

# The Ackerson Article March 2025



Meeting new students at welcome week.

## **Today, I became a follower of Jesus!**

Last September, we received a team of volunteers from Blake's home church who met a Chinese student at the University of Sydney named Rongyu. He was eager to learn about Jesus. Over the last few months I have been going through the book of Mark with him, and in each meeting Rongyu would come with lots of questions about Jesus. God was clearly at work in him! During the new semester welcome week, I invited Rongyu to meet new international students at our booth and share about getting involved in our community. When Rongyu arrived at the booth he first had a few more questions he wanted to talk through before we started the day. So for the next hour we mainly talked about what it means to follow Jesus. Then, after our discussion he helped welcome the new students, and I was amazed at his interactions with them, as he is normally a pretty shy guy. At the end of the day our team of staff and student volunteers met to share about our experiences and pray. Amazingly, Rongyu openly declared to the group, "Today, I became a follower of Jesus!" He is eager to join a church and get baptized. We continue to meet regularly this year before he graduates to help prepare him to walk with Jesus for a life-time. (He's in the picture: right, middle)

## **Experiencing Growth**

Our team's ministry to international students is experiencing growth on many levels. For example, there are 4 new missionaries who have reported this year, one of whom is my niece, Claire. Around this time last year I invited her to consider an internship with us and amazingly she said yes! As a kid, I remember giving her a Children's Operation World prayer book when she was 5 and praying that God would help her be a light to others. It's such an incredible blessing to have her here.

Another area we are seeing increased growth is ministry among South Asians. We have a team of 5 student leaders from Indian who are passionate about taking steps to bring the gospel to their friends. I and two other staff are overseeing reaching South Asians at the University of Sydney. Our main objective at this stage is building a contextualized community where South Asians experience loving friendships where we have opportunities to share stories of Jesus impacting our lives. This past month at our weekly event called Chai and Chat, we are seeing close to 20 South Asians attend! We praise God for the growth and momentum among these students.

Lastly, we are seeing growth at the University of New South Wales, where I'm partnering with a local church to build a ministry to international students. We have a team, a developing direction and goals, volunteers, and a growing community of international students. We will continue to engage students through offering English practice, sharing the gospel on campus, and forming investigative Bible studies.



### **Friends for Dinner Promotional Video**

Two days before our welcome week, I (Blake) had the fun experience of producing a film! Over the past few months I've been assembling a team and working on a script that tells a story depicting the heart of Friends for Dinner, the hospitality program that seeks to make connections between international students and local Christians. We hired a director, actors, a cameraman, and found volunteers to be extras. God provided a neighbor who opened their beautiful home where we filmed the majority of the scenes. We were also able to film on campus and at a local grocery store. Amazingly, one of the actors turned out to be a Christian and was already familiar with Friends for Dinner through her church! God provided in all the small details to allow it to come together. The purpose of the video is for churches to use it to help promote the opportunity of hosting international students for a meal during Easter and Christmas. It is our prayer that through this strategy we will see local churches across Australia engaged in welcoming the nations through hospitality and as a result see lives transformed by Jesus. (Video link: <https://vimeo.com/1067655688/b27706155c>)

### **Family Update**

This season is a full of transitions! Emily started a new exercise class to strengthen her back and bones. We are encouraged at her process. Nathaniel started kindergarten. Elijah started pre-school. Addie is getting closer to taking her first steps and loves to "talk". We are so blessed to have these three little ones. We are regularly reminded of your partnership in the gospel and often give thanks to God for the incredible honor of being sent out with the gospel through you. We love you!

*Blake & Emily Ackerson*

Below: a) our South Asian community. b) Filming the promotional video c) Family photo at a nearby beach.



### **Praise & Prayer**

- Praise God for our new brother in Christ, Rongyu. Pray for God to establish him in the faith and for protection.
- Pray for the start of the semester as we meet hundred of students. Pray many to be open to the Lord.
- Pray for the budding community among South Asian students. Our greatest need is for more people to be praying for an open door for the gospel among this unengaged group on campus.
- Continue to pray for the ministry at UNSW to be established through our local church partner.
- Praise God for the production of this new promo video for Friends for Dinner. Pray for many local Christians to welcome international students this Easter!
- Pray for Nathaniel as transition to kindergarten has been challenging.

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