

That was the year that was

As I write this, the burden of my brother's death is very much with me. I shall be taking his funeral at the crematorium in Dumfries later this week and I am deeply conscious of my own need and that of others for comfort and reassurance. My brother John endured a weight of guilt for being with my eldest brother when he was killed in a car accident in his invalid carriage in 1972. There was no way to relieve John of that burden and I suppose he should have received counselling after my brother's death but that simply wasn't provided then. While he relied on the Lord Jesus for forgiving his sin - he made a profession of faith on the same night my sister and I became Christians - he was unable to forgive himself for being a passenger on that day. That was a terrible though irrational burden he took upon himself but John now knows complete peace as he is in the Lord's Presence. His family will have wonderful memories of a loving father who loved fun despite his sadness. It has reminded me though that we should, in faith, accept the need for self-forgiveness when we come to Christ and know **His** forgiveness for all our past. One of the shortest books I have read recently - but one of the most significant - is Timothy Keller's book 'The Freedom of Self Forgetfulness' in which he states that 'A truly gospel humble person is not a self hating person or a self loving person, but a self forgetful person.' As I think about family relationships and my own failures as a son, husband, brother, father and now grandfather, there is much room for improvement and I need to seek forgiveness for sin and God's enabling to be better in all the roles given to me. In the light of death, our own lives are exposed but this can be an opportunity for repentance and renewal. So, despite the inevitable gloom of my present thoughts, I remain hugely encouraged and joyful with the work in TCF and feel that I have been ministered to as I take my place within the TCF Family. The expression of our fellowship is evident by your care and love in *1 Corinthians 12:26* 'If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together.'

God's Word

I have just completed drafting two surveys and have issued them electronically - Ruth and Matthew 5-7. Although I am very aware of my own deficiencies, there is also great joy in studying the word of God and passing on truths that become evident in the quietness of my study alone with God. It is also hugely beneficial to us as a church - and to me personally - to have others within TCF and from other churches sharing in this task 'to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ' *Ephesians 4:12*. I thank all who teach. My own input during 2016 will be 47 preaching and teaching episodes at the main Sunday services (out of a total of 90 possible - 52% overall; 23 out of 52 Family Services and 24 out of 38 Bible Teaching sessions). Your feedback is crucial as it provides a reminder of why the teaching is undertaken - to see lives that are biblically formed and reformed. I need to revisit your feedback already given so that the information gleaned already is being acted on - lessons learned to be relearned! Your participation is so valuable and it is very much appreciated. I shall also try to be very focussed on the practicality of the teaching - though sometimes, it is our minds that are being renewed as part of our maturing as Christians, *Ephesians 4:18-24*. But...Bible teaching is not necessarily bible learning.

The Pines

Activity in my home at Guildtown is varied: life with Cliff is interesting and we have good discussions together. A 'Thanksgiving' meal was a highlight this month. However, he finds unusual places to put items of crockery away, and he always uses a dinner plate even if it's only a sandwich at lunchtime he is having! Cliff has felt very much part of the church and it is good to see him so evidently enjoying the various tasks which he has been assigned. I am enormously grateful for the work he is doing for Alpha and with other regular groups - YF, Jigsaw at Scone and Young Adults. The first Men's Prayer Breakfast was a joy to host on 12 November and a second is scheduled for 10 December 2016. The men who came were those who for various reasons find it difficult to meet with their assigned Home Group but this alternative opportunity for fellowship outside of the usual church services has been appreciated. If not the breakfast, then the prayers for each other, our respective families and our church. The men are praying all month for the issues shared by their prayer partner. The more social gatherings of friends from the church - often on Sunday nights - are very special for me. Also, some have already just 'dropped in' on the way past the house. If the car is there, you would be VERY WELCOME. If it's just a 'hello' and a refreshment or if you want to chat about spiritual or other issues, my study is a place of quiet retreat and its walls refuse to let anything confidential pass through! Honestly, it would be the highest privilege to have you drop by the house. If you prefer, you can always check if I'm in - 01821 640844 or 07784 702876. I'll also be in TCF every Tuesday morning from 6 December.

Other

As we embark on Alpha I hope you will be praying about the course but more particularly, preparing to invite friends, family, neighbours or work colleagues to attend. The core team will be serving the whole church through this activity and it is already being a blessing as we have had the stimulus of the Young Adults Group in our prayer time on 23 November. We will also have a further brief prayer time on Friday 16 December for Alpha and Stephen Jones is organising a whole day of prayer for 11:00 on Saturday 14 - 11:00 on Sunday 15 January 2017. "I have been driven many times upon my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had no where else to go. My own wisdom and that of all about me seemed insufficient for that day." **Abraham Lincoln**

Thanking God for...

His faithfulness...

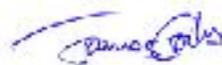
and your generous love in 2016.

Review of the Strategic Plan for 2016-2020

You may remember that the elders consulted on the church planning intentions for the 5 year period 2016-2020. We had your input to the core purpose, strategic aims and values and then we devised a plan of action for 2016. The elders regularly review action and here is the interim report of progress at November 2016. Obviously it doesn't list all the other work done! As we move into 2017 shortly my you know the peace of Christ at Christmas and a blessed 2017.

Strategic Aim: 'Together...' and Objectives		Action	Notes
Allocate each member of the TCF Family to a Home Bible Study Group	1.1.1 - 1.1.3	Review composition of Home Groups and ensure everyone is allocated to a group. What other groups do we sustain? How are members of groups being helped as disciples of the Lord Jesus?	This review is substantially complete. In addition to proposing changes in the number, composition and activities of the Home Groups we have also agreed that where appropriate, other small groups should provide opportunities for bible study, prayer and fellowship. The young Adult's Group is an example of such a group as is the Ladies Bible Study Group and the Men's Prayer Breakfasts which have just recently started. Some further thinking and engagement with Home Group Leaders is ongoing as they provide support to group members.
Ensure those who are most vulnerable are regularly visited	1.2.1 - 1.2.2	Consider how the Pastor and the Elders support the ongoing visitation of the TCF Family. Consider what is meant by an 'entitlement' to a visit or visits and who are all involved in such informal and formal support and care.	The Pastor has visited everyone on the TCF Directory (and more) during his first year and is committed to visiting every one at least once per year in the period 2017-2020. There is also ongoing visitation done by Home Group Leaders and the Visitation Team and others. This is considered routinely at Elders meetings.
Seek to have everyone in the TCF Family assigned to a ministry team	1.3.1 - 1.3.3	Undertake mapping exercise to discover where gaps exist and undertake survey of the TCF Family as to their contribution in the various ministry teams	Whilst the mapping exercise has not yet been done, we are considering how this is best developed for the future so that we benefit from the gifts, talents and abilities that the TCF Family offer and undertake. Building on such a pool of willing contributions, we have considered how blessed we are to have so many who contribute effectively in our varied ministries. We undertook specific training for the Leadership Group by an input from Mark Stirling on the role of all leaders in making disciples.

I hope that this brief update is encouraging to you. As we come to the close of 2016 soon, we look to the Lord to refresh and renew us as we remember His wonderful advent and His promise to be with us always - including 2017! Have a peaceful Christmas and a very blessed 2017.



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His faithfulness...

and your generous love in 2016.