

A time of gratitude



Autumn 2013



Autumn 2016



Thank you

Tonight was a time to show our gratitude to each of you for your service, help and encouragement in a time of crisis for our family. We hope you are encouraged in some small measure of how you encouraged us.

This booklet is a memento of our evening together and highlights some of the things that we have come to value during this journey. As you go about your life after tonight, this booklet will help you remember what an important part you played in our lives, and especially Joseph's life.

Please share with us your impressions and remembrances of Joseph's story. You can do that by sending a text to **07520631144** or an email to underwoodupdate@icloud.com We will be compiling these for Joseph.

Lastly, we want to express our gratitude to the Lord Jesus Christ, who not only heard our cry in our hour of need but rescued us from "going our own way". Whether you find the idea of his rescue quaint or the most wonderful thing you have heard of - it would be our privilege to share with you the hope that is more powerful than anything, even death itself.

Your Friends,

Ed, Kate, Elijah, Moses, Joseph, Ezra & Selah

Human Dignity

When Joseph was diagnosed we had to confront the basis for our decisions for health care. Would we be making decisions based on a quality of life calculation? Taking what treatment was available out of resignation? Or was there deeper bedrock to be found for these decisions?

We found that the Bible had a clear answer. It tells us that human beings are created in the image of God, or *Imago Dei*. Just as a twenty-pound note has no value other than that assigned by the government, so every human being's value comes from their Creator - in this case, the dignity and honour of the Creator himself.

This honour and dignity is damaged by the brokenness of our world as we harmfully go our own way, against the design of our Creator. However, just like a Picasso painting found covered with grime and even scratched is still a masterpiece, so too are we masterpieces of our Creator. This means that we do not own ourselves, so we have

no right to end our lives prematurely. Yet, we do not seek to prolong dying.



We are to restore that which is broken and resist the effects of this broken world. So we use sound medical treatment to resist disease, we seek the face of our Creator for his restoration and we see the dignity of each person, no matter their health, age, or ability.

Why do Children get Cancer?

In addition to leukaemia, Joseph was found to have a deadly infection with no immune system to fight it, no matter how strong the antibiotic. This appeared to be a truly hopeless situation.

Many, in frustration with the injustices of this world, have taken the view that we are just biological machines who have no real purpose and whose existence is controlled by random chance. So disease is just “how the odds worked out”.

However, this view does not account for the fact that we *innately know* that a child dying of cancer is a tragedy.

So, if we are not biological machines then we have an unavoidable question: "How could a loving God allow a little boy who had never harmed anyone to have cancer and face this hopeless situation?"

We found the Bible has an answer:

It was not to have been this way.

The Loving God created a perfect world without death and sickness. He created perfect people who would never age. Yet these people chose to do things their own way rather than as designed by their Loving God. This broke them, the world and the entire universe that had been perfect. This “going their own way” is called “sin” in the Bible and it became intertwined into every person since then. This brokenness is the source of disease, death, war, and millions of other tragedies that occur on a daily basis. But why did the Loving God leave things like this – if they are so broken?

Well, again the Bible gives us a clear answer. The Loving God did not just leave it that way – he sent Jesus to rescue people from this broken world and is preparing a new world where there will be no

more sin and brokenness. The problem is that this broken world has to be totally done away with before the new one – without sickness and death – can come to be. The new world will have no place for “doing it our own way”.

Until then, the Loving God is patient – even with those who hate him, giving everyone time to be rescued, even when that patience allows suffering and death to continue. But he will not wait forever.

In the meantime, each of us adds to the brokenness of this world each time we sin or go our own way. Just as a rock carelessly thrown off a cliff can unintentionally kill a hiker in the valley below - so too our “small sins” can cause far more destruction than we would ever suspect.

So why did the Loving God allow Joseph to have leukaemia?

Because Joseph was born into a broken creation and carried in his body, even from conception, the interwoven brokenness from his parents and forefathers and foremothers. The Loving God had sent Jesus to rescue us from the broken world and because of his great love to those who have not yet been rescued, this broken world is allowed to continue a bit longer. So suffering and death continue – for now – but will soon come to an end.

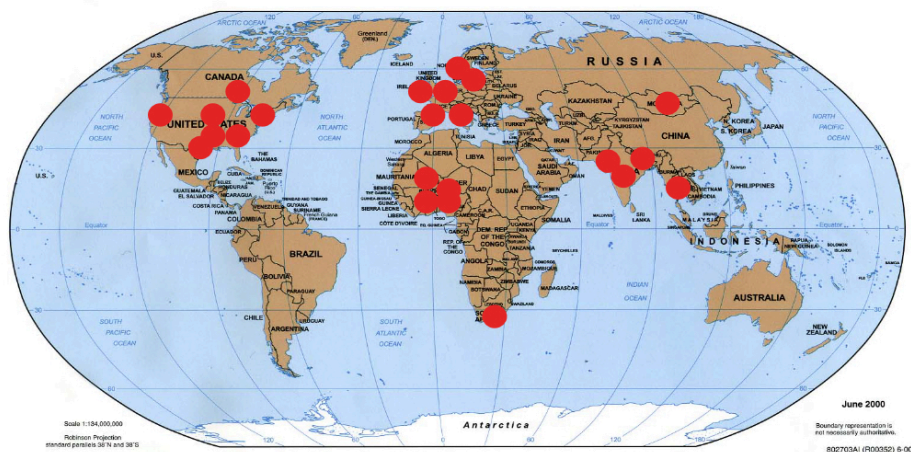


God is There and he Hears

In this broken world with injustice and suffering and death, is there no hope? When we found that Joseph faced an infection that he could not fight we asked God for help. We knew that God loved Joseph more than we did and had a good plan – even for Joseph's death. But we still asked for Joseph to be preserved and we asked our friends to pray as well.

Then something wonderful happened...

Spontaneous groups of people began to gather to pray for Joseph and to tell others. Soon there were over a hundred groups in Northern Ireland who were praying, then it spread to mainland England, Scotland and Wales. Then to Europe, the US and Africa, India and Hong Kong.



We did not have any way to officially count the number of people but our best guess is that more than 10,000 people were praying for Joseph at the peak of his crisis.

Back at the hospital, staff were doing their best – using the most powerful antibiotics, looking for any way to give Joseph's body time to regenerate an immune system. We well recall

Dr Johnson checking on Joseph at 3:00 am to see if there was any progress, anything else that could be done.

Joseph's treatment for leukaemia had the effect of masking the symptoms of infection by suppressing inflammation and fever. But that treatment could do nothing to the infection itself. So we entered this strange phase where Joseph appeared to get better and better though he had no trace of an immune system. We watched for the unhindered infection to come roaring into prominence and overwhelm his tiny body. But instead it just disappeared. This all happened as these thousands of people were praying for Joseph to be preserved from the deadly infection.



The Blessing of Community

The Bible calls the Church the “Body of Christ”. That means that the people in the church are to care for one another as the different parts of our body care for each other. We experienced this at Stramillis EPC. Two ladies with busy careers and families – Sandra Hall and Karen McCain – spent scores of hours caring for us and coordinating the response of the church. We received meals for every day for 7 weeks of induction treatment. Shopping was done. Laundry was washed, dried, ironed and folded. The house was cleaned, beds made, messages run, child minding supplied as well as constant support emotionally and spiritually.

Family was another blessing, with Marie McFarland, better known as Super Nanna, caring for Joseph in 12 hour shifts every night for 7 weeks. Then continuing to support and encourage for the past 3 years of treatment.

The medical community – who on the whole did not share our faith – had spent the bulk of their adult lives serving and preparing to serve people with needs just like ours. There would be hundreds of names, but Victoria our named nurse, Sinead the research nurse, Bernie the Sister of the children’s haematology and cancer ward, and our doctors – Dr Macartney, Dr Cairns, Dr Johnson, and Dr McCarthy have been such a support and so patient with us as we asked hundreds of questions. They gave us more than world class care – they gave us themselves.

Then friends, neighbours and the wider community were a great support and blessing – from David and Heather Watson our next door neighbours, to the Wilsons at the end of the lane, to the postal clerk at our local post office who showed compassion and concern, to the village committee of our village, to our children’s Suzuki violin group led by Mireia Ferrer. This web of community was encouraging, comforting and a blessing.

The Greatest Thing

We are so happy and joyful that Joseph was preserved and has completed his treatment in good health. But that is not the most important thing, because one day, whether by disease, mishap or old age, he will die as well as all of us.

While we can rejoice in the many prayers that were offered up for Joseph, we know many parents who prayed and whose communities prayed, yet their child died.

And while we were blessed by wonderful community, there are many for whom there is almost no community, or even worse, a hostile and uncaring community.

But we have experienced something so profound that the brokenness of this world cannot touch it – the love of God in Jesus Christ.

Because of the deep love that we have experienced, the inner transformation and freedom, even in the most horrible circumstances we have hope and a place of safety.

The forgiveness of every wrong that we have done – without exception. The healing and restoration of every wrong done to us. Real justice, real mercy and real love.

You have undoubtedly heard about Jesus before – but we would invite you to meet him. You will find that he knows you well – your brokenness, the wrongs done to you. And he knows your troubles and sorrows.

But what you will also find is an unfathomable love, life and power in Jesus. Once you are his, disease, discouragement and death are still real and painful – but only temporary.

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth,
for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away,
and there was no longer any sea.*

*I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem,
coming down out of heaven from God,
prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.*

*And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,
“Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people,
and he will dwell with them.*

*They will be his people,
and God himself will be with them and be their God.*

*He will wipe every tear from their eyes.
There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain,
for the old order of things has passed away.”*

*He who was seated on the throne said,
“I am making everything new!”*

*Then he said,
“Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”*

*He said to me: “It is done.
I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.
To the thirsty I will give water without cost
from the spring of the water of life.”*

Revelation 21:1-6