



THE BENGEE BULLETIN

Winter 2013

In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now....

Phil. 1:4-5

Winter is here...but Spring is coming!



View of a Kiev winter from our balcony.

Winter announced its arrival in Ukraine with colder than normal temperatures and lots of snow. It has been a paradox of beauty and danger. The same snow that covers the blemishes of dead weeds, cracked sidewalks, and dirty streets with a velvety white blanket also masks the hazards of slippery ice for thousands of pedestrians. The same frigid conditions that beckon children to go sledding and adults to go ice fishing caused dozens of homeless Ukrainians to perish! The wonder of the first snow has faded, replaced by a yearning for the warmth of spring.

Ukraine has been in the grip of a *spiritual* winter as well. For decades, the tyranny of atheistic Communism robbed people of personal freedom. The collapse of the Soviet Union led to a thaw of political oppression—but there was little in its place to protect people from the *slippery* fantasy of Western

materialism. Even the evangelical church, which survived decades of intense persecution, has not always fared so well in recent years. As in C.S. Lewis' land of Narnia, it is *still* winter for many here. Nevertheless, to use a phrase from The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe, "*Aslan is on the move.*" Aslan, of course, is the main character in Lewis' story. As the Lion-King moves closer to de-throning the White Witch, the ice and snow of an endless Narnian winter begins to thaw (typifying Jesus' work of redemption and restoration in a world under sin's spell).

What I (Jerry) have been observing in the Ukrainian church reminds me of this story. Too much emphasis on "*the way things have always been*" has resulted in the neglect of biblical priorities and the weakening of spiritual growth. Yet, by God's grace, several pastors are beginning to recognize the need for Christ-centered expository preaching that aims for life change. They are taking more seriously the responsibility to shepherd their flocks through discipleship and biblical counseling. They are even rethinking traditions that have hindered the church's growth and passion for the Gospel.

For example, one of my pastoral leadership students (who is a church leader in his region) shared how he has prayerfully led his church to understand the importance of financially supporting the pastor so that the pastor can be free to adequately know, feed, lead, and protect the flock (1 Timothy 5:17-18). Very few churches in Ukraine practice this. Many are unwilling to even discuss it for fear of challenging a tradition that was necessary in Soviet times, but which has become an obstacle to developing healthy churches. However, under his patient leadership, his church has embraced their responsibility, freeing this pastor to feed and equip his church. The result is that the church is moving forward and experiencing spiritual renewal. Another KTS student who is studying biblical counseling is practicing and promoting it in several churches in his region. In November, we conducted two mini-conferences on biblical counseling in his hometown of Korosten. But the real excitement for me is that *he did the major part of the teaching—and he did it well!* (2 Timothy 2:2).

It is becoming evident that ***the Gospel is on the move.*** And when it is on the move ***in*** the church, it can't help but impact people ***outside*** the church. Please pray that God's Spirit will continue to work in the Ukrainian church by raising up under-shepherds who will love and lead like Jesus. And pray for me as I continue to train students in the class room and conduct conferences in their churches (see pictures below). Winter's days are numbered in Ukraine. Spring is coming.



Biblical Counseling and Preaching Seminar in Lugansk, home of several of our KTS students.



I had the privilege of co-teaching two seminars on Biblical Counseling with Valentin Shamara in his hometown of Korosten.



Jerry teaching Introduction to Pastoral Leadership class in October.

Building Gospel Friendships Through English

This fall three missionaries and a young couple from our church began a new ministry with the goal of pointing young professionals to the Lord by means of teaching them English. We planned and prayed, and on September 19 began our first class with 14 students. We met for 10 weeks every Wednesday night for class and had informal times in homes, playing games, watching a movie and eating together so that we could build relationships. Along with other ESL groups in Kiev, we organized a cultural evening to celebrate American Thanksgiving with turkey, dressing, cranberry sauce,

mashed potatoes and gravy, salads and pumpkin bread. Jerry talked to them about the history of Thanksgiving, underscoring the fact that they had found something (a relationship with God) that was worth more than the comfort and safety they had left behind in Europe. One girl from our group told him later that he had really made her do some thinking. We have had some good opportunities to talk together, and the students have enjoyed the club. Keep praying as we plan to do another ten-week session starting near the end of January.



Three students from the English club with our daughter, Karissa at a Christmas party

Praises: Thank the Lord with us that:

- ◆ God is sending students who have a passion for His Word and who desire to promote a Biblical model of a healthy church.
- ◆ God is giving Jerry opportunities to counsel pastors and students and to provide leadership training in churches.
- ◆ God gave us a wonderful Christmas with our daughter, Karissa here in Kiev.

Requests: Pray with us for:

- ◆ Dependence on the Lord for both of us as we prepare for and carry out ministry here.
- ◆ Two important resources from Matthias Media that we are translating into Russian: The tract, Gospel tract, “Two Ways to Live” and the book for church leaders, The Trellis and the Vine. (More about this in an upcoming blog).
- ◆ Our son, Joel and his fiancé, Rachel as they plan and prepare for a wedding July 6 and a life of wholehearted commitment to God and each other.
- ◆ Kellie’s parents as her dad struggles with a disease that is similar to Lou Gehrig’s disease. Pray for both of them to continue to trust and rest in the Lord with hope in God’s promises.

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