

Update 9, written July 1, 2016

**Quarterly Birthday Party** – On June 3<sup>rd</sup> we invited all the special needs kids who had celebrated a birthday in March, April or May to ‘their’ birthday party. For me one of the coolest things to see happen is how the community is helping itself (vs. seeking a sponsor).

For example: One of the special needs moms knows the director of a business in town that provides entertainment for children’s birthday parties. So Tanya got the phone number from this mom and called to ask if they would come to help our first quarterly birthday party? The director not only said yes, but also said that they would come for all 4 parties and everything would be for free. We were very impressed with these 3 young ladies the first time and they wow-ed us again this month.

Another example happened with the cupcakes. During the winter Tanya K. got a call from a lady who had found out about her ministry online. This lady makes cakes for a living and was calling to ask if she could make a birthday cake for a handicapped child once a month? Tanya told her about our quarterly birthday parties. She caught the idea and agreed to help. So in that way also, we were all blessed in a beautiful way.

After we finished cleaning up, I heard Tanya and the other team members say, ‘This was the best birthday party so far.’ After they repeated it a bunch of times, I just stopped and asked why. I thought it had gone well but I didn’t get why ‘It was the best ever.’ “Kristina, the main reason we want to do these birthday parties is to use the situation to start a relationship. Didn’t you see how everyone was involved? No one was off sitting by herself. Everyone was enjoying it; everyone was a part of the party! I finally got it – my team had seen the wall of fear drop and how this group of 25 moms had stepped forward toward a relationship with us. Thank you Lord!!

*“...love is not like other resources. There is an infinite supply.*

*You can use it and use it, yet there will still be more left over.*

*As a matter of fact, the more it is used, the more its supply increases.”*

**Chris’s Birthday** – Over a year ago, Chris returned to the states with one of his special needs sons. The physicians in Kiev had been able to stabilize him but to get to the bottom of the problem it was necessary and urgent to have access to a higher level of medical care. What Chris thought would be a short trip turned very different and the whole family returned to Oklahoma.

This family of 9 kids (5 of whom have Downs Syndrome – 4 of whom they adopted here] had been serving in the special needs community in Ukraine for the previous 3 years. Their ministry included helping American families adopt

from Ukraine; working with Tanya K. (the ministry leader with whom I also work with) as well as helping in other regions of Ukraine.

Leaving without the chance to say good-bye; living under a question mark in the states; the many blessings that came in this turn of events and also the pain.... When we had the chance to catch up a bit we understood that while our situations had been different, so many other things were the same.

It has been in the home of this family where I have been staying these past 7 months. When Jamie saw that Chris would be here on his birthday, plans for a party started. It was very fun to have nearly 50 people come to 'our' house and celebrate with him!

This 16-day trip 'back home' has been healing, encouraging and confirming for Chris. On Wednesday we said good-bye to him but soon look forward to welcoming his wife and her sister, as they will be joining us for 2 camps in July.

*"Love is the only medicine I know of that, when used according to directions, heals completely yet takes one's life away.*

*It is dangerous; it is uncontrollable;*

*and it can never be taken on any terms but its own.*

*Yet as a healer of emotions, it has no equal."*

**Special Needs Retreat-** 'Priceless' was the theme of the 3 day retreat Chris led for 19 mom's of special needs children. Working alongside local Christians, this evangelistic event was held outside a large city (Jzhetomer) about 3 hours west of here.

Thorough thoughtful consideration regarding their lodging & meals, care for their children, talks, and small group and worship times – they repeated the message in various ways – 'You and your child are priceless in the eyes of God!'

About a month prior to his arrival, Chris had asked if Jamie and I would help him at the retreat. At events like this I usually, and very happily, serve in the background. My First Aid backpack & I roam around and look for ways to be helpful. But, at this retreat Chris chose to push me up front. At one session I shared my testimony and at another session I led a small group. It was very humbling (and made me very happy) to have been used as a tool by God to reach several of the moms.

Perhaps the most touching moment for me was when I watched Chris handing out chocolate gold coins to each person. He had led up to the moment by asking what the most valuable material thing there was on earth? Of course the consensus was that it would be gold. Everyone grinned as he pulled out a bag of

chocolate gold coins. And then he proceeded to approach each person to give them a coin. For the several who dropped their eyes when he came to them, Chris bent down and twisted his head so as to make eye contact with them as he said – “To God you are of great value.” For me it was a sacred moment as, in a very real sense, he was showing and sharing communion. In God’s eyes we were worth it. In His love, we have value. ‘His body given for you. His blood shed for you.’

**Ahead:** It may be awhile until I write again as the weeks ahead are jammed packed.

July 4 – 9 ‘Flying High with God’ Evangelistic camp for special needs kids and their mom’s -1<sup>st</sup> Camp.

July 11 – 16 – 2<sup>nd</sup> camp.

July 19 – Aug 1<sup>st</sup> – I will make a quick trip to Oregon to attend my niece’s wedding.

August 8 – 13<sup>th</sup> – ‘Life in Abundance!’ – Family Camp.

The first two camps are being directed by the Grace Baptist Church special needs ministry and their sister church in Ohio. The team of 4 from Berean Baptist Church in Mansfield, Ohio will fly in tomorrow. The program at each camp will be the same but each week we will welcome 20 special needs children and a parent will accompany each. We are excited that of these numbers, 16 families will be first timers at camp.

My trip to Oregon will be a blur but still I am grateful to be able to go. While on the field these past 17 years, I have missed much in the life of my family so each opportunity to be present is something I treasure.

I mentioned Family Camp in my last update. It is being directed by us -the Grace Baptist Church special needs ministry and the focus of the program will be on spiritual growth. With the special needs ministry being 5 years old now, there are some changes that need to happen and it was out of growth that this Family Camp dream was born.

Those moms and kids who have attended the evangelistic camps for 2 or more years were asked to come to Family Camp. They have heard the Gospel, are a part of the year round ministry events and are ready to grow further spiritually. By having these ‘veterans’ come to Family Camp, Tanya K was able to invite the 16 new families to the evangelistic camps.

This wasn’t as easy as it sounds though. I guess that is a good thing that they were reluctant to change. That camp has been the highlight of the year for them. But, God bless them for taking a huge step of faith and agreeing to go

come this new camp instead. The main goal for Family Camp is spiritual growth. It is life changing to be saved from your sins. But if you stop there you miss out on the abundant life that Christ promises already here on earth. I long for them to have that!

Another goal of the Family Camp is to begin building relationships between the members of Grace Baptist Church and the special needs community. Therefore about half of the folks coming to Family Camp do not have special needs kids. For this first camp, Tanya K and I invited several key families from the church – those how are open, kind and relational. Family Camp will give everyone a chance to become un-afraid of each other, and with the Lord's help, the number of special needs families desiring a deeper relationship with God will greatly increase.

I was praying that there will be at least 90 total who attend but last night Tanya K said that 98 were signed up! I know there will be last minute cancelations but I continue to ask God to bring all who He wants to be there.

To be honest, I am nervous. I am not alone but the planning and programing of Family Camp has been on my shoulders. Never done this before (be co-director of a camp) but Tanya K and I have been given a strong team to work with and that is a HUGE blessing. I am also nervous about the overall schedule for the next 8 weeks. I saw this coming 3 months ago and have been working towards getting things in place since them. Still, these next 8 weeks are going to be more intense then I can physically do on my own strength.

As God leads you, please pray -

- \* that God's perfect will be done at each camp
- \* that God would provide all that is needed
- \* for health & safety for all of us
- \* for emotional & physical strength to share and serve
- \* for wisdom & obedience and servant leadership - especially for all the leadership team.

Thank you for your prayers!! And, Happy 4<sup>th</sup> of July!!

Blessings, June

Quotes from – 'A Minute of Margin' by Richard A Swenson M.D.

Two of our mom's and their child at the quarterly birthday party and our donated cupcakes.

[Chris holding his piano birthday cake \(and Tanya K. making sure the music](#)

don'ts blow away. The birthday group photo.  
Chris giving out the gold coins - "To God you are of great value." The mom's at  
the retreat opening their gift bags (that had a Bible, Children's Bible, blank journal  
book and the book 'Unstoppable' by Nic V.  
Me with 3 year old Nichol who was my special needs kid during the retreat.







