

Update 17, written April 2, 2017

“Do you know the history of Norway?” I had to confess to Sergi (director of the AGAPE rehab center) that I did not. “Well our family got to visit there and I would describe Norway as a cold heaven. It is amazingly beautiful there like heaven is – just cold. There are mountains everywhere – high ones! And, by breaking down the rocks, they have built beautiful roads with this same rock. They are strong roads that make the mountains accessible. You can see homes in very remote places. It is also a stable and wealthy country. Do you know why?” Again, I shook my head. “In the late ‘60’s they discovered how to drill deep for oil out in the sea.”

“That is the way I see AGAPE ministry, doing all we can to make ‘the mountains’ accessible for those with disabilities and tapping into the resources of each one. In each person God has placed jewels...but for those with disabilities these talents are not easily seen. I want to tap them...like Norway did for oil...to help each person uncover and discover all the riches God has given them.”

Amazing and noble words - especially considering their story. 16 years ago they didn't have a clue about people with disabilities. Then, one day the tire blew out of the car they were in, sending it careening over the bridge they were on. In the back seat, Natasha was holding their 2-year-old son in her lap. He and Serge came out unharmed but her neck was broken when the car landed upside down. A horrible tragedy....that in the hands of God chose was used to reach others for Himself.

When you go to their website: <https://www.agapeukraine.com/about-us> you will read this....Sergii and Natasha Bolchook were involved in a car accident in 2001 which left Natasha as a quadriplegic. The family spent a year and a half in hospitals and health centers where they witnessed the hardships for people with disabilities in Ukraine. God moved their hearts to help these people. They spoke to their church about beginning a ministry for people with disabilities and received their support.

Within 4 years of the accident, Sergi & Natsha and the church they attend began reaching out to others with disabilities. First, in an empty room at the church and later in a larger rented space in town. Then the God sized vision was given to them and in the fall of 2016, the AGAPE center opened.

**AGAPE UKRAINE - is the name of the ministry for people with disabilities. A team of dedicated people give practical assistance to people with disabilities and also encourage other churches to join the ministry.**

**Our Vision: To discover new opportunities for people with disabilities and the Church.**

**Our Mission: To plant and develop a ministry for people with disabilities in churches throughout Ukraine.**

One of these 'people with disabilities' is **Vassia**. About 4 years ago, out at the river with his friends drinking, Vassia dove into the water and broke his back; leaving him paralyzed from the chest down. “I had a girl, we were doing a lot of ‘stuff’ together. She left me when she understood I would never walk again. I had ‘friends’ that I was doing bad stuff with and they are gone now too. Everything changed that day. I had seen Christians before. Once I even helped with some remodeling at a Christian camp. I watched the people as I worked. Honestly though, I didn’t want anything to do with it. When

I came to AGAPE I had my guard up. I thought they were going to shove that God stuff down my throat. But the rehab specialist didn't say a thing about God. She was kind, respectful and over time I really learned a lot from her. I could not do really anything for myself before but now I can do a lot. I asked God into my heart about 6 months ago. Now I just want to get out there and tell people my age about Him! I want to go to the schools and tell them that people in wheelchairs are just like them!"

As is often the case here, his pressure ulcers developed when he was still in the hospital after the accident and unfortunately had never healed. He had been a patient at the AGAPE Rehab Center and then returned to his home in a village about 90 miles away. Anya, the center's administrator, had asked him to return when she learned I was coming. Therefore, Vassia was one of the first patients I met when I visited for the first time in February. From his history, the look of the wounds and the smell – I didn't like what I saw. I strongly suspected bone infection and asked about the possibility of getting an x-ray done? The next day they handed me his x-ray and even my untrained eyes saw the infection.

It was then that I had to explain the situation with hope to this young man. "Vassia, unfortunately it looks like I was right. Both of the bones you sit on are infected. This often happens when wounds do not close over a long period of time. I'd like to start you on antibiotics so that we can start fighting the infection from within as well as use a type of dressing that will lower the level of bacteria in the wounds themselves. But, doing all this is not going to solve the problem. I think what will need to happen is for a surgeon to clean out both areas down to good bone."

I knew that in Vassia's mind this correctly translated as a very long time confined to bed. While doing nothing would mean death as the infection eventually took over his body but the thought of major surgery is a hard thing to wrap your mind around especially when the problem doesn't even hurt. So there, sitting on the floor looking up at him, I promised, "Vassia, I will do all I can. After surgery I will come back and help you."

Friday we started him on antibiotics that God had provided and I had brought with me. On Monday, he had a confirming CAT scan and on Wednesday he was seen by a surgeon and admitted into the hospital. That Thursday he had surgery.

I returned home and kept in touch with Vassia's progress via emails and phone calls. God provided him a competent surgeon and it turned out that once they got in there the picture was different. While there was a deep bilateral festering infection, the path report showed no infection of the bones! Fantastic news! But I still did not anticipate the surgeon to close both wounds. I expected, at best, a delay in suturing his wounds closed but they were closed during surgery. Honestly I was a bit worried about that. Would the wounds reopen later because the infection had not been completely dealt with? 16 days after surgery, Vassia was released from the hospital and, to keep my promise, I was back at AGAPE 2 days after his discharge.

Concerned about possible complications, I came as soon as I could, arriving late on Sunday night. But it turned out that in the 5 days I was there, I spent the least time with Vassia because all the way around, he was doing great! I/we all are grateful to God for His mercy, grace and care towards this young man.

**Bunches of bums!** If anyone were to scroll through my inbox right now, they would see *A LOT* of bottoms with wounds. I have never had as many photos of pressure ulcers on my computer as I do

right now! When I went to AGAPE the first time to teach the patient care staff and medical staff about pressure ulcers, we saw a couple patients in house and also several in their homes. This time, when I went in March, my goal was to move the theory that we had covered last month into practice. So, we saw even more patients. All that to say, each time I leave more consults and questions fly back and forth by email between us.

It has been fun to see Valya, the nurse, catch on to wound care and want more. As I invested in Tanya at the church clinic in Premorski; in Era at the church clinic in Berdansk; and Valya & Tanya at the church clinic in Zaporoshja....so I will here too. To the best of my ability I want to pour all I know into Valya so as to strengthen and expand her skills for the glory of God and the blessing of those He brings her way.

When God speaks so to us of fear, He is not saying that it is wrong for a Christian to *become afraid*.

He is saying that we do not need to *stay afraid*.

CMDA devotional

**I can't do it!** The collision of emotions began the day I promised Vassia I would return. So on one hand, I was committed to keeping my word. And, as I explained in February's update, being at AGAPE was for me like a fish back in water. I love it...everything about the place I really respect and personally enjoy. On top of that, the medical staff, rehab staff and the director & his wife made it clear they wanted me to return.

However, on the other hand are all my current responsibilities – English Club every other week, Purpose Driven Life study every Sunday, a 10 day trip to Berdansk & Zaporoshja this coming week, planning for an Autistic conference at the end of April and organizing & co-directing Family Camp which will happen in mid - June. In addition to all of that, now I am doing wound consults for the AGAPE folks via the internet and traveling to Lytsk once a month. The fatigue and neglect of my body's needs caught up with me and this week I got very sick - a chest cold and a kidney infection both requiring antibiotics. Part of the problem are prior commitments I made before I knew about Lytsk. Keeping my word is important so that means juggling a lot through the end of April. At least now I am planning things differently. But, another part of the problem is myself.

*'Lord! I can't do this!'*

"No, you cannot...alone."

Oh that I was like Sergi, who when he understood God's plan for AGAPE that he immediately understood that it was absolutely utterly impossible...without God. Jesus and all the other hero's of the Bible were all given huge tasks too. Compared to them, however, what I've been called to is ever so much smaller and yet I crumble...because I try to do it all by myself. I guess what I am saying that underneath all this activity is another activity. My learning to ask Him much more often - 'What do you want? Leaning into Him for help - for the strength & wisdom to accomplish it. Seeking - not my own, not others but His approval alone. Learning, in a still deeper way, abiding and obedience.

A book my dad had given me several years ago found it's way back into my hands...and blessed me again -

“So what is my job? Once again, it's the same as your job. It is to step beyond the limitations of my own compassion in order to share Christ's compassion with a world that is running on empty. It is to let God love others through me and to be ready for this always, on all days, whether in the ditch or on the road. My job is to pour my life into the lives of others seen in situation where there will be no one watching, no one applauding, no thanks, given, no rewards received, no honoraria or travel expenses forthcoming, and no fruit to be seen, in places where the only joy is the inner certainty that I was in the right country at the right time, in the right ditch by the right wayside. The joy will be in knowing that I do His will, which, you know is, is quite enough to fill me. “

"Your circumstances, of course, are different from mine. You may not travel or speak. You may not be involved in full time ministry. Yet, if you are a believer, your basic job description is the same as mine. It is to be full of the Holy Spirit and to pour yourself out to others in love and ministry, trusting in the Spirit to make that possible.”

“We so often want the whole thing the other way around. We want God to pour in what we need before we start pouring out. We expect Him to pour in some courage before we take action; we expect Him to pour in strength and inspiration before we obey Him. but it doesn't work that way. We first have to be obedient to the prompting of the Spirit....then, after obedience, the power comes.”

'A little Pot of Oil' by Jill Briscoe

Blessings, June



Vassia - Reluctantly posing when I asked for his photo : )



A birthday party - I felt very honored to be invited to Luba's (top row in the middle) 9th birthday this week. Tanya K's (Special needs ministry) kids are Vlad (bottom row far left) and Nastya (in the striped shirt next to me). Luba's mom is one of my first friends, and one of my best friends, at church.