



Lifeline

...a prayer letter from John and Jackie

June 28, 2000



Dear friends,

Jackie and I greet you once again in the Wonderful Name of Jesus! He is the reason for our life, our hope, our health, and our happiness! His kingdom, His purpose, and His gospel are worth fighting for. Life is a battle for everyone, but you can choose your war. We choose to fight the good fight of faith in Jesus! When we think of you, we remember that we aren't fighting it alone. We have friends beside us and "comrades in arms"! Thanks!

Fixing our eyes on Jesus...again

We are continually reminded that we must keep our eyes on Jesus alone. The world is so full of distractions these days that it is easy to be pulled in many directions at the same time.

The age of high tech communications in many ways is a great blessing. It is a great advantage for missionaries to be able to email their prayer partners and their headquarters and get instant responses from the other side of the world. There is also a downside to this rapid dissemination of information. The same networks that deliver good news deliver bad news. No other generation has had instant access to the news of every major tragedy and disaster happening around the world. Not many of us can handle all that information well. We go into "overload".

Most of us are now accessible by phone, mail, and computer to countless organizations who want our help. Who can handle the dozens of needs that we may hear about daily? What does your newspaper, your mailbox, your television, and your email bring to you each day? Too much to handle, we suspect. A large chunk of time is needed just to organize the information.

With so many things screaming for our attention, all of which may seem equally important, we may react in one of two ways. Either we occupy ourselves with the things that scream the loudest at us, or we become paralyzed with anxiety, shutting down on the inside to all that we hear, and do little or nothing worthwhile. But there is a third and better way. Take everything to the Lord and let Him sort it out!

Mary had the sense to sit at Jesus' feet and listen to Him. Martha was "distracted with all her preparations". We don't think this meant that Mary was lazy. She just had the sense to fix her attention on Jesus when He was in her house. Martha was so concerned about doing everything right that she almost missed this opportunity. Jesus had to correct her: "*Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted about many things. But few things are necessary, really only one, and Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.*"

No doubt Mary returned to her normal way of working hard just like her sister. But she probably worked with a clearer focus, more joy, and an inward stillness from having been with Jesus.

Fixing our eyes on Jesus will not make us inactive or withdrawn from the battle of life. Giving Him our attention will allow us to receive a fresh infusion of His grace and a clear instruction of His wisdom. Then our time and energy will count for the best. This may be the greatest challenge of a believer's life, to find that "good part" that Mary found -- at the feet of Jesus.

It is possible and necessary to live at the feet of Jesus. It is possible to sort out the conflicting voices of our soul and hear the consistent quiet voice of God. There is a price to pay for it, however. Mary had to resist the intimidation of her sister. Martha even tried to intimidate Jesus into asking Mary to help her! It is necessary to turn away from voices that seem "right", but which you cannot recognize as the voice of Jesus. His voice is consistent and His nature is unchanging. Only by "letting the peace of Christ rule in your heart" can you find the most important things God has for you. Anything else will pull you away from His highest plan.

I'm glad that God is not pouring over a thousand emails in heaven, too distracted to know what to do. I'm glad He's not in heaven looking at CNN and wondering how to respond to the latest trouble. He is way ahead of the news, working in secret, working with eternal purpose, weaving scarlet threads of redemption in the darkest places of this world...especially where His people are asking Him to do it!

"Lord, help us to sort out the priorities of our lives in Your presence, at your feet, in Your word. May our lives be invested in Your highest purpose. May our days count toward the destiny that you have foreordained for us in Jesus Christ."

The continuing Ukrainian connection...

Jackie and I want to thank you for supporting us in prayer and giving, not only during our mission trips, but also in our home town. The Lord continues to divide our time between other nations and Minnesota.

In letters from us written earlier this year we expressed a sense of change in our future. Quite honestly there are no indicators of what kind of change this might mean. So we have looked at everything we are doing with the question, "Lord, are you changing this involvement? Are You closing some doors and opening some others?"

As we made preparations for the Ukraine trip in May this question was before us. Was it time to close this chapter of our lives? Since January money for the feeding program of the church in Krivoy Rog has not come through as it had been. (Except for two faithful people who have supported the feeding of students monthly. Thank you!) The Lord had provided this for many months, through our ministry. Gifts for the children's camps and for medicines have also been very small. Looking at the big picture, we had to ask, "What are you saying to us, Lord? Are you shutting us down from helping the Ukrainians?"

When we got to Ukraine, it became quite clear that our time in Krivoy Rog is not finished. In fact, an even stronger involvement may be ahead of us. Pastor Gregori's vision keeps spreading; the next phase is to see seven new churches planted this year in strategic places, one of them in a much larger city some distance from Krivoy Rog. This will probably mean another Bible school starting there, and another circle of churches planted from this new "mother church" in that city. Many other large cities in Ukraine need similar efforts.

The Ukrainian Church has a destiny...

Our task always has been to support the vision of the Ukrainians, not to plant our own vision. We are servants to them. We encourage this same attitude in all the teams that go there. More churches, more cities, more Bible Schools....this means more ministers and churches serving as partners to these Ukrainian pioneers. This means we must enlarge our own vision of helping them and getting others to help them. Consider this: Ukraine was the "bread basket for the nations" before Communism. The Ukrainian church is destined to be the "spiritual bread basket" for the nations, even in the midst of her poverty.

We rejoice at all the Lord is doing in these people who are hungry for God, multiplying workers and leaders among them who are ready to go with the good news of Jesus. No better investment can there be than to work beside them, help them in any way possible, and cheer them on!

Filling empty tummies...

Our hearts continued to break with some of the physical and material needs we saw. The main "Church of Praise" tries to serve meals to two hundred people daily. Bible school students get a noon meal which for many is their ONLY food for the day. Gregori wants to serve them a breakfast as well. There are also twenty or more homeless people who live at the church. In exchange for them literally building the church, they get housing and food. In addition, there are other people who have no money for food who come and work on building the church. They are also fed. They can't feed everyone, but feeding these people bears eternal fruit! They can't feed them either without your help!

Feeding the spiritually hungry...

Gregori has expanded the building twice in two years and it is only a three year old building! More and more people are hungry not only for meat and potatoes but for the heavenly food – Jesus! One outreach ministry is an illustration of this: Alpha Bible courses for non-believers have exploded with nearly one hundred newly saved Alpha graduates joining the churches every three months! People are coming to Jesus in many other ways as well. We thank God for recent gifts that are supplying many Bibles for this year's expected harvest of souls!

Praise God for the power of the blood and name of Jesus!

As always many people come for prayer. There are deep spiritual needs expressed, and addictions of all kinds – alcohol, drugs – in families, and the obvious problems surrounding these issues, such as illegal activities, broken relationships and financial needs. We pray against diseases of all imaginable variety, and for many troubled and confused minds...

Moms and kids...

But the problems that are the hardest ones to handle are the ones involving mothers and children, such as malnutrition. There is a tremendous need for vitamins, especially prenatal and infant and children's vitamins. There are too many stories of moms and babies dying. Too many stories of children having only plain pasta to eat for months and their moms requesting vitamins.

Not a "welfare mentality"...the Word is most important!

Knowing how to help in situations like this is a serious matter. We do not want to build a "welfare mentality" in our relationship with the Ukrainian church. We want to see a strong church that can stand WITHOUT help from the west. From the beginning we have spent a lot of time and prayer, asking the Lord,

"How can we help the churches succeed and prosper as people of faith? How can we help them help themselves?"

Our first goal is to preach the Word or provide for it by getting Bibles and faith building literature so they can grow up strong in the Lord. The tremendously encouraging thing is that when truth is presented, they understand! They go out and "do the Word". We hear about many miracles of God's provision as the people trust God and watch Him supply. However, it takes time for people's understanding and faith to grow. So there is a great need for practical help. We cannot ignore the physical needs.

Supplying the medical dispensary...

We believe the Lord has directed us to provide a small dispensary of medicines for the church to give to those in need. We want to keep simple antibiotics, pain relievers, vitamins, and a few other basic medicines in this dispensary. Most things are dispensed on the recommendation of their doctors.

Need surgery in Ukraine? Bring everything with you!

A pregnant woman about to deliver must provide everything the doctor needs for the delivery: sutures, gloves, medicines, dressings, syringes, needles...everything! The same is true for people having surgery. People must bring to the hospital EVERYTHING needed for their surgery! We try to supply the dispensary with some of these things as well.

Let the little children come....

Another great concern is the Bible education of the children – the future of the church. Five or six teachers share one teaching manual. There are few aids for teaching and even less materials for crafts and prizes. In July there will be children's camps for more than three hundred (mostly unsaved.), three camps of two weeks each. There is NO equipment. There are NO crafts. Last summer's camps brought tremendous stories of good fruit. (They also do day camps for children in the villages, where the children go home at night.) They are exercising faith in putting on these camps, paying fees themselves and even arranging scholarships for children in need. But they need tools for the work!

Your opportunities to help...

We felt an inward nudge to present (or re-present) this vision and see what the Lord would do. Can and will you help with these needs? Can you help the Churches of Praise in Krivoy Rog help themselves?

Here are the immediate goals in these three areas of material need:

1. Feeding the hungry: Goal: \$1000 per month is needed to feed 200 each day. Monthly pledges would be wonderful!

2. Medicines and Vitamins: \$3000 is needed to resupply the dispensary. In addition, surgical supplies can be donated: needles, disposable syringes, and all kinds of bandages.

3. Children's Bible clubs and camps: \$2000 is needed for supplies and camp needs. In addition, sports equipment and craft supplies (NEW OR NEW CONDITION ONLY) can be donated. We can ship some in time if it is available really soon!

Thanks, Thanks, Thanks!!!

You are a great blessing to us, and if you are still reading, you must really care! (Long letter.) Thanks for praying, and thanks for your obedience to the Lord as He leads you in giving. May the Lord richly bless you in every way!

With love,

John and Jackie

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

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