



## Cookies, Chai, and Conversations about Jesus

As I walked near the library at Sydney University during exam week, I looked for a shady spot under a large tree so students could easily find me. The stress in the air was almost tangible. The day before, my boys and I had packed small containers with homemade cookies, instant chai packets, and a note of encouragement with a scripture verse. With a few of those containers in hand, I sat under the tree waiting to share this small gift with my Indian friends as they prepared for exams.

Raj was the first to come by. Over the past semester, trust had been growing within our South Asian community, and now we were beginning to invite friends into a new small group called *Dinner and a Story*—a place to hear stories from Jesus' life. Raj received his little box of cookies and read the note. I asked how I could pray for him. He told me, "Back in my hometown there was a church close to my house. I would often go there with friends, and I know many of the worship songs." He asked me to pray for his exams, and after I prayed in Jesus' name, he shared that he wanted to learn more about Jesus.

Since then, Raj has joined our weekly *Dinner and a Story* gathering—along with fifteen other Hindu students who have come at least once. Each week we start with a topic everyone can

relate to and then share a story about Jesus connected to that theme. Raj has even brought his friends and often asks me to pray for him. After receiving outstanding marks on his exams, he thanked me specifically for praying.

Please continue to pray that many of our Hindu friends—like Raj—will encounter the Lord in these gatherings and be drawn to Him.

## An Unexpected Meeting

Claire (Blake's niece) and I had just finished unpacking bags from the Asian market, laying out all the ingredients for a Chinese hot pot lunch. Ten UNSW friends were on their way over, and since it was their last English Corner before exams, we thought it would be fun to gather at the new ministry house near Sydney Uni where Claire and some of the staff are living.

As everyone arrived, they quickly noticed something—we were missing some pretty important sauces! So, a little embarrassed and already worn out from two long days at Sydney Uni's Welcome Fest, I made a quick run back to the market. Welcome Fest is such a unique time—thousands of international students everywhere, and our team worked hard to meet as many as possible and invite them into community. In the middle of it all, I had briefly met "Hymn," a Ph.D. student from Thailand. He seemed friendly but not very interested, so I didn't expect much from this interaction.



But as I was walking back with the sauces, guess who I ran into? Hymn! We were both surprised. This time, he opened up about feeling discouraged because of a housing problem. I felt like God nudged me not to miss the moment, so I invited him to our hot pot lunch. He came—and it was amazing to see him welcomed into the group. I realized he was actually much more open to God than I thought in our first short conversation. I encouraged him to join a group, and he's now connected to our community.

Please pray for students like Hymn—that God will keep arranging these unexpected meetings and drawing them closer to Him.

## Family Update

Winter in Sydney has been one of the wettest on record, so it was nice to travel to see some family over the winter break. Our kids loved all the cousin time! Emily had her annual back scan and the good news is that her bones are a bit stronger, but we still have a long way to go before it's in the normal range. Nathaniel, while making some progress in his learning, is still struggling emotionally and socially at school. His teachers are suggesting a specialized school where he can have more support with the goal of transitioning back to his current school 1-2 years from now. We covet your prayers.



Above: a) UNSW English Corner Social with Hymn on my left. b) Below: A partial family gathering on Emily's side.



We often give God thanks for all the ways He provides for us through you. Thank you for your love, support and prayers. We love you.

*Blake & Emily Ackerson*

## Prayer Requests

- **Praise God** for the many new relationships we've formed with international students at Sydney University. Right now, we have eight small groups with 4–8 students each who are exploring Christianity. Pray that many would be drawn to Jesus through these communities.
- **Pray for Dinner and a Story**—that it continues to be a safe and welcoming place for South Asian students to explore who Jesus is. While we are encouraged by their attendance, there are many barriers to the gospel. Ask God for the light of Christ to break through in powerful ways.
- **Pray for our training called *MyFriends*** that Blake is facilitating over nine weeks with some of our student leaders. Ask God to equip them with practical skills and courage to make Jesus known within their own social circles.