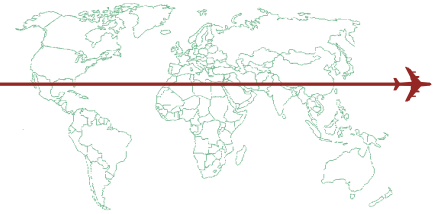




Lifeline

...a prayer letter from John and Jackie



November, 2006

Dear friends,

We greet you once again in the wonderful name of Jesus! I, John, wrote most of this from Krivoy Rog, Ukraine, while Jackie was in Minnesota.

One of my greatest joys...

I have just experienced my highest honor -- teaching the Blood Covenant to young believers. I spent several days teaching the comined Mission College and regular Bible College. They are serious and hungry for God. As the light dawns in their hearts what Christ has done for them, who they are in Christ, and who Christ is in them, their faces lighten up and I feel their enthusiasm for the gospel rise in the classroom.

The gospel of Jesus Christ -- who He is, what He has done, and what has been provided for us in Him -- this is the foundation for faith. Without it laid solidly in our heart and the mind, religion creeps in, and we Christians can become miserable, anxious and uncomfortable in our faith.

It is often said that Christians need to get out of their "comfort zone". Though this might be true in terms of getting out into the world to help people in trouble, it is NOT true if we are referring to the inward condition of a believer.

In this case, the big need is for Christians to get "INTO their comfort zone". The comfort zone is where the "Comforter is"! The comfort zone is having complete confidence in the goodness and faithfulness of God. Being in the comfort zone is knowing the comfort of His presence, His promises, and the assurance He is taking complete care of us! We need to get in there, not get out of there!

Only the real foundation in Christ will enable these new ministers to go out into the darkness and overcome through any and every circumstance. This is the job God called Jackie and me to do: to help young ministers to stand firm, and know how to never give up. For this reason, we keep teaching the only good news God has given -- the solid rock of Christ and the comfort zone of His great faithfulness and great promises!

Fresh rain from heaven...

During the last few months, the mood of the leadership of Churches of Praise has been somewhat discouraged, and many felt that their spiritual fire had gone out. They had seemed very tired when we were with them in the sum-

mer. Most conversation was about problems and obstacles. Even Gregory and I felt this way.

How can I describe what has happened since the first day I arrived here? It is like the tide turned, or the sun came out, or the rain came after a dry season, or new fire and passion came in....on almost everyone.

This was very noticeable in our senior leaders' conference, with perhaps fifty in attendance. These are the heads (plus spouses and a few assistants) of the church planting teams in the sixteen oblasts of Ukraine where there are Churches of Praise.



Some of the Bible College and Mission College students who are studying this year.

Everyone was giving testimonies of what God was doing, instead of talking about big problems. I can't really say that the circumstances have changed so much in the churches: the problems are there, and the work is still not easy, and great needs are still there. But, somehow, somehow, God infected many people with new grace, new hope, and new vision.

It was as God said he would do in Ezekiel 34:26, when He would take over as the true shepherd of his people: "THERE SHALL BE SHOWERS OF BLESSING!"

I experienced this in every situation I have been in since I arrived, not only in the leaders' conference, but also in classes, in small meetings with

leaders, and even in my personal discussions with Gregory. It has been like new light cracking through the window.

In the senior leaders' conference, it was like new fire coming out of peoples' mouths, as they testified what God was doing. One man who was brought by a senior leader was a recently saved old man, the chairman of a village. He is now assisting in the evangelism of his village. He stood to testify and at first sounded like an old communist leader shouting to his whole town. But his shouting was full of honor to Jesus and full of the urgency to bring the gospel to lost people. It was reported that he was using his authority to compel and almost demand his village to get saved! We all laughed with excitement as this rough old man exploded with praise to Jesus!!

When Anya, Dean of the Mission College rose to testify, she was near tears. She lives for three months with each new class of students from the villages. They are mostly rough new Christians that have to be rapidly transformed into ministers. Three times a year, she cares for a new class of eighteen to thirty people. (With the help of those who teach their classes) She teaches them to stay clean (physically and morally), to pray, to love each other, to worship, to witness, and to be disciplined. She eats with them, sleeps with them, prays with them, and suffers with them. Sometimes she has to be like an army sergeant, but she becomes their spiritual mama, and they love her.

She broke down and cried as she expressed her love for these people who have all become her children. 160 of them have graduated and most are out ministering in the villages. We all felt her tears, and I felt shocked at the glory of God displayed in her and her "children".

The strong main church...

A freshness of God was also very noticeable in the meetings at the main church. Last Sunday, we ordained sixty ministers. I mean sixty leaders of ministries in the main church. In addition to three ladies who were set in as pastors, these were various heads of ministries, such as counseling, worship, schools, rehab, cell groups, etc. All were ordained with the same spiritual authority as the pastors. These are the true ministers and leaders in the body of Christ, and they needed the recognition, the anointing, the blessing, and the authority that goes with the ministry.

What a wonderful group of people they are! Many are former alcoholics, drug addicts, and even criminals. Now they are the saints of God, and are acting like saints. Pastor Gregory told me how greatly he loves his church, and loves to work with all of them, because they are such

The Lord sent "showers of blessing" into our senior leaders conference... (Ezekiel 34:26)

...It was a "time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord!" (Acts 3:23)



wonderful people. I see that too. Almost all of the 1200 people now in the main church have been saved since we started here. Many others are now gone of course, out working with the new churches. These people are the living proof of the power of the gospel!

It was like fresh rain falling as we prayed for the sixty ministers. It was like even more rain coming as we released them to pray for the hundreds of people who came to the altar following the ordination.

Fifteen people came to the altar to repent and be saved. Even those people -- dressed poorly and looking like they had come out of a war -- even they seemed to receive their salvation with unusual eagerness. Though we have had the honor of leading hundreds of people into salvation at altars here, for some reason I felt the fresh rain as I led these fifteen souls to Christ.

God said he would do things like this: the apostle Peter put it this way in Acts 3:19: "*Repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that TIMES OF REFRESHING MAY COME FROM THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD...*"

Take some of this right now for yourself. May the Lord send the fresh rain of His grace, His hope, His peace, and His love into your soul. May you have "a season of refreshing from the presence of the Lord."

Revival in the smallest of new churches...

One church planter gave this testimony, illustrating the work in the villages. He reported how he had been going to a village week after week, month after month, and was serving the tiniest church possible: three ladies. Having wit-



Pastor Dennis, Senior leader and church planter who in three years has planted and now oversees thirty one Churches of Praise, working with the team of pastors and leaders he has trained.

nessed to many in the village, only these three had repented and were meeting as a church. They prayed and prayed and prayed week after week. The church planter prayed and prayed and prayed, as he walked and walked and walked to this village. He said he kept doing it out of faithfulness, having lost the feeling of passion or fire. Then, just a few days ago, he arrived at the meeting house in the village, and the room was full of people. All three husbands of the three ladies had come to get saved as well as several other people. In a day the church had grown over 300% to ten excited people! We all got really excited too, as the church planter reported this with fresh fire in his eyes and his voice!

"Tell the Ukrainians to send us their sons..."

Pastor Clava, one of the senior leaders (grandmother/pastor/church planter and general heroine) had a vision during our senior leaders' conference. She saw a young lady dressed in Asian clothes behind a wall, kneeling and praying. The lady in the vision cried out to the Lord, "Please tell the Ukrainians to send us their sons!" It overwhelmed her as well as many of the other senior leaders in the room.

I received this vision from the Lord as evidence that He indeed was calling Churches of Praise to press into the unevangelized countries to the east.

Pastor Vasili's sorrow...

Pastor Vasili, one of the older pastors with several children and grandchildren, just lost his wife in a

traffic accident. A fast moving car hit the passenger side and killed her, while Vasili was uninjured in the drivers seat. Two of his children think it was his fault and told him he killed their mother, though the evidence points to the fault of the other driver. So, Vasili has double grief. Please pray for him and his family.

Two elderly prayer warriors also injured...

Walking home from prayer, two sisters in their sixties (natural and spiritual sisters) were hit from behind by a car, causing them both to fly through the air. Broken feet, broken hips, broken lower backs... Agree with us for their full recovery.

A third car accident turns to extra blessing...

Pastor Ivan was Gregory and Galina's spiritual father since childhood. Now in his eighties, he has still been planting churches. Three years ago, he wanted to go to heaven, feeling his work was done. Gregory urged him to go to the villages instead of going to heaven. So he did, and opened five more churches.

We got a call that he and his wife were in a car wreck. The message was that it was bad. We went to pray for them in their village, the village where Gregory grew up. We expected to find them injured, but no, they were OK and outside working. It was mostly bad for their old car, I guess. Actually, we didn't pray for them at all. Instead, pastor Ivan laid one hand on Gregory and the other hand on me, and prayed that we would open many more churches than he ever did. It was an honor to receive the blessing of Gregory's spiritual father, who through continuous communist resistance had evangelized and built churches all his life!

Children's Christmas in Krivoy Rog

January 7 is Christmas day in Ukraine. At that time, Churches of Praise will invite children of the city who are orphans, who live on the streets, or are the problem children in the schools. Probably 2000 children will fill the two main churches.

Would you like to help provide this celebration and gifts for the children? \$5 per child will insure that this will happen. Would you like to provide Christmas for one, two, twenty or more of these children?

Church buildings...

There are now perhaps 30 buildings among Churches of Praise. Twelve of them are in Krivoy Rog. The main church, becoming more of a campus, and Galina's church, are the largest. The next largest, led by pastor Uri, is new construction that can seat 500. Many of the others are a first step: buy a house and renovate it. The typical Ukrainian village style house is 20 ft square. Gutting it into one room makes a

Pastor Oxana and her Church of Praise on the north end of Krivoy Rog. This was our first church, planted in 1993. She and her church have planted fifteen other churches.



cozy meeting place for perhaps seventy five people. These buildings are normally referred to as "prayer houses". Dozens more are now needed!



Pastor Marina's Church of Praise purchased and renovated their "prayer house".

Armenia

As you may remember, I was in Armenia for 12 days before coming to Krivoy Rog in Ukraine.

Churches of Praise have about 15 locations in Armenia, started since 2002. Though the work is small there now, I think it is a good beginning for a lot to happen in that country. Like seeds scattered in a field, this ministry will grow.

There is no country like Armenia. It's Christian tradition dates back to 300 AD, when "Gregory the Illuminator" brought the gospel there. The king soon threw him into a deep pit, where he lived for eighteen years, fed by a mysterious woman each day who appeared with bread and water. (Probably an angel.) Then the king repented, and a movement of the Spirit swept Armenia. It has remained a culturally Christian nation ever since. Surrounded by Islam, the land has gone through great suffering, the worst being in 1915 when the Turkish government slaughtered more than one million Armenians. annexed more than half of their country, and drove out more than another two million who had to flee as refugees to other nations. The Turkish government reasoned that the rest of the world would turn their back due to WWI. They were right. It is the forgotten holocaust.

Though culturally Christian, Armenia is spiritually a very dark land. The official Apostolic Church controls and resists all evangelism and mission work outside of itself. There are more laws against new churches there than in some Muslim countries.

Of course, everyone there thinks they are Christian, even though they have no relationship to Jesus. They fit the words of Jesus, when he said of the religion of His day, "If the light that is in you be darkness, how great is that darkness."

But God is moving in Armenia. There are some new churches, and people are coming to Christ. One new Church of Praise has led one hundred to Christ in the last six months, fifty of whom are now members, which started from zero last spring. I had the privilege of teaching them.

After I read them Isaiah 53, "He was wounded for our transgressions...", I asked how many of them had heard that verse before. Only three of the thirty-five present had heard that verse. **Then I realized none of them had Bibles.**

Perhaps two hundred and forty believers are in the fifteen Churches of Praise in Armenia. Two hundred of them (mostly in poor villages) do not yet have Bibles. One Armenian Bible is ten US dollars, a formidable price in a very poor country. *Would you provide some Bibles for Armenia?*

Please pray for Armenia: More Armenians live in other countries than in Armenia -- especially in the USA. With deep poverty, most people depend on money sent by their relatives in other nations in order to survive.

The interesting connection of Armenia for missions is in Iran, on Armenia's southern border. Thousands of Armenians live in Iran, because of a war several hundred years ago. They kept their Christian culture in Iran. In Iran, if you are ethnically Armenian, it is legal to be Christian.

This means a bridge of opportunity for Iran. Many people in Armenia were actually born and raised in Iran. God is using this connection for his purposes. We are involved in the beginning of mission into Iran, and ask you to pray for this. It is a very serious commitment for the Iranian/Armenian family who is at the leading edge of this plan. Pray for the wisdom and provision of God.

As we wrote before, this plan may include people coming from Iran to Armenia for Bible training. Though there are obstacles in the way right now, we believe God will open this door.

Afghanistan...

Meanwhile, we also have another door opening through a Tajik family now living in Afghanistan doing evangelism, and ready to open churches. I am planning to go to Afghanistan with Gregory later in the winter. Thanks for agreeing with us for a movement of God in Afghanistan.

There is so much to write, but this letter is more than enough for now! More later...

Thank you for your prayer and support of this ministry. We appreciate your friendship very, very much. May you stay in the joy and peace of God during this holiday season!

With love,
John and Jackie