

**David & Olivia Nelson**  
**Tauranga, New Zealand**



“Knowing God and Making Him Known” is the mission statement of the Otumoetai church of Christ, a wonderful church family we have been serving in the beautiful city of Tauranga.

We are David and Olivia Nelson, and with our two boys, Caleb (10) and Seth (8), we are missionaries with you in Tauranga, New Zealand since 2015. We have a love for people, and a passion to see people take steps towards their full potential in Christ. Whether it is a person from church, a neighbour across the fence, or someone at our kids’ school, we want to be a light in their life and a presence of Christ in their life.

Over the last few years, our ministry has touched on meeting a wide range of needs, but the major focus of our ministry has been ministering to this congregation in the development of a healthy leadership and eldership. Through many conversations, studies, sermons, meetings, meals, successes (and setbacks), and of course, much prayer, we saw the instalment of deacons in December of 2019, and the instalment of an eldership in July of 2020. Woohoo! This has been a huge undertaking, but one that is setting this congregation up to be in a better position to step into the mission God has called her.

Obviously, 2020 has thrown some major obstacles in our ministry. Lockdowns and gathering restrictions threw us for a loop, but on a positive note it gave us opportunity to develop more of our technical capabilities. David became the creator/ director/editor/producer of Otumoetai Online and Olivia coordinated children’s ministry via zoom. It was a HUGE learning curve (I’m confident you all understand), but thankfully we were able to adapt and survive. Olivia and I are very excited and hopeful about the work we want to engage in 2021. As the leadership and eldership stepped into place, we have been freed to be able to focus on some other areas close to our hearts - outreach.

Our focus this year is to equip the Otumoetai church of Christ to more fully step into the second part of their mission statement “Making Him Known.” We are working towards helping the church develop a greater presence in its local community as well as equipping and encouraging membership to have a more missional mindset. David will also be taking on an intern this year whose focus will be gaining practical experience in ministry geared towards evangelism.

**Story of Hope**

The Hope Story I want to share is the Hope I feel towards the missional focus of the church we are working with. A rut is defined as “a habit or pattern of behavior that has become dull and unproductive but is hard to change.” Sometimes churches can fall into ruts. No one wants to be in a rut, but over time it happens very easily. One of the ruts that a church can fall into is the idea that “someone else will do it.” This can be a mindset applied to various activities in a church— including outreach.

That’s where our church is at. Through the years this congregation has had people come in who are focused on outreach. There are some great and amazing stories of salvation because of the work these evangelists have done, but the presence of these gifted people through the years have also led towards the development

of a rut - "it's not my responsibility, someone else will do it." But God did not call Olivia and I to Tauranga to do evangelism *for* them, we came to do it *with* them. So we push and push and push, but people just stay stuck in this rut.

However, lately we have seen some movement. Our family volunteers in a community food program, taking a food truck to various areas of the city and inviting neighborhood kids to come and eat. Sharing our experience in doing this with our kids has led to another family at church volunteering once a month in the same program. This year, we talked to our neighbors about hosting a street wide Christmas party inviting people to bring a plate and share an afternoon with their neighbors. We shared this idea with the church and challenged them to do the same. This was a message I got from one of our members, "Hi, I wanted you to know that I had your idea about meeting the neighbors/street party on my mind since you suggested it but... our November/December weekends seldom have free slots so... I wrote Christmas cards to each of our neighbors introducing us and making sure to include a blessing on them for being a good neighboring for the Christmas season - I also dropped off a bag of cookies to some front doors to say hello. It's not a street party but it was an idea put into action that was sparked through your Sunday lesson. We do listen-and sometimes... we do act!! Bless you in all the work you do for the Kingdom."

I get frustrated because so much of the time it just seems like this church is stuck in a rut. But this gives me hope. This makes me excited. Things are happening, people are acting. Maybe it's slow going at times, but if more and more people get out of that rut, this church can gain momentum, and who knows the limits to how far God will take us.