

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

Prayers in response to the coronavirus pandemic

INTRODUCTION

Are you struggling to pray at the moment? *I* am. You want to bring your fears before God. You want to commit yourself and your loved ones into his keeping. You want to pray for the innumerable people facing unimaginable difficulties and hardship at this time due to the pandemic that has descended so swiftly upon us. But prayer doesn't come easily. We feel almost numbed, almost lost for words, almost as though our own little concerns (however huge they may feel to us personally) are relatively trivial in relation to the scale of the crisis now facing the world. Yet we need to pray, today, more than ever. Not that prayer will guarantee our safety or that of our loved ones, or that it will miraculously put everything right, but we need simply to seek help and strength to get through whatever the months ahead may bring.

This book aims to help you to articulate some of your innermost thoughts and fears in these dark days, as well as to remind you that, however much it may feel like it, you are not alone. Some of the material here first appeared on my website (<https://nickfawcett.uk/>), where I recently set myself the target of providing a prayer each day to help people respond to the crisis; it quickly became clear that this resource was striking a real chord with readers, hence my decision to produce this free e-book in the space of but a few days. There is a real need among so many at the moment – Christian, religious or otherwise – for words to express their fears, concerns and needs. It is my hope that the words here may go some way in helping you and others to do just that.

Nick Fawcett

About the author

Brought up in Southend-on-Sea, Essex, Nick Fawcett served as a Baptist minister for thirteen years, and as a chaplain with the national charity Toc H for three, before deciding to focus on a writing ministry, backed up by editing, both of which he continues with today, despite wrestling with myeloma, an incurable cancer of the blood, that places him in the highest possible risk category during the current coronavirus crisis. He lives in Wellington, Somerset, with his wife, Deborah, and has two children, Samuel, now living back in Wellington with his partner, Hannah, and Kate, studying for a Master's Degree at the University of Manchester. Delighting in the beauty of the West Country, Nick and Deborah love nothing more than walking stretches of the South West coast path at weekends, though for the coming months, like so many, he will be isolated at home to protect his health. His aim, increasingly, is to write material free of religious jargon that reaches out to people of all faiths and none.

5

1

Lord. What can I pray for?

Lord, what can I pray for? What should I say?
I'm frightened, troubled, confused,
everything in life having been turned inside out and upside down.
And whatever words I use in prayer seem inadequate, hollow,
even trite. Help me, hold me, hear me,
and at this troubled time, encircle all – myself,
my loved ones, the wider world –
in the warm embrace of your love. Amen.

2

I'm frightened, Lord

I'm frightened, Lord –
no, not frightened: terrified –
not for myself but for my loved
ones, my family –
what might befall them,
and how they'll cope if something happens
to me. The thought doesn't bear thinking
about,
but think about it I must,
for I know that faith offers no guarantee against
life's ills, and that each of us,
however strong our commitment,
can be tested as much as the next
person. You understand how I'm
feeling, don't you? Of course you do.
Yet I still feel
troubled,
vulnerable;
still crave reassurance.
Lord, you promise us strength in our
weakness; comfort in distress,
and hope in times of
despair. Grant those
now, I beg you. Calm
the waters,
and still the storm.

Amen.

3. I'm not praying for me today, Lord,

I'm not praying for me today, Lord, but for others:
young people meant soon to be taking exams, their future now in doubt;
carers looking after loved ones, striving to keep safe those at risk;
those suddenly finding themselves out of work, financial pressures added to fears over health;
owners of small businesses,
cafes, shops, bars and restaurants among many others, faced by the prospect of their
livelihood collapsing in ruins, what had seemed a wise investment now a millstone around
their neck;
clergy, counsellors and chaplains, seeking to give succour and support to those reeling from
recent events;
GPs, nurses, doctors, consultants, NHS staff,
increasingly overwhelmed by massive pressures yet with limited resources to meet them;
politicians and leaders in this country and beyond, trying to work out the best way forward –
a way of safeguarding life as effectively as possible,
while also limiting potentially devastating economic consequences for all.
Give help, Lord;
give strength; guidance; wisdom.
In our hurting world, bring hope and healing, love and life.
Amen.

4

So many are worried, Lord

So many are worried, Lord. Calm their fears.
So many are hurting. Tend their wounds.
So many are grieving. Comfort them.
So many are lonely. Assure them of your presence.
So many are vulnerable. Protect them.
So many are struggling to make ends meet. Provide for them.
So many are despairing. Encourage them. So many are sick. Heal them.
So many are seeking to bring help to those infected. Equip and enable them.
So many are looking to defeat this disease. Guide them.
So many are in need, Lord, and so many more soon will be.
Reach out to them,
in love, tenderness and mercy,
and see them safely through. Amen.

5. Why, Lord?

Why, Lord?

Why have you let this happen, this dreadful virus descend upon us?

Yes, I realise that the whole business, in the final analysis, is not down by you, but can't you do something, anything, to offer a helping hand?

Why do you seem simply to sit back, unmoved, unconcerned.

Don't you care?

Aren't our prayers reaching you? That's not fair, I know that, for you've made the world in such a way that you cannot simply intervene when it suits you; your hands instead being tied by the laws you have set in place.

Yet I'm asking you, I'm pleading with you, look kindly upon us, and reach out to our aching world, ministering your love and binding up its wounds. Amen.

6

How can I bring before you, Lord, my trivial concerns

How can I bring before you, Lord, my trivial concerns, when thousands are dying?

How can I ask for your blessing this day, when a multitude are at risk?

How can I trouble you with some minor request, when many, even at this moment, are fighting for breath, for their very survival?

How can I seek guidance in little things, when a frantic host cry out to you, yet seem to receive no answer?

How can I pray about such matters, when my thoughts are focused on one thing alone: the crisis that overshadows us, the uncertainty that stretches ahead, a bleak and scary void yawning before us?

Forgive me, Lord.

My thoughts are in a jumble, but you know what's in my heart, what I truly feel, what I yearn to say, even if I struggle at the moment to express it.

Hear my unspoken words, my heartfelt plea – for me, for others and for all – and, in your mercy, answer. Amen.

7

I've been complacent, Lord

I've been complacent, Lord, my faith shallow, ill-thought-through, comfortably assuming that whatever life brings, everything will be all right.

That's all very well, in the context of eternity, but in terms of life now, it's a different story,

for you do not promise your followers an exemption from trouble, nor guarantee that anyone, no matter how deserving, will be immune to this world's trials and tribulations.

I've grasped that with my mind,

but in my heart I foolishly imagined otherwise,
daring to believe that you will protect me from danger, whatever form it might take.

Teach me to trust, not that you will deliver me from harm,
but that you will support me through it, however testing it may be,
and that nothing in earth or heaven, life or death,
will ever be able to separate me from your everlasting love,
the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. Amen.

8

Reach out today, Lord, to the frightened

Reach out today, Lord, to the frightened, anxious about themselves
or their loved ones.

Hold them and help them.

Reach out to the isolated, the lonely, the vulnerable

Hold them and help them.

Reach out to the sick, those wrestling with the symptoms of coronavirus,
those whose situation is complicated by underlying health conditions.

Hold them and help them.

Reach out to those ministering to the afflicted, offering support, comfort and treatment as best
they can, but hampered by limited resources and the scale of the crisis.

Hold them and help them.

Reach out to the bereaved, those already mourning family and friends, their love and
companionship snatched away.

Hold them and help them.

Reach out to those affected financially – those who have lost jobs and livelihoods,
the future they took for granted now under threat.

Hold them and help them.

Reach out to the countries of our world most affected – Italy,
France, Spain, Iran, China, South Korea, Germany,
the United States, Switzerland and the United Kingdom –

and the many places elsewhere in the world seeing an increase in infections, and facing
imminent catastrophe in turn.

Hold them and help them.

Reach out, Lord, to a world in need, a world teetering on the edge of chaos, on the brink of disaster. Hold us, and help us all. Amen.

9. Three months, Lord

Three months, Lord, three months of isolation, of keeping my distance,
not just from colleagues or friends, but from those closest to me,
even my nearest and dearest! Separate rooms,
separate beds, separate towels, separate everything.
Just my own company, hour upon hour, day upon day.
Can I cope? Will it drive me mad? I honestly wonder, faced by that daunting prospect.
Yet, of course, that's nonsense –
for it's a small price to pay to protect not just myself but others.
It seems hard, but it's not really –
not compared to what so many are going through at this time.
Remind me of that, Lord, should I start to feel sorry for myself, and teach me to do my bit,
gladly, willingly and conscientiously. Amen.

10 Lord, to people everywhere at this troubled time

Lord, to people everywhere
at this troubled time give a spirit of responsibility,
Compassion and community; of concern for the greater good
and a willingness to put themselves out for the sake of others.

To those who fear
or know they are carrying the virus, give the common sense to isolate themselves, for
however long is required, no matter how inconvenient or frustrating that may seem.

To those at risk,
conscious of the symptoms taking hold of them, and spiralling out of control,
give reassurance, support, and the best possible care,
that they may return safe and well to their loved ones.

To those in intensive care,
on ventilators, in evident distress, not responding to their treatment, give strength and
succour, and, should it come to it, a peaceful end.

To those mourning loved ones,
life cruelly plucked away, give comfort in their shock, their numbness,
their despair, and sustain them through the darkness.

To our suffering world,
Lord, in so much turmoil, bring hope, help and health.
Amen.

11. Lord, I bring to you not only those sick with coronavirus

Lord, I bring to you not only those sick with coronavirus,
but especially today those whose health it risks affecting indirectly.
Reach out to those waiting for operations or surgical procedures,
who will now wait many months more,
many enduring pain, stress, difficulty in day-to-day living,
and possibly a worsening of their condition due to the inevitable delay in treatment.

Reach out to those facing postponement of consultations,
especially where those concern potentially serious illness –
pressures on health service providers pushing back appointment times
and thus adding to the fears those affected are already wrestling with.

Reach out to those who, despite the risks, still need to attend clinics,
still undergo investigations, still attend GP surgeries or spend time in hospital,
potentially exposing themselves to infection,
no matter how rigorous the attempts to preclude this.

Safeguard all in such situations as far as is humanly possible, and grant your love,
your strength and your protection to all. Amen.

12 To those shaken and confused, Lord

To those shaken and confused, Lord, grant guidance.

To those frightened of what they may have to face, grant reassurance.

To those worried they may be showing symptoms of infection,
grant wisdom to take the appropriate steps.

To those most at risk whose health is taking a turn for the worst, grant quality care and
healing.

To those troubled about critically ill loved ones, grant help to believe the best,
yet to cope with the worst should it come.

To those who, despite the best efforts of medical staff, are dying, grant relief from any
physical distress, and a peaceful end.

To those wrestling with the bitterness of bereavement, grant comfort and hope,
even amid the tears.

To all engulfed or overwhelmed by the impact of this crisis that has fallen so heavily upon us,
grant the knowledge that, however much it may seem otherwise, you are with us,
in life and in death, sharing our pain, our heartache

and our fear, and that, come what may, your love for all will continue. Amen.

13 Where are you, Lord?

Where are you, Lord? Where are you?

Can't you see the multitudes fretting, trembling, dreading –
fearful of what the future may hold?

Can't you hear the pleas for help – the cries, the sobs,
the desperate appeals for guidance?

Can't you see the crowded hospitals, the struggling patients,
the tearful families and relatives? Can't you hear the groans,
the gasps for breath,

the anguish of the bereaved? Where are you, Lord? Where are you?

Hear us, we beg you. Answer.

Show us you are here. Amen.

14

In our fear, Lord

In our fear, Lord, be our confidence.

In our weakness, be our strength.

In our panic, be our calm.

In our sickness be our healing.

In our confusion, be our anchor.

In our insecurity, be our rock.

In our darkness, be our light.

In our grief, be our solace.

In our despair, be our hope.

In our storm, be our sunshine.

In our night, be our day. Amen.

15 When will it end, Lord?

When will it end, Lord?

When will this nightmare be over?

We're told things must get worse before they get better;
that the death toll will rise

and the number of those infected continue to climb,
despite every measure being taken to prevent it.

Yet we're promised also that, eventually,
this disease will peak,

and that we can then slowly start picking up the pieces of our lives again, rebuilding our
economy, and hopefully returning to some semblance of normality.

But will that happen,

or will this virus prove more stubborn, more resistant,
more difficult to eradicate than we imagine?

We just don't know.

Give us patience to make whatever sacrifices are necessary, however long the duration.

Give us fortitude and determination, strength and wisdom,

to respond sensibly to whatever challenges we face. And help us to keep faith that,
however interminable the tunnel may seem, we will finally see light at the end of it.

Amen.

16 When the clouds are heavy, Lord

When the clouds are heavy, Lord, and the storm seems to last for ever;
when the night is dark,
and the morning proves long in coming; though the rain is constant
and sunshine feels a distant memory; though the winter continues
despite spring having also begun;
teach us to trust, to keep faith,
to believe that day will dawn again; that the clouds will lift
and life will blossom once more; that after tears will come laughter, after despair, joy,
after chaos, order, after sickness, health, and after death, life. Amen.

17 We have no claim on your love, Lord

We have no claim on your love, Lord, but we seek it nonetheless.
We have no claim on your help, but we ask for it all the same.
We have no claim on your mercy, but we beg you still to grant it.
We have no claim on your goodness, but we plead with you to bestow it.
We have no claim on your blessing, but we need it as never before.
We have no claim on your healing power, but we cry out for you to grant it.
We have no claim on you, Lord, no claim at all,
for too often we forget you, dismiss you, ignore you,
scarcely spare you a second thought. but we need you now,
so much, more than words can say.
Undeserving though we may be, faithless and fickle in so much, hear us,
help us and heal us. Amen

18 We're going under, Lord

We're going under, Lord,
or at least that's what it feels like,
swamped by a disease so minor for the many, yet so major for the few –
one that is wreaking havoc across the world, overwhelming hospitals,
submerging countless lives in chaos, engulfing countries and continents in turmoil –
medical, economic and social.
How can we get through?
And what state will we be in when we finally do?
Where will it leave our livelihoods, our communities, our citizens, our future?
Save us from panic, Lord, from knee-jerk reactions. Save us from resignation,
and grant us instead of spirit of fortitude, of resilience,
or courage and determination. Reach out to us in our plight,
and hold our heads above the water,
until our feet touch firm ground once again. Amen.

19 Am I going to die, Lord?

Am I going to die, Lord? I might do.
And though, as the years have passed and age has crept up on me,
I've learnt, in theory at least, to live with my mortality,
I'm finding the realisation that death could actually come hard to handle.
Up to now it's been something 'out there',
a grim truth I can push away, deal with tomorrow,
but suddenly that's no longer an option: the possibility is real,
hovering over my shoulder like a vulture eyeing its prey,
and it's frightening, not just for me but for my loved ones.
Help me, Lord, to fight off this infection, should I succumb to it.
Yet help me also to be realistic; to set my affairs in order,
and do what needs to be done, should the worst come to the worst.
Put your hand in mine,
and help me to hold firmly to yours, whatever the future might bring. Amen.

20 It's not just here, Lord

It's not just here, Lord; it's everywhere;
this horrible virus seemingly affecting everyone and everything.
It's spread across the world, one moment here, another there,
nowhere apparently beyond its reach,
so many people in so many countries living now under its shadow,
wondering what the future holds for themselves and their loved ones.
Help me to keep that bigger picture in mind,
rather than turning inwards in narrow self-pity.
Help me to remember the needs of those far afield, as well as those closer to home;
to think of others, pray for others,
and do what I can to help others, whether near or far.
So much divides us, Lord – person from person,
nation from nation –
denying our common humanity.
If nothing else, may this crisis teach us that we are one world,
despite our differences, and may we learn from it truly to work together,
for the good of all. Amen.

21 Thank you, Lord, for those working in the front line during this crisis

Thank you, Lord, for those working in the front line during this crisis, confronting the challenge of coronavirus head on.

Thank you for hospital staff –

doctors, nurses, consultants, pharmacists, support workers

and so many others behind the scenes – caring, treating, comforting, sustaining, sometimes at real personal risk to themselves.

Thank you for GPs, district nurses, helpline staff, and those working in the community, offering guidance and support to those in special need.

Thank you for these people: for their dedication, professionalism, compassion, and giving of themselves above and beyond the call of duty.

Support them in all the pressures they face,

and help them to cope with the extra workload, the limited resources,

the emotional and physical demands made upon them, so that, through their work and skills, you may show your love and bring your healing. Amen.

22 It would be easy to feel sorry for myself, Lord

It would be easy to feel sorry for myself, Lord, to fret about the long hours of isolation or worry about what might happen to me or my loved ones, but what good would that do, what help offer to me or to anyone? Teach me instead to think of others, and to ask myself what I can do for them, for we can all do something, whatever our situation.

A letter, card, phone call, text;

a tweet, post, message;

if nothing else, through such as these I can stay in touch,

show concern, offer companionship, express love, offer support.

Show me what I can do, how I can help,

in ways I might never even have considered.

Whatever these days might bring,

help me to make them not about me, but about others.

Amen.

23 Show us that you're listening

Show us that you're listening, prove to us you care,

come and bring us healing. Father, hear our prayer.

Show us that you're with us, help us know you're there.

Offer strength and comfort. Father, hear our prayer.

Show us that we matter; in these trials we bear, give us help and wisdom.

Father, hear our prayer.

Show us there's a future, save us from despair. Grant us hope and courage.

Father, hear our prayer.

24 We thought we were in charge of our destiny, Lord

We thought we were in charge of our destiny, Lord; that we had all the answers,
all the solutions to our problems, nothing being beyond our wit to solve.

And no doubt in time we will beat this virus, as we have beaten many others,
human ingenuity triumphing again over adversity.

But this crisis of recent months has reminded us
that we're not quite so much in control as we like to imagine;
that life is less secure, less certain than we sometimes think,
and that much of what we take for granted can be swept away in an instant.

Help us to recognise our limitations as well as our achievements,
our vulnerability as well as our strengths,
and may we find in you one whose promises endure beyond the changes and chances of this
fleeting world, enfolding us, and all things,
in your eternal, unchanging love. Amen.

25. Lord, I prayed for the people of Wuhan at the start of this outbreak

Lord, I prayed for the people of Wuhan at the start of this outbreak, asking that the disease
would be confined to where it started, limited in its impact,
soon be over.

But it didn't stay in one place, it wasn't restricted to a few, and it's still going strong,
if anything seeming to gather pace.

I prayed when coronavirus began to spread that it would be held in check,
that measures to control it would be effective, that a pandemic might be avoided,
but again I was to be disappointed, for it's rampant now,
all attempts to stop it have proven woefully inadequate, the whole world now in its grip.

I prayed when it reached this continent, this country,
that we could deal with it, that few would be infected, none might die
chaos might be avoided,

but it seems I was wasting my breath, for thousands are unwell,
hundreds have perished,
and nations are reeling from one blow after another. Aren't you listening, Lord?

Can't you hear our prayers? I don't understand.

Only, I do, of course, for this isn't your mess; it's ours,
this whole sorry business being, in part at least, of human making, like so many we blame
you for.

You did not wish it upon us, and you yearn to help us through it,
your heart being heavy at the pain we endure and fear we wrestle with.

Teach me that you do hear, do listen,
and, in whatever ways you can, will answer.

Amen.

26 I can't believe it, Lord

I can't believe it, Lord.

The world turned on its head so quickly, so unexpectedly.

One moment, everything normal,

proceeding much as it had always done before, and the next,
chaos and confusion,

everything overturned in an instant, institutions teetering on the brink, certainties crumbling
into dust, lives descending into mayhem.

I'd thought I could plan ahead, fashion what the future held in store, but I realise now how
wrong I was: that though we can control much, we cannot control everything,
our ultimate destiny lying not in our hands but in yours.

Grant your guidance, show us the path to take,
and lead us through this crisis. Amen.

27 Hold on to us, Lord

Hold on to us, Lord, through this troubled time.

Where there is sickness, may there also be health.

Where there are tears, may there also be laughter.

Where there is despair, may there also be hope.

Where there is fear, may there also be trust.

Where there is hardship, may there also be help.

Where there is doubt, may there also be faith.

Where there is weakness, may there also be strength.

Where there is defeat, may there also be victory.

Where there is chaos, may there also be calm.

Where there are problems, may there also be solutions.

Where there is distancing in body,
may there also be a coming together in spirit.

Where there is death, may there also be life.

Come, Lord, and work your miracle of love, out of darkness bringing light.

Amen.

28 Show us that you are here, Lord

Show us that you are here, Lord,

that you have not abandoned us to our fate.

Show that you are not blind to our needs or deaf to our entreaties.

Show us that, though everything seems to suggest otherwise,
you are with us in this crisis we are facing – that we are not alone.

Show us, above all, that we matter to you;

that you care about what so many are going through; that you are hurting with us,
weeping with us and reaching out to us, seeking to help,

to hold and to heal. Amen.

29 To those consumed by dread, Lord, at this troubled time

To those consumed by dread, Lord, at this troubled time, give us words to reassure.
To those overwhelmed by panic, give us words to calm.
To those feeling they cannot cope, give us words to strengthen.
To those experiencing hardship, give us words to support.
To those isolated and lonely, give us words to uplift.
To those exhausted by caring, give us words to support.
To those hospitalised by coronavirus, give us words to encourage.
To those overcome by grief, give us words to comfort. So many, Lord, are hurting, reeling,
and we feel inadequate to help them.
But, if nothing else, we can express our love and concern. Give us the words to say,
and a heart to mean them. Amen.

30 Hear my prayer, Lord, for scientists

Hear my prayer, Lord, for scientists,
for all involved in seeking a vaccine against coronavirus,
a way of releasing us from its stranglehold,
from the threat it poses to the elderly and vulnerable.
Guide them in their research, in their experiments,
in their early trials with volunteers,
and keep them and all who work with them safe.
Give them insight into the nature of this disease – into the way it develops,
the way it spreads, the way it affects the human body, and help them to unravel its secrets
so as to find solutions effectively to combat it.
Grant that, through their efforts, we may look forward soon to a time when this pandemic is
consigned to history, and it presents a danger no longer.
Amen.

31

In this time of crisis, Lord

In this time of crisis, Lord, you call us to pull together, as families,
as friends, as communities.
Thank you for those who are leading the way in doing that: relatives helping loved ones,
neighbours helping neighbours,
support groups reaching out to strangers,
individuals responding to the plight of the vulnerable.
Thank you especially today for the efforts of shops and supermarkets to do likewise,
setting aside shopping times and delivery slots for those most at risk.
Forgive those whose thoughts are only for themselves –
people who, devoid of conscience, are panic buying, who are hoarding food and provisions,
who are stripping shelves,
without any consideration for those far more in need than themselves.
Forgive the heartlessness, the greed, the selfishness,
that looks only after number one and cares nothing for anyone else.

Challenge and shame such behaviour,
and prosper the efforts of all who are seeking to show compassion, concern
and care to those least able to help themselves.
We are all in this together.
Prompt each and every one of us to realise that. Amen.

32 Lord, it's hard to see any good coming from the crisis we're facing

Lord, it's hard to see any good coming from the crisis we're facing,
this time that is bringing such anxiety,
such heartache, and such hardship to so many.
Yet if one useful thing might come out of it, let it be this:
that we learn – as individuals, as a nation, as a world –
from the experience,
and so be better equipped in the future
should similar or worse threats to our health arise.
May lessons from these dark days equip us, if need be, to respond more effectively,
provide more meaningfully,
and help more swiftly in times ahead.
Open our eyes to the best and the worst in all that is happening now,
and enable us truly to learn from both.
Amen.

33 Thank you, Lord, for family at this time

Thank you, Lord, for family at this time; for loved ones, there to support us,
to demonstrate love and care in action,
to do what they can for us in time of need.
Thank you for friends;
those to whom our welfare really matters,
who seek to help us in whatever ways they can,
showing their concern, compassion and friendship,
not just through words but through deeds.
Hear our prayer for those who do not have such support, who are truly alone –
those for whom long days of isolation were already an all too frequent reality,
and who now feel cut off from all:
frightened, helpless, hopeless.
Reach out to them,
assuring them that you are by their side, and help us too, in whatever ways we can,
to reach out likewise,
and show them they are not abandoned or forgotten. Amen.

34 Lord, we need your help at such a time as this

Lord, we need your help at such a time as this, or we will founder.
We need your strength, or we will crumble.
We need your encouragement, or we will despair.
We need your support, or we will go to pieces.
We need your comfort, or we will break.
We need your reassurance, or we will panic.
We need your peace, or we will grow distraught.
We need your guidance, or we will be lost.
Lord, quite simply we need you. Be there for us.
Amen.

35 This crisis has brought us up short, Lord

This crisis has brought us up short, Lord, overturning our way of life,
shattering our security, leaving us feeling vulnerable, scared, alone –
fearful for our welfare, fearful of the future.
Help us to remember that for many in our world,
this is not the exception but the norm,
thousands having grown used to living with the constant threat of disease
– malaria, Ebola, Zika virus, cholera, dengue fever,
to name but some.
Help us, through what we are wrestling with now,
to understand and empathise with what too many wrestle with repeatedly,
to realise how fortunate we have been and to resolve to help build a fairer more caring world
for all. Amen.

36 They feel so inadequate, our prayers, Lord

They feel so inadequate, our prayers, Lord, so small a response to so great a crisis.
Even if we could find the words we seek to sum up our concern,
express our fears, articulate our needs
and entrust into your care the many we know to be at risk,
even then, our efforts would seem lacking.
But we can't get anywhere near that, our entreaties to you being muddled, halting,
confused, disjointed.
We do not know what to say or how to say it;
what to pray or how to pray it,
and we are left feeling we have failed ourselves, you and others.
Do not let that deter us, Lord.
Teach us that you heed not only the words of our lips

but also the thoughts of the heart, prayer not being an exam we must pass but an opportunity to embrace.

Help us, then, simply to share with you, as best we can,
what we are feeling,
so committing ourselves, our loved ones,
and the world beyond, sincerely into your keeping. Amen.

37 In our darkness, Lord

In our darkness, Lord, be our light.
In our despondency, be our hope.
In our dread, be our assurance.
In our isolation, be our companion.
In our need, be our provider.
In our confusion, be our lodestar.
In our brokenness, be our healing.
In our sorrow, be our joy.
Reach out to us, Lord, in this time of need, and be our all.
Amen.

38

We thought we were in control

We thought we were in control, but find we are not.
We thought we were strong, but find we are weak.
We thought we had all the answers,
but find ourselves now beset by questions.
We thought we were ready,
but find ourselves unprepared.
We thought we had life mapped out,
but find instead that the future is uncertain.
We thought we could deal with anything,
but find ourselves struggling to cope.
Lord, we are confronted by awkward, uncomfortable truths,
and we don't like to face them,
but face them we must.
Help us to pause and take stock, to reflect,
and through adversity, to learn and to grow. Amen.

39 I'm calling to you, Lord

I'm calling to you, Lord, crying to you,
pleading for help in this time of need.
That's not something I'd usually do – you're well aware of that.
I don't typically give you a second thought;
not being sure, in fact, if I even believe in you.
The chances of me being caught praying,
even thinking of you, until this crisis struck,
were, let's face it, more or less zero.
But things have changed,
and yes, if I'm honest, I'm getting desperate,

no one and nothing quite being able to offer the reassurance I seek.
So I'm here now,
with all my doubts, all my questions, all my lack of faith,
conscious that, up to now, I've had no time for you, yet asking, despite that,
if you're there,
and if you're listening, be there for me. Amen.

40 Lord, be with those struck down by this disease that has come upon us

Lord, be with those struck down by this disease that has come upon us,
those who are lying now in hospital,
afraid, wondering what they might have to endure.
Be with those threatened by a high temperature,
those struggling to catch their breath,
those placed on a ventilator and in intensive care.
Be with those at risk of pneumonia, sepsis,
organ failure.

Reach out to all in such a situation, Lord, and minister your love.
Relieve their distress, calm their fears, support their body,
guide and help those who care for them, and grant that healing may come.
And to those who do not respond to treatment,
give succour,
give comfort,
give peace at the last,
and enfold them in your everlasting arms. Amen.

41 Thank you, Lord, for those who are willing to go the extra mile

Thank you, Lord, for those who are willing to go the extra mile,
to put their own health at risk, at this time of crisis,
for the sake of others; to work extra hours,
even to give freely of their time and expertise, for the greater good.
Thank you especially for doctors, nurses and medics, working long and demanding shifts;
for those coming out of retirement to offer their services;
for all those striving to provide care,
even though it means they may well end up needing care themselves.
Thank you for those working in shops and supermarkets,
those in our emergency and essential services,
teachers providing cover for children and young people,
delivery drivers working to supply our needs:
these, and so many more –
a host of people, recognised and unrecognised,
without whose efforts our normality would disintegrate completely.
Keep them safe, we pray. Keep them well.
Watch over them and their loved ones,

and help us to appreciate in these difficult days the few to whom we owe so much. Amen

42 Lord, it's hard to glimpse your presence even at the best of times

Lord, it's hard to glimpse your presence even at the best of times, and now,
with this disease causing such havoc among us, it's harder than ever,
our prayers appearing to go unanswered,

your face seemingly turned away from us.
Yet it is at such a time as this, more than ever,
that we need to keep faith you are with us.
Though we feel abandoned, we are not.
Though we feel alone, we are not.
Though we feel forgotten, we are not.
Though we feel hopeless, we are not.
Though we feel left high and dry, we are not.
Draw close to us, Lord,
and envelop us in your love. Draw near,
and help us to recognise that you are by our side. Amen.

43 I can't do much, Lord, to help in this time of crisis

I can't do much, Lord, to help in this time of crisis,
but I surely can do something:
a message of concern, a word of reassurance, a gesture of affection,
an expression of solidarity –
there must be all kinds of ways in which I can try, at least, to respond.
For there is so much fear,
so much need. so much loneliness, so much heartache –
so many people needing something, anything,
to offer them hope, comfort, cheer.
And if in some small way,
no matter how insignificant it may seem, I can help to make a difference,
it has to be worth doing. Open my eyes, Lord, open my mind,
open my heart,
and help me to see where I might serve, and to do so.
Amen.

44 You're here, Lord

You're here, Lord, though we do not see it. You're here,
though we do not feel it. You're here,
though it doesn't seem it. You're here,
though our plight denies it. You're here,
though we cannot grasp it. You're here,
though we sometimes doubt it. You're here,
though our dread obscures it. You're here,
though we can't believe it. You're here, Lord,
as much in the night as in the day, the bad as in the good.

You're here. You're here. Amen.

45 I could dwell on the future, Lord

I could dwell on the future, Lord,
on what might happen to me,
how sick I might become,
the possibility, even, that I might die.
But what would be the point of that?
Would it help me?
Would it change anything?
Would I feel better for it afterwards?
I could brood about how many months
I may need to social distance, lock myself away,
cut myself off even from my loved ones.
But what use would that be?
Will it solve anything?
Will it make the time shorter?
Will I feel happier for it?
I could fret about food, money, my job:
whether we'll be left to go hungry;
whether we'll find ourselves in debt;
whether I'll end up with no work.

But what's the good of worrying?
Will it help me to cope better,
or will it leave me drained, more troubled,
less able to cope with what might come?
No, I will not brood,
will not worry about what tomorrow might bring;
let each day's care be sufficient for itself.
Who knows what the future holds, for good or ill?
Who can say what blessings or trials lie in store?
But I'm alive now,
I'm well now,
I'm here now,
and this, Lord, is the day you have given.
Help me to celebrate it,
to give thanks for it and to live it to the full.
Amen.

46 Times are bad, Lord

Times are bad, Lord,
but remind me they could be worse.
They are hard, but remind me they could be harder.
They are testing, but remind me they could be far more challenging still.
They bring trouble, but remind me many face adversity much more demanding.
It's not easy, you're not asking me to pretend otherwise,
the events of recent months having brought trials and tribulations
such as most of us have never begun to experience before,
yet though much is being asked of us, we know much more is asked of others,
though the path we tread is difficult,
it is less gruelling than the one many have to travel.
Teach me, Lord, should I feel weary, shaken,
sorry for myself,
to focus on the good rather than the bad, the best instead of the worst,
and to recognise that, however tough things may be,
I still have so many reasons to give thanks. Amen.

47 Breathe your peace within me, Lord

Breathe your peace within me, Lord,
peace such as only you can give.
When I fret about tomorrow,
when I worry about my loved ones,
when I question whether I can cope,
when my stomach feels knotted and panic rises within me,
help me to hear your still small voice,
rebuking the wind and waves, stilling the storm,
calming the roiling waves,
and in place of turmoil bring tranquillity,
in place of chaos, quietness,
in place of a troubled, anxious spirit,
rest for my soul.
Amen.

48 Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord

Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord: hear my prayer.
Up to my neck, I plead with you: hear my prayer.
In my fear, I entreat you: hear my prayer.
In my uncertainty, I call to you: hear my prayer.
In my vulnerability, I appeal to you: hear my prayer.
In my need, I beg you: hear my prayer.
In this day of darkness, this time of trouble,
I implore you: hear my prayer.

Amen.

49 So much, Lord, is in the melting pot

So much, Lord, is in the melting pot – uncertain, unsure.
It's not just risks to health, though that's scary enough;
it's the very fabric of our society:
our schools, colleges and universities, our shops and stores,
our arts, sport and leisure facilities,
our businesses, factories, financial institutions, economy.
Everything, everywhere,
is under threat,
and though governments across the world are doing their best to limit the damage,
desperately trying to keep the plates spinning,
the balls somehow still juggled,
there's a danger that it will all come crashing down,
leaving hardship in its wake such as we can scarcely begin to imagine.
Give wisdom, Lord, to those who must take decisions,
those who must formulate plans, those who must weigh up the options
and decide on the path least painful for all.
See us through this difficult time, we ask you,
but see us also through the time beyond that, and the challenges it will surely bring.
Amen.

50 I'm not strong, Lord

I'm not strong, Lord, but weak.
Help me.
I'm not brave, but timid.
Help me.
I'm not confident, but afraid.
Help me.
I'm not calm, but troubled.
Help me.
I'm not wise, but foolish.
Help me.
I'm not full of faith, but racked by doubt.
Help me.
I'm not ready for death, but thirsting for life.
Help me.
Amen.

51 When the wind blows, Lord

When the wind blows, Lord, may your arms shelter me.
When the rain falls, may your arms cover me.
When the storm rages, may your arms protect me.
When the waters rise, may your arms support me.
When the flood is fierce, may your arms encircle me.
When all seems swept away, may your arms hold me fast.
Whatever I may have to face,
Lord, whatever the days ahead may bring,
may I know your arms around me, upon me, beneath me,
cradling me now and for evermore in your everlasting love. Amen.

52

Lord of all, hear our prayer for those wrestling with coronavirus – enduring all the fear, confusion, tragedy and loss associated with that.

Hear our prayer for those in places where the disease is spreading, the death toll daily rising, and where measures to quarantine those infected, and control the epidemic, seem to be a losing battle.

Hear our prayer for those in hospital receiving treatment, those with underlying health issues for whom treatment may not be enough, those already mourning the loss of loved ones, those virtually imprisoned in their homes or town, those stuck in a foreign land finding it difficult, if not impossible, to get home.

Hear our prayer for those battling against the disease – doctors, nurses and care staff putting their own lives at risk to do so, governments searching for the best way to respond, scientists striving to find vaccines and a cure for the disease.

Lord of all,
give reassurance to those terrified they may have contracted the illness,
strength to those who have done so,
comfort to those it has left bereaved,

give support to those in hospitals at the front line in combating it,
and wisdom to those entrusted with not only limiting its worst effects, but finally, somehow, defeating it.

Reach out, we pray, in love and mercy, to help and heal,
sustain and deliver. Amen.

