

HUTCHENS FAMILY

Serving in Christchurch, New Zealand

Family News



Pink confetti! Our recent gender reveal shows we are expecting our 3rd girl!

Since our last prayer letter, we've been able to have our anatomy ultrasound for our unborn baby, and found out that we are expecting girl number 3! Emma and Alexa are very excited about another sister, and Juliana and I are thrilled to add another girl to the family!

Juliana's pregnancy is going very well, with everything checking out with recent checkups. She's feeling bumps and kicks every day! We're excited to meet our newest daughter this coming October, and appreciate your prayer for a continued safe pregnancy.

Winter Arrives

Winter has arrived in New Zealand, and with it, our darkest and coldest days. Last winter was quite mild and dry, and this winter appears to be trying to correct the imbalance. Last week, Christchurch saw 12 minutes of sunshine ***the entire week!*** Despite that, as I write, the sun is out, and the distant mountains look stunning in their snow-capped beauty. New Zealand is always beautiful, but especially so in the winter months!



A recent snowy scene at Lake Tekapo, 3 hours from Christchurch.

Back to Normal!

New Zealand has accomplished something not seen hardly anywhere else in the world - we have literally eliminated COVID-19 in our nation. At our last letter, we were coming out of lockdown, but still had a few cases active in the nation. Within a few days of that report, we started having multiple consecutive days without any new cases in the nation. By the end of May, all restrictions on life within New Zealand were lifted, including church services. Our first Sunday back was on the 31st of May, and what an awesome service it was! A few days later, the final few cases of COVID-19 fully recovered, and we were COVID free. In the days since, returning Kiwis from other countries have brought the virus with them, but all returning Kiwis are kept in isolation for two weeks after arrival, and we still have no known cases in the general population. What a blessing to be able to go to church, go soulwinning, have youth activities, go out to eat, and other aspects of 'normal' life that had been previously taken for granted!

With the resumption of normal life, our church services have experienced a solid boost in attendance. Some who had been less faithful before lockdown have been coming regularly since. We've also had visitors nearly every Sunday since coming back from lockdown. Where our attendance before was around 60, we've been north of 70 every Sunday since coming back, with 85 this past Sunday!

One huge blessing has been a man named Gary. God got Gary's attention during the lockdown, and he started tuning in to our services on Facebook. I had no idea until the lockdown ended and he emailed asking to attend the physical services. He hasn't missed a service since! He has a solid testimony of salvation from a few years back, but got away from the Lord. Praise God for working!



Fiona, David, Jonathan, Gary, Alyssa, Levi, & Syesha. All baptized on June 28!

Praises

- Praise the Lord for bringing Gary to our church through the lockdown and internet services.
- Praise the Lord for how he has worked in lives, especially for David in getting baptized!
- Praise the Lord for Jane, who was recently saved after being diagnosed with cancer.

Prayer Requests

- Pray for our Chinese Sunday services. We're taking steps shortly to enable even more to attend!
- Pray for the salvation of two Chinese men in particular that I believe are close - Liam and Tiger.
- Pray for Jane, as she begins her Christian life and faces the unknowns of life with cancer.
- Pray for our building situation, which was put on hold during lockdown. Progress is now being made!

Ministry Blessings

We have seen the Lord blessing in a lot of ways over these past few weeks, and I'm very excited to share some updates of what has been happening.

One of the big victories of late was our recent baptism Sunday, when we baptized seven people. One was Gary, the man I just mentioned. While his salvation testimony was strong, he had never been baptized. Three were children of families in our church, and it was a joy to watch each of them accept Christ over recent months and desire to be baptized. The other three were Chinese converts. Fiona was the one whose salvation I reported back in March, just before the lockdown. Jonathan is one who we originally started witnessing to back in late 2018. He moved away to Auckland after a few months, and a friend of mine, Pastor Paul Brinkman, was able to see him saved a few months later. He moved back to Christchurch late last year, and it was a joy to baptize him.

The final gentleman was a man named David, and his story was especially sweet. David moved to New Zealand about this time last year, and quickly became connected with our Chinese Bible study. He had previously spent some time in the USA, and had interacted with some Christians in Arizona. He recalled that they had shared the Gospel with him, but wasn't sure if he had accepted Christ. He made sure of that decision around August of last year.

In November, I sat down with him to discuss being baptized, and he very politely declined. He gave me some reasons for not wanting to be baptized yet, but I found out later his true reasons. He was nervous about being baptized and potentially moving back to China one day. He believed he might be in danger if he ever went back and it was found out that he had been saved and baptized. Fast forward to a few weeks ago, and I asked him again if he wanted to be baptized. Again, he declined, and this time was more honest about his fears. I tried to encourage him to be obedient to the Lord and not fear man, but he was still quite nervous. I committed to pray for him in the matter, and let it go.

The following Friday night, I received a text message after Bible study. It was from David: "Pastor Sam, will you baptize me?" I was so surprised, because it had only been a few days since our chat! I told him I absolutely would, and told him we'd talk more on Sunday. That Sunday, I sat down and asked him what changed his mind. He pointed at Warren, the gentleman who leads the Friday Chinese Bible study and said, "Him!" I said "Warren talked to you about it and changed your mind?" "No," he replied, "but this Friday he taught about Daniel and his friends, and how they decided to do what was right in Babylon, even though it might get them in trouble. I knew God was telling me to do the same!" What. A. Blessing! I loved being able to say "God did that!"

I have one other huge blessing to share (and there are more I won't get to) that will force me into a rare third page of this report. Recently, I received a call from Pastor Brinkman in Auckland, asking if I would visit a lady he knew named Jane. Jane used to live in Auckland, but a few years back moved down to the west coast of the South Island. Years ago, when she lived in Auckland, she had battled and beaten cancer, and seemed to be doing well. However, she had been having some symptoms lately, and found out just last week that the cancer had returned. This time, it's entered into her spine and lymph nodes, and she's been given 12-18 months to live. She's being treated here in Christchurch, and Pastor Brinkman asked if I would visit her. He was especially concerned that she had never trusted Christ before. I set up an appointment for the next day.

When I arrived to visit Jane, I could tell this would be a conversation unlike most. Here was a lady who was just a couple of days removed from finding out that her time on this earth was incredibly limited, and her conversation betrayed where her thoughts were. In the first few minutes of my visit, she kept talking about how she's been trying to lead a good life and go to church and so forth. You could tell she was concerned if she had done enough to be ok with God after she died. Finally, after a few minutes of becoming acquainted, I felt the Holy Spirit leading to ask her point blank about her soul.

"Jane, you're in a unique position, having an idea of how much longer you have to live, and it seems to be really making you think about what happens next. So let me ask you, where do you stand with God? Are you ready to meet Him?"

Her reply was "Well, like I say, I've been trying to go to church and not curse and be a good example to people. I don't always do right, but for the most part, I think I'm ok. I hope I'm ok. But I'm really not sure."

I said "Well, going to church and not cursing and being a good example are all really good things. But Jane, they don't have anything to do with your standing before God."

I went on to explain our problem of sin, and how it cripples even the "best" of us, and makes us all unworthy of God's favour or of Heaven. I noticed how shocked she looked, and then how frightened she looked as I explained our helpless condition. I found myself wishing that all people could see themselves before the Lord as Jane was seeing herself. Because of her realisation that death was coming, she was keenly aware that she needed help.

The fear in her eyes melted into literal tears as I explained why Jesus had died for us. She hardly said a word as I explained how God loves us, and that while we were still sinners, Jesus died for us. When I read Ephesians 2:8-9 for her, her eyes grew wide at the declaration that salvation was not of works, but rather a working of the grace of God, accepted by faith in Christ.

After going through the entire Gospel with her, I asked her if she was ready to trust Christ right then, and she virtually jumped at the opportunity. Just a few moments later, Jane bowed her head and called out to the Lord for salvation. After we had prayed, I looked up to see tears streaming down her face. "It's just mad, isn't it?" She said between sobs; a Kiwi way of saying "How amazing is all of this?" And yes, it truly was "mad" to see her recognize the love of God for her, and for her to come to Christ so eagerly.

That afternoon, I rang Pastor Brinkman with the happy news. Later that evening, he gave her a call, and found out he was interrupting her as she was explaining to a visiting friend how she had been saved earlier in the day, and that she now knew she was on her way to Heaven. Praise the Lord!

Pray for Jane. She has a rough few months in front of her, as does her family. I received a note from her brother, who lives in Australia, later that evening. He said "I want to thank you for visiting my sister today. It gives me such peace to know that she has personally accepted Jesus." I would imagine there will be a lot more peace for Jane and her family because of Jesus.

I know this has been a longer letter, but my heart is full to consider what God has been doing as of late, and I wanted to share it with you. I hope you'll join me in rejoicing over the Fionas, Davids, Jonathans, Garys, Janes, and many others in whose lives God is continually working.

*Thank you for your continued prayers!
Sam, Juliana, Emma, & Alexa Hutchens*