



...a prayer letter from John and Jackie



March 25, 2010

Dear friends,
Greetings again in the name of Jesus!

Home again...

I arrived back from Ukraine a few days ago, and we want to thank you for praying and supporting us for the sake of the gospel.

For me, this trip was very significant, in that I gave the time totally to the primary assignment that God gave us when we first went to Ukraine, to impart the foundations of Christ into the lives of believers and leaders.

I taught the school of the blood covenant in ten different places. In some places, it was many hours of teaching, in other places I had only a short time.

One of my favorite memories was a bus layover in Kirovograd, a major college and university city where a church planting team has been working for a year. It was on the bus route from Smila back to Krivoy Rog, and time only allowed me to be with this team for three hours between buses.

We met in a cultural center, in a small back room that was actually quite beautiful, with long draping curtains on all four walls, and a ceiling covered with golden leaves. I sat at a long table with the twelve of them. It came to me that it was easy to imagine this setting as the room where Jesus and his disciples had the last supper and instituted communion. It also was when he washed their feet and had the lengthy discussion with them as recorded in John 13-16.

It was where and when he gave them his commandment: Love one another, as I have loved you.

So we imagined ourselves being the disciples with Jesus at that table and had a very precious and meaningful time painting the picture in our imagination of that first communion and encouraging these modern disciples to love one another just as Jesus loves them.

It was an unforgettable time for me, not knowing if I would ever get another chance to be with them, and hoping to leave an indelible impression on them of how to live and work together in the presence of the Lord.

Another favorite setting was a three night school of the blood covenant in Dnepropetrovsk. This was held in an upper room of a nondescript building overlooking a (how shall I say it?) "courtyard" of old trucks and vehicles enclosed by various old garages and storage buildings. After walking up the old stairway we came into a room perhaps 20 feet square, filled with forty ancient theatre type seats. There was only a small space in front of the seats, room for a podium, a keyboard and large loudspeakers on poles in either corner. (Were they really needed?). As I sat in the front row during worship, my feet almost touched the feet of the keyboard player facing the people. It was very cold in the room.

By the time we started, the room was packed out, and warmed up nicely from the heat of our bodies. We met for four hours each evening.

I taught the Blood Covenant from Genesis to Revelation, and it flowed like a river, pulled from me by the hunger of the people.

The leading Church of Praise pastor in this area told me he never had time to lay these foundations. (After five years.) This was no surprise to me: it is that way almost everywhere. I call it the gospel that is believed but not preached to the church. Pastors around the world rarely teach these foundations.

The people were from several small Churches of Praise in the area, some of them young leaders and ministers, some of them elderly, and a few children.

By the time we ate and drank the communion together on the third night, they were excited about Jesus, and I felt part of this family.

One unsaved man was brought to the school by his ex-wife. He gave his life to Christ during the school. Since he was an alcoholic, we brought him back with us to Krivoy Rog, where he entered the main Church of Praise rehab center. By God's grace, he will come out of there another evangelist or church planter.

The graduation of pastor Ivan 1925 - 2010

On Friday, February 26, pastor Ivan went to heaven. Pastor Ivan was Gregory's spiritual father. Gregory and Galina grew up in his church, serving faithfully there since they were small children.

Pastor Ivan also served the Lord since he was a boy. He entered the ministry as a young teenager, establishing and pastoring churches during all of his seventy years of ministry.

When we first came to Ukraine in 1993, Gregory was the pastor of this same Pentecostal church in which they had grown up. However, they had been touched by God in a fresh way by the new movement of the Holy Spirit.

By the 1990's, the Pentecostal churches of Ukraine had become entrenched in tradition. The Pentecostal movement in Ukraine had started powerfully, straight from the Asusa street revival in the USA in the early 20th Century. Gregory and Galina's parents had experienced that movement under communist rule. But it faded into legalism.

Gregory and Galina knew they had to start planting churches outside the present denominations. That is when we arrived.

Unfortunately, soon after we were there and helped them open their first Church of Praise, dear old pastor Ivan, their spiritual father, evicted them from his church that they were still leading. Too much dancing...too much smiling....too much lifting hands....

A few years later, after we had about thirty five Churches of Praise, Pastor and Ivan and Gregory reconciled. I remember the pastors' conference where they did this publicly and Ivan presented a village church building to Gregory. He said, "I can't believe I'm giving this building to a bunch of dancers and whistlers!"

Hmm...I had seen some dancing; I can't verify the whistling.

Soon, the Pentecostal denomination evicted pastor Ivan for being friends with Gregory, and cut off his pension. Gregory paid Ivan's pension until recently, when his government pension was restored.

When Ivan's wife went to heaven, Ivan thought he was done, and wanted to die too. Gregory finally convinced him to go to the villages again, and open some new churches. Eighty-year old Ivan established five more churches. ...married another wife too.

Pastor Ivan was a faithful minister through decades of communism at its worst in Ukraine. During that time, many pastors were sent to Siberia, killed, or just disappeared. Ivan served faithfully, and not in secret. He is surely a hero of the faith.

I was privileged to know him, and have him pray over me many times. I miss him.

Gregory's wife Galina...

When I first arrived in Krivoy Rog in February 2010, Galina became suddenly ill. After an ambulance ride, it was finally determined that she had a stroke.

She was hospitalized for two weeks, and is now home, though not yet returned to preaching at her church of 500 people. However, she was working with her church by cell phone after a couple of days in the hospital, and she preached and prayed for everyone around her all the time.

She suffered no paralysis, and has the use of all her body, but needs to regain strength. She continues to get better, and plans to preach on Easter Sunday. Agree with us for 100% recovery of her strength.

An open door to government officials...

During the last several months, Gregory has received several calls from the national president's office to come to Kiev and meet with government officials. The meetings have been with twenty leaders of the largest fellowships of churches in the country. The occasions have been cordial and informal, with heart to heart discussions between the pastors and men who serve in the office of the president of the country.

You may know that Ukraine now has a new president, Mr Yanakovich. By reputation he leans to Moscow and does not show favor to the church.

Gregory and the other leaders have been in personal conversations with president Yanakovich's close aides since before the January election.

Gregory has recently been asked, along with a few other church leaders in Ukraine, to serve as an advisor to a leader in the parliament who is also the assistant to the prime minister.

Please agree with us that Gregory will have wisdom concerning these open doors to speak to government leaders.

In addition, Gregory is hosting these same church leaders in Krivoy Rog March 30-31. He hopes to influence them to have a chief purpose of working together to plant more churches in Ukraine. Pray for this unusual event, that God would further His purpose of expanding His kingdom in Ukraine!

Another big thank you...

Our appreciation for your prayer and support is much deeper than any words we can say. Your partnership with us enables us to serve God's harvest among the nations!

With love,
John and Jackie

p.s. Pray for May plans, now in the making, for travel to Armenia and other parts of Ukraine.