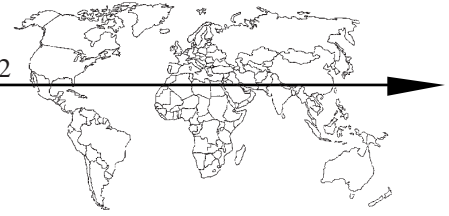




Lifeline

...a prayer letter from John and Jackie

February 25, 2002



Dear friends,

Jackie and I greet you once again in the wonderful name of Jesus! Having just arrived home from Ukraine, we are trying to write while things are fresh in our minds, but jet lag clouds the memory!

We came home together. Thanks for praying for wisdom on the issue of whether I (John) was to stay longer. A few days before departure from Ukraine, it was clear that we were to come home together.

The Bible College...

Teaching in the Bible College was a top priority. These students are the future leaders. On most weekdays, we taught the first year students for two hours in the mornings on the subject of Jesus Christ — who He is, where He is, His authority, and what He is doing today. One hour in the afternoon I taught the second year students the book of Ephesians: The last hour of the school day was with the third year students, on the subject of “How to endure in the ministry” I shared about tests every minister will face, such as “trusting God for finances”, “working with difficult people”, “getting past rejection and betrayal”, and “dealing with disappointment”.

Pastors' Conference...

We had a three day pastors' conference for all the pastors of the Churches of Praise, two days combined with the Bible College, and one day alone with pastors. I continued in this conference the theme of Jesus Christ, focusing on His High Priesthood and the blood covenant, and Christ's present ministry as the “Mediator of the Covenant” from the book of Hebrews. This all boils down to living according to the Word, having our minds renewed to think like God thinks.

Other meetings...

We also ministered in several daughter churches, and one evangelistic rally, where about one hundred people came for salvation. Jackie spoke in various settings, on repentance and salvation, being salt and light, freedom from fear, breaking bondages and getting beyond hurts.

Visiting the prison, almost...

I visited one of the prisons near Dnepropetrovsk where a strong “Church of Praise” now exists. Perhaps 350 men in size, it is one of the largest daughter churches! Well, it turned out I didn't really quite get there. I got to the gate, where the officials turned me away, after previously saying I could enter and preach. So, Gregori and his son went in with my digital camera. I told them to take pictures of everything. Photographs were not allowed either, but the officials ignored that rule. More than three hundred were at the meeting. Some had to work and missed the meeting.

Fifteen came for repentance, many for healing. They had a water baptism for sixty five new converts. It was glorious. (so I heard.) I do have many pictures of the event to prove it!. Hopefully we'll soon have a web site for you to see them.

The prison has seven separate compounds with a total of perhaps three thousand men. Believers are in all seven compounds. There are now seven prisoner/ministers leading the church, one in charge of each of the seven cells, with an average of fifty men in each cell.

Gregori and I had ongoing discussions on how to establish the Bible college in that prison. The prisoners are requesting this. Right now they are doing an Alpha course for the newest believers, with 123 in the course. Sasha, prison outreach director, is going every two weeks to teach that course.

My time waiting outside the walls of the prison was not wasted. The officials were very embarrassed about turning me down, and assigned one of the leading prison officials to take me to a tiny café and show me hospitality. Costa, my translator accompanied me. This became a two hour conversation about the Lord, during which this man gave his life to Jesus.

Back in Krivoy Rog...

Each Saturday morning Gregori has a school for new pastors. Seven are now being trained and in the process of opening new churches. Each one is being raised up under an older pastor, who accompanies them to the class. Among other things, they are assigned to preach in this class, and the others critique their preaching. Quite a challenge!

Every Saturday evening there is a meeting for Christian businessmen. Perhaps twenty packed pastor Gregori's office the evening we met with them. Most of them are entrepreneurs of new businesses, not a passive one in the bunch! It was a lively meeting, as they discussed the challenges of serving the Lord in a very corrupt business culture. In the past we have prayed that God would give the believers creativity to start new businesses, and we saw the answer!

As always, we saw many at the altars coming for repentance in church meetings. We heard testimonies of healings and miracles in the course of normal church life, including cancers disappearing and documented healings from Aids. There were also testimonies of family members coming to Christ and being set free from drugs and alcohol. (Krivoy Rog has had the worst drug and alcohol problem in the nation.)

Three former bandits are now in the Bible college, one of whom was known as a “father” in the local Mafia. One of those former bandits, Kolya, a second year Bible college student, has now opened a new church and is a pastor!

Though we want to tell you what God is doing, we also want you to understand that there are setbacks, and disappointments among these churches as well. Few things are easy! [p. But the work among these churches continues to grow strong, and we consider it a wonderful place to invest much of our lives, and a great place for anyone to sew seeds of time, love and finances!

Upgrading the hospitality for visiting teams...

It became clear on this trip that it was time to upgrade the apartment which is used to house the visiting teachers and teams. (except for us – Gregori and Galena insist we stay with them.) Not one of our friends have complained, mind you, and we know the Ukrainians have done their best with things donated by church members. However, we recently realized that the beds and furniture in the hospitality apartment are very sad. Some beds sag so badly that it's like being in a hammock, though a hammock would be more comfortable. One of our friends slept sitting in a chair because of it. We saw the chair and can't imagine it was any better.

The walls were dingy, the refrigerator didn't work, the kitchen table was very unstable, it's been downright dreary. There really was no place to sit, except on a bed. There was no place to study and no light for reading.

We send teachers every month for two weeks at a time. They pay their own way and leave an offering for their own food and transport! And then think of these accommodations! Everything – linen, floors, etc. were very clean, but nevertheless the beds looked covered with rags by our standards.

All this has been a great concern of ours and we haven't known how to address it without insulting our Ukrainian friends. Finally, somehow, the Lord gave us a way and we talked with them about what fine people of hospitality they are. And of all the people in the world they are among the best at doing so! We told them we would like to give them some tools to help them do better what they instinctively know how to do. I don't think they were offended and in fact seemed genuinely pleased.

We figured out a way to find some of the money to begin the process of redecorating the apartment and order some of the needed furniture and linens. Pastor Gregori repeatedly said, "Oh, yes, we have to get this ready for when Marcia comes!" (the next teacher to arrive.) New beds were delivered shortly before we left. Some linens and bedding have been purchased, paint and wallpaper purchased, and the men from the church rehab center started to redecorate the place.

A table and four stools were to arrive shortly after we left. We were able to find some gooseneck lamps to put beside each bed for reading lights. (Table and floor lamps are almost nonexistent there.) With considerable effort shopping the open markets, Jackie found enough new quilts, pillows, linens and material for curtains that would match and go together. It's amazing how a few inexpensive things can make a place look quite nice when the colors match! The ladies are sewing curtains while the place is being redecorated.

If you would like to honor those who give of their time and resources to go to Ukraine and minister, you can give a contribution to the "hospitality project". The total project — new beds, sheets, blankets, tables, lamps, a new sofa bed, two new comfortable chairs, a new refrigerator, and the redecorating, -- is nearly \$2000. It's a way we can say "thank you" to those going to minister and serve the revival in Ukraine.

We are so grateful for friends...

Thank you for your partnership with us in love, and prayer, and giving, and...for a few of you, thanks for going!

This ongoing mission would not work without other ministers and teams going, in addition to us. For each pastor, missionary, or team member who has gone, we are grateful! This missionary "traffic" continues. A friend, Ken Beaudry, from Elk River Minnesota is now in Krivoy Rog with his son Trevor, leading "Holy Spirit meetings" in the main church. It will be a great time of refreshing and refiring! Later, our missionary friends Steve and Marilyn Hill will be there, with a special burden for youth and youth conferences. Pastor Jeff Orluck and team will be going later in the spring. The summer will include other teams...and so on. This partnership of pastors and missionaries allows us to continue a long term vision with short term teams!

We ourselves plan to return to Krivoy Rog in mid April, with evangelist Mark Johnson, pastor Roger Sutch, and pastor Gordy Steck. It will be a time of more extensive training of the ministers and pastors, as well as doing several outreaches in the daughter churches.

Thank you!!!

As you know, there is always a story connected to God providing for our mission trips. We have no reserve account or store of wealth for these journeys. God does, however.

On the Sunday before we left town, a significant release of finances began, mostly from people in our home church handing us checks unexpectedly. A very large amount was still needed, however, and that gap was still there the day before our departure on Friday. By 4 p.m. Thursday I had to tell the travel agent what to do. We just kept packing, putting our faith in our feet and hands. On the inside, our faith was waning. Actually, I felt my faith was gone. Thursday morning was not a pretty sight. Our tempers flared, and we raised our voices at each other. We're glad you weren't in our bedroom that morning. We apologized and kept packing.

I had an afternoon meeting scheduled with a friend. Before parting at 3:30 p.m., he bid me farewell on our journey. I had to say that I wasn't sure we were going. Why, he asked? The funds haven't arrived, I said. How much do you need, he asked. I told him the large amount. "As you were speaking," he said, "the Lord told me to give you what you need." He wrote a check for the amount needed. Humbled but blessed, we got our tickets, finished packing, and left the next day in peace.

God is wonderful. So are his friends. So are our friends. Whether you just stand in faith with us, or are used by God to assist financially, a great big thanks!

We have no exciting stories about the travel itself. Getting there and back was uneventful. That is because of people praying for us.

We continue to carry you in our hearts, believing the Lord for blessing in your lives, and fruitfulness in your service for the Lord Jesus. May you experience the peace and joy of His presence every day!

With love,

John and Jackie

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

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