

Update 7, written April 24, 2106

**Whew...since I last wrote you on March 8th, a bunch of stuff has happened.** I traveled within Ukraine for 10 days. Was sick for about 10 days. Traveled to outside of Ukraine for 5 days. And then jumped right back into ministry here. Let me catch you up!

**Making the rounds....**I traveled south by train to visit the 2 church clinics I work with. It had been 10 months since I had seen them so I was looking forward to seeing them. In Berdansk, where my teammates Jonathan & Heather Powell live with their two daughters, I had fun spending several hours with them. Most of my time, however, was spent with my national colleague Era. I proudly point to Era as the best example of a medical evangelist that I know of in all Ukraine. She is also an excellent wound care and ostomy nurse. But while she had my brain to pick, together we saw several of her tougher patients and reviewed how various dressings work. She had also prepared a 2 hour mini seminar for 40+ ostomy patients. I was surprised and pleased at the turn out and listened as their pastor spoke on suffering. It's so true that it is often only when times are really tough that we turn to God and how in God's hand suffering can turn our hearts to Him and become a time of blessing. After Pastor Sergi, I shared my testimony and Era closed with some encouraging words. Then over the next 2 days, for those ostomy patients who wanted it, we did individual consultations.

I have another story to share as well - from Era's husband. About a year ago, God laid on Greesha's heart to reach out to the soldiers fighting for Ukraine. Berdansk is located about an hour from the edge of the war zone. Being this close obviously the effects of the war were felt more intensely. When I visited, for example, last June all the soldiers, police stops and small field tent outpost cities rattled me. Now with the front line pushed back, fighting happening in smaller areas and the war having moved into more of a chronic situation, the tension has eased. Yet, the draft is still in place and soldiers are still out there.

Greesha started by just bringing fresh baked bread to the various places where the soldiers were. When he was able, he brought sausage and even cookies. As he slowly got to know them, he found out that they were not only physically hungry, but also spiritually. He began to ask about their needs. Unlike other countries, the soldiers here have to provide for themselves, especially if they volunteered. During the Christmas holidays, he felt compelled to share about the needs with a pastor in Western Ukraine. Unbeknownst to Greesha, this pastor has just received a large shipment of humanitarian aid. That church quickly sent it to Greesha and he had the joy of being able to give out to several posts, socks, soap, sweaters, gloves and food! Again and again he was met by thankful and puzzled expressions from the soldiers. "Why are you doing this?" Greesha would begin his response by saying, "God loves you and through His church He is providing for your needs!"

Over time Greesha got acquainted with captains chaplains and field doctors. Always up front with them, he would explain, "I don't have anything but God has everything. Tell me what you need." And, here is the story he made me promise that I would tell you - "The field doctors are the first to receive the wounded and they have nothing to work with. They told me of their need for the most basic things - gauze, tape, gloves, splints and braces. I called Era back at home and told her of their needs. At her first possibility, she went to the church, down to the basement where the medical supplies are kept, and started gathering what she had extra of. As she was looking, she pushed aside a box and noticed another one behind it. It had the word 'braces' on it. She pulled it out, and found 2 more behind it! [Believe me this was not a case of disorganization or forgetfulness! This was a case of God providing, preserving and

then revealing.]

After unpacking them, Era remembered how these braces had arrived over a period of a year and how, with not that volume of need, she had tucked them out of the way. She called Greesha to share the joy of her discovery of God's provision. Not but a day or two later, Greesah delivered the braces along with all the rest and left the request that the doctor call him to confirm he had received them. Almost a week went by with no word. Greesha called the doctor, concerned that the supplies he had left had been stolen. To his great relief the doctor returned his call. "I received your boxes the day you left with for us. Forgive me for not calling sooner. We have been very busy. But I want to thank you! The quality and types of braces you gave us I have only seen in catalogs! And you gave so many! And, thank you for all the dressing supplies! 90% of what you gave us is already being used. How is it that you have all this?" Greesha replied, 'I have nothing but God has everything. Praise God! God, through His church has provided for your needs!"

For me that was an amazing story to hear. Along with Greesha, I also want to say thank you. You see the medical supplies that Era has in the basement comes from my professional colleagues & hospitals in Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Montana. Somehow I wanted to show you that all you give really does get to Ukraine. It really does reach the people, it's given for free and is given with the Gospel. For all who have gathered & gave, for those who supplied funds to ship and to those who have helped my Mom sort & pack. Thank you!

"When you reckon things up, bring God in as the greatest factor in your calculations."

Oswald Chambers

**A big surprise...little Katya....**My visit to Zaparoshja was shorter, just 3 days. But on day number two I was told that a little girl was coming in and would I see her? Of course! About 6 in the evening I was told she had arrived so I left my paper work and walked into the room next door. Big eyes, curls and a somewhat worried expression looked up at me. Some 4 hours later I was snuggled in bed but knew sleep would be slow to come The joy of it all! What a gift we had each been given! God's amazing ways!

Lena is in her mid-30's, single and a history teacher in the local school. She loves her job and her students are all her kids. Lena is also a Christian and last Christmas she joined a group from her church who went to visit the local children's hospital. During that outreach Lena came upon a very sick 1 year old laying in her crib in the corner of the room. From the nurses she found out that little Katya had been abandoned by her birth mother and that Katya had been born with many problems. Due to their duties, the nurse could hardly spend any time with her and yet had fallen in love with this forsaken one. As Lena and Katya's eyes met, "Somehow I knew that I was to be her mother. From that day on, over the next year, I began working on the adoption process and basically lived at the hospital."

During this time, Lena met Vita. Vita is the oldest daughter of Zoya and along with several others from their church visit this same hospital. [Zoya heads up the ministry and we have been working together for over 10 years.] Finally, this past January, the adoption went through and Katya now lives with Lena and her her parents. At 3 1/2 years old, she has already had 8 surgeries and more await. As I took her history something clicked inside and I understood that I was looking at myself. Meaning little Katya has my diagnosis - VATER (VACTERAL) Syndrome. An acronym of birth defects and if you have 3 or more of them then bingo....you win. Perhaps it sounds weird but for me it was such a gift to see another like myself. Such an

honor to be able to help another like myself. Such a joy to tell Lena that 'Look, Katya and I share the same...this is hard but not impossible...I am here for you....you are doing great job and Katya has hope!'

In the basement of their clinic God preformed the same providing, preserving and then revealing miracle as He did in Berdansk as I uncovered several months worth of ostomy supplies that were just perfect for this little tummy. Later I sent more from Kiev and Era sent more from Berdansk...so they are well supplied for some time now. Yes, little Katya still has some big hurdles in front of her but God has already provided much including a loving family. His hand is on her life. My job will be to hold them in prayer and provide ostomy supplies - which will be my pleasure to do.

**Yuck** - Shortly after I returned from my trip I gave myself food poisoning by eating bad mayonnaise. With all the 'fun' stuff that comes with that I got dehydrated. And, because of being dehydrated, I got a kidney infection. It was a rough 10 days. During this time I heard that my parent's dog, whom I loved very much, died. And, I got word that my Dad had been badly injured. While trying to take down a tree, it fell on him. All but 4 ribs were fractured, his shoulder blade was fractured and some part of his collar bone was broken. He could have been killed or had severe spinal damage but God spared him from both. As it was he spent 3 days in the hospital. He is recovering at home now but in much pain; crushed muscles and nerves don't quickly heal. In many ways, recovery...any kind of recovery is harder than the event that happened. It is just a whole lot of plain hard work. It takes grit, guts and discipline. And, done with God, it changes you for the better inside. Dad and Mom have a difficult road in front of them and I would appreciate your prayers.

"We jump at the alarm of a Seiko but sleep through the call of the Almighty."

Richard A. Swenson M.D

**Community Health Evangelism in Urban Europe** - I had the opportunity to attend the 'Paris 2016 Impact Cities' conference. Community Health Evangelism (CHE) is a Christ-centered educational program that equips communities to identify issues and mobilize resources to achieve positive, sustainable change. Lives and communities are transformed as people come to Christ and work together to address local needs. CHE seamlessly integrates evangelism and discipleship with community health and development.

For me, the Basics of Urban Wholistic Development was a review of the conference I attended in Tulsa, OK last August. Still it was helpful because now I have been on the field 5 months. Now my situation has faces and street names, where last August I could only guess as to how my situation would be. The remainder of the conference focused on Europe with topics including: Community Development and European Churches, Urban Wholistic Community Development in Brussels, among the Roma people (Gypsy people group in Europe), in France and Finland.

These were all interesting talks however, what I gained most from was the break out sessions. Meaning, the conference participants divided up into our specific regions to discuss various topics. My region was Eastern Europe and it included nationals &/or missionaries from Slovak Republic, Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary. As we 'brain stormed' questions such as 'How do you reach your neighborhood?' we all understood each other in regards to such things as 'the fortress mentality' (of the church & people in general), suspicion, lack of personal ownership, hand out mentality, distrust of authorities and difficulties in working with the

government.

Another way that conference benefitted me/my ministry, was the chance to meet others who are working in Europe. The chance to network helped me because personally I am in a place of questions. On one hand I have the CHE teaching and I get the concept. On the other hand I have been on the field 5 months and have a grasp of the situation. My questions are: how do I bring the 2 together? This is what I see & think...this is what is happening now....and this is what I think should happen next. BUT, am I right??? Am I on the right track? Because of my hunger to get some answers, I presented my situation before my Eastern Europe break out group and also to two experienced couples. Each responded with positive encouragement, saying 'You are on the right track.'

So you might be asking, 'What are you trying to do?' Tanya and I would like to continue to work purposely towards creating community among the special needs families for the spiritual purpose of evangelism & faith building and for the physical & social purpose of mobilizing their own resources to achieve sustainable change in those areas that they address as needs. In one small way, we have already begun. Remember a few updates ago, I talked about 'Rainbow'? One special needs mom is a trained speech therapist and she was willing to share her skills to help others. Many moms wanted this kind of help for their kids, including one business man who's son has Down's. He agreed to pay a small stipend (for needed materials and her time). The kids were invited to come for a 1 hour session each Saturday. [3, 1 hour sessions are held each Sat.] While the kids were busy, Jamie & Tanya spend time with the moms doing a Bible Study.

"Discontent will destroy your peace, rob you of joy, make you miserable and spoil your witness.

We dishonor God if we proclaim a Savior who satisfies and then go around discontent."

J.I. Packer

**Home again** - I got home from the conference at 2 am - minus my suitcase. The next day I was up and going to our Saturday events - Rainbow and English Club. My suitcase showed up much faster than my feeling recovered from the road. But, now I have been home for 2 weeks and have my feet back under me.

**2 questions for you....**I am leading a conversational English on Saturdays and am trying to come up with positive, interesting, helpful topics. So my first question is - can you think of such a topic for us to discuss?

My second question is - can you send me a saying or two? One of my ideas is to talk about sayings and their meanings. [For example - Six of one, half dozen of the other. Barking up the wrong tree. It's raining cats and dogs. ] There are also proverbs that we use...for example "Better one in the hand than two in the bush" "The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence." If you can email your ideas, sayings or proverbs, I'd sure appreciate it! Thanks!!

**Happy Easter!!** In my last update, I totally forgot to wish you all a Happy Easter! However you spent celebrating Resurrection Sunday, I hope it was filled with joy and deep meaning. For us, today was Palm Sunday and Easter will be on May 1st. That is why yesterday found me making up 50 "Easter Baskets". Ok...let's take that a step down...they are large cups filled with candy. Easter Basket is a bit over the top...but work with me here...because, despite my budget & time, I thought they turned out pretty cute.

Tanya (special needs ministry leader) is attempting to do something this Easter that she has never done. She asked the congregation to leave one section of the sanctuary free - 60 seats - for the special needs families. When I arrived 5 months ago, she had 170 families on her list. It has grown to 186 and she is inviting them to attend Easter morning service. Some live at a distance, others attend other churches and many just won't come...but it is our job to invite and so she is.

There are many details to think through...greeters, those to carry the wheelchairs up the stairs, extra helpers in each Sunday School and child care for some of our special needs kids. After the service, she has sufficient Samaritan Shoe boxes to hand out to each handicapped child. However, in many cases the handicapped child has a younger sibling. While we don't have a box for them, we wanted to have something fun to give little brother or sister and that is where the 'Easter Baskets' come in.

As Tanya calls the moms, she hears impressive stories. "I want to come to church but as soon as we prepare to come my child starts throwing up. ....my child has seizures. ...I can't get my door unlocked but then an hour later it unlocks just fine." Tanya knows that this is spiritual warfare going on. She asked the congregation this morning to pray for these families - for all the friends & families the church will be inviting to come on Easter. That each would take that step of faith and that God's will be done.

Blessings, June

Little Katya, 'Easter Baskets' and Berdansk seminar for ostomy patients



