



Lifeline

...a prayer letter from John and Jackie



January 29, 2005

Dear friends,
Greetings from Ukraine!

I (John) arrived here on Monday, January 24. Well, actually I arrived in Krivoy Rog on Tuesday, delayed in Kiev by bad weather in Dnepropetrovsk, where my last flight was to land. I had to stay overnight in Kiev, and then fly to Dnepropetrovsk the following morning. From there it was two hours by car to Krivoy Rog.

Jackie has remained home in Minnesota manning the office as well as her other responsibilities. It is not clear if she will join me for this part of my travel. I plan to stay in Ukraine until March 1. Thank you for praying for her at home, for the Churches of Praise, as well as for me.

After catch-up time with pastor Gregory on Tuesday afternoon and evening, we began the monthly pastors' conference on Wednesday morning. Perhaps 250 were present. Gregory had received a vision giving him a theme for 2005 of, "Living in the Victory". With considerable effort I convinced him that he should preach first. (He always pushes me to the pulpit.) I continued this theme in the afternoon; then Gregory picked it up on Thursday morning, and I finished off on Thursday evening. Though preaching was scheduled Thursday afternoon, the Spirit came in such a way that we worshipped through much of the afternoon.

One testimony given during the conference describes one reason why we keep coming here. Vadim is a church planter who is opening churches in the Poltava region. He described what happened to him recently on the first day that he and his team entered a village. They went through the village during the day inviting people to come to a meeting, testifying to the healing power of Jesus. That evening, eight unbelievers showed up at the meeting place, bringing a blind woman. The eight ended up the entire congregation. They arrived saying, "You promised healing, so we brought her." Vadim noticed the look in some of their eyes, cold and suspicious, as if they were saying, "OK, now prove it."

After preaching, he knew he had to do something. The blind woman was sitting right in front of him. He had to pray for her. He felt the stare of all 16 eyes on him, and he told us that he felt very afraid. He put his hands on her and prayed for her, and immediately she received her sight! All eight people present, plus the woman herself, repented and gave their lives to Christ!

The team had arrived by car in that village earlier in the day. The car had become stuck in a big hole outside the meeting

place. Even with all of them pushing and shoving, they had not been able to get it out.

After the meeting, they went outside to find the car sitting on the side of the road, a short distance from where it had been. It was out of the hole and ready to go. Who had moved it, they wondered? They discovered that there were no tire tracks in the snow, no trail of the wheels from the hole where the car had been stuck. It looked as if it had been lifted up in the air and put down in another place!

The harvest continues here, and new churches continue to open in unreached towns and villages. Yesterday we met with several teams of planters who were asking for permission to open more churches. That has been the problem: not getting people to go, but sometimes needing to slow them down. We had sent out one of these teams just last November when I was here. In two months, they had opened churches in ten villages. The leader was now requesting to turn these churches over to his assistant, so that he could move to another district to begin evangelizing yet another group of villages.

I observed as Gregory interviewed him about each village, and about his relationship with his team and his assistant who would take over the ten villages. Was the assistant ready to take such responsibility? Had he proved himself able to develop the work in these new churches? How would he continue to oversee the work of this younger minister? And so on went the interrogation. Gregory then had this planter role play with another church planter in the room, telling him to interview the other planter about his young churches. Discover the problems, he said, and advise this man how to correct the problems. Both men were trembling as they went through this grilling under the eyes of Gregory their spiritual father. I was doing my part, listening and learning and being encouraged by the care given to this process.

During the next four weeks, I will split my time between classroom teaching and traveling to other regions of the country where there are young Churches of Praise. In various places, Gregory and I will meet with teams of young pastors and leaders to encourage them and to hear how they are doing.

The Bible College this year has 30 first and second year students. Several others are in the third year program which is not in the classroom, but in practical ministry. The new session of the Mission College began yesterday. Unlike the Bible College which is a three year program, the Mission College is an inten-

sive three-month training for village church planting. Thirty-five of the new students were sent from village churches by the church planters working in their areas. Five of these are new Muslim converts from the southernmost part of Ukraine called Crimea. The other ten students are from the rehab center at the main church. This Mission College is the biggest class so far. We were all surprised yesterday by their serious attitude and enthusiasm. Though mostly very young Christians, they seem ripe and ready for ministry.

I look forward to my time in both of these colleges. What a privilege to lay the blood covenant foundations of salvation in Christ in the hearts of hungry and dedicated people! They will take everything given to them and go out and do it, and pass it on to others!

A note about the rehab center: As you know, the rehab center at the main church is for men and women whose lives were broken by drugs, alcohol and crime: During 2004, 30 of these men and women graduated from rehab into ministry and church planting!

A note about our translators: our former translators have all moved on to other things after serving for 4-5 years. Several younger ladies in the church have just now stepped into the harness of translating. Anya, Gregory's daughter, and two others - Paulina and Lera - are working with me. They are a blessing, and doing very well, though a little scared!

Thursday and Friday I had a true Ukrainian experience. I married the same couple twice. Once on Thursday, and again on Friday. That couple is planting churches in Muslim Crimea. They wanted me to marry them during the pastors' conference — or at least that is what Gregory thought they wanted. So I did...preaching, vows, prayer, and pronouncing them husband and wife.

Friday, as we met with church planters in Gregory's office, in came one of the wedding party asking us to please come now and do the wedding! What? We already did that! No, she said. That wasn't the wedding, that was just a blessing! Today is the wedding! No, Gregory said. Bring in the bride and the groom! I'm sure they don't see it that way! In came the bride and groom in their beautiful wedding clothes. Yes, they said, please come right now, Gregory and John, and do our wedding! Everyone is waiting! Oh, Jesus, help us! said Gregory. Oh, John, help us! said Gregory. Go and marry them again, will you? Of course... I went and did it again.

Do you think if you marry someone twice, the marriage is stronger? I hope so. At the end of the ceremony, I forgot the rings. My translator Lera whispered in my ear, the rings, the rings, the rings...!

If I forgot the rings, I may have had to marry them three times...

Thank you!

As always, Jackie and I remain deeply grateful for your friendship, prayer and God-inspired giving. You are our senders, and you share in the fruit that we report to you from our wonderful friends here in Ukraine.

Please agree with us for new funds to be given for the church planting. Last year, two very, very large gifts gave us a reserve to keep monthly giving at a high level. That reserve is gone. The present church planting need is more than \$10,000 each month, including the work in Central Asia. Will you share your faith with us in agreement for His provision?

In addition, we are trusting for extra funds for Jackie's travel when she is ready, and also for further international travel for me in this part of the world. The following is still in the prayer stage, but here is what is in my heart: I would like to go to Armenia after finishing here in Ukraine, to visit the Churches of Praise there. I have never visited these churches, though we support the work there. I then want to go to Belgrade, Yugoslavia in mid March to the Eastern European ministers' conference of AFCM led by Jim Kaseman, and take Gregory with me. After that, I hope to go to Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Are these wishes from the Lord? If so, abundance will come!

After these travel plans and after some time back home, we will return to Ukraine in June for the annual Congress of the Churches of Praise.

It is all by God's abundant grace, and the help and prayer of the saints!

May God bless you and your family richly, and remember to keep yourself in the love of God!

With love,

John in Ukraine and Jackie in Minnesota