illicit trade globally, valued at over \$23 billion annually, mainly controlled by criminal networks. It poses a significant threat to biodiversity, ecosystems, and climate. It disrupts natural balance, impacting global sustainability. This illegal trade is transnational and organised, generating enormous profits; it was pointed out that banks have regulatory obligations to combat financial system abuse by such criminals. DP World, a major global supply chain solutions provider, revealed that a high portion of illegal wildlife trade products is transported by the maritime sector. The panel called for greater cooperation among stakeholders, including the financial sector, transport industry, and law enforcement, to combat this critical issue.

Pray: for stronger action to curtail this illegal trade, which is such a huge threat to our planet. (Genesis 1:26)

More: asianews.network/concerns-aired-over-illegal-wildlife-trade/

Nicaragua / Guyana border dispute is reignited

Guyana's vice-president, Bharrat Jagdeo, has issued a strong warning that his country will defend itself 'by all and any means' amid growing concerns that Venezuela's president Nicolás Maduro may attempt to annex a portion of Guyanese territory, particularly the mineral-rich Essequibo region. The current borders were agreed in 1899 after international arbitration. Guyana, a small nation, has historically relied on diplomacy and international law but is now exploring defence cooperation with allies, including the USA. Its army, with only 4,000 active personnel, would potentially face Venezuela's well-equipped, Russian-backed forces of over 350,000. Jagdeo also expressed concerns that the decision by the USA to ease sanctions on Venezuela may have emboldened Maduro in his threats. The border dispute has intensified since oil was discovered off Guyana's coast in 2015. Many believe that Maduro is seeking to shore up support domestically before the elections in 2024. Washington expects him to ensure a 'free and fair' vote as part of the sanction relief deal.

Pray: that the dispute will be peaceably resolved, without recourse to violence. (Isaiah 54:17)

More: www.ft.com/content/061c41ab-c1ce-40af-885d-5f2528eb8f03

USA: Chinese attempts to hack vital infrastructure

The Chinese military is increasing its capability to disrupt vital US infrastructure, such as power and water utilities, communications, and transportation systems. Hackers linked to its People's Liberation Army have infiltrated around two dozen critical entities over the past year. Targets included a Hawaiian water utility, a major West Coast port, an oil and gas pipeline, and even an attempted breach of Texas's independent power grid. While these intrusions did not impact crucial industrial control systems or cause disruptions, they indicate China's intent to complicate US military efforts in the Pacific region during a potential conflict, particularly in the context of Taiwan. This cyber campaign, known as Volt Typhoon, emerged about a year ago, highlighting the increasingly antagonistic relationship between the two countries. These actions underscore China's evolving cyber strategy from espionage to potential infrastructure disruption.

Pray: for effective action by the US authorities to counter this threat, and for better relationships between the two countries to be restored. (Psalm 46:1)

More: www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2023/12/11/china-hacking-hawaii-pacific-taiwan-conflict/

South Africa: plans for new nuclear power stations

The government has announced that South Africa, battling crippling power blackouts, plans to add 2,500 megawatts of new nuclear generation. The country has Africa's only nuclear power station, but the Koeberg plant near Cape Town is currently only working at half capacity. The first of the new units will probably come on stream in 2032 or 2033. Electricity minister Kgosientsho Ramokgopa said the extra nuclear power would be a significant milestone. He added that it would be part of the government action to 'ending the existential challenge that is confronting the country' over power shortages and long-term energy security. Rotating power cuts of up to twelve hours a day over the past fifteen years have badly hit the economy and the government's reputation as it heads into an election next year. National power company Eskom has been tainted by corruption and maintenance problems which have led to the power cuts. In a bid to extend the life of the Koeberg plant by twenty years, one unit was closed for nearly a year and the second unit was shut down for maintenance this week.

Pray: that the authorities will have wisdom in knowing how to improve electricity generation, both in the short term and in the long term. (Proverbs 2:6)

More: www.africanews.com/2023/12/13/south-africa-to-build-new-nuclear-plants-that-will-come-on-stream-in-a-decade/

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