

As we focus on the start of this new year after recently celebrating our Saviour's birth we would like to send a big thank you for your generous support, both financial and in prayer, of our many ACF students throughout 2014. It was a wonderful year with many students receiving support because of people like you.

One ACF student we would like to introduce you to is Joel.



Joel has just finished his second year of a Master of Divinity at Sydney Missionary & Bible College. Joel grew up in the Blue Mountains, an hour west of Sydney, and was greatly affected by the raging bush fires there in October 2013. His family home, filled with all of its treasures, was tragically lost in the fires and Joel's thoughts about his loss have been a great encouragement to many Christians throughout his community.

Here is part of Joel's story: ..."Standing in the smouldering rubble of violently twisted metal and blackened walls which had provided such unappreciated security was a sobering reality check, the likes of which one never imagines would happen to them. We had just lost stuff, but no amount of reassurance could disguise the fact that that house was full of stuff that I loved. Dearly. As though farewelling so much of the past were not enough, the task of rebuilding now sapped away what little emotional energy we had left.

How could I reconcile my loss with an all powerful, all loving God, who seeks the best for his people? In my experience the more I ponder this question the more I am forced to stand in awe of the sheer magnitude of God. The more I study the life, teachings and work of Jesus, the more I am blown away by just how relevant He is to me in my suffering.

If it is a fundamentally true statement that God is good, as the bible claims then His goodness is true, no matter what my personal circumstances may be.

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I was reminded of Jesus' agony as he wept in the garden before his horrific crucifixion. Abandoned by everyone He held dear, the Son of God was about to taste the bitter cup of suffering and begged that what was to come might pass him by. Jesus did not question his father's goodness, nor did he question his father's power. Indeed at this point nothing about God was in question. Rather, there was a complete recognition that all of this was part of the plan.

If there is a divine plan and purpose behind all that we see, then the invitation is opened to us to take on a greater perspective, which recognises Gods sovereignty over all things and the great plans He has for his creation. It is in this perspective that I have come to find peace and hope that transcends the parochial materialism that characterises our culture and have been drawn into a deepened understanding of who God is.

For me, this has been such a profound experience as I have come to understand more of what Jesus said when he gave us the loving command to store up treasures in heaven where moth and rust cannot destroy, and fire has no power. When our treasures are safely hidden away in eternity then what grasp can the fleeting distractions of this world have on us? Instead we will be free to live life as we were designed to. In deep authentic relationships with the people around us, acting justly, loving mercy and walking humbly with our God. I look forward to the chance to one day look back and see what God's plan was all along...."

Joel has been enjoying his study at SMBC and he looks forward to a future in ministry, serving wherever God may lead him. Joel is one of nine SMBC students who have received bursaries in 2014.

To financially support people like Joel click [here](#).

We take this opportunity of thanking you for your support during 2014 and we look forward to partnering with you again this year and beyond to assist faithful men and women of God to study His word, thereby fully equipping them to spread His gospel of saving grace to our needy world.

Happy New Year from all at the ACF.