



A recent church lunch

Dear Family and Friends,

***'The Name of the Lord is a strong tower.'* Proverbs 18:10**

What or who do you run to when life throws you curveballs? Often it is life's challenges that show us our deepest idols – idols of control, acceptance, comfort or power. To what do we turn when we feel life isn't giving us what we want? Living in a context of such visible trauma and violence, we daily see the surface idols that entice – youth turning to vapes or harder drugs, alcohol or gangsterism. Perhaps the idols are more hidden and instead endless gaming, tiktoking, mindless scrolling or eating become the means to try to numb the pain or meaningless within. How often we witness people seeking out new relationships in a desperate attempt to feel more valued, more loved, more accepted – only to find that this quickly fails and the feeling of desperation increases. If we are honest, we are all tempted to run to surface idols to satisfy our deeper idols. Perhaps not so obviously harmful, but equally unfulfilling. None of our self-redemption strategies will fulfill.

So, what does? We were recommended a book called *'Who you are: Internalizing the Gospel to find our true identity'* by Judy Cha. It has been so helpful in parenting and in ministry at St Thomas. We are

reminded that how people make sense of their experiences is even more important than what they actually experience. Mental health practitioners, counsellors, education can help immensely, but without the undergirding of a gospel framework, these interventions will be inadequate.



Celebrating the 90th birthday of a lady in our Seniors group who remembers St Thomas when it first moved to the Cape Flats during the forced removals of the Apartheid Government and when it met under a tree!

As a congregation we are working through Proverbs 10–31. Recently Alun reminded us that our only strong tower, the One to whom we can really find satisfaction and worth, is the LORD. As a family, we ourselves have had to remind ourselves to find daily refuge in the safe fortress of God's tower. Life simply isn't predictable. We can't live in a broken world and expect to sail through life unaffected. We

have had a number of health issues this year – just this week Timothy was unexpectedly admitted to hospital with Hepatitis A and bad jaundice. Malachi last month developed a string of hemiplegic migraines which also required a hospital stint, scans and an appointment with a neurologist. Thankfully he is now on daily medication and the attacks are seemingly under control. Debbie has an ongoing eye issue which after numerous appointments was recently diagnosed as Fuchs Endothelial Dystrophy – a condition which has good days and bad days but will ultimately need a corneal transplant at some point. We aren't in control.



Youth Bible study

Yet, despite what has been a particularly challenging six months, we can see tangible signs of God's goodness and ongoing intervention. We asked you to pray for our Christianity Explored course; God answered your prayers as about 35 people attended with around 20 guests. We are thrilled to see St Thomas growing and more people finding a home in our growth groups. We are deeply thankful for new youth leaders who are assisting on Friday nights and Sunday mornings. We are grateful for a new crop of young adults.

Particularly noteworthy has been the encouragement of a Matric student, 18-year-old Sieraat, who is regularly meeting one-to-one with Alun with the hope of becoming an apprentice at St Thomas next year. Sieraat is testimony that God saves – he is humble, teachable, faithful and already serving in both our kids and youth ministries. His testimony underlines our long-held belief that people who have experienced suffering can find tremendous healing in a church community. Our biblical counselling ministry continues to meet people at their point of need, networking with multiple service providers, but crucially offering a means to understand their stories within the 'Grand Story' of God's redemptive purposes and pointing people to a new way of living in a new family. We continue to be amazed at the faith members of our congregation have in the midst of seemingly never-ending hardship – they are able to see that their suffering is small compared to eternity and they believe that Jesus' death shows they are loved, and his Spirit will provide strength to endure.

We are planning to be in the UK for five weeks from the end of May, and hope to connect with many of you. Please pray for St Thomas' whilst we are away – our new presiding bishop Rev Siefried Ngubane will be preaching one Sunday and Katleho Meslane will have an increased workload. Pray also for South Africa who go to the polls on 29 May. 30 years of democracy in this nation has not brought the desired changes for millions – we pray that the elections will be peaceful and that the right leaders will be appointed. Pray for Heideveld which has recently undergone an increase in shootings. Thankfully the rival gangs responsible have just declared a truce, but please do pray that they would stick to it, and that gang members would truly repent and have their hearts transformed through faith in Jesus. Pray for the police to be effective and for safety for families and children who have to live, work and go to school in these streets.

As always, we want you to know how much we value your support – your WhatsApp messages, your prayers, your financial generosity, your emails. They encourage our hearts.

Every blessing,

Alun, Debbie, Likhona (19), Ilana (16), Malachi (12) and Timothy (8) xx

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