



# Lifeline

...a prayer letter from John and Jackie

August 30, 1999



Dear friends,

*"The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, "The LORD is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him."* Psalms 92:12-15

I like the word "flourish". It means something more than surviving. It means to prosper, to do very well, or to thrive. It means to be at the peak of success or development; to be in the prime. I noticed once that the Bible doesn't really have a plan for survival, for just barely making it. The promises speak more of flourishing. Overcoming is the word. As it is written in Romans 8: we are more than conquerors!

I also like the part about still bearing fruit in old age. To some of you, being fifty-something seems ancient. To others, it is still young! What it seems to us in our late fifties is that old age is near. Old age may seem scary and depressing to many, but in the Bible, old age is pictured as a time of fulfillment and blessing. Jackie and I are claiming such promises with urgency and expectancy!

Such as Psalms 37:25,26:

*"I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread. They are always generous and lend freely; their children will be blessed."*

We do not yet see pensions and bank accounts stored up for our old age. But we do see Jesus who never forsakes us. We don't yet have a great monetary blessing in store to leave for our children. But we do have a great promise that says our children will be blessed!

You'll notice that these promises are for the "righteous". It was a long time before we could honestly receive the promises that are given to the righteous. We didn't feel righteous, and compared to the standard of Jesus, we were far below. Only when the conviction of imparted righteousness became real to us — the fact that we are righteous by virtue of Jesus' blood, and His righteousness is ours — then we could begin to claim the blessings promised to the righteous.

Have you taken your blood-bought righteousness as your own? Remember the hymn: *"...all other ground is sinking sand!"*

**Getting old? ...the best is yet to come...**

So, to be old and righteous is a good thing. In fact, in the Word it just gets better and better! Thank God the promises have no age limit! Thank God that the Word says that *"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me ALL the days of my life..."*

Jackie and I are realizing that this is our plan for old age. It is a plan based on such promises. It is to continue to bear fruit for God. It is to stay fresh and very green. It is to be satisfied with the Lord's good things so that our youth is renewed like the eagle (Psalms 103:5). It is to have the spirit of Caleb, who asked for a mountain full of giants as His inheritance at age eighty-five. (Joshua 14:6-15)

Some look forward to the rocking chair. We look forward to new adventures with God. Some look forward to the joy of relaxing at the beach and let the younger generation take up the mantle. We look

forward to standing beside the younger generation on the front lines of battle and cheering them on, trusting God to keep renewing our strength. Yes, we know that our bodies grow old, but the inner man is being renewed day by day! It seems to us that the best way to grow old is to stay young on the inside. The best way to stay young on the inside is to stay on the front lines of faith in God and loving others -- serving this generation in the greatest harvest of souls the world has ever known!

Where will you be when God unleashes the harvest that is yet to come? It could be a hundred times as large as what we presently see! We want to be in the middle of it, gathering in the harvest of souls, binding up their wounds, feeding them with the Word, and sending them out into the harvest as reapers!

We plan to do this until Jesus comes, or until our bodies are laid to rest in the ground!

### Ukraine report...

My journey to Krivoy Rog was profitable and overdue. (You may remember that I went alone this time. Jackie stayed home.) I stepped off the train early Sunday morning and soon was in the morning service. What a joy to see the hundreds of brothers and sisters again, praising God with exuberance! Only those who have been there may understand the feeling of stepping into that anointed atmosphere. I preached morning and afternoon on Joshua 1: *"Be strong and courageous...this book.. shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night...for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success."*

It was a message on the heart, the mind, and the mouth. I continued this theme in

several meetings, bringing it into the New Testament, teaching on the armor of God, emphasizing that *it is in the heart, the mind, and the mouth that we put on God's armor*. If our heart is right, our mind is right, and our mouth is right, we are armed in Christ, and Satan cannot defeat us. We prayed with many for heart attitudes, renewing of the mind, and cleansing of the mouth. People were saved in every meeting, and many filled with the Spirit.

We had a two day conference with the pastors from the "Churches of Praise", the fellowship of 15 churches led by pastors Gregori and Galina. They have all become dear friends to us, and it was a pleasure to meet with them in a personal setting around the table for these days. I spoke on the subject of leadership, emphasizing the following points:

1. Jesus is our leader, and our example for leadership: remember that He is first of all a FOLLOWER Himself: In John 5:30 He said, *"I can do nothing on my own initiative...I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."*

2. Leadership is a stewardship, not an ownership. Whatever we lead is not ours, but God's.

3. The purpose of leadership is to help others succeed. The congregation does not exist for the success of the pastor. He exists for the success of the people.

4. Jesus trained leaders by being with them and loving them. This was His "leadership training school". For three years, they walked with Him, ate with Him, watched Him, listened to Him. He answered their

### Prayer points:

1. Anointed teachers for the Bible School in Krivoy Rog each month.
2. \$1000 monthly to feed the Bible School students and church construction workers.
3. Expansion of the children's ministry, and supplies for children's ministries, so children will be part of the harvest in Ukraine.
4. Money for Bibles to be given to new converts. \$3 provides a Bible.
5. Continuing provision of desperately needed medicines and medical supplies.
4. Wisdom for pastors Gregori and Galina as their churches rapidly expand with new converts, cell groups, and churches being planted, and raising up new leadership for it all.
5. Wisdom for us in our partnership of love and service to these believers and churches.

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questions, rebuked them and encouraged them. This shared life together was the background for his words in John 13:34, 35: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, **EVEN AS I LOVED YOU, that you also love one another.**"

When He said "EVEN AS I LOVED YOU", these disciples knew what He meant, for they had experienced this love on a daily basis. And in this context Jesus imparted Himself to them. They were trained. He taught them to do the same.

In the last session of the pastor's conference, we had a time of ministry for each pastor. As each pastor stood in the circle, we worshipped God, brought the pastor's requests to Jesus, and asked for the Holy Spirit to come. It was the most unusual and powerful time of Holy Spirit outpouring that I had ever experienced! What a joy to see these brave soldiers refreshed and renewed in the Holy Spirit!

I continued the theme of leadership when I met with about seventy five cell group leaders from these churches. I emphasized in this meeting that as leaders, they need not be afraid of people's problems, nor worry about not knowing what to do, or always having the answers. I gave them the example of king Jehosaphat, who stood before the people in a day of great danger, and said, "Lord, we are powerless, and we don't know what to do, but our eyes on are **YOU**" (II Chron. 20)

This was good spiritual leadership on Jehosaphat's part. He didn't try to act wise or strong; he simply led the people to God. I said that the main lessons of good leadership are learned in being a good usher. An usher knows that people have not come to see or to hear him. He knows that his job is to show hospitality, lead them to a good seat where they are comfortable, make sure they can see clearly. So with spiritual leaders. Whether pastors, cell leaders, counselors, etc. -- we are all really ushers. The people who come for help are not really there to see and hear us. They have come to see and hear Jesus. Our task is to lead them to Jesus.

While pastoring, I often said to a person after he or she had just poured out a great problem to me: "I'm sorry to tell you that I cannot help you." After pausing, I would then say, "But I know Someone who can help you. Let's bring it all to Him, and see what He has to say about it." I then would usher them into the Word and then to the Throne of grace, where they would receive mercy, and find wisdom and help from God. That is just being a good usher.

#### **The Bible School...**

Pastor Gregori and I were able to have good and long conversations concerning the organization and planning of the Bible School for the coming year. (Most of you know that he looks to us for spiritual covering and advice.) A second year class is starting, and with new students there will no doubt be a full house. Perhaps overflowing, to the point of knocking down walls to enlarge classroom space.

Like last year, the Bible School continues to be a great faith adventure. Since there are few trained Bible teachers in these young congregations (even the pastors are just a few years old in the Lord) we are agreeing to provide half the teaching. This means, as last year, that we need to send teachers for at least two weeks of each month. Even more could be needed this year, with first and second year students now studying at the school.

*Will you pray that God will continue to provide anointed Bible teachers?* All who have been to Krivoy Rog hope to return, and others are being asked. It is good to see a growing circle of ministers and churches who are concerned for the Ukrainian church and share the common goal of helping them to succeed in spreading the gospel and planting new churches. God is pouring out His Spirit in this part of the world, and the harvest is great. They can reap more of that harvest than we could ever hope to do! In order to help them, we need your help in this tremendous challenge!

All this is happening in the midst of continuing poverty in Ukraine. Everyone works (it is a great shame not to work), and many work very hard for little or no pay. The legal minimum salary is less than \$10 per month. An average salary is no more than \$50 per month, but many have

not been paid their salary for months. Some students will have nothing to eat except what is served at the school. Pastor Gregori has committed to feed them the noon meal, and wants to serve a morning meal as well, since many of them come a long distance and have no food to eat in the morning. (It's not easy to learn on an empty stomach.) In addition, twenty some people work full time on the expansion of the church building. They are happy to work long hard hours just to be fed. (They get three meals a day.)

*This is a huge responsibility, feeding 120 or more people a day! It costs the church about \$1000 per month to do this, money they don't have.* (Church offerings are needed for many other needs.) They are not asking for help, but trusting God. We have not promised to provide this, but are trusting God that it would be provided, and are asking you to pray with us for this. If God leads you to help with this need, it would be wonderful. Somehow the money came through various friends of ours to provide this need all through last school year. It is an ongoing miracle! We thank you for praying and helping as you are able. We believe it is an excellent investment to help these students learn -- they have committed their lives to the spreading of the gospel.

#### **Children's ministry...**

The director of children's ministry came to visit me and to give a huge thanksgiving for the children's supplies which came to them this spring and summer. For the first time at the children's camps, the children could actually play! (Last year they had not one ball, not one game, no supplies whatsoever!) This year was amazing to them, and the craft and teaching supplies are enough to help them begin new children's ministries. *Thanks to all who helped with this.* The need is ongoing. Until this summer they had only one teaching manual for children. Sixteen teachers made their way to the church each week to hand copy the week's lesson!. A recent gift allows them to purchase more manuals.

#### **Medicines...**

As fall and winter approach, the need for medications increases. Most of you know that this is a dire need. We have been stocking a small pharmacy in the church, which is used not only for church members in need, but as a mercy ministry to help the poor of the community: hence a tool of evangelism. The shelves are almost empty. *We need to place an order for more antibiotics, vitamins for mothers and babies, etc.*

When anyone goes to a hospital, they must provide everything themselves -- surgical gloves, sutures, dressings, medications, needles and syringes -- everything! *Perhaps your doctor or clinic would like to help provide for these ongoing needs!*

#### **More Bibles needed...**

With so many being saved, the need for Bibles is continuous. \$3 will purchase a Bible. There is a possibility that a publishing ministry will provide Bibles for Krivoy Rog. *Pray that this door will open.*

#### **My last day...**

My last day in Krivoy Rog was a great pleasure: another water baptism. Just eight weeks ago 165 people were baptized. I thought this would be a small group, but it was 100 people! What a joy to address these new converts and bless them in their new life!

And then, with strong and mixed emotions, I waved good-bye to these friends at the train station and departed...till we meet again. (In two months, by God's grace. Jackie and I plan to return in November.)

#### **Thanks again...!!!**

Jackie and I thank you for continuing to pray for us, and for those who are able to support us financially, a big thanks. Your partnership makes such outreach possible, and it is also the source the Lord uses to meet our personal needs. We especially need help now. It is a privilege for us to serve the Lord with your help. We continue to trust God, and we find Him faithful! *"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our life. And we shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever."* That's our plan for old age and beyond. I hope it's yours as well.

With love,

**John and Jackie**

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*Remember: for tax purposes, write checks to "Scarlet Thread Ministries"*

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