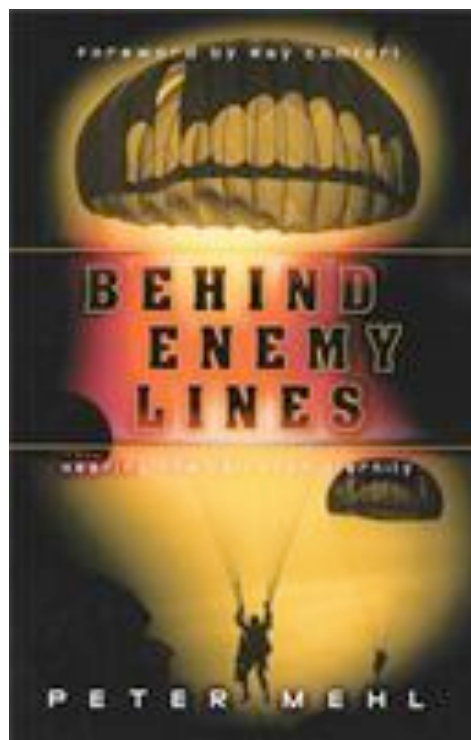


# Behind Enemy Lines

Hearing the Call from Eternity

Peter L. Mehl



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**What Christian Leaders  
Are Saying about Peter Mehl &  
Russian Harvest Ministries**

“Peter and Jill Mehl have been leaders in their home church for years. They have had a history of prizing prayer, missions and evangelism as their priorities, in their daily lives. Their home church, and I their pastor, endorse the effectiveness of their work in Ukraine, the authenticity of their call to this work, and their commitment to the call.”

Pastor Dan Rothwell  
Senior Pastor, First Assembly - North Dakota

"I have seen the work of Peter Mehl first hand in Ukraine. He is not just a teacher of nationals—he is a trainer. He is not just preaching about churches, he is planting churches. Peter is one of the new breed of apostolic church planters being released in the earth today..."

Rev. Kevin Leal  
Key Ministries – Florida

“I heartily recommend the ministry of Peter and Jill Mehl to anyone who wants to further God’s kingdom in these tremendous harvest fields. They have the anointing, experience, integrity, vision, energy, and methods to get the job done.”

Rev. Bob Weiner  
Weiner Ministries International - Florida

“I had the privilege of going to Ukraine with Peter Mehl for a church planting conference. Peter’s perseverance, in spite of dangers and obstacles, readily portrayed his Calvary love and Holy Ghost compassion and energy to reach the lost. I believe he has been sent by God to play a big part of the end time harvest in the former Soviet Union”.

Pastor Jim Hessler  
Senior Pastor, River of Life Church - North Dakota.

“The overseas works of Russian Harvest Ministries is an apostolic work ordained by God for these last days. I have been with Peter nine times, in both Russia and Ukraine. The work is real! I was with them in Odessa when the military police came with machine guns and dogs and shut us down. I have seen the work first hand. Thousands are reached for Jesus, churches are being pioneered and leaders trained. I recommend this ministry to pastors, church leaders and everyone looking for a place to invest missions dollars.

Pastor Steve Quernemoen  
Senior Pastor, Country Bible Church - Minnesota.

“My wife Debbie and I have been ministry partners with Peter and Jill Mehl since they first took their family to the mission fields of Russia and Ukraine in 1993. We have served as their ministry stateside home base, logistics coordinators, prayer partners and more. A number of descriptive adjectives come to mind for this ministry. First, God has bestowed on Peter and Jill a

powerful apostolic anointing. They are fire-starters and church-planters for these end times. Second, God has placed within them an evangelistic fervor of the highest order. They are spiritual warriors in the most classic and truest sense. Their love for the lost is real. And it is contagious! Third, as ministers of the Gospel, they are bold in their proclamation of the Lordship of Jesus Christ, His soon-coming return, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit to His church.

John Trombley  
President, Impact Management Solutions - North Dakota.

“Peter and Jill Mehl are in the vanguard of what God is doing in the former Soviet Union. I have traveled and ministered with Brother Mehl in Ukraine and can highly recommend this ministry for its effectiveness, genuine concern, tenacity and integrity. No individual or church can better invest missions dollars anywhere else. Brother Mehl ministers in a Holy Ghost anointing and boldness that is uncommon and that achieves glorious results.”

Pastor Jerry Lubrano  
Senior Pastor, First Assembly - Florida.

## Behind Enemy Lines

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this book to my soul mate and wife of twenty-eight years. God was good to me for providing a woman who would stand with her man in the good times and the bad, in sickness and in health. These are qualities that have diminished almost into extinction in a large percentage of marriages of our Western culture. Jill, I love you dearly. Thank you for sacrificing finances and comfort for the sake of lost souls. Thank you for leaving family and friends and accompanying me to the ends of the earth. Thank you for standing with me through persecution, ridicule and scorn which we continue to face together as we pioneer a New Testament apostolic enterprise in the former Soviet Union.

To my children, Christina, Alicia, and Satia, you too paid a price when you left family, friends, and all your nice surroundings to follow your dad into the former Soviet Empire in pursuit of destiny. On behalf of your mom and I plus the thousands that have repented and come to Jesus in Russia, Ukraine and other nations where we have labored, thank you!

An added feature of this book is that when relevant, I have included thoughts from my children. Relevant times would be when they discovered a corpse on the beach after a Mafia hit or when Jill was nearly hit by a sniper's bullet. These will be words from their own hearts and are intended to show the reality of life on the mission field and the dangers and hardships many of God's people face for the sake of propagating the Gospel of the Kingdom. It is not only parents, for when kids are involved; they too, pay a price.

## Forward



**"God bless Peter Mehl.** He has a zeal for the lost; a hunger for the Word, a passion for prayer and a burning love for God that has consumed him. Nothing else matters to him, but the will of God. Peter Mehl is a normal biblical Christian.

It is sad that zealous Christians like him seem to stand out from the rest of the contemporary Body of Christ. They are like coals of fire in the midst of cold and hardened snow.

So, those who are on fire for God tend today to be a little isolated. Those around them melt away, as those who are zealous have some sort of horrible disease. And they have.

They are horribly dis-eased because all around them people are sinking into an everlasting hell, and few seem to care. So the laborers are still few. May God use this book to raise up faithful and fiery laborers, whose supreme passion is the will of God..."to seek and save that which is lost."

***Ray Comfort, Author, Hell's Best Kept Secret***

## Introduction

On February 1, 1993, the five of us were standing at the International Airport in Moscow, Russia. My wife Jill, our daughters Christina, Alicia, Satia and myself had just made the move of a lifetime. We left our life in America in search of our destiny in Christ on foreign soil. If I said it was an easy decision I would be forging a lie. God had given us a successful business, a beautiful home, Rolex watches, mink coats, and at the time of our move, three daughters ages 6, 7 and 11. We were blessed of God, but the sweet voice of destiny was calling and we had to respond. We were no longer satisfied with the good life. We were in search of the best life. That meant obeying the leading of the Holy Spirit, no matter the cost. We chose to leave the land of the free in exchange for Stalin's land of death; a land of wealth and victory for a land of poverty and defeat. A decision we will never regret. Souls were plunging into Hell at an alarming rate and we had to take our rightful God ordained place in the Great Commission. We could no longer bury our head in the sand while multitudes perished in the belching furnace of the damned. We had to step out in faith and follow our hearts and follow our God!

Our story began in 1981. A shaky marriage and a messed up life sent Jill and I on a search for the God we knew existed but did not know personally. For six months we were on a desperate search. We attended church, asked questions of those that would listen, and read the Bible. We prayed and often cried out in the darkness of night, "God, if You are real, please reveal Yourself." We were desperate but no one was coming to our rescue. I remember one night in particular. Getting out of bed I looked out at the penetrating brilliance of the heavens and with tears streaming down my face I audibly said, "God, we must find You, please help us." We had to find God, I had to find God. The pain was too great, the emptiness of my soul too agonizing, the fear of Hell too intense.

Our search ended on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1981 when a friend, David Haugen invited us to hear a visiting evangelist. We didn't even know what an evangelist was but we were desperate and needed to be set free. Jill and I repented that night and gave our hearts to Jesus. Our lives were turned upside down and inside out and we have never been the same since. Jesus came into our hearts, saved our marriage, gave us new life, revealed our purpose, and set us on a path that would lead us into our destiny. We thank the Lord for sending that evangelist to Fargo, North Dakota. His name is Benny Hinn. God Bless you Benny!

## Chapter 1

### *In the Beginning*

Jill and I will never forget the day we repented of our sins and were born again. Benny Hinn, the visiting evangelist spoke about the Holy Spirit. The entire service was fascinating for both of us. The lively worship, the raised hands, and all the noise. The atmosphere was electric. We were used to people being quiet in church, which is how we were brought up. Surprisingly, these things did not bother us. Why? We were seeking truth. We wanted to find God. We wanted to meet our Creator. The emptiness in our souls was screaming for a heavenly connection. Up to this point in our lives no one had ever presented us with the Gospel. No one ever told us we needed to “repent and believe” (Mark 1:15). We had only heard things like “Light some candles, pray the rosary, go to confession, go to mass,” nothing else, but inside we were dying. Actually, we were already dead but did not know it.

For six agonizing months we sought after God. We purchased books and Bibles, study guides and Christian magazines. We even began attending the formal church we were raised in thinking that maybe we missed Him the first time around. I was spending hours each day studying the Bible and Bible doctrines. I studied about certain doctrines: the rapture, the gap theory, giants, the Second Coming of Christ and more, but I did not know how to be born again. I was gaining knowledge in my head but had no personal experience of the heart. It was not until a friend invited us to church to hear a visiting preacher; what a day that was! My wife was eight months pregnant with our first child. We were both six months pregnant with desire to know God. When Benny Hinn began to walk the aisles and touch people, I was surprised to see them falling down. I thought, “What was this strange phenomenon?” Whatever it was, if God was in it, I wanted it. I was desperate. I remember saying, “God, if this is of You, let him touch me.” Over and over I repeated this prayer in my heart. Then it happened. He touched me on the chest and I went down as if a pile-driver slammed me into my seat. My strength left me and I found myself in my seat short of breath and covered with what looked like red goose bumps. I looked at the person to my right and he was in the same condition. It was awesome, so powerful! I knew then that Jill and I were about to meet God. For the first time in months I had hope. Excitement rose up in my heart. This is it! God is real! He is not dead! He is alive! When the altar call was given I pushed Jill out the left side of the pew and over three people. There could have been a hundred people in the way. It would not have mattered. One way or another I was going to get to the altar, bringing my wife with me. We went forward together that night, repented of our sins and received Jesus into our hearts! What a glorious night that was!

Noticing that Jill was pregnant, Benny Hinn laid hands on her and prayed for the baby. Jill went down under the power of God. She was shocked. Benny then prayed for us both and together we went down again. It was not through the power of suggestion. We were not pushed down. It was not a fluke or a figment of our imagination. This was the Holy Spirit at work. This was the power of God in action. We had never seen or heard of such things. Actually, we had never been to a church where we were not expected to kneel, sit, and stand at regular pre-chosen intervals. We knew for sure, what we were experiencing now was a visitation from heaven. What a great

night it was for us. Our search was over. We had met Jesus and He was wonderful. Instantly we fell in love with Him. Our lives would never be the same. We had known we were sinners and guilty before God, but no one had ever shared the Gospel message with us. The Law of God, the Ten Commandments had exposed the reality of our wicked hearts, but the final step did not come until we heard of the Jesus of the Bible, Who would forgive us of all our unrighteousness. We knew we deserved Hell but did not understand how to gain Heaven.

Sitting at a restaurant after the service, Jill and I made a pledge to God and to each other. We pledged to serve God with all the energy and determination in which we served the devil. We committed our marriage, family, business and money to the Lord. We were not sure what the future would hold, but we knew one thing. We had met Jesus Christ and we had the joy of the Lord. Why? Because we knew we were forgiven! We had entered the realm of the redeemed! Our sins had been washed away! There is no greater joy than to be free from the penalty and bondage of sin. "Thank you, Jesus! We will follow you forever!"

This is why, as believers, we must all be about our Father's business of reaching the lost. Billions are dead in their sins and on a one-way path moving steadily towards the torments of an eternal nightmare the Bible calls Hell. 3.8 billion people have not been evangelized with the Gospel message. Of this amount over two billion have never heard the name of Jesus. The significance of this statement rests in the truth of Acts 4:12:

*"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."*

Only through the name and the person of Jesus can man be saved. Like Jill and I, millions are searching for the truth but Christians are not being obedient in sharing their faith or committed to spreading the Gospel throughout the earth. Even at this early stage of our walk with Christ we knew we could not just waste our life on the temporal. Only a few hours old in the Lord, we threw ourselves at the feet of Jesus and said, "Here we are, use us for Your glory and let Your purpose be fulfilled in our lives." We made a choice to live our lives in light of eternity. Things became less important and souls became more precious. The call to serve with passion became real. Destiny sang forth in her wondrous voice. Glory to God!

In the next few months our lives changed radically. Church became a way of life. We were baptized in water. We were baptized in the Holy Spirit. We began to tithe. The booze went down the sink and our worldly record collections became a pile of shattered plastic after we smashed them with hammers. Anything and everything in our home that we deemed ungodly went out the door.

Our lives became consumed with a passion for souls, evangelism and world missions. We began sharing Jesus at every opportunity. Our family and friends rejected us. We were branded as insane and told that we were "of the devil and in a cult," but we kept living for Jesus. We began

to invest money in overseas missions, funding Gospel crusades and church planting teams. Matthew 28:19-20 was branded on our hearts:

*“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”*

We had to be part of reaching the world for Jesus. How can a true believer do less? Isn't this what Jesus expects? We had to become less and He had to become more (John 3:30). Christianity is not about us but about others. It's about Him. We had to let the world know that Jesus is “The Way, the Truth, and the Life!” (John 14:6).

Along with this evangelistic zeal came a desire to know God's Word. Early morning, prayer and Bible study became a way of life. Deep down I knew that I was designed to be something other than a businessman. At that time in my life I did not understand gifts and callings, nevertheless, I did know that there was a unique place God had for Jill and I in the future. From the beginning we began preparing for the day when the Holy Ghost would propel us into our destiny. We never dreamed it would actually be to serve our King on foreign soil.

Over the years we were blessed of God. The business prospered, income increased and so did our giving to missions. We knew it was right. The world had to be reached. However, something inside of me said there was more - destiny was whispering in my ears. In 1990, a burden came upon me to visit some overseas locations where God was directing Jill and I to invest funds. The nation was South Africa. We arrived in the midst of riots, car burnings, and violence. It was a week we will never forget. In the midst of the violence we witnessed the power of God in action as souls repented, sick bodies were healed and demons were cast out. We saw churches being pioneered in remote places. We had been exposed to real New Testament Gospel work. A new burden came upon us after this visit. A new passion to plant churches in remote places of the world had been birthed in our spirits. A new desire to go where no man had gone before arose inside our hearts. A dream took root in our souls. Over the next eighteen months, Jill and I raised funds to help a radical church planter named Richard Sherber, conduct tent crusades and plant churches in South Africa. Several churches were raised up during this time. Church planting and Kingdom expansion became our passion. It was an opportunity but even more than that, a responsibility. We had to do something to help this man of God fulfill his dream. This sowing, I believe, became the seedbed for our future harvest of souls in the former Soviet Union.

Then it happened. The word of the Lord came to me in the spring of 1991. The Holy Spirit said, “Step out of the business world and go plant churches in the former Soviet Union.” Wow! The time had arrived! Our family was about to embark on a mission of a lifetime. Our faith was about to be stretched to the limits. The dealings of God were about to rain over us like a torrential downpour.

I was ready to leave immediately but there were the legalities of our businesses, the properties, the house, the cars. Then of course, there was my wife, Jill, she was part of this equation. God had spoken to me, now He must speak to her and she must hear. Over the next year, I would make five trips into Russia and Ukraine. During this time God did speak to Jill, she did hear, and we both obeyed.

Our house sold quickly and much of our belongings we just gave away. The businesses and partnership were not so easy to dispose of. In order to separate amicably, we would end up giving away our interest in an environmental consulting firm and commercial and rental properties worth over half a million dollars. Some accused us of being “foolish and rash...” “After all,” they said, “you can just stay here in America and continue to just give money. Don’t give away so much. What about the future, your wife, your children?”

We were not just leaving family, friends and our local church body and going to a strange land to pioneer new churches. We were also faced with a decision that jeopardized our financial future, our retirement. Were the callings on our lives worth the price? Were the souls of those in the former Soviet Empire worth what we were about to give up? The answer was a resounding “yes!” *“One soul is worth more than the entire world.”* Since 1993, thousands have come to Christ and churches pioneered in every state of Ukraine. Churches have also been pioneered in the Russian Far East, Uzbekistan and China. Bible smuggling operations were launched to deliver over thirty thousand Chinese Bibles into Mainland China. Over a hundred and twenty prisons have been evangelized in Ukraine and 1,150 villages have received our Gospel materials. Besides this, almost 10,000 students have been trained in our correspondence Bible schools. Bible schools, missionary training centers and drug rehab centers have been pioneered. Mobile evangelism teams have been raised up and more than 200 villages have been evangelized. Millions of Gospel tracts have been printed and distributed and so much more. Yes, it has been worth offering ourselves on the altar of the Great Commission! Yes, we would do it again!

Christians have a tendency to cling to the things of this world. I am not the brightest person but I am smart enough to know that we will not carry possessions with us when we die. At death we will all be stripped clean. Nothing temporal will accompany us beyond our last heartbeat. Matthew 13:45-46 reads:

*“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.”*

Jesus is telling us that the pearl, Himself, will cost us everything we have. The call of Christ is costly. It costs us all of our money, cars, homes, clothes, jewelry, lands—everything. It costs us our spouses, children, and pets—everything we possess. Our lives, our future, our plans and our desires—everything. We are but stewards of everything we have. We do not own anything, everything belongs to Jesus, when He needs something for the Kingdom, it must be given. He is

the owner and we are His servants. I am not saying that when we commit our lives to serve Jesus we must walk around like vagabonds or beggars. What I am saying is that we cannot be like the unbelievers, who are consumed with the spirit of the world. We cannot be like the world or even like much of Christianity, which is selfish and self-serving. Instead, we are called to be selfless.

We must be willing to lead a simpler lifestyle. We cannot allow ourselves to be caught up in the affairs of world. Eternal souls are at stake. James 4:4 reads:

*“Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.”*

Friendship with the world and its ways is a sure sign of lukewarmness and unwillingness to lose our lives that others may live.

Never lose sight of the fact of how short your life on earth really is. What will you leave behind? I want to leave behind three daughters who serve Jesus valiantly and a testimony that I lived for Jesus with my whole heart. I want to leave behind millions of people that my life affected for Christ. I want to leave a tombstone that reads, “Here rests Peter Mehl, a man who lost his life that others could find theirs in Jesus Christ.”

*“Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”* (Matthew 16:24)

Will you deny yourself and follow Jesus, even if it costs you everything? Will you sell all you have and buy that pearl of great price? Is Jesus Christ worth it? I hope your answer to every question is yes!

My wife asked God about the issue of giving up so much. His response to her? “Jill, what I gave, I can take away.” That’s all it took for her. We were on our way to Russia!

## Chapter 2

### *Life in Stalin's Russia*

On February 1, 1993, our family left Fargo, North Dakota to live in Moscow, Russia. We went from a city of eighty thousand people to one of over ten million inhabitants. In the midst of tears we said our good-byes, not knowing what the future really held for us. We were experiencing mixed emotions. "Did we make the right decision? There's no turning back now. Do we possess the grit to overcome the challenges we were to face?" Then there were our children. I thought to myself, "They may be paying the greatest price of all." Fear was attempting to raise its ugly head. The warfare of the mind began to intensify.

Why does the devil especially hate those doing frontline Gospel work? Why is he so entrenched against apostolic and evangelistic people, churches, and ministries? I believe there is one simple answer. Because they are hastening his demise, he knows it and he hates it. Revelation 12:12 reads:

*"Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time."*

The devil is full of fury because he knows the clock is ticking and radical evangelism, soul winning, church planting and frontline pioneers are enhancing the speed of the clock. Every soul reached for Jesus shortens his timetable.

We had not even left America and the confrontation had already begun. What diabolical schemes lie ahead? For us, there was no turning back. Our home was gone, retirement investments stopped, businesses given away and as a final step we purchased one-way tickets.

The world is full of graves of brave, selfless missionaries who went out into the harvest fields of the world knowing that they may never return. This was the heart I had asked God to give us. I am certainly not saying that we measure up to any of the missionary pioneers of days gone by or any of the great ones today. We desired only to be honorable vessels in the hands of a holy God.

Twenty hours later, we arrived at Moscow's International airport. The airport has since been renovated, but at that time it still had that creepy sense of evil and control and looked the part. It was colorless. It was lifeless. It was gray, dull, and emotionless. Military and customs people were everywhere and merciless in their attempt to be intimidating. An eerie touch of death and doom still walked the halls of this Communist experiment run amuck.

It took another two hours for us to clear customs, find the people sent to meet us and load our belongings into a broken down relic that they called a bus. We were all tired but sleep would evade us for several more hours. There was still the drive to our apartment, unloading of the boxes and then carrying them up the stairway of Hell: past the graffiti and over the cigarette

butts, beer and vodka bottles. Then came the disheartening news from the people responsible to find us an apartment. “We still don’t have an apartment for you. You can stay in this one but for only thirty days—that’s it.”

### **But God – You Promised!**

Jill had been praying for an apartment that would suit our purposes, that it would not have super-sized cockroaches nor be dilapidated. She was holding on to the promises of Mark 10:28-30:

*“Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee. And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel’s, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.”*

We were shown several possibilities over the next thirty days, but nothing could pass the cockroach test, the grime test or the dilapidated test. We were not being difficult on purpose, it is just that we believed that God had told us that He would provide a decent place to live. Especially Jill, she was adamant about it. She was holding on to the promise in God’s Word and would not budge. When our thirty days were up there was only one apartment available and even then we could only have it for ten days. It was on the seventeenth floor of another apartment complex. So we loaded up once more and made the move. Our new dwellings had no refrigerator and no furniture except a bed and a few beat-up chairs. It was getting worse, not better. “You have ten days and then you will be on the street,” retorted one of the leaders in the organization we were with when we first went to the former Soviet Union. “That’s okay,” said Jill, “we believe God has a place for us. Either He called us and will provide or He didn’t.” They were not happy with her answer but then we believed we needed to stay faithful to God’s Word and to His confirmation to Jill that He would meet our needs.

### **Taking matters into our own hands**

Our first family project was searching for an apartment. The organization had failed, so as a family we joined forces to get this job done. Together we made up several hundred flyers and went throughout the whole district gluing our advertisement to the doors of every entry. All five of us. Because people would tear them down we had to make daily rounds to put up new ones. We were determined to find the apartment that God had set aside for us. Then the telephone call came, “We have a nice three room apartment on the fifth floor.” When Jill returned from looking at it she said, “Peter, this is it, it’s perfect.” It was! God is always faithful to His Word and we must be also.

The day before we were expected to be out of our other location we moved into apartment number three and lived there the next twenty-nine months. It was down to the wire but God used the incident to our advantage. We were forced to trust Him early on because the fiery trails that

were to come upon us later would be much worse. If we relented at this stage we would surely crumble when the pressures of apostolic ministry intensified. Those who choose to stand for Christ and His promises must often stand alone. It can be a lonely life. Many times we may not understand situations or circumstances but God's promises are true and we must learn to trust Him. We must learn to be obedient to His Word regardless of what our five senses are telling us. We could have given in and accepted anything that came along, disregarding the promises of God. We knew the battle would only intensify: if we could not stand in faith now, we would crumble when the warfare increased.

### **Learning the Rails**

We had been assigned a person who was to help us adjust to our new surroundings. On the night of our arrival in Moscow he showed up with a bag containing some eggs, a few potatoes, a couple apples and a halfhearted welcome. We could tell by his lack of enthusiasm that we were on our own. If we were to survive life in Moscow we would have to step out in faith and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. Our first course of action was to learn how to navigate the city. Since we had no vehicle we would have to master the traditional means of transportation. These would include the underground railway, buses, trolleys, and taxis. Our first challenge would be the underground railways. Jill and I determined to conquer this strange means of travel by total immersion. Everyday for over a week we traveled the subway, getting off at each stop, we made our way up to the surface, looked around outside and then headed back down. We were trying to memorize the system. Many times we got lost; and often we were nervous. We did not know the language. People were mean and everything was fast paced; everything totally opposite of Midwestern America. Back home people smiled, were usually polite and had a "let the women and children go first mentality," but not in Moscow.

The underground system was made up of several rail lines denoted by colors. There was the "red line" that went to a certain section of the city, then there was the "green line," the "blue line," "yellow line" and others. They all intersected with the "brown line" and some with each other. Millions of people each day traveled this perplexing underground world. Even the Russians would get confused. Millions of people traveling underground like moles, coming up long enough to travel to their concrete cubical they call "home" where they would spend the night. These people need Jesus. But who cares about them? Who really cares? We do and that's why we were there. Humanity is lost and in need of a Savior.

300 million Russian speaking people held in spiritual and physical bondage, brainwashed by Communism desperately needed Jesus. Christian television will not reach them. Special events are not the answer. The worlds lost will be reached by the ground troops. Apostolic church planting teams made up of native missionaries are the keys. Yes, Christian radio and television have value but the reality is that the war is never won without the ground troops going in for face to face combat. The white glove approach will not bring closure to the Great Commission. To do this we will need to get our hands dirty.

We finally did master the subway. Over the next two years we witnessed some of the craziest things in this underground world. Like the three drunks standing next to us that broke into a fight, with each other! They went at it until one was knocked to the floor, bloody and bruised. The interesting thing was that they were all friends. They came together, fought with each other, and left together. Strange! Or the time when a drunk passed out on a bench began wetting his pants, which then drained to the floor and ran down the center of the train toward the rear of the car. The urine smell was ferocious. Needless to say, most people exited the train car at the next stop whether they needed to or not.

There was the time during one of our thirty-second station stops, in which I needed to get off but couldn't get to the door because of the crowd. We were still new to the system and I was being polite, not knowing you had to play American football rules to travel on these subways. As I was trying to politely maneuver my way through the crowd I felt a pair of hands grab me from behind, push me to the door and out onto the landing. Turning around to thank the person, I saw a very stocky built Babushka (grandma) wearing a big smile waving me goodbye. I sure felt like a wimp.

It has been so crowded at times that others on the landing forced people inside so the automatic doors could close. Often, for fear of my kids suffocating I held up my arms to prevent people from crushing them. One time in particular the people were pressing in so hard my shoulders were in agony as I tried to keep the crowd at bay. I was protecting my youngest daughter, Satia. As I looked down at her those big brown eyes spoke volumes. She looked so small and helpless. She trusted her dad to keep her from harm. In my mind's eye I can still see her. She looked so small, so helpless, so in need of her father. I remember saying, "It's okay, Satia, Dad will protect you." The enemy will raise his ugly head at times like these in an attempt to bring discouragement. Have you ever felt discouragement raise its ugly head? So what do we do? The Bible says this:

*"Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." (2 Corinthians 10:5)*

Some of you reading this book may be in a challenging situation right now. Maybe you have stepped out in faith, pioneering a church or launching a ministry to the nations. Or maybe you are a mom or dad with family responsibilities, and the tentacles of stress are attempting to pierce your armor of faith. Please, whatever you do, don't give up. Do not bow to the pressures of life or the attacks of the evil one. Get into your prayer closet. Begin fasting. Get your confession in agreement with God's Word. Finish what you started. Don't be a quitter.

*"Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." (Romans 8:37)*

The next system we needed to tackle was the buses, then the trolleys and then of course the taxi system. In a city this big you had to learn each mode of transportation. We were to learn that every car was a potential taxi. It was the people's way of making extra money. To obtain a taxi we had to stand along the roadside, flag down a car and then negotiate a fare. It was an art we became good at doing. Usually we went through several cars before we could negotiate both the right price and correct location. There were also some rules we established. Never get into a car alone if there were two or more people already in the car. Never get into a car alone with the opposite sex. Always negotiate the price first. Most importantly we learned to be led by the Holy Spirit. If there was a check in our spirit we would never get in the car. Every car may be a potential taxi, but it could also be a potential nightmare.

Although our ministry was to Ukraine, we were based out of Moscow for a little over two years. I was traveling extensively, conducting crusades and leadership training conferences, and pioneering churches. It was a difficult time for all of us. Every time I left for Ukraine, I felt concern for my wife and children. Spiritual warfare was fierce. As souls came to Jesus and churches were planted the warfare intensified. One quality the devil has is that he is a hard worker. He works twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week to prevent Gospel work. He never takes a break or a vacation. We were to discover that pioneering churches is something that the devil takes special notice of and hatred for. If we were to survive and overcome we had to stay spiritually fit. Our prayer life had to be strong. Our family had to be united. Our marriage had to be secure. The last thing I wanted was to gain others for the Kingdom yet lose my own soul, lose my kids or end up in divorce court.

*“But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.” (1 Corinthians 9:27)*

We must keep our entire lives under subjection. Not only *from* fleshy and carnal things but *into* holy and righteous acts. This includes an active prayer life, fasting, and study of God's Word. We took spiritual warfare seriously. Just going outside could be dangerous. Prayer became a way of life.

### **Satia's Dilemma**

Looking back on our life in Moscow I can now recall that there were more challenges and sacrifices than first realized. One incident that was to span eighteen months was especially hard for me, as a dad, to overcome. Satia, my youngest daughter slept on the floor for this entire period. She had no bed or mattress. We searched Moscow high and low for a mattress but could not find one. Now things are different but then immediately after the doors opened the effects of Communism were still rampant. All three girls slept together in one small room and at night I would go in and pray over them. Seeing Satia curled up in the corner was gut wrenching. I hated it. I felt as if I had let her down. Yes, it hurt. In America she had her own room, her dolls, teddies, and of course, her own bed. Now this: *“The devil seeks to steal, kill and destroy”* (John 10:10). He was out to destroy my self worth as a father.

At times I would take my three girls outside to the playground. It was a mess. Everything was falling apart and dangerous. The equipment was rusty, broken, and virtually unusable. But this was all there was. I had the power to change this if I just took my family back to America. But this could not be. We had to endure. We had to pull together as a family.

There was a period of time when the enemy raised his ugly head against my oldest daughter, Christina. Because of our open air preaching near our apartment complex our family became known in the area. Two boys in particular took special notice of Christina but for all the wrong motives. The Christian school they were attending at that time was in the next building. I made it a habit to walk our kids to and from school. On one of these walks these boys were waiting and so bold they even asked me if they could take my daughter out on dates, they meant a threesome. That's bold! That's sick!

The attacks intensified. Daily, a group of up to nine or ten boys, 14-16 years of age, began hanging out near our apartment complex entrance smoking, cussing, and calling out Christina's name. The elevators had now become graffiti boards with lewd and vulgar language about our daughter. It became vicious. Jill and I were able to keep our kids from seeing the graffiti. Many times we scraped the elevator walls with razor blades. Daily we prayed and daily I confronted these kids. Once they surrounded me as if to attack and it was a stand off, a mental game of courage. They were not giving in and I sure wasn't going to either; this was my daughter.

We were not about to give in or compromise in any way to escape the heat of the battle. When Christian's back off from the battle that is when they get crushed. Our only chance was to stay in the fight and go to the end. We must stop flinching when the devil roars. We must stop bowing to his every growl. We must stay on target and let God shoot us like arrows! You and I have been called to hit the bull's eye! He's called us to fly straight! God has called us to pierce the atmosphere, slay the dragons and come out the victor! In the end God brought victory and the gang of hoodlums did not bother us any more. There is only one thing to do when the devil raises his ugly head and that is to cut it off!

When we first arrived in Moscow, we expected to be there for only a short time and then be sent to Ukraine. This did not take place and for us it was very frustrating. However, we were not about to sit around and twiddle our thumbs. We were called to build the Kingdom of God. We didn't need a pulpit. We did not need to wait for Ukraine. We began to conduct open air preaching at different venues including underground subway stations, street corners and apartment complexes. Over the next several months many people repented on the streets as we preached the Gospel. They were healed and baptized in the Holy Spirit. God shows up when the Gospel is preached! It was incredible! Was it easy? Certainly not, we were cursed, shut down by police, harassed by drunks and rowdies, and were used as target practice as people peppered us with beer bottles, fruit, and cigarette butts.

### **The China Connection**

One of the passions I had was to raise up Russian believers to smuggle Bibles into China. This opportunity began to take shape in 1994. After a three-week trip into Ukraine in which we successfully launched two churches I boarded a plane and flew to Beijing, China. It was on this trip in which the reality of smuggling thousands of Bibles into China came alive in my spirit. I spent several days meeting key leaders of the underground church, attending secret house church meetings and even baptized several new converts in water. One of my fondest memories was spending time with a great saint of God who had helped smuggle over 250,000 Bibles into the hands of believers in the underground church. At the time of our meeting this saint of God was in her 80s. This trip was also a catalyst for the launching of another ministry, China Harvest, which Bob Weiner pioneered. Bob helped open some doors for us, which would later be of great help as we launched our smuggling efforts. By the time everything was said and done we were instrumental in obtaining over 30,000 Chinese Bibles, setting up a smuggling operation and casting a vision that eventually included several Russian pastors. One pastor went on to establish a Bible school to train Chinese and North Korean believers. Our efforts did not go without challenge. On one of my trips to China I was attempting to smuggle duplication equipment for audio and video training. We purchased the copyrights for video Bible school materials and had smuggled in the masters. I was attempting to bring in thousands of dollars worth of electronic equipment. I never made it past the customs inspections. They nabbed me at the airport and confiscated everything. I was alone, had no interpreter, and was coming into China at a relatively unknown airport. No one was there to help me, except the Lord. But He was more than enough!

When believers preach the Gospel, we invade enemy territory and the devil will resist. There will be retaliation. Nevertheless, we must press on in all haste. People are lost and on a fast train toward Hell. For those walking in Great Commission obedience: insults, ridicule and slander will come. But keep your crown in sight. Keep your focus. When you are knocked down, get up again and fight on because you are not forsaken. Rise up in unflinching, passionate zeal, get back in the race and go the distance. Apostle Paul said this in 2 Timothy 4:7, *“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.”* You need to do the same. Forget the past. Bury the excuses that have been keeping you from all God has for you. Repent of the self-enhancement gospel and begin living the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are all called to lay down our lives. If we try to keep them we will lose them.

*“Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it.”* (Luke 17:33)

Lose your life in Christ, only then can you find yourself and discover your destiny.

### **Chapter 3**

#### *New Beginnings in Ukraine*

The time had finally come. After two and a half years, 50,000 kilometers of travel by train and much hardship, we were finally moving into Ukraine! Our family and staff were busy loading up a semi-truck with our belongings, including 100,000 Christian books, plus Bibles, New Testaments, and one million Gospel tracts. But now the tricky part, the truck had to be inspected by customs agents and sealed. “No big deal,” I thought. They will just take a look, read our manifest and we will be on our way. Oh foolish man that I am, to believe it would be so easy. Little did I realize that the old system dies hard. For two days we went from one government office to the next being kicked around like a beach ball and then finally, when we thought we saw the light at the end of the tunnel they said, “Unload the whole semi-trailer.” What! I wanted to cry and probably would have if others had not beaten me to it. Someone needed to be strong and stable. I was the logical choice. We were all tired. Exhausted is a more fitting word. Who did these jug-heads think they were? Whether I liked it or not these guys had the power to be jerks. After several more hours of hassles, the truck was finally on the road and we entered another leg in our journey of life in the former Soviet Union.

We needed just two more miracles. The truck was required to go through two border stations, Russian and Ukrainian and we needed it to go through without paying duties, or should I say bribes, a miracle by anyone’s standards. Clearing these two checkpoints without fees is unheard of in this land of bribery and payoffs. I remember the time I sent one of my workers to deliver a sound system to a church we planted in Uzbekistan. He returned several hours later with another horrible story that we hear all too often. Upon arriving at the train station he was approached by two Mafia thugs who demanded payoff and protection fees otherwise they would destroy the equipment and inflict upon him severe bodily harm. What could he do? It was too much equipment to carry at once and baggage handlers are Mafia controlled too, so they will not come near you when a person is being squeezed. It cost a \$50.00 protection fee plus another \$50.00 when they demanded they help him carry the system to the storage lockers. Payoffs are not only for Mafia but government officials and police. It’s sickening. However, in the former Soviet Empire it is reality. It is a way of life. Even so, by God’s grace we passed both border checkpoints without duties or payoffs and were on our way!

#### **Ukraine at Last**

We arrived at our final destination after twenty-six hours of travel. We were tired and dirty. We were all looking forward to a nice soak in the tub. Unfortunately we arrived to find out that the village water tank was broken down. For the first thirty days of life in the village of Yarkoe, we had no water for toilets, clean up or drinking. When water finally arrived at our faucets we discovered the hot water boiler did not work and that the water was not drinkable. Cleaning up became a chore. Once per week we had family clean up day. We would boil water on the gas stove and fill the tub. One by one each of us would take a hot bath. You should have seen the scum that came off our bodies. It was gross, nevertheless, it was a wonderful feeling to be clean. At these times it became easy to recall the ease of life in America and everything we took for

granted. A simple thing like turning on a faucet and expecting hot water is a way of life in the States, but not so in Ukraine. To have hot water at a faucet or a hot shower are precious commodities. We learned to appreciate the simple things. A toilet that flushed! A sink that didn't leak!

Although it was good to finally be in Ukraine, it was not easy beginning over again. All the friends we made in Moscow were gone. It helped immensely that we had developed a wonderful staff. We also had a track record of success and had learned much. We were soon planting another church, conferences were held to train leaders and evangelists were being released into ministry. The Kingdom of God was being established. The next six months however, would be the greatest stretching, shaping and molding of our Christian character we were to face to date. Although it seemed like torture at the time, we would not trade our tests and trials for all the caviar in Russia. God did a work in us that no amount of study could provide. The plastic Christianity that seems to invade the lives of many believers in the West was melting away, leaving behind vessels more usable for the Master's bidding. We had entered another leg of our spiritual journey. Our life on the mission field has never been easy. Yet, because of the hardships the New Testament became more real to us; the life of Paul more understandable.

### **Child Talk**

"I remember the hundreds of times we had to boil the water, so we could drink it. Then there were the mice that constantly roamed the house. I had my own room and a bed. In Moscow I lived in one room with my other two sisters. In Moscow, I had Christian friends. Here there were none. It was difficult." Christina; age 13

"My memory of living in Yarkoe was that we now had a house instead of a small apartment in Moscow. Instead of concrete and gray we had flowers and even roses in the yard. We no longer had to live in a concrete box." Alicia; age 9

"I remember the toilet had no water for a long time and it stunk. We had to empty it by hand. Yuk! We also had to share bath water. Mom and Dad would heat water on the stove and I would usually go last. When it got to be my turn the water was gray. But when I was done it was black. I liked to play outside in the dirt! I made friends and we played together in my yard so for me this was better than Moscow. I made a friend, her name was Yanna. I remember one time Alicia and I were walking down the road and a man came running right between us chasing his wife. He had a knife in his hand, he was yelling and she was screaming. I think he was trying to kill her. It was really strange. I never saw that in Fargo, North Dakota." Satia; age 8

No, it was not easy. But what we were attempting to accomplish in Ukraine was not about us. Life is not about us it's about Him Whom we serve. It's about Jesus! The life of Apostle Paul was not an easy one either but it was the life of what should be a "normal" Christian. He was a tentmaker, he worked with his hands. Just like many of you reading this book, you work too. You provide for yourself and your family. Apostle Paul was on a mission. Every tent he crafted, every trip to the market, every voyage by sea and walk on the beach was incidental to his real passion in life: which was to rescue more people from the raging furnace of an eternal Hell.

What drives a man like Paul to hazard his life for the sake of people he did not even know? He writes this in 2 Corinthians 5:14:

*"For the love of Christ controls and urges and impels us. . ."* (Amplified Bible).

He did what he did because he loved Jesus and was filled with His love for the lost. He constantly lived to please the One Who died for all mankind, Jesus Christ of Nazareth! Challenges of life are real and trials will come. But if we want to stand the test of time, firm in Christ until the end, we must relinquish our life to Jesus. Let Him take control. Let Him be Master of the ship. We must lose our life that we may find it again in Christ. We must serve Jesus with everything in our being.

On the mission field we were forced to die to self. Scooping human waste out of a toilet has a way of killing pride and mastering the flesh. Sharing bath water woke us up to the realities of life that multitudes across this planet face daily. The life we now lived is what Paul meant when he wrote this in 1 Corinthians 9:22:

*"To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some."*

We became as Ukrainians and Russians in order that we could win them to Jesus Christ.

## Chapter 4

### *Military Police Bring in the Dogs*

*“The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy...”*(John 10:10a)

This verse rightly depicts the nature of the devil. You can make no deals with this demented creature of oppression. He hates mankind: but especially believers who are doing front line Gospel works and those who support these works; these he hates with an eternal vengeance. You and I have been called into a spiritual warfare with Hell and it will not cease until our dying breath.

Our lives on the mission field took us from the realm of hearing of such things, into the reality of the adventure. In America, a believer feels persecuted if someone doesn't receive a Gospel tract from them. They pout, cry foul, and act like spoiled kids if they are cursed at for the Gospel's sake. Believers in the West need to grow up. Our freedoms are being stripped away daily and if the trend does not change, we may soon lose all religious liberties. We must never forget that we are “called-out” ones. We have been called out of the worlds system and into a life of victory in Christ. We have been redeemed by the precious blood of the Lamb; not for a life of laziness and hoarding but to good works and generosity. You and I were not saved just for Heaven but to partake in the Gospel enterprise of reaching the world for Christ! That's good news!

*“I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”* (John 10:10b)

It was the summer of 1994, we were building momentum and things were looking up. Churches were being planted, salvations were mounting, and awesome physical healings were constantly occurring. God's favor was upon us! Our ministry in Ukraine was getting off the ground. Our first conference, a few months earlier, was attended by 49 believers, the second by 180, and now the third was being attended by over 240 believers from across Ukraine. Momentum was building: we were excited about the potential soon to be released across the nation; as these believers returned home with fresh vision, to plant churches in every village of Ukraine. Our conference theme was “Taking Ukraine for Jesus.” Conference participants were excited. They were receiving renewed hope and passion for reaching their own people for Jesus.

Our ministry funded the hall, covered the cost of housing and food for all participants, plus provided 100,000 Christian books on foundational themes, 20,000 New Testaments and Bibles, and 500,000 Gospel tracts for these emerging leaders. We were believing for 100 village church plants as a result of this conference. One person sold out to the purposes of God can accomplish great exploits for the Master. Sitting before us were many that were serious about the things of God and took the Master's Great Commission to heart. The potential for Kingdom expansion was incredible. Everyone was filled with anticipation.

Everything was going great until the administrator who rented us the facilities frantically informed me that “We have visitors from the KGB.” She was beside herself. “Please” she said, “If you do not obey they will come in the ‘Big Black Car’ and take me away.” This was an obvious statement from the days of Communist control. She was consumed with fear. My next move probably did not help matters when I asked her to relay this message, “I will join them after my next session.” The poor woman turned every shade of the rainbow. She returned an hour and a half later looking as if she was doing an impression of Revelation 6:8, “*And I looked, and behold a pale horse...*” She was sickly looking and sounded even worse as she begged, “Please, if you do not come now I will lose my job, for these people are serious.” And of course, how could I forget about the “Big Black Car.” I was escorted to an area containing a large padded door with brown leather that matched the walls, as if to make it look like there was no door at all. When the door opened I noticed another door of the same size about three feet in. It was a vestibule, a buffer to drown out noise! “What kind of noise? Screams as they pull out innocent people’s fingernails or stretch them on the rack!”

When I cleared the second door I saw a large oval table with one person sitting at the far end and one on each side. They all looked the part of the stereotypical Russian KGB henchmen. Every one of them had mean grumpy faces and thick bushy eyebrows extending up their foreheads. The only words spoken were, “Sit down!” They knew the game of intimidation and they played it well. After all, they had 70 years to perfect it.

For over an hour I was interrogated, as most of the discussion had nothing to do with our current situation. Questions shot out in rapid fire, accusations pounded forth with precision and threats to my person and family spewed forth its dastardly venom. These guys were trained by the best in dishing out fear and intimidation. My personal interpreter, Natasha, was not with me and the one I had for this meeting was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. She pleaded with me to compromise and tell them everything they said was true and that I was in the wrong. “Play their game” she said “and it will be easier on you.” Something I was unwilling to do. The meeting ended with their last threat. (Yes, they got in the last word.) “Your meetings are canceled, don’t you dare continue holding them in the hall.” These people were God haters. They did not hate me they hated Jesus. Their minds were darkened and their consciences seared. They cared nothing for the welfare of their own people. They cared nothing for their own souls. To them, humans are but animals that live and die—that’s it.

Upon returning to the conference it was not long before they cut power to the hall. At this point we moved from the hall and into the street using the top landing of the steps as a platform to preach from. Some would say arrogance fueled our fire but I beg to differ. “Foxe’s Book of Martyrs” is filled with stories of saints that refused to bend to the pagan power of their day. For this they died but they died in the faith. Was that arrogance or a love for their Lord and His Word? I believe the latter.

Shortly after we moved outdoors, military police came with their dogs and automatic weapons. Cars came to screeching halts, doors slammed, dogs barked and here they were, the Communist

Gestapo. They surrounded the crowd and stood there, guns drawn and at attention. It was a stand off. My friend, Steve Quernemoen, told me later that he was getting a little nervous. He said, "I was hoping you wouldn't push this thing too far." The looks on the faces of some of our American guests revealed that they were getting visions of spending their remaining years inside communist prisons. I could just imagine some of these visitors going to bed that night in the fetal position, rocking back and forth crying "Mommy, Mommy." American preachers are not used to this sort of thing. Another friend of mine, Mike Bartolomeo who is an ex-Marine, trained to eat snakes, bugs, and break necks was with us too. What was he thinking? No, he was not planning any heroics. Mike was simply thinking, "We need God." It's true, we did.

Would they dare do anything drastic, especially if it involved their own people? The truth was our documents were proper, and our visas did authorize us to do what we were doing. The problem rested in the fact that the Ukrainian government passed a new law after our visas were approved. They gave us permission, allowed us entry into Ukraine, and approved the rental of the building. Now they were changing the rules. Should we back down? Should we close up shop and send these believers home before we could effectively cast the vision and release them back to their villages armed with Gospel tracts, New Testaments, Bibles and training aids? After all, souls were at stake and thousands would be reached for Jesus through these believers. Churches would be pioneered. Apostolic movements would be launched. We couldn't just throw in the towel now. That is why the attacks were so real. The potential for Kingdom expansion was there. It was not an easy decision. I was not concerned for myself. We had visiting Americans and then of course the 240 nationals. The decision was made to continue and pray that there would be no altercation. We needed the grace of God.

These military police and the people that sent them were serious. They hated righteousness and were full of demons. They did not care about the Gospel or their own people. That night we finished preaching without incident in front of military police, guard dogs and curiosity seekers. There was no altercation and for this we praised the Lord. It could have been ugly. It can get that way when we stand up against unrighteousness.

The battle was on and not only for our ministry in Ukraine or for the very city in which we held the conference but for the destinies of many participating in our conference. As far as I was concerned destiny was hanging in the balance. For our ministry, the city of Odessa, a hundred villages, and millions who had yet to hear the Gospel. Yes, I realize many would respond with "Who is this guy? A virtual nobody making such bold statements." Nevertheless, this is what I felt. We could not close the conference. We could not bend to satan's rule. Too much was at stake. We had to continue, but how?

People often ask me why I put up with all the hassles. They reason that I could have stayed secure in the safety of America. The words of C.T. Studd, a famous British athlete turned preacher answers the question for me, "*Some want to live within the sound of the church or chapel bell. I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell.*"

Secretly that night, messengers were sent by me to tell our people that we would continue the conference. Half would go to the beach and the other half to the park. That morning the weather was in our favor and the conference continued. As over 240 believers received God's Word, half at a nearby park and the other half at the beach on the Black Sea, I went to plead our case in front of the head of Odessa's religious department and two other officials. After six hours of intense meetings, we walked away with a piece of paper that gave us permission to move back into the hall. For the moment it seemed like a small miracle. Little did I know what had really taken place. It would be two years before we discovered that the KGB and the religious department had schemed together to plant a spy in our conference.

Unknown to us the spy registered as a pastor along with some other late comers and as is our policy, was placed on our mailing list. This was only discovered years later when we sent two of our staff to Kiev, the capital of Ukraine, to speak with the head of the nation's religious department. We were going through terrible persecution and I wanted to know why we were being singled out and attacked so severely. It was then that the head of Ukraine's religious department presented a file four inches thick on the "notorious Peter Mehl." He also produced a box of materials containing every book, Gospel tract, video and audio teaching that we ever distributed. They were very thorough. Their goal was to build a case against me that they could use to "legally" remove me from the country. He specifically made mention of our vision of 1,000 church plants in villages. What was his concern? It was the fact that they would be unregistered and therefore not easily reached for government control.

Once we learned this, some serious decisions had to be made. We looked at ourselves as insignificant in the big picture. Apparently they didn't. Hundreds of letters had been sent to Kiev complaining about our evangelistic efforts. This also greatly disturbed them.

First, we removed Jill's and my name from everything concerning the ministry. We also changed the ministry name, did not allow my name to be used in crusade or conference advertising and put our database in limbo. We did not know who we could trust.

I guess we should have seen it coming. When we first planted the church in Odessa the government took away our building four times in twelve months and never allowed us more than a few hours notice. They were relentless and used every means of intimidation they could. I remember after the fourth incident, we had scheduled another crusade to begin the rebuilding process once again. I arrived at the hall to find the pastor alone on the stage playing his guitar. With tears streaming down his checks he was asking the Lord if he was even worthy to be the pastor because everything was always falling apart. The enemy was working overtime to destroy this man. The devil hates us and works nonstop to keep us from living our God ordained destiny: which is to win the lost at all cost. As bad as it may get we cannot throw in the towel. We must run our race with patience trusting in Jesus, who is the beginning and end of our faith.

*"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily*

*beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.” (Hebrews 12: 1-3)*

It looked as if we would lose the battle in Odessa. It was a vicious attack. Every ounce of logic and common sense told us that we had been beaten. Our emotions protested and screamed “it is enough!” Our flesh cried out, “run for safety!” But we couldn’t, we had to keep up the fight of faith. I challenged the pastor as I now challenge everyone who may be faced with a battle of a lifetime. Paul challenged Timothy to *“Fight the good fight of faith”* (1 Timothy 6:12). Paul further challenges Timothy with these words in 2 Timothy 2:3, *“Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.”* Anyone doing true Great Commission works or supporting these ministries will face hardships, trials, and tests. Don’t wimp out because of them but fight on and overcome them! Don’t throw away your destiny in the economy of God. Fight for your place in the history book of Kingdom expansion. Your hour of victory is within reach!

The crusade in Odessa was a success and once again the church was reborn! One incident of this particular crusade was of special eternal significance. Next to the hall where we held the meetings was a building that was housing about 100 children from Chernobyl, home to the worlds worst nuclear disaster. By God’s grace we were able to get permission to have these children attend our service. Every one of them without exception, was completely bald, frail and deathly white from the effects of radiation. It was a sight forever branded in my memory. These kids were stricken with cancer and dying of this horrible disease. Calling it a tragedy is too mild. Catastrophe is more fitting, yet, pales in comparison to the stark reality of the moment. Even so, in the midst of it all, God still had a plan. In the middle of this nightmare from beneath, God reached from heaven to anoint the atmosphere and electrify His eternal Word as it was preached; the result was eighty-five of these young people repented and received Jesus into their hearts!

We may have personally been going through attacks, trials and persecutions, but in the midst of it all God reminded us of why we live and move and have our being. And that is to reach the lost with the Gospel of Christ! It is for those without Christ that we must not give up. As long as we live we must make it our life’s ambition to reach as many souls as possible for Jesus. We must stop feeling sorry for ourselves and begin taking notice of the billions who have never even heard the name of Jesus. Life is too short and lives too precious to do anything less.

When things began looking better in Odessa and hopes of success began to burn bright once again, the attacks resumed. Newspaper articles portrayed me as the “smooth talking fat-handed preacher.” To this day I still don’t know what that phrase meant. They dubbed our worship team as “made over prostitutes.” It was ugly. They labeled us a “cult” and warned readers that we will lead their children astray. They made up stories and put them to print. It was vicious!

Have I failed to mention the letters written to the religious department? Baptists, Pentecostals, and Russian Orthodox all wrote attacking us from each ones slanted viewpoint. The Baptists did not like our freedom in worship. The Pentecostals disliked women in leadership and jewelry and the Russian Orthodox disliked everything.

To them it was not important that people were coming to Christ, being healed of physical ailments, and delivered from demon bondage. These “Christians” and I use the term loosely, only cared about laws, rules, and traditions of men. Sound familiar? It should, Jesus dealt with it continually and for Apostle Paul it was a lifelong struggle. How can people fueling such hate call themselves Christians? They were purposely trying to get our ministry shut down. But this is what the devil does best. We must never forget that we have an enemy. He is out to dry up our funds, spread lies, divide friends and make us ineffective. In the midst of such attacks the devil will try to use discouragement, sorrow, and disappointments to cause us to back away from or even stop us in our efforts to reach others for Jesus. He will prefer that we spend our time in the four walls of the church or that we be consumed in social works that negate the Great Commission. He likes us to be busy but not busy in the harvest, rescuing people from Hell.

How about you, do you find yourself in the middle of a situation that seems to be trying to take you out of the race? If so, then I challenge you to arise, attack, and finish what God intended to perfect in your life. We all have a job to do and when knocked down we must get back up and finish the course. James 4:7 says, “*Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*” God has chosen people like you and I to reach this generation for Christ and complete our God given purpose. The devil sees us as a threat and will attack us. But there is no reason for alarm. I John 4:4b says, “. . . *because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.*” You and I can have a powerful impact in today’s world. Remember that our service to King Jesus is twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Our safeguard is to know that we are in a spiritual war for the most precious commodity in the universe—souls. Take up the weapons of your warfare and fight on, saint of God!

“I know one church in Donetskay oblast that grew from 12 people up to 70 using your materials and books. We want to join your vision to start 1,000 churches, but we can only do 2 villages... Our church is very young. It was started because of your conferences. We have 14 people. We are waiting for your help...” *Pavel Riazanov – Skvira, Ukraine*

“After the teachings about evangelism that I heard at one of the conferences of Peter Mehl, the Lord started to use me. Many people got saved and now they study the materials you provided at the conferences.”  
*Alla Kuzmenko*

“After your April conference we raised up four leaders and now have four cell groups. All the cell group leaders came to the last conference. In the

cell groups we use the materials of Peter Mehl, including his teachings tapes. This helps us to grow more. We have many healings and wonderful things are happening in the church.” *Victor Zabarchenko*

“From the very first conference in March we received your tracts and posters. We went out to the villages and about 80 people repented. Now it’s a lot more. Now we have started our own cell church, which is about 15 people, and 12 of them came from the streets. We minister at the drug centers, hospitals, military stations, schools, and orphanages...” *Tanya Skorhadova*

## Chapter 5

### *Attacks of Brethren*

One of the most eye opening surprises, yet, disappointing times in my life, has been when fellow preachers turned into vipers. I understand the concept that young inexperienced sheep would put up a fuss, complain and buck authority during their discipleship process. But what Jill and I were to discover would change us forever. How naive we must have been. What we expected life in the trenches to be like was far from reality and we were to be disappointed more than once.

Our first encounter took place with the self-proclaimed bishop of Ukraine's Crimea region. Although unknown to us at first, this person harbored a great bitterness toward us because we planted a church in a city where he also had a church. We were oblivious to the "Territorial rights" theology or the "My ministry" demon. Instead of talking to us about his concerns he set out on a plan to destroy our ministry. Yes, you heard it correctly. It started with a plan to publicly ridicule me before a group of pastors, the "Charismatic Union" of Crimea. Can you believe it? Does this really happen in Christendom? Surely this would not happen between pastors or denominational officials. Is it possible for this to happen in America? Unfortunately, we were to learn it takes place all too often.

They mailed me a nicely typed invitation to attend their upcoming fellowship meeting. There was no indication of any problem. Everything appeared to be squeaky clean. Unknown to me at the time it was to be like the cannibals who invited the white man for lunch and he was lunch! Fortunately for me, I did not feel an urgency to attend the meeting. Only afterwards, through a friend, would we hear about this gathering of preachers. We did have one friend in the group who had the courage to stand against this craziness. When I did not show up or should I say, when his plan did not work, he went into a madman rage and vowed to run us out of Ukraine. He also threatened every pastor in the fellowship. "If you have anything to do with Peter Mehl, you will be removed from our fellowship."

Could this happen with born-again, Spirit-filled pastors? My wife and I were shocked. We were the ones who gave up our life in America to reach their people for Jesus. We were dedicating our lives to help establish the Kingdom of God in the earth. Surely they must understand this. We were to discover that a spirit of territorialism had penetrated deep into the hearts of a majority of the church in the former Soviet Union. Regardless whether the pastors were Baptists, Pentecostal or Charismatic, everyone seemed to be laying claim to their own turf. This was not an immature and inexperienced Mickey Mouse demon. This demon was a major player in the realm of the demonic. These brethren had lost their pure love for their Lord and fallen into extreme legalism. Someone moving into their territory was a threat for fear of taking some of their allotted reward. What followed was bitterness and hatred toward us.

The bishop produced a 90-minute "Hate-Tape" on audiocassette and sent it to pastors throughout Ukraine. This was really beyond me. I was naive to such garbage going on in leadership in the

body of Christ. I did obtain a copy of the tape. It was blistering. It hurt. If I said otherwise I would be lying. It was not so much that I was maligned but the fact that such blatant nonsense goes on in Christianity, and worse yet, in leadership and in the name of “service to the Lord.” No wonder the world looks on in disgust. How can we ever expect the world to repent when we first need to and we don’t? Whenever this man traveled to other churches to speak he would always mention me in a demeaning way. I became “dead-meat” for his sermon illustrations. He was consumed with hate. He was on a crusade. His vow was “I will run Peter Mehl out of the country never to be seen again.” To be totally honest, I still cannot comprehend how a Spirit-filled Christian could be so filled with hate. Maybe my next question should be “was he really a Christian or simply a false convert, a wolf in sheep’s clothing?” What was the crime? We had invaded his territory—that was our crime. How can church leaders set out to actually try to destroy another believer or his God ordained ministry? It happens in Ukraine. Could it happen in America? Unfortunately it does. God help us.

*“But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.” (Galatians 5:15-16)*

### **Another Brother Flips Out**

We helped another brother with evangelism outreaches, crusades and conferences; build his church from 150 people to almost 1,000 people over a three-year period. The results were incredible. We also helped by purchasing sound systems and musical instruments. Besides this, we helped him plant two other churches. Dramatic healings took place in the meetings. Demons were cast out and great deliverances occurred. God was there. It was tremendous. We were anticipating many churches to be birthed through our relationship. The potential was enormous: a hundred churches could have been launched by working together in the Kingdom call.

Then I made a fatal mistake. I decided in one service to take a poll and ask how many in the audience had been saved or had received healing or deliverance through our ministry in the church. I was going to use the response as a faith builder to those in the service who needed a touch from God. But when a strong seventy-five percent raised their hands I saw a look in the Russian pastor’s eyes that I did not like. From that day forward things changed. It was as if he became a different man; like Saul toward David, the spears were continually airborne.

This pastor also went on a mission to destroy us. He wrote letters to the religious department and government officials to ask that we be barred from Ukraine. He too, claimed to be the bishop of Crimea. He was an in-law of the other self-proclaimed bishop. It must run in the family. Why is it that everyone wants to be a bishop? Titles are about as helpful as a mole on the end of a nose. A collar does not make the man or woman but the call of God and obedience to that call does.

If we are truly dead and risen again in Christ we can go on for God regardless of what others do. Regardless of what happens, we must keep our hearts focused on the Great Commission. This is what we had to focus on, especially now. The attacks were vicious.

If we, as believers, keep our attention focused on the cares of the world and our own personal problems, fears, and distractions of life; we will find ourselves desiring to get out of the battle. We must keep our attention on Jesus and our call to reach this generation with the Gospel. We must live our life as if we can fulfill the Great Commission in our lifetime. This will help spur us on to greater works. You and I can make a difference. We do have value in the plan of God.

If you find yourself in the wilderness, keep going—don't throw in the towel. No matter what has happened, your shattered hopes or unfulfilled expectations can turn around. Stay on course - God has not forgotten you. He is testing you. And when God has you in a test, many times He is silent. The question is: Will you pass the test? Surrender to God, let your life be hidden in Him, and pass the test. Victory is closer than you think.

#### **Oh no - another one!**

In 1999, when one of the pastors of a church we pioneered committed adultery, I asked him to step down for a season so that the issue could be dealt with. He refused and appealed to some leaders of a certain Charismatic fellowship in Ukraine. To my surprise, they sided with the pastor. When I refused to bend and suggested the fellowship keep their nose out of something that was not their affair, the attacks started once again. It wasn't even their church. They did not labor over this church for four years. They did not invest time, money or sweat equity. They never prayed, fasted and cried over this body of believers.

Pastor Sergie, a friend of mine, sent an e-mail to warn me. "Peter," he wrote, "These people 'The Charismatic Fellowship' are powerful, they will try to destroy you. They have power and will write letters to the government..." Can you imagine? What was transpiring? This fellowship wanted the church. Why not? It was a successful church. It was one of our regional centers and had birthed several other churches. Our mobile evangelism team located there had evangelized seventy area villages in the previous two years. We had poured our lives into raising up a center for evangelism. Sin and rebellion changed all that.

How sad that this has to take place in Christianity. It is sickening. How about you? Are you one of the power hungry elite that will run over people in order to climb the ladder of success? If so, I suggest you repent and get right with God. Maybe you are someone who has been hurt by the system. I challenge you not to give up and please don't be bitter. Forgive all that have hurt you and get back on track. If you have been knocked out of the race for whatever reason then it's time to get back in. You may not understand it all now. But one thing is clear, Jesus is returning soon and He expects to find us in the faith and taking care of Great Commission business.

Why are we in this race anyway? Is it for us? No way! It's not about us, it's about Him Whom we serve. We all need to re-evaluate our lives and especially those involved in full time ministry.

We must get back to the heart of why we live and breathe and have our being. We need a fresh heart for the harvest. Jesus constantly taught His disciples about the Kingdom of God. And whatever He taught, He lived. His disciples watched His life from every angle and found it to be true to His Words. Let's live our lives like the Master!

Let me finish this chapter by an illustration from John chapter 4. The disciples had gone into the city to buy food and upon returning offered some to Jesus.

*“But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of. Therefore said the disciples one to another, Hath any man brought him ought to eat? Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work. Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.”* (John 4:32-35)

What was Jesus really saying? He was saying “You are tired and hungry and only care about the here and now. You are not thinking about eternity. Lift up your eyes, look into eternity and see what I see. You think there is still plenty of time. But I say the souls of men and women around you right now are in trouble and they need your help.” Jesus was saying the fields are ripe now and the crop will soon be destroyed. Sure, Jesus was hungry, tired, and dirty. But the crisis of souls going into an eternal Hell consumed Him. Because this is also on my heart I am no longer hungry for the world's enticements or for the junk that entangles many of the leaders in Christendom. No, I do not claim to be better than anyone but I have caught a glimpse of eternity and His grace empowers me forward. My wife and I are passionate and desperate to finish the work we were sent to accomplish. We refuse to be caught up in “climbing the ladder of Christian success” while millions plunge yearly, into the fiery abyss of Hell. I refuse to climb the ladder of competition. Those who do will find out too late that they spent their whole life climbing a ladder that was leaning against the wrong wall.

Jesus has commanded us to follow Him. He commands us to forsake all. Jesus tells us to make disciples of all nations. What is the focus of your life? Is it money, retirement, houses, careers? Is it to pastor a big church or build a huge ministry? None of these things are success. True success is to know Him and to know Him is to serve and obey Him.

For those of us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Jesus commands *“Lift up your eyes and look on the harvest of lost souls instead of on yourselves.”* He is commanding us to see the urgency of the moment. There is a harvest in the earth right now that will be lost forever if we fail to respond properly. We must reap it now while it is daytime for the night is coming when no man can work. The life of Christ was marked by statements of a continuous urgency, *“I must go,” “I must work.”* Jesus was desperate to get the job done. Shouldn't we be too?

Let's repent of our Western laid-back lifestyle and re-focus on what is eternal. The church needs to get on track once again. When was the last time your church gathered together and wept for

the lost? When was the last time your church or you prayed hours into the night for the nations of the world? We must be willing to make sacrifices, deny ourselves and do something so others have the opportunity to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In America, we have thousands of Christian bookstores, plus Christian radio and television stations galore. Christian books, tapes, videos, buttons, wristbands, hats, tee shirts and a million other trinkets to flood the market. We have twenty-four hour a day satellite to beam into our homes every kind of Christian programming imaginable. All this is in America yet billions have not yet heard the name of Jesus Christ. Why is it that we do not respond? Are our hearts that calloused toward those hell-bound and lost? Please, let the Holy Spirit arrest your heart today as He did mine. Lift up your spiritual eyes, the fields are white for harvest: ready and waiting for you.

*“Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” (James 4:17)*

For only one dollar per day a Christian in America can help sponsor a Russian or Ukrainian missionary in the former Soviet Union. Maybe it is hard for you personally to win a soul to Jesus every week or month but not for our missionaries. We are constantly training and equipping indigenous missionaries in Ukraine. They are waiting to be sent into the harvest fields. They only need dedicated believers like you to stand with them. I know that you desire to be part of something that brings glory to Jesus and expands His kingdom in the earth. Partnering with our missionaries will produce eternal fruit in your behalf as people are saved and churches are pioneered!

## Chapter 6

### *War Casualties*

Some of the greatest pains we ever faced were when disciples whom we had trained and released into ministry walked away from both their calling and from Jesus. We have not faced an avalanche of casualties but we have faced them more than once. The pain of such tragedies never seems to decrease. Although we have faced casualties while in the heat of battle in foreign lands we will certainly not just fade away into a nice little pastorate somewhere in America and never be concerned with ever pioneering another church. The devil cannot get rid of us that easy. We refuse to deny our responsibility and turn our back on a perishing world. Eternal souls are at stake; we cannot turn tail and run when casualties occur.

In John chapter six, most of those following Jesus left Him. Many of Paul's disciples left him too. We will suffer loss if we are doing front line battle. But we cannot allow this to stop the advance of the Army of Christ. Nevertheless, when we do lose someone close to us the pain is real. It does hurt.

Yuli, a pastor of one of our first church plants was a dear friend lost to the enemy and became a casualty of war. We were like brothers. I loved him and still do. He was a former prisoner who came to Christ and went to Bible school shortly after the walls of the Russian Empire came crashing down in the early 90s. Yuli was gentle and had a heart to serve. He stood with us in the beginning and together we pioneered a church. He also did the legwork for many of our early conferences. It was Yuli who stood with us on the steps as we faced off with machine gun clad military police and their German Shepherd dogs. Together we reached thousands with the Gospel message.

After being chased out of Crimea and being re-established in Zaporozia, there were a few months in which we did not see each other. I had no idea that there was a problem brewing. The devil was hard at work behind the scenes. Then the surprise happened. There was a knock at our door. It was Yuli. Without notice he had traveled across Ukraine to speak to me. I was glad to see him but unaware of what was to soon unfold. For the next three hours we talked but it was not a pleasant conversation. Yuli had fallen prey to the lie of the devil and he was leaving the ministry. He had fallen into deception and was throwing in the towel.

In his words, "I no longer believe in salvation by faith." He became sin conscience and was self-condemning for every little mistake. It was a sad day for us all. Before he left that day we hugged and spoke of our love for each other. I have not seen him since. The pain is still with us. It hurts. What could have been is no more. God only knows the souls already in Hell because of this loss. For us it was a dreadful blow. It was a well-planted strike by the devil. Together we had accomplished so much. Together we should have accomplished much more. The devil has no time clock. He doesn't put in eight-hour days. He works around the clock. We must always be on guard so we don't fall into his deception. 1 Timothy 4:1 says: "*Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits,*

*and doctrines of devils.*” Doctrines of demons are prevalent in the earth today. Be on the lookout!

Did we quit when Yuli threw in the towel? No! We were not about to put our tails between our legs and run, but it was a wake up call. More than ever we realized that we were in a real war with a relentless enemy. These are not just people who backslide. They are war casualties of Kingdom expansion. They are loved ones precious to God and to us. We must continue to fight on at all costs. There is still hope for Yuli. There is still hope for the millions without Christ but they must be reached with the Gospel message before it’s too late. For you and I, the clock is ticking, but not for 120,000 people a day who drop into eternity’s inferno. The fireball of Hell maintains an unquenchable appetite for souls. You and I, however, can make a difference.

Paul told Timothy to fight the good fight of faith. You and I are soldiers in a war. We are Olympians in an eternal contest for the souls of men, women, boys and girls. We are out to win and fighting to a draw is not an option. Throwing in the towel would be unthinkable. Turning from Christ would be nothing less than an eternal nightmare in the fiery regions of the damned.

Yuli was a war casualty of 1995. The most recent was in July of 2000. This one, however, struck a staggering blow to our ministry and to me personally. The casualty was a personal Timothy. My right hand. For five years I had groomed him, poured my life into him. Why wasn’t my investment into his life enough to prevent this tragedy? Where had I failed?

Together we had evangelized many villages, planted churches, held conferences, preached the Gospel, healed the sick and cast out demons. Together we faced many cold nights in flea-bitten, cockroach infested hotels in villages throughout Ukraine. We were run out of villages for preaching the Gospel, cursed at, scorned, and rejected of men. But somehow, some way a secret sin went unchecked and grew into a raging monster. A demon of gigantic proportions was being fed in the regions of his mind. I was with him when it was uncovered. It was I who felt the leading of the Holy Spirit to confront an issue even though I thought, “This couldn’t be.” It was the sin that takes many good men out of the race. I begged him to repent. I prophesied to him his future if he would not repent but he brushed it off like a piece of lint. The tragedy was that it was not just his destiny. Hundreds were affected by his decision. Thousands more will be.

Great Commission work does not include playing sissy games. It is not just play-acting. Every believer is called to war. We are all called to make a deliberate sacrifice for the sake of Christ. There is a price to pay to be one of His followers. It is all or nothing. We must be willing to storm the gates of Hell for the sake of souls. When we do, there will be casualties, injuries, and even martyrdom. There are hills to conquer and valleys to roam in search of souls for the Master. Jesus conquered Calvary, now we must advance on what remains. Is there a hill you have left in enemy hands? If there is, draw your sword, advance and take dominion. Do not let it go unchallenged!

If we ever expect to see the Great Commission fulfilled in our generation we must deny ourselves, accept some suffering, sacrifice, and pain of battle. Forget about today's sissy evangelical gospel of "Jesus came to make you happy, give you joy and meet your needs." John the Baptist said this in John 3:30: "*He must increase, but I must decrease.*"

We must choose the way of the cross and repent of being sucked into the current culture of the Americanized Gospel. The modern Gospel of much of evangelical Christianity does not have enough life to turn the corner, let alone turn the world upside down. We must turn back the clock and preach like Jesus, Peter, and Paul. We must have the convictions of men like Moody, Finney, and Wesley. They preached with conviction, purpose, and power. They used the law lawfully, knowing that the law was made for sinners in order to reveal their wickedness. Only then can a wayward sinner truly repent and become a true convert.

We are in a war but let's use our weapons properly. We will face the reality of war casualties but need not quit because of it. Let casualties, hardships, and challenges strengthen your resolve to fight on with all haste. Saint, don't give up, give in or get knocked out of the race.

Apostle Paul, by the Holy Spirit, penned these powerful words:

*"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."* (Philippians 3:13-14)

### **Testimonies from the field**

"Because of your ministry I had a chance to graduate from your correspondence Bible school, receive Jesus as my Lord and Savior and now I'm witnessing to other people...I know of many cell groups that were started here in the prison because of your help. Many people in this prison got literature, Bibles and other materials from your ministry. I want to evangelize the village I was born in. I am 36 years old. I want to thank your ministry for helping people like me in prisons." *Yuri Tishenko – Appalonovka, Ukraine – Prison #YIA 308/21-281*

"Your ministry has sent me literature, New Testaments and audio tapes. Many people in this prison were born again through these materials. The church in Odessa prison was also started with the help of your ministry. You can help me to spread the Word of God in this prison by sending more literature." *Nicolay Pivovarov – Herson, Ukraine – Prison #17-61 OTR*

## **Chapter 7**

### ***Dead Bodies***

The following incidents happened while we were living in the village of Yarkoe of the Crimea region of Ukraine. They took place during the time my visa was revoked and I was hiding from the KGB. The first incident happened when my family and I had just arrived at the local beach to perform a water baptism ceremony for several new believers. This new church plant was growing and we were all excited about celebrating water baptism with the new converts. It was a rather chilly day and I remember joking about the guy sunbathing on the beach. I believe the comment I made was “The guy must be brain dead.” It turned out to be prophetic. He lay there in his shorts motionless. It was about fifty-five degrees and cloudy. Definitely not a day best suited for catching some rays.

My youngest daughter, Satia was the first to venture over to this apparent sun worshiper, annoyed that he would be tanning on a cold, cloudy day. My middle daughter, Alicia followed. I was observing from a distance and noticed an inquisitive look on my daughters’ faces. I thought it best to investigate; thinking the guy may be drunk.

As I approached the apparent sunbather, I noticed his arms drawn up and stiff and his skin a jaundiced color. This guy was dead! We had discovered a corpse! Suddenly we began to hear the cries of a woman. Two ladies and a man approached us obviously very distraught and began to tell us the story of this man’s demise. He was the brother of the crying woman.

As my family and I listened, they told us this story. “Just an hour before you arrived my brother was drowned, murdered by four Mafia thugs. My brother and his friend owed the Mafia money. They murdered my brother to set an example and let his friend go with the threat that the same would happen to him unless the money was paid.” This man was murdered for a few hundred dollars and left dead on the beach. How can people have such little respect for human life? Communism has left a giant empty void in an entire society. 300 million people were taught humanism, evolution, and Marxism. If humans are but animals, then why not murder. If there is no God to judge, then steal, kill, and destroy. Sound familiar?

We did share Christ with this woman and her friends; unfortunately we had to keep it short. The police would be there soon and the last thing I wanted was to be questioned by military police when I did not have a valid visa to be in their country. They would probably be more interested in me than the murder that just took place. More than likely the murderers were never caught and justice was never carried out. But even if this was the case we can take to heart the words recorded in Genesis 18:25: “...*Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*”

My kids were young and innocent but they were growing up fast. Discovering corpses on beaches and hearing tales of Mafia murders will do that. Once again we put our faith in Jesus to protect us and keep us safe from harm.

### Child Talk

*“I thought it was very odd to see a guy laying on the beach on a day like this. Then when we found out that the person was murdered I realized if we would have been here an hour earlier we would have been in danger too. There is a Mafia and we were able to see first hand the results of what they do. They have so little respect for life.”* Christina; age 13

*“I thought to myself, “How cruel the Mafia is.” When I saw the corpse shriveled up and with yellowish-blue skin I thought “Yuk!”* Alicia; age 9

*“I thought it was gross but interesting. A guy in shorts laying on the beach in the cold was sure strange. I remember my dad saying, “We need to get out of here because the military police will be coming.”* Satia; age 8

This is the reality of what we deal with on the mission field. It is a war zone. Reaching souls for Jesus on the front lines is not the vacuum Christianity that has invaded much of the church in the West. This vacuum declares a gospel without pain, sacrifice or the cross. We must wake up to the reality that outside of our borders believers are tortured and die daily just because they are Christians. While our brethren overseas suffer famine and persecution, believers in the West drive \$50,000.00 cars but are too embarrassed to pass out a Gospel tract. We need to repent. Our Gospel was birthed in pain and blood and will only be carried to the ends of the earth in like manner. There is a price to pay to be a Christian and that price is total surrender. Jesus lived with a passion to go and preach in the next villages. He longed to deliver to a lost generation the only message of salvation. To be a Christian is to be like Him, to do what He did and do what He commands. A church that does not portray the life of Christ with tangible action cannot properly be called the Bride of Christ. We must repent and get back in the race. Repentance is a good thing. It is a changing of one's mind, heart and finally lifestyle so we can better serve the Master.

Within a month we would find another corpse, but this time the police would beat us to it. This story involves a pastor whom we were working with at the time. Over a period of time it became apparent that although this pastor had great talent he also had major character flaws.

One week prior to the discovery of the second corpse this pastor's house was robbed. The pastor suspected his neighbor, who also happened to be his landlord. After speaking to his landlord about the robbery and not getting satisfaction, Pastor V. made an incredibly dumb decision. We found out after the murder that the pastor called some Mafia connections he knew from the past and asked them to put the squeeze on his landlord. Well, they squeezed a little too hard and murdered him in his own front yard.

Still without my visa and in hiding, a few of my staff and I pulled around the corner on our way to visit Pastor V. The place was swarming with military police and before we could turn around they stopped us and began to ask for identification. After checking the documents of the driver

and front seat passenger, the officer was called away briefly, giving me time to slip out the side door of the van and into the bushes, escaping around the corner.

The victim was also a drunk. He lived hard and died hard. Died without Jesus and now faces the eternal flames of Hell. Yes, it is sad but it's reality. Over 120,000 people die every day on this planet and most perish without Christ. Nevertheless, we persist. We press on in our endeavor to reach as many for Jesus as possible. One soul is of more value than the entire world. What is the value of two, ten, or a thousand people?

Where is the church in this hour? While believers in the West are building bigger, fancier buildings, millions die each year without Jesus. Believers in America are unaware of their affluence. Multi-million dollar church structures are being constructed at an alarming rate while our brothers and sisters overseas starve and live in dire conditions and the world goes unreached for Jesus.

A few months ago I wrote a budget for what I believed it would cost to evangelize Ukraine. I came up with a ten-year plan and a cost of \$17,042,000.00. The plan included a fully equipped mobile evangelism team for each of Ukraine's twenty-six states. It also included the evangelization of 5,000 villages resulting in 1,000 new church plants. To accomplish this 125,000 believers would be trained in our leadership correspondence Bible school, 7,500 trained in a two-month believers boot camp and 2,500 trained in a one-year missionary training center. Material distribution would include ten million Gospel tracts, plus Bibles and New Testaments. While most would balk at such a plan, even though it would have an impact on a nation and reach millions for Jesus, they would gladly give away their money to build another twenty million dollar church building to house a few thousand believers in America. We are not fighting church-building programs but it seems that the church has been consumed with the mindset of the world and that is something God abhors. Why doesn't the church tithe to world missions? Why isn't the church supporting an army of national evangelists, their brothers and sisters in the Lord already giving their lives in service to Christ? Church, we need to repent and get back to basics. We must seriously be about our Father's business of seeking and saving the lost.

These two men spoken of in this chapter died tragic deaths, murdered by Mafia hit men. What is our response to be? Should we surrender to the overwhelming odds? Never! Should we stand tall and refuse to bend to the threats in the face of the enemy? Absolutely! We invite you to stand with our brothers and sisters in the former Soviet Union and together plant churches and expand the Kingdom of God. Let's stop putting our money into brick and mortar and begin investing in eternal souls. One person can do so much. You can make an eternal difference for thousands. The Mafia will continue to do their thing. Religious zealots will continue to do theirs. Therefore, let's get busy doing ours. Let's get radical for Jesus and His Kingdom Call.

## Chapter 8

### *The Snipers Bullet*

It was the evening of July 9, 1995. We had just finished celebrating our middle daughter's 10<sup>th</sup> birthday. It was a joyous evening! The kids were in the living room, Jill was in the kitchen, and I was in our makeshift office at the far end of the house. It was pitch black outside. No moon. No stars. It was unusually still. Silent. Gunshots changed this! Two loud eruptions rang through the night like a shock wave. Nothing too unusual, considering where we were living. We have heard these noises before. This time however, they came to close for comfort. Jill was screaming for me to come to the kitchen. The urgency in her voice indicated something out of the ordinary had taken place. I ran to the kitchen to find Jill on the floor screaming at me to get down. At first I stood there, stunned, not grasping the situation. Then I saw the shards of glass, the pieces of cement on the counter and the bullet-holes in the window. Horror gripped my soul. That "dark fiend of Hell" was at it again. That "relentless tyrant of the abyss" was stretching forth his hand to inflict damage to our destiny. Oh, Lord, has she been shot? Dropping to the floor I crawled to Jill's side. Thank God, the bullets had missed their target! By now my adrenaline was racing into every cell of my being! My thoughts now focused on my family's safety. Whoever took those shots at Jill is still out there somewhere and we did not know his next move. Racing through the house as fast as I could on my hands on knees, I went from room to room turning off the lights. I double-checked the locks on our door, not that they would help much. Both the locks and door were so flimsy a healthy burp could blow them open.

Jill and I, and our three girls gathered in the living room. I wanted us all together. Both to get a head count and to pray as a family. We went into spiritual warfare and began to take authority over the attackers, binding their next move and releasing confusion into the enemy's camp. We had no gun, no people to help us, no natural protection, we needed the Captain of the Lord of Hosts.

We tried telephoning our staff but the phone line was dead. That feeling of being totally helpless made a feeble attempt to raise its ugly head but to no avail. God was still on the throne! As my family prayed, I very carefully went from window to window in an attempt to see where the gunslinger may be hiding. Nothing! I couldn't see a thing. We continued to pray and quote God's Word of protection and deliverance. This situation spoke volumes to Jill and I and our kids. We all have a day appointed to die. We all need to keep our walk with God sharp and in focus. The clock seemed to stand still—it was a long night for all of us. Someone was outside, the phone line dead and all we had was each other, prayer, and faith in God. It was enough! Finally, at about four in the morning I was able to drift off to sleep. Thank you, Jesus.

We never did find out who the culprit was or why it was done. Yes, we did contact the local police but as usual, they did nothing. For all we know they were in on it or at least knew more details than they were willing to admit. Tactics like these were common under Communism to put fear into people, hoping that they will just leave without incident. It is at times like this some may cave in under the pressure. Having three young daughters did not help matters.

Nevertheless, God called us and we were determined to be defiant in the face of the enemy. We chose to believe God's Word, which says:

*"No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper..." (Isaiah 54:17)*

Please do not get the wrong impression. I am not suggesting in the least that we are some kind of spiritual super giants. But the truth is that we cannot cave in when trials and persecution raise their hideous heads. It was no secret that the local mayor and others in the nearby city of Djonkoe wanted us ousted. By now Operation Train Robbery (You will learn more about this ministry in Chapter 10) was in full swing and over a million Gospel tracts had been distributed by this time. Our workers were laboring non-stop at the train station and many were repenting and coming to Jesus. The local church plant was growing and believers were constantly witnessing on the streets. We had made it a ministry policy to pick up villagers along the road and transport them to and from Yarkoe whenever we traveled. Also, we never charged passengers money but always shared Christ and gave out Gospel literature. Over the months, many people came to Jesus and a church was launched in Yarkoe as a result. When this happened we gained both friends and enemies. We had become a thorn in the devil's side and he was retaliating.

#### **Child Talk**

*"I remember my dad crawling into my room, shutting off my light, and then he grabbed me and pulled me to the ground. My dad gathered the family together and asked each of us if we were ready to meet Jesus. I knew I'd go to heaven because Jesus lives in my heart. But I wondered if I did die, would I go quick or slow? Would it be painful or not? I just thought to myself, "If it does happen Lord, let it be quick and painless." It was hard to sleep that night. I really wanted it to be morning. I woke up several times during the night and thought to myself, "We are still here!"* Christina; age 14

*"Afterward I thought it was pretty cool because it took place on my birthday. But when it happened I was scared that they would come to the door and shoot us. I was glad my mom didn't get hurt because the bullet was real close. Only a few inches and she would have been dead because it would have hit her in the neck or maybe her head."* Alicia; age 10

*"I remember hearing a shot and wondering what it was and then there was a second shot and my mom began screaming, yelling for my dad. My dad ran to the kitchen and I heard him telling my mom to stay down. He then began turning off all the lights and then got my sisters and me together and put us first in the big room and then under a table in the office. I was really scared. I wondered why this would happen to us. For weeks I was scared people would be following me to hurt me and I would always be looking back over my shoulder."* Satia; age 9

## Chapter 9

### *Overtaken by Mice*

Life in the village of Yarkoe looked promising. The weather was more temperate than Moscow, and we no longer had to face the daily rush of millions of people in a metropolis. We also lived in a house instead of an apartment in the center of a concrete jungle. Yes, we did have a few drawbacks such as the stinky water, when there was water, the terrible telephone connections, the constant mooing of cows, five a.m. rooster calls, and of course, the mice.

If there is one thing that my wife and three daughters hate, it's mice. Then again I am not crazy about the little varmints either. Our home was to be dubbed "Miceville." Between our two dogs and traps, we were catching up to twenty-four mice a day. It became a way of life. Our dogs were sure happy since they always had something to do. My daughter Christina often freaked out whenever she caught Danni, our Russian born terrier, eating a mouse on her bed. She did not appreciate the blood and guts on the bedspread. She had no sense of humor. We were finally able to greatly reduce our daily mouse kills after I plugged every known means of entry with liquid expandable foam. That slowed the mice but it did not help our sleep. At night we heard constant scratching as mice tried to make their way through the foam. Still, we did not completely stop them. Now we lived with mice in the house during the day and their constant scratching at night.

The incident most vivid in my mind was when Jill and I were saying our good-byes before I was to leave on one of my trips. We happened to look up at the ceiling. We were standing under an area that was to eventually become the entrance to the unfinished second floor. The opening was covered with a piece of plywood. Around the perimeter of the plywood was a space of about quarter of an inch and the whole opening was covered with eyes, feet, and tails. It was nauseating. Mice by the hundreds, or so it seemed, were roaming the second level. They were pacing the perimeter of the wood trying to squeeze through. Fortunately, I had planned ahead by bringing a caulking gun and caulk from the States two years earlier. As I filled the opening with caulk mice feet kept poking through but eventually I won—it was quick drying caulk! Knowing that hundreds of mice lived below us and now above us was not a comforting thought. Those devilish little creatures surrounded us. I was developing a great dislike for these little fur balls; these disease infested miniature rats.

The only incident in my memory that turned my stomach more than some of these mice encounters was my episode with "the pear." We were traveling from Kiev to Izmail by car and as a gesture of kindness one of the travelers gave me a pear to eat. Trying not to be disrespectful, I took a few bites, that is until I noticed something moving. To my horror the inside of the pear was crawling with white worms! I had to quickly master my emotions and my stomach, if not I would have vomited on the spot. It was disgusting. My vivid imagination pictured these little creatures crawling inside of my stomach with plans to chew through the lining into my other organs.

### Child Talk

*“It was a common occurrence to see mice race across the floors. I hate mice. But as long as they don’t touch me it’s not so bad. I remember times when my dog Danni was on my bed eating a mouse and getting mouse guts on my blanket. It was so gross. I never emptied the mice traps, my mom and dad did that. But I remember the time my dad made a shoebox mouse trap and put it behind the couch. Later when Gideon, our other dog, chased a mouse behind the couch my dad pulled out the shoebox but didn’t realize the mouse was in it. He lifted the top and the mouse jumped out, hit the floor and the dog-mouse race was on again. The funniest part was when the mouse jumped out of the box my dad jumped a foot in the air. He was so surprised. The whole family laughed. It was good because it was a time when we were going through great tests and we all needed some relief.” Christina; age 14*

*“To me the mice were so gross. They were everywhere. At first I couldn’t sleep at night because I thought they would crawl on me and scratch or bite me. It sure was easier back in America but even though I was young I knew that God had called my dad and mom to this place.” Alicia; age 10*

*“It was gross at first but I got used to it because many mice died in Christina’s room and she made me pick them up. Danni would kill them and sometimes there would be five or six at a time laying on the floor chewed up and bloody. Sometimes it was interesting because the dogs would always be chasing them and sometimes I would chase them with a broom trying to smash them. I didn’t have a problem sleeping like my sister Alicia. She would stay awake and stare at the ceiling. In our house we had mice, spiders and all kinds of bugs.” Satia; age 9*

## **Chapter 10**

### ***Operation Train Robbery***

While planting a church in the city of Djonkoe, in Ukraine's Crimea region, we discovered some fascinating information. This city was the main train hub for the entire Crimea. What's the significance? The Crimea was the vacation haven of the Soviet Empire. Millions of people still traveled there yearly to vacation spots like, Yevpatoria or Yalta, the city where Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin met at the close of World War II. Upon investigation we discovered that every train leaving and entering Djonkoe stops for a time period of between three and twelve minutes.

I thought, "What an opportunity." About four million people would pass through the city in the next twelve months. Millions of people destined for Hell unless reached for Jesus. Eternal worm chowder. Hell kindling. Millions of lost souls—millions of potential converts! I was excited about the prospect of reaching millions with the only true message of salvation. The Gospel of Jesus Christ! "How can we reach them for Christ?" I wondered. "Is it possible to actually raise up workers to mount these trains, evangelize and get back off in three minutes time?" It had to be possible! All things are possible with God. What better reason to attempt such a crazy and daring task than for the Gospel!

If Jesse James could mount trains to rob them of something valuable. We too, could mount trains and rob the devil of something valuable to God: souls of men, women, boys and girls. Thus, we dubbed this new ministry outreach "Operation Train Robbery." Over the next year and a half we distributed over two million Gospel tracts and booklets. Our teams worked two shifts in order to cover the time period of the heaviest activity. They worked non-stop. It was hard, dangerous work and we took our share of abuse. Workers on our teams were beaten with some ending up in the hospital. Daily our people were cursed, mocked, and ridiculed. Vendors would throw spoiled fruit or vegetables at our Kingdom evangelists. There is a price to pay in order to carry out the work of Christ. But Jesus said it best in Luke 9:23, "... *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.*" We did follow Him and our efforts paid off. In the face of mockery and abuse the results began to trickle in, giving us a much-needed boost of hope.

Over the months letters came in from several different countries of the former Soviet Union. People wrote to tell us of how they received Jesus after reading one of our Gospel tracts or booklets. Hundreds receiving Jesus into their hearts turned into thousands. The abuse our teams were taking was paying off. Many testified of being on the brink of suicide, but instead received a Gospel tract in Djonkoe, Ukraine that forever changed their destiny.

To our amazement during the first part of the year 2000—five years after Operation Train Robbery ended—we received several letters from teenagers who had just finally repented! Each testimony carried a similar story line. They received the Gospel tract about five years earlier but put it in their desk drawer because Jesus did not appeal to them then. Now, however, after all

these years they began to feel the conviction of their sin. The Holy Spirit was at work! They remembered the tract, found it, reread it and repented. They all asked to study in our correspondence Bible school. *“We want to walk for God but have no one to show us how. Please help.”* These were the words of these young people. Yes, we are helping and will do our best to see them live out their destinies in God. How many millions of young people are in similar circumstances. Desiring help and direction but receiving only vain humanistic advice. If we are ever going to reach this generation for Christ we must begin with our youth. Jesus totally submitted His will to the Father and we must do the same. We are the servants and the servant is not greater than the Master (See John 13:16).

There is a high cost to pay for being a servant. We must give up our rights and replace them with the desires and purposes of the One we serve. When our Master says go we do not negotiate the wages. We simply obey. Whatever God asks us to do that is what we must do. I believe God is calling out an army from America who will take their proper place in end-time Gospel work. He is calling millions to be radical servants. He is also calling you to raise the standard! Let the Holy Spirit grab a hold of your heart. Get on fire for Jesus and touch a world in need of salvation.

It amazes me how after all these years Operation Train Robbery is still producing fruit for the glory of God. The mocking, ridicule, and shame our teams endured was worth it all. Even believers mocked us telling us that it was a waste of time. Yes, it took a great deal of effort, time, and money. Yet, thousands came into the Kingdom because of it. If given the opportunity we would do it again.

Operation Train Robbery was made up of national evangelists working to reach their own people for Jesus. Believers in the West, with a heart for souls and with eyes to see and ears to hear contributed financially. There was no tape of the month, no prayer cloths or special anointing oil mailed out. No gimmicks or schemes. Only Heaven’s list of souls won to Christ. Thousands more could have been reached for Christ but few seemed to be interested in supporting such efforts. After all, there will be no building to show for it. No names on bricks, no plaques or special autographed books. Only eternal souls reached for Jesus!

What was accomplished through Operation Train Robbery is what we refer to as “militant evangelism.” It is an attitude of the heart and a way of life. This is what the church needs to return to. The only way to reach the lost is to go to them. We must leave the comfort of our four walls and take the Gospel to where it is needed most. Every church in America needs to have a well-structured Gospel tract ministry. Along with this every church member needs to be trained in the use of these tracts and in personal witnessing. The fact remains, we must all be out doing our Father’s work and that is “to seek and save the lost!”

## Chapter 11 *The Great Escape*

Since moving to Ukraine we have had a non-stop battle with government officials, including the KGB. I realize most people thought that these bands of tyrants, these demonized trailblazers of Communism were no longer active: Not by a long shot. Their name may have changed but they are alive and well.

On July 26, 1995, Jill and our three girls were given three-month visa extensions but mine was denied. According to the religious department and the office of the KGB I was a radical Christian that needed to be eradicated from society and expelled from their country. Jill was told she could stay but would not be allowed to preach or teach the name of Jesus. Sound familiar? In effect the ministry would be shut down. With Jill and the kids' visas secured, even though mine was not, we did what we thought best, we chose to go forward in spite of the risk. We could not turn from our heavenly calling. It was not yet our time to leave. We continued full steam ahead in all phases of ministry activity even though my visa had expired. All the while praying and believing that God would make a way where there seemed to be no way. For the time being, I went underground playing a continuous game of cat and mouse.

As time went on, the risk magnified and we knew the KGB was closing in. We had informants too and based on their observations, the net was about to be sprung: Phones ringing but no one responding when answered, strangers at our gate; the tension was increasing. Yet something happened on Sunday, August 27th, that jolted us into reality. The incident caused us to move quickly and forced a decision that sooner or later had to be made anyway. We could no longer evade the issue. We had just returned from ministering in another city in Crimea. People were born again and many recommitted their lives to Jesus. God moved wonderfully. Everything was great. Within an hour of returning home Valari, one of our leaders, arrived at our house. As he walked toward the door I noticed a very serious look on his face. And then he told me the news.

“Peter, they’re closing in.” In his usual serious tone, Valari continued, “Two KGB agents were at the Djonkoe church today looking for you.” The net was drawing in and they were ready to make their move. Although we continued all ministry functions I had been very careful not to advertise my meetings nor do anything with much advance notice. We were being very cautious. It is like something you would read about in an old spy novel or some old documents concerning the cold war between Russia and United States. I had to sit down and think...clear my head. “Was this really happening to us? Or was this a nightmare I was about to awake from? Who am I and why is our ministry such a target?” My mind was trying to rebel and I needed to pray. I knew that praying would be the only thing that would clear my head and help me refocus. “Were we nervous?” Yes—but thank God not paralyzed!

We gathered some of our staff together to pray and to ask God's wisdom. We then brainstormed to lay out the possibilities. Team members shared one by one but in the end it was always the same, "Peter, the final decision is up to you." They were right. If they tracked me down, and sooner or later they would, there would be consequences. These included: prison, ejection from the country, passport confiscation, fines, and confiscation of our properties. The one thing I knew for sure was that Jill and the children had valid passports and visas, and that was some comfort. Jill agreed with the plan and that was important, for I needed her to be strong.

### **The Plan**

We decided that I would work my way out of the country into Russia where I still had a valid visa. We sent a few of our staff out to locate the best train routes and buy tickets. We wrote out a strategy to help Jill keep all ministry functions operational and on course. The next several days would be critical and it would not be safe to telephone home and discuss these things over the "Ukrainian Ma Bell." We would have to pray and connect spirit to spirit.

Meeting with our staff, we discussed the plan of action that was given to Jill. Which included making sure that Jill and the kids would be safe. We also translated it into Russian so that both the Russian staff and our family knew exactly what would take place. This would be no vacation. We were heading into some serious business. Everything had to be in order. The countdown had begun. In less than six hours our drama would begin to unfold. The train was scheduled to leave at 1:40 a.m. For now, we waited—we prayed.

During those six hours, it seemed like a million thoughts cascaded through my mind. Emotions swirled. I could tell there was a spirit of doubt trying to enter in: "You fool, you idiot, what are you doing? Who is going to protect your family? Tough guy, taking them away from America, their home, their nice cars, their schooling, their friends, and putting them into a situation like this. Now you're going to leave—you'll never get back, you'll never see them again." This was serious business and if something went wrong it could get ugly real fast.

Jill seemed confident enough. She knew what had to be done. We both knew it would be difficult. My children, on the other hand, looked so innocent. Christina stood crying and the two little ones were wide eyed, not knowing what was really taking place. Now the tears began swelling in Jill's eyes too, but she stood firm. She had to. We both did. We waited. We prayed.

It's at times like this that you start thinking of what is really valuable to you. I realized then, how valuable my kids really were. My wife, who is the flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone, is infinitely valuable. We are one and I realized how much I loved and appreciated her.

We had kept the lights off outside all night for the first time in many weeks. This time we wanted it to be dark. We did not want a full moon. Then the unexpected happened. The phone rang. It wasn't anyone on our team. We told them not to call. "Should we answer?" No! Let it be. As planned our van pulled up about 12:50 a.m. no honking, just a mad dash to the van and

through the open door. Valari broke the silence first and mentioned that they had noticed someone across the street, obviously watching our home but did not see me enter the van. Now there was no turning back. Scene one of our real life melodrama had begun and we had to go on with the show. We had to trust God. We pulled around the corner and down the street as fast as we could go without being obvious. Pulling over just long enough to pick up Natasha, our interpreter, we made our twenty-minute trip to the train station. I wondered if anyone back in the States would believe that this was actually taking place. The phones were tapped, so we could not notify anyone stateside of our situation. Were intercessors busy behind the scenes? We prayed that they were!

As soon as we reached the train station, Sergie and Valari took off to scout the area to see if anything looked suspicious. They returned at 1:30 with only 10 minutes to spare before the train departed. “Everything looks safe,” whispered Valari. We all headed toward our designated exit point. Within a few minutes the train was there. It was perfectly timed. We entered the train, found our berth and sat down. Praise the Lord—we made it!

The train jerked and we were off on the first leg and the most dangerous part of our journey, which would last about 48 hours before crossing the border into Russia. We were headed toward Zaparozia, our first stop about five hours away. Valari and Sergie returned to Yarkoe. Valari had the responsibility of tracking down my passport, which was in Simpheropol, a city two hours from where we currently lived and seven hours away from where Natasha and I were heading. We were to meet thirty hours later at a pre-appointed location that only the three of us were aware of. Sergie had his duties as well, to safeguard my family. The last thing I needed now was for the government to hassle my wife and kids. That would be the tactic used by these spiritual criminals, which is to attack the innocent.

Natasha and I pulled into the train station early that same morning and everything went without a glitch. We began searching for a telephone that actually worked. We needed to connect with the people who were preparing my “Letter of Invitation.” This letter was the key element in the puzzle in obtaining another visa. After several hours of searching we finally reached the person responsible for preparing my letter. When we finally made contact we were told, “Sorry, it’s still not ready.” It was not just a simple letter written on a church letterhead, it had to be signed and stamped by two government officials. The process is intense and intimidating and requires much prayer. That’s just what we did and five hours later I was handed a legally authorized “Letter of Invitation” for a three-month visa! Now just one more thing was needed and that was for Valari to do his part and locate my passport. You may be wondering why I didn’t have my passport. The religious department in Crimea had confiscated it and refused to return it. That’s why we needed another miracle. In the natural it was an impossible situation but faith says, “If ‘impossible’ is the only objection, it can be done in Christ!”

The next morning we drove to the local train station and there was Valari, right on time! Standing there wearing a big smile and a clenched fist pointing towards heaven as though he were saying, "We are going to make it, God did it again!" Yes, he had my passport! God is so awesome! With His Word He spoke the worlds into existence. With one breath, He blew them into their proper orbits. He numbers the hairs on each head and is concerned whenever a sparrow falls to the ground. This all powerful, all knowing God sacrificed His Son on Calvary so that I might have eternal life. How could I return His kindness by living a lukewarm passive Christianity? I couldn't.

Upon checking the schedule we realized that the next train did not leave for over 5 1/2 hours. That was too long of a wait, we had to keep moving. After checking other means of transportation we found a bus that was leaving in thirty minutes for a city named Dnepropetrovsk in the next state, and a main train hub. From there we could catch another train. We knew it was best for us not to stay in one location too long, so we flagged down a taxi and made it to the bus station in time to purchase the last three seats. Two hours later we were in Dnepropetrovsk, the second stop on our excursion toward Moscow. Valari's assumptions were correct and two hours after arriving in Dnepropetrovsk we were on another train heading toward the city of Kharkov, our third stop. Kharkov is the inspection point where Customs officers check all passengers for valid passports and visas. Our journey could have an abrupt ending if we were checked in Kharkov.

The plan was to have Natasha continue to the next major city on the Russian side of the border, where she would get off with our bags and wait until we arrived. This was a definite act of faith, especially for her, it's not safe for a young woman to travel alone. As soon as the train stopped, Valari and I jumped off with just one bag containing a few items that we thought we might need, including my trusty "Swiss Army survival knife!" Valari had already mapped out the routes that we must take. We scrambled through a sea of people as fast as we could toward the underground subway. Finding the right train line, we headed toward a predetermined destination on the outskirts of the city. Twenty minutes passed before we ventured our way out of the subway. By now it was dusk and very few people were at this station, only a few vendors selling some fruits and vegetables. It didn't look promising. The prospects of finding someone to take us to the border looked dim. I asked the Lord for another favor, "Father we need you, open the right door for us."

It was then when we noticed two vendors about ten yards away from us. Valari nonchalantly made his way over to these guys. Two minutes later he motioned for me to come. God had provided a driver! Valari and I agreed that he would do all the talking and I would keep my mouth shut, hoping the man would not realize I was an American. In this country this is the wise thing to do, otherwise the price doubles and questions are raised. This particular man was of great value to us; he knew how to get us to a small village within five miles of the Russian border.

After traveling for over an hour we turned off on a side road to what appeared to be no more than a path into the woods. Thirty minutes later we arrived at a small village in the middle of nowhere. From what I could see by our headlights the village was run down and decrepit. Another windfall of the “great Communist experiment.” By now it was close to midnight. There was no one in sight and we had no idea which way we needed to go. Then, another miracle! Within 15 seconds of pulling up to the only light pole that was working, a young boy about 13 years old came walking by. Can you imagine—it was midnight! Valari immediately jumped out to speak to this lad and after some small talk the kid took off running, returning about three minutes later with a friend of the same age. After several minutes of negotiating the driver agreed to take us a little further. Using the two kids as guides we headed off into the unknown. These two boys knew the back roads and that’s exactly what they were. We drove through fields and cow paths that had more potholes than a flat surface. We did everything but balance on two wheels and drive up a tree.

The kids pointed out lights in the distance, which were the Ukrainian and Russian customs stations. We knew we were now at the point of no return. The driver was obviously scared although the two kids were having a ball. They seemed to like the challenge. Then it happened! All of sudden, off to the right, we saw the lights of another car. The driver slammed on his brakes and pleaded; “Get out, I can go no further.” By this time we were in the buffer zone that exists between the two countries. Either side could grab us. My heart was racing a mile a minute, as was Valari’s. There we were, standing alone in “no man’s land” between Russia and Ukraine. Now what? I certainly didn’t want to be caught there or anywhere else for that matter. Who would have ever thought our life in the former Soviet Union would be like this?

The boys had given us some last minute instructions, “Let your instincts guide you.” Thanks kids! The car we had seen was still there somewhere but we could no longer see nor hear it. “Are they watching? Is it the KGB? Customs officials? Border guards?” We had no idea. But we did know one thing for sure, there was no turning back. We were stuck in the middle, a dreadful place to be.

Although not fully understanding it all, I somehow knew that this was a major test in my Christian faith. But it was something I had to go through. I did not know why, but I was not about to question God. It reminded me of the time when we received an early morning phone call from a man from New York. He asked me “Why are you preaching the Gospel overseas? We have enough lost people here.” My answer was simple. “Because God called me there.” On more than one occasion, I have been lambasted for doing overseas missionary work. Without exception, the chastisement has come from so-called Christians. During the time we were setting up Bible smuggling operations from Russia into China, we also received criticism. We were accused of breaking China’s laws and therefore God’s. We were called sinners and told that we needed to repent. When those who profess to be Christians refuse to tithe, give to missions, sacrifice their own lives, and then criticize others who are carrying out the Gospel, the church is

in trouble. If our small work overseas is so challenged I can only image what those with substantial ministries face. God help us!

We stood there for a moment gathering our thoughts. It was dark and still. It seemed peaceful enough: yet, even the silence that night, for some reason, seemed sinister. We began making our way down a cow trail toward a few lights that we could see off in the distance. We passed a little pond, then over a bridge and headed towards what we thought was a small village. It turned out to be a large collective farm: a hold-over from the Communist nightmare. We could see the glowing haze of light coming from the two customs stations, about a mile apart. We had to travel far enough to clear both stations before we dared to show ourselves on the highway.

Everything seemed to be going well, almost too smoothly. We came upon a dirt road and walked toward a clearing in the trees that seemed to be heading toward the highway that we had to get to. If correct, we would come out about a half a mile past the Russian customs terminal. We were carefully making our way up the dirt road when in an instance, a flash of light pierced the darkness just over our heads and a vehicle began coming our way. Dropping to our hands and knees, Valari and I crawled for the nearest fence line. The adrenaline rush began slamming into every cell of my being. We stayed there for awhile, watching, listening, but nothing happened. We could see the lights and hear the engine but it was as though we were frozen in time. My heart felt as if it would beat right out of my chest. Neither of us could see because of the fence obstruction, tall grass, and darkness, but we knew we had to keep moving. The question was where? We could no longer go straight. The car was coming closer and the lights flashed across the sky as if the vehicle just made a turn and was heading straight toward us. We had to move and fast! As soon as I calmed my heart and found the nerve, we did. The only unobstructed direction was away from our target but we had no choice. The car was closing in fast and we were about to be nabbed.

We headed off in a back breaking squat-run, making our way along the fence line of a corral that housed a large number of cows. My back felt like snapping in two and my legs were like lead. It seemed as if the fence would never end, but we had to keep going. The car was getting closer and coming in our direction. If we did not clear this fence line soon they would nail us for sure. “Faster, Valari, faster!” We made it to the end of the fence and dashed around the corner just as the headlights lit up the trail behind us! It was getting too close for comfort. We dashed across a dirt road and began making our way up a hill. We were running through what we thought were piles of straw or overgrown shrubs crunching under our feet. It was not until a few moments later that our noses revealed what we were walking in. We were standing in a large stockpile of cow dung! Unbelievable! As if we didn’t have enough problems. After backtracking out of the dung we kept moving as fast as we could toward the tree line. We had to reach it before the car could make its way to the end of the fence. By now we were gasping for breath and running on pure “will-power.” We made it to the trees and quickly found our way into the thickets. We stayed just long enough to catch our breath and make sure that no one from the car was following

on foot. Just on the other side of this tree line, not more than a hundred yards away was the main highway that would take us to the city of Belgrad, where we were to rendezvous with Natasha.

Someone was chasing us and we could not take the risk of standing on the road too long. We estimated that we had about five minutes before our pursuers could backtrack to the main road. Getting a ride in the middle of the night would not be easy and we needed another supernatural intervention. The manhunt was on and we had to keep up the pace. After just a few attempts Valari secured a car and once again we were off. We arrived at the train station to find Natasha huddled in a corner carefully guarding our luggage. She looked frightened but you would have been too, if you had seen the conditions. She had performed her part well and we were proud of her. After some small talk and high-fives we purchased tickets on the next train to Moscow. Thank the Lord, we made it into Russia “safe at last!” Or were we?

The door shut and we were finally safe inside the berth of our Moscow bound train. Wow! “It sure feels good!” I said to the others “No more reason to be concerned.” Just when we thought we could relax someone began banging on the door. Bang! Bang! Bang! I opened the door only to stand face to face with two Russian “Customs officials” dressed in their bright blue uniforms and packing “firearms.” What a rush! They had watched us enter the train. “Give us your passports” they demanded. They were serious and obviously expecting to find something wrong with our documents. Fortunately, every document was in order. After all, I was legal in Russia and so were Valari and Natasha. After ten minutes of haggling we said our good-byes and we were on our way to Moscow! We had finally made it!

Moscow’s system of obtaining visas was the same as usual: slow, inefficient, and bureaucratic. I was anxious to get back to my family and all the red tape was aggravating. Finally, after a week of jumping through hoops I had my Ukrainian visa. Good news except for one drawback, it was only good for two weeks. They refused to write us one for the “three-months” we had requested. They said that only the officials in Zaporozia could extend my visa. Russia had a new law on the books. The twenty seven-hour train ride back gave me much time to pray about the next possible moves of the KGB and our strategy to stay one step ahead of them. It would prove to be prayer time well spent.

Valari left the train in Zaporozia to negotiate my three-month visa extension and Natasha and I continued on to Yarkoe. We arrived early in the morning and Valari returned a few hours later, 8:15 a.m., to be exact. He arrived with my passport in hand and a fully approved “three-month” visa extension. Fantastic! Our troubles are over! My exuberance, however, was short lived. Less than two hours after receiving my passport, two cars came to screeching halts in front of our house. Peeking through the curtains I saw two men standing guard with the cars while two thugs with briefcases ran towards our house. Before I had time to get to the door they just kicked it in and entered the house. There they stood, faces ashen gray with demeanors of brut beasts. Their voices were angry and unforgiving. “Show me your documents,” was all that they said. Over

the next ninety minutes I was thoroughly questioned by these two KGB radicals. We had been one step ahead for months and they were out for blood.

For them life is a continuous string of chess matches and they live to play – and win. They came prepared to play their final move and place me in “Check-Mate.” What they did not know was that I now had a valid visa. They were in for a big surprise! When they kicked in our door and demanded to see documents, they fully expected that they would be taking me away in the paddy wagon. Not so! The look in the eyes of the officer when he came upon my passport page with the visa stamp was both comical and scary. The situation lost the comical edge when I showed him the “three-month” extension. He cursed, shouted, and paced the floor in rage. His arms raised tensely, as if he wanted to hit something, probably me. He was furious. He vowed to get me. “Somehow, some way I will get you” were his words, as he stuck his finger in my face.

The following week they notified us that they were putting pressure on Zaporozia to revoke my extension and also said that Jill had violated the agreement, which was that she would not preach the name of Jesus. First, we never did—nor would—agree to their conditions and secondly Jill had never ministered publicly since the time of her extension. This was just more of their communistic tactics of creating a file full of lies to be used against us in the future. The truth is we were not the problem. Our message was the problem. It was Jesus Whom they hated and not us.

I will not mislead you by saying it was easy. Leaving America to live under these conditions is a shock to any man’s system. After expenses, our income the first year on the field was \$800.00. A far cry from the six-figure income we had been receiving. Certainly money was not our motive. Is there a reason for such madness? Of course there is. My wife and I want to live our lives for our King. It’s that simple.

Let me finish this chapter by leaving you with a few questions that I often ask myself. If your life were to end today would it leave a legacy of lost souls reached for Jesus? Or will your Christian life have been lived with little or no impact for the Kingdom of God? Has your money been building a kingdom on earth or the Kingdom of God in the earth? Sobering questions but nevertheless, they need to be answered.

*“For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36)*

Whenever I think about the adventure Peter calls “The Great Escape” tears come to my eyes. I never thought that serving Christ could be so dangerous. I still remember us discussing how we would make our way out of the country and I remember thinking, “how can we possibly do it?” But then, I thought about why we were doing it. We had a call of God on our lives to reach this nation with the Gospel and that’s why giving up could never be an option. Yes, I was scared, especially when I was alone, waiting for Peter and Valari on the other side of the

boarder. Even so, in my heart I had faith. God never failed us! It was worth it all! *Natasha Lazuka: Co-Director Russian Harvest Ministries Ukraine*

## Chapter 12

### *KGB Retaliates*

Not being able to find a crack in our visa armor really put the local KGB and the mayor of Yarkoe into a frenzy. They were out for revenge! They were ticked off! We were playing under their terms and winning and they did not like it. The mayor of the village that we lived in jumped into the fray with both feet. He was a sold-out Communist die-hard. This guy still kept a big picture of Lenin behind his desk. He was the person who interrogated my wife while I was in hiding. Jill along with our interpreter, Natasha, were called in for questioning. They were trying to find out where I was. It was an extremely hard thing for me to allow, but the next course of action would be to simply turn myself in. I would do that if it got to the point of my family being in danger. The questioning by the mayor was intense and intimidating. He shot out questions in rapid fire never giving either Jill or Natasha time to answer. In the words of my wife, "He was vulgar and rude." Natasha informed us that it was typical KGB tactics because then they could say that we did not answer their questions, implying that we refused to answer, and thus a guilty plea.

He knew many things about us and made it a point to let Jill know. What was the implication? They were watching. He knew our girls' bicycles had been stolen. He knew whom our kids played with, where they went and whom we spoke to. He was making it clear that eyes were everywhere. We were giving our lives to help him and his people. Why did they dislike us so much? The answer is found in Matthew 10:22:

*"And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved."*

Here's the key: we are hated because they first hated Jesus. It may be difficult and we may be hated of men but as bad as it may get, none of us have ever sweat great drops of blood like our Lord did. We must go on. We must finish the race. We must emerge victorious. Complaining never does any good but standing in faith will always produce fruit!

We continued our work of pioneering local churches and holding leadership meetings with other pastors who desired to see their churches operate under apostolic government. By now Operation Train Robbery was running full steam. The correspondence Bible school was growing by leaps and bounds and material distribution surpassed half a million books. Church Planting Kits were being packaged and shipped daily to villages throughout Ukraine. Altogether, more than 800 of these kits were distributed to apostles, evangelists, pastors, and church leaders. Hundreds of letters were coming in weekly with testimonies of people getting saved, healed, and delivered! The Kingdom of God was being established! In the midst of our greatest challenges we were having wonderful success. Souls were being reached for Jesus and churches were being launched! This is why we live and breathe and have our being! Glory to God! Once again we were gaining momentum and things looked bright! That is until the disheartening news came.

We were warned through a friend who worked in the local police office that the KGB had found a weak link in our armor. Maybe I should say they created it. Unknown to us they never did properly register our children's teacher, Julie Kinunen. They had laid a plan and now they were going through with it.

Our friend in the police force tipped us off, "Thursday morning you will have visitors." It was now Monday. Government officials were coming to personally escort Julie out of the country. Fortunately, just one week earlier God had opened a door for us in another region of the country. Was it time to move on? Yes! That very night I gave the word to our staff. "Find a semi-truck and trailer, in twenty-four hours we need to be packed up and headed to Zaporozia." I had already looked at a vacant campus where we could house the Bible School. Calls were made, faxes sent and we were ready for another move. In the next twenty-four hours we loaded belongings from four locations plus our storage facility containing tens of thousands of books. It was a grueling marathon of work. We were dirty, sweaty, and tired—and racing the clock. This was hard enough but it got worse. Pastor V. (the backsliden pastor) showed up with a few local police in an effort to stop us.

He was still angry over the issue we had previously dealt with—the sin in his life—and was out for revenge. We learned a great deal about human nature and Christian character in those days. There on the street for two hours we presented our case and Pastor V. his case. It was a shame that those who represent Christ had to do this before heathens. Nevertheless it was done. It was embarrassing. It was a disgrace. We were all tired and dirty and wanted sleep. Pastor V. was hoping we would just give in and pay him off. He wanted money. Not a chance! Righteousness was going to prevail in this deal. I was not about to give in to his sin this easily. In the end, by the grace of God, we prevailed and were told to go. Even the police saw through the hypocrisy and said so. My only desire was to get moving and clear the Crimea border before anyone else found out what was transpiring.

We said our good-byes to our landlords, shed a few tears, prayed and began our journey north to begin life over one more time. So much had happened in Djonkoe in the short time we were there. Two churches were planted. Operation Train Robbery was launched. Conferences and leadership training were conducted, the correspondence Bible school greatly expanded and much more. Many were born again, baptized in the Holy Spirit, healed, and delivered. God was with us! Now we faced this. "Was it us? Were we failures?" Or was this part of the reality those living for Christ face? Friend, it is part of the life God calls all believers to live. He calls us to bear the burden of the Great Commission. When this happens we will face trials and persecution. "Is it fun?" Of course not. "Do we look forward to harassment and ridicule?" No, never. It's something that comes with the territory. We only go around once in this earthly tabernacle—So let's be radical for Jesus!

It has been appointed once for us to die and then the judgment. Let's not debate the issue. Millions are plunging into Hell every year. In the next twenty-four hours 120,000 more souls will be sucked into the eternal regions of the damned. Every Christian needs to re-evaluate their

life and make the needed adjustments. Invest in eternity, invest in reaching the lost while you have the chance. Are you searching for reality in your life? There is no better reality than to reach souls for Jesus Christ, rescuing them from the wicked flames of Hell. We must return to Jesus, the focus of our faith.

Someday, we will all stand before God. We will give an account of our life. In light of eternity I suggest that we all take a good look. We must ask ourselves, "Where can I begin to live more simple that I may sow into reaching the world for Jesus?" Giving ourselves to Jesus is a daily choice. What does Jesus want us to do with our life and finances? Before you answer for yourself let's read 1 Corinthians 6:19-20:

*"What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."*

We are not our own, God purchased us with the blood of His Son. The price was the sacrifice of His Son on Calvary's cross. Everything we are and everything we have is His. We do not own anything. If the heart of the Father is the evangelization of the world and the supreme task of the church is the Great Commission and we are God's property and only stewards of His possessions: What do you think He would want us to do with His money and property?

## Chapter 13

### *Starting over in Zaporozia*

Although we believe that God had opened a door for us to be in Zaporozia, we were to undergo another great test. I will be honest. It was another incredibly difficult time in our life. We had been rejected again, we were all tired, finances were already low and now this. It was by faith that we had made arrangements to rent a whole campus to house our family, our staff and eighty Bible school students. The building that we would have for our family was not designed to live in. It was a concrete box with a bunch of cubicles. From this we were expected to make a home. It had now been a few years since we had a normal home, with heat, water and without mice. It did not look like this place would be much better. Jill and I were faced with another dilemma. It was either His plan, His agenda, His desires, or ours. Christianity is all about choices. It is daily choices of dying to self that Christ might live in us. Our plans, desires and future must be laid at the foot of the cross. God must have the freedom in our lives to lead us wherever and however He wills.

Apostle Paul had one main passion in his life and that was to be like Jesus. His desire was to die to self that Christ might live in and through him. Paul said this in Acts 20:24:

*“But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.”*

Paul was once a wealthy political leader of high status and education. He considered it all garbage for the sake of Jesus. “How about your life? Are there things that you are clinging to and unwilling to let go of? Do your giving records reveal a person that clings to this life too much? Or do they reveal a generous heart that tithes and gives generously to expand the Kingdom of God on planet earth. Is your real passion to be more like Jesus who was consumed with a zeal to seek and save the lost?” Maybe it’s time for another inventory. Why? Because you have enormous potential and God desires to use you greatly.

After working feverishly to get out of Crimea and traveling another fourteen hours we finally arrived at our location in Zaporozia. We were exhausted, we desired sleep, but now we still needed to unload the semi trailer. The driver wanted to be on his way and was anxious to get unloaded. It was almost midnight and the semi loomed so large. When Jill walked to the second floor where we were to live and saw how bad it was she fell apart. She broke down and cried. It was her first time seeing the building. The pressures we were facing just became too much for her. The place was a pigpen. I was told it would at least be cleaned up but it wasn’t. I know how she felt. It was terrible. Even though I had done my best, I felt like a failure. It was another moment of truth. We had to die to self. Souls were at stake—eternal souls! With God’s grace all things are possible and we could make it through. We had to stand strong. Eighty of us worked hard to empty the semi and by 3:00 a.m. we were able to go to bed: cold, dirty, and tired we each found a corner and went to sleep.

It took us a few weeks to get things operational. We did what we could to make the place livable. We did not have a bathroom, shower or tub. There was no hot water. There was also no heat in the building and with winter coming on something had to be done. The Bible school would start soon and crusades were scheduled. It was a busy time. Maybe this was for the best since it did not give us time to focus on the condition of our living arrangements. In our makeshift home we also housed our ministry offices, the correspondence Bible school staff and conducted home schooling for our three girls. Three of our staff also lived with us. It was an interesting time for us—character-building time! The ministry continued to grow, churches were planted around Zaporozia and eighty students eventually graduated. From these students several more churches were planted. Was all the inconvenience and hardship worth the results? Yes! Only eternity will reveal the souls in heaven because of our time in Zaporozia. We would gladly do it again.

We stuck it out in the midst of hardship. Why? Because we are soldiers for Christ and we are in a cosmic war for the souls of humanity. We had made our decision for Jesus and if it included sacrifice, hardship and pain then so be it. Discomfort and pain are part of the calling. Much of the teaching coming from our Western pulpits may teach otherwise but it is not the Gospel of Jesus – it is the gospel according to America. If the church does not come out of her prostitution with the world; self-indulgence and worship of the “Me” Christianity; and accept some self-sacrifice, and deny herself of the “I deserve blessings” mentality, we will never reach our generation for Jesus Christ. Jesus said this in Luke 9:58:

*“...Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has not where to lay His head.”*

Jesus allowed Himself to be consumed and finally murdered to launch this great Christian enterprise. How can we ever expect to carry on the work He began by living in self-indulgence, consuming the blessings of God on our own lusts?

We are called to serve not to be served. Waste has become the norm for the body of Christ. While our brothers and sisters in the second and third world suffer hardships, torture, persecution, and death, American believers live in the lap of luxury. Persecution watches tell us that approximately 159,000 Christians are murdered each year. Why? Simply because they are Christians. That’s the only reason. Then there are the millions of Christians living under persecution and the constant fear of torture, rape, and death. Jesus gave His life for us but we refuse to give ours for the cause of Christ. Church, we must repent and come out from among both the world and the worldly ways that have penetrated the body of Christ. I am not talking of a “works gospel” but the “Gospel of the Kingdom,” where Jesus is truly Lord of our lives.

## **Chapter 14**

### ***Zapped by the Zaporozia Government***

We had a valid contract. We fully intended to uphold our end of the bargain. It was signed and official: we expected the city government in Zaporozia to have the integrity to honor the rental agreement. We were so wrong. Now, after four-months they told us, “We want twice the rent we originally agreed upon and paid ‘four months in advance.’” Greed is such a wicked enemy. “Who did these guys think they were?” We do not do business like that in America. Who cares, we were not in America. We were in hostile territory and they were not interested in honor. We were invading their darkness and they refused to comprehend the light.

Even in a worse case scenario we never expected they would just walk in and kick us out. Certainly we would be given at least a thirty-day warning. It was late November and Jill and the kids were leaving for the States to spend Thanksgiving and Christmas with family. I was to follow a week later after teaching a leadership conference that I was conducting. Everything was going fine or so it seemed.

The very day I was leaving for the States, the news came. “You have twenty-four hours to get out.” That was it. They gave us twenty-four hours to move all staff, eighty students and a semi-trailer full of materials. The worse part was that I had to catch a train in two hours. Everything fell on Natasha’s shoulders. This young lady, who God had given to us had to carry this tremendous load alone. She was only eighteen years old at the time. Life seems so cruel sometimes. The curve balls thrown at us seem so wicked and unfair. Was this the devil? Was this God’s way of moving us on? Was this His way of stretching us? The fact is that we are in a lifelong battle with the enemy of the Kingdom and he is relentless in his efforts to destroy us. During the next few months we were once again severely tested but refused defeat. Why? Eternal souls were at stake. Our calling was on the line. Our destiny hung in the balance but we knew prayer and fasting would weigh in our favor and we set out to seek the face of God. The work had to continue. We couldn’t quit. This was not only a test for Jill and I but Natasha was about to come to grips with her own destiny. She was about to make the most difficult decision of her life.

## Chapter 15

### *Fresh Beginnings in Crimea*

During the next twenty-four hours Natasha coordinated the moving of our staff and our entire ministry equipment and materials. She squeezed much of it into a two-room cockroach infested apartment and there she lived, running the ministry, until I could return in early January.

In Natasha's own words, "It was the most terrible time in my life and I had to make a decision. It would have been so easy to quit and go home to Moscow. This was a critical time in my life, however, I chose to follow the call of God no matter how hard and difficult it would be. Jesus saved me for a purpose and it did not include being a quitter."

On January 6, 1996, I returned to Zaporozia to find Natasha and a semi load of books and Gospels tracts squeezed into a two-room apartment. It was literally so packed a person had to walk sideways to get through the hallway. The bedroom was so full that there was only room for a single mattress to sleep on and during the day it was set on edge so people could pass by to get materials. The other room where we had the computer set up was laid out the same.

After my arrival, complete with a restless night, I rose early to study the Word and pray. The only place to sit was in the kitchen, all the other space was taken. Natasha came in about an hour later and turned on the gas oven to make some breakfast. What occurred next was absolutely disgusting. As the oven heated up so did its inhabitants—COCKROACHES!—Hundreds of them. They came crawling out of every crevice and hole. Small, medium and large, every shape and size, it was a family affair. They lived in the insulation. They either jumped to the floor or climbed the walls. It was a mass exodus. Needless to say, I lost any appetite I had.

It was in these conditions Natasha lived and made her decision to continue to serve God on the mission field. Even though her first language was Russian and she was born and raised in Moscow, she was a missionary to Ukraine. She could have stayed in Moscow and by their standards lived an affluent life, but she chose instead not to run back to mom and dad. She was still a teenager, a young woman, and alone: called to oversee a ministry reaching thousands for Jesus. What Natasha did, all young people must do. "How about you? Who or what will you choose to serve? Your plans? Your opinions? Your own desires? Or will you choose to serve God and follow His plan for your life?" Let His plan be your plan!

During the next two weeks we needed God to open some major doors because we could not continue as we were. The government had successfully put the squeeze on us once again. I do not consider myself worthy of carrying apostle Paul's coat but after eleven years of church planting in the former Soviet Empire I believe I can relate to him. I thank God for the grace He gives us to carry out our calling.

We made arrangements with the local pastor to see to it that our labors in Zaporozia would not be fruitless. He would make sure our students finished their training and were released to plant

churches, working with the network of churches in that area of Ukraine. By God's grace many are now successful pastors and still others have gone out to pioneer more than one church. Although life in Zaporozia was one challenge after the other, it bore much fruit. We poured our lives into the students and now they pour their lives into others. That's New Testament Christianity!

We found out later that the government put the squeeze on us because of pressure from the KGB and religious departments in Simpheropol, the capital of Crimea, which we had evacuated several months earlier. It was time once again to move on. "Would this ever end? Was it worth the continuous hassle?" To the natural man and carnal Christian the answer would be "No, it's not worth it." Our response is different because we believe that one soul is worth more than the wealth of the world. We had to go on. Souls were worth more than our comfort. Our love for Jesus had to be greater than anything they could ever do to us.

### **Back to the Lions Den**

While we prayed about a city, the Holy Spirit spoke to us about contacting a church in Crimea in which we had relations with and moving the ministry there. It seemed very strange to us. After all, we were run out of Crimea five months earlier. But we believed this was a word from the Lord so we pursued it. While living in Crimea, God had opened a door for us to befriend a pastor of a church in a certain city. God had also given us great favor with the leaders in this church. We had held conferences and crusades there. Many had been born again and great healings had occurred. One such healing involved a man named Boris. We were asked to visit him in a nearby village where he was stretched out on a large wooden plank. A bull had crushed Boris and his back was broken in several locations. He was a pitiful sight when we first saw him. He was stretched out and unable to move. His wife was in tears. We anointed Boris with oil, prayed the prayer of faith and left. That was it. We had a schedule to keep and needed to leave.

Upon returning a month later, an extremely excited man ran up to me and asked, "Do you remember me?" "No," I said. He replied, "I am Boris, the guy with the broken back – remember the bull? I'm healed!" He proceeded to dance and jump and praise the Lord. He had the biggest smile I had ever seen. He was a very happy man. As of January 2004, Boris is alive and well and drives the church van for mobile evangelism outreaches for his church. Wow! Jesus is still the same, yesterday, today and forever!

Natasha and I took a train to Crimea to discuss the possibilities in person with the pastor and his leadership. In less than two hours they had found a place to store our materials plus a "three-room cockroach free" apartment to be our office and Natasha's home. God had done it again! He provided a place to base the ministry. The Crimea, home to the religious leaders who vowed to run us out of Ukraine was once again our headquarters.

We now had to return to Zaporozia, load up and move. Not a big deal on the surface, but my surprises were not over. A telephone call from Jill changed things. "Peter," she said, "We had a

fire. Everyone is okay but we are living in a hotel.” That was not all. A few days earlier she hit a patch of ice and had a car accident. As bad as things get in our lives we can be assured that God has not forsaken us. We put our trust in Jesus once again and kept putting one foot in front of the other. The battle loomed large but by God’s grace we kept going. Nothing was going to keep us from living our destiny in Jesus.

We made the move and re-established our ministry in Crimea. We were all certainly “conforming to the death of our Master.” It’s an ongoing process. It’s a daily process. Jesus never promised us a “bed of roses.” He did promise us that we would face persecution. Much of the church only preaches life and the power of Pentecost. Yet, in the life of a Christian, death must precede life and the cross always comes before Pentecost. Our existence on earth is to be based on what He wants and not what we want. Let’s choose death to self so that the resurrection life of Jesus, can operate in us and then flow out to a world in need of the Savior.

For the next four years, our ministry would be based in the Crimea region. Natasha would grow in grace, meet and marry a man of God and together they would oversee our ministry and plant churches in several states of Ukraine including Herson, Crimea, Odessa and Chernigov.

During this time our ministry would translate and reproduce the “Big Money” Gospel tract written by Ray Comfort. We printed one million of them and the tract was an instant success, especially with truck drivers and Mafia thugs. My personal testimony tract, of which we have printed more than two million, and the “Big Money” tract were reaching so many Mafia and young hoodlums for Jesus, a contract was put out on my life in Crimea. It was a strange feeling to know a death warrant was out for me. To be honest, I wore the death threat as a badge of honor. If I am to be “bumped off” I want it to be for the Gospel’s sake and not to just be another statistic.

## Chapter 16

### *Mafia Threatens Death*

After the incidents in Zaporozia, the fire and car accident stateside and the reestablishing of our ministry in Crimea, a new phase began in our missionary life. With our religious visas also revoked we were forced to operate differently. Our ministry went from living full time overseas to that of missionary evangelists. We began what has now been eight years of continuous travel to and from Ukraine. Six to eight trips per year ranging from two to six weeks in duration. Thank the Lord for an awesome apostolic team! Without which we could not have sustained the work. Our Ukrainian and Russian staff have served valiantly under great sacrifices, tests, and trials. They are winning the lost and pioneering churches! They take seriously the call of the Lord. They have answered the call of eternity. They have captured the passion of Paul which he writes of in Galatians 2:20:

*“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”*

Everyone who names the name of Christ must be willing to submit and surrender all to Jesus. We, as believers in Jesus, must recapture the passion that carried the first century Christians into greatness. They had a passion for Jesus and a passion for lost souls. We must return to preaching truth from our pulpits and live out the same in our daily lives. We must repent of living a pleasure seeking life and return to the foundation of our faith and live a life of self-sacrifice. After all, “Do we really need that new boat, new car or new furniture? Do we really need to add to that credit card debt? How about those appliances, can’t we get by a few more years with the ones we have?” It’s time to refocus our lives and regain the passion of our first love.

I encourage pastors to re-evaluate their entire church budget and channel funds away from selfish uses and into world missions. Re-evaluate the efficiency of your current missionary support. When was the last time your church leadership fasted and prayed about the missionaries you support and their vision? When was the last time you had a church-wide late night, all night, or all day prayer for missions?

We have relied on everything that Madison Avenue has to offer but have forsaken prayer, fasting, and the pursuit of the face of God. If we are to be the generation which ushers in the closure of the Great Commission then we must refuse to give only out of our abundance and pay a price in order that the lost may be reached with the only message of salvation.

During one of the many trips into Ukraine bringing in finances and materials we had another unforgettable experience. We arrived at the Kiev train station with ten dish-pack boxes, each weighing seventy pounds. Two Russian staff and I had just placed the last box under the shelter when it began to rain. “Awesome,” I thought. It would not have been good to get these boxes

wet as they contained much needed computers and other electronic equipment. Within seconds of placing our last box out of reach from the rain three shady looking characters approached us. You know the kind, you look into their eyes and realize they are not the only ones living at that address. It did not take a rocket scientist to realize they were connected with the local Mafia.

“How much is your stuff worth?” belched the obvious leader of the pack. I knew the story. I understood what was going down. It was typical for Mafia thugs to approach people with a large amount of belongings and extort money based on the value of the goods. Ten-percent duty was common for these arm-breakers. My response was not well received. “It has no cost value because these things were free gifts to a Christian ministry. You are trying to rob from God.”

After a few verbal exchanges the leader pointed to several more of his associates standing around us. He then proceeded to tell me of my impending death if I did not pay him \$100.00. He expounded on my death: “slitting of the throat” in great detail. He was irritated but so was I. We could not just roll over and give in, but neither could we press the issue too far. They were serious and I was not ready to die for a hundred bucks. Besides, we negotiated for fifty. A small price compared to the value of the goods I had in the boxes and the ten thousand dollars I carried on my person.

It was a reminder to me of how fragile life really is. As the Bible says, “our life is like a vapor.” Here one second and gone the next. My oldest brother died recently of a heart attack. One minute he was talking to a friend. The next minute he was dead. No warning. He was dead before he hit the ground. Life is so fragile. We cannot afford to mess around with it. We must examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith. “Are you?” The book of James challenges us to examine our faith. Does your faith show evidence of works of repentance?

*James 2:17 reads, “Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.” Verse 26 continues with “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” Apostle Paul gives us a further challenge in 2 Corinthians 13:5, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves...”*

Maybe by now you are beginning to think, “This guy is always lecturing me.” No, that’s not the case, I am challenging you to go higher in Christ and further in purpose. I am provoking you to good works and stirring up the gift that is in you. To do less would be sin on my part. You have destiny threaded into your DNA by the very hand of God. My hope is that by provoking and challenging you, decisions will be made that will affect eternity.

It was a stand off. We were outnumbered ten to one. They had guns and knives and were not afraid to use them. The three of us could not pick up the ten boxes and run. It was an intense moment. But it did not end there. Now I felt he owed me his ear. I shared Jesus with the ringleader and several times told him of his need to repent. The interesting thing was that now I had the upper hand. He was on the defensive. I used the law of God to reveal the sin and

wickedness of his heart. He may have gotten fifty bucks but he also got a dose of God's Word and a chance to repent. Before we finally boarded our train I asked one of the station workers if these Mafia thugs would really kill someone. His response, "These guys are evil, they would just as soon kill you as listen to you." I got my answer.

## **Chapter 17**

### ***Train Rides We'll Never Forget***

During the first twenty-six months of missionary life overseas we lived in Moscow, Russia. Visa problems kept us from moving our family into Ukraine. However, I could obtain short-term visas. This allowed us the opportunity to begin establishing a ministry in Ukraine. During those months I traveled over fifty thousand kilometers by train. It became a way of life. These trains are not Amtrak, I remind you, and the conditions were something to be desired.

Although not too bad when each trip began; as the hours passed the conditions worsened. Drunks walked the halls, pestering people: they were obnoxious and looking for trouble. As the evening wore on, the one and only bathroom, which accommodated forty-eight people, developed a layer of urine that would swish across the floor as the train swayed from side to side. Vomit and human waste from drunks splattered the walls, toilet seats, and floor. The smell was enough to make you gag and seeing it magnified the nausea.

#### **Mafia Thugs**

After two very fruitful weeks of evangelizing in Ukraine, myself and the group I was in charge of were returning to Moscow by train. We had rented three separate compartments, four beds per room. Lights were out and we were trying to sleep. About 11:00 p.m. we began to hear loud banging sounds and shouting in the halls that did not diminish. Finally, after an hour I had enough of this distraction and opened our door to investigate. To my horror blood splattered the walls, windows and floors the full length of the hallway. At the far end were two men kicking another man senseless. It was obvious that these two were Mafia thugs. Of the forty-five other passengers, we were the only ones who attempted to intercede on behalf of the man being beaten. We were not trying to be heroes nor is it wise to stick your nose into some of the affairs that transpire in that country. However, this guy could have easily been killed. For over an hour they had been dragging him up and down the hallway kicking his head against the wall. When I saw him the next morning his head looked the size of a watermelon. His entire face was black and blue. He was a mess. The two guys who had beaten him were two of his roommates, people that rented the other beds. That is the problem with traveling by train. If you do not buy up all four spaces in your compartment you end up sleeping with three strangers, men or women, drunks, sex maniacs or as in this mans case, Mafia thugs.

We have had our share of train experiences, especially when we first began in ministry. Money was tight and we could not afford to purchase all four berths. Often I traveled alone. One such time was in the dead of winter. There was no heat on the train and it was about twenty below zero. I was put with two strangers of the baser sort. They knew I was an American and therefore probably carrying money. During the first two hours they finished a quart of vodka. I knew I was in for a long night. I lay in my bunk fully dressed, including parka, gloves, scarf, and stocking hat. I did not dare sleep because these guys could not be trusted. Instead I prayed for hours. I was waiting them out. Sooner or later the vodka would catch up to them, they would

sleep and hopefully, so would I. I did not know much of the Russian language at the time but I knew enough to understand their intentions and they were not good. It was a restless night!

### **Cockroaches Galore**

Then, of course, there was the twenty-six hour trip that our family took on the cockroach infested train car. Sleeping in the same compartment with my wife made the trip all the more adventurous. Jill hates cockroaches and kept me up half the night. Not only because of the constant banging as she smashed cockroaches but because she kept the lights on. I would just about be asleep when she would reach over to my berth and smash an innocent cockroach on the wall, or worse, on the ceiling above my head. Wanting to appease her and yet still get some sleep I gave Jill a roll of two-inch wide packaging tape. I thought she could silently entomb the filthy little varmints.

It worked, but by morning the walls and ceiling of our compartment looked more like an UPS packaging room than a sleeping berth. Hundreds of these poor little creatures were brought to their untimely deaths by the hands of my dear wife. But that was not the end of the story. Two weeks later when we were to leave Odessa we were sold tickets with the same train car and berth numbers as before. I told the others, “surely this could not be the same train.” Not only was it the same train, but the same train car and the exact same rooms. Brown packing tape verified this fact. I did not bother to wait. I simply gave Jill the packaging tape and crawled into my bunk.

On another occasion we were given a compartment in which the window had rusted shut with age. It was an extremely hot day and the temperature in the room was over 100 degrees and extremely humid. It was scheduled to be a twenty-six hour trip. The heat was unbearable and I was determined our family would not suffer the next twenty-six hours in this sweatbox. Fortunately I had my trusty Swiss Army knife. For over three hours we worked to get that window open. I even went into the hallway and dismantled the handrail so it could be used as a pry bar. Finally, after three long sweaty aggravating hours, victory came and so did the fresh air.

At other times we were not as fortunate, like the time I traveled with Valari, one of our Russian staff, and we spent most of the trip sitting in our underwear. It is at times like these I catch myself thinking, “There is no way I am going to backslide away from God. Hell is not worth ‘sin for a season.’”

In the winter the extreme went the other direction. Many times, because we had no heat, we nearly froze and very seldom slept. On many occasions I walked the halls during the night praying and rubbing my body to stay warm. Paul’s word in 1 Corinthians 4:9-13 became very real to me over the years:

*“For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in*

*Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised. Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace; And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day.”*

There was the time back in the early days of the ministry when a friend and I were kicked off the train in the middle of nowhere. Unknown to us we boarded the wrong train leaving Dnepropetrovsk. We jumped on at the last minute thinking it was our train. Unfortunately we did not put two and two together until after we were moving and then only after we spent ten minutes arguing with the people who we accused of being in our berths. It was embarrassing. But it was not the end of our embarrassment. No matter how much we pleaded, the train car operator would not even let us stand in the hall until we reached Moscow.

“At the next stop you will get out,” she shouted! We were given the boot in a small village called Pavel-Gorad, translated “Paul’s Town.” We found a place to sit in the “unheated” train station and hunkered down until our train, the one we had tickets for, came by. When it finally did come, the train car attendant would not let us on since our tickets originated in Dnepropetrovsk and not Paul’s-Town. I am glad that one soul reached for Christ is of tremendous value. Because at certain times it is so hard and your faith is severely tested. Only for the Kingdom’s sake and opportunity to win the lost would I go through this torture. Only after paying this lady for berths, even though we had tickets, did she let us on the train.

Space will not allow us to share all the strange and challenging train experiences we encountered over the years. Like the food we purchased from train vendors that was full of hair or the nights when we could feel cockroaches crawl over us as we tried to sleep or the times Satia, my youngest, challenged the bathrooms. Not wanting to step in urine, she would climb up and hang from a towel rack and as she put it, “go potty.” She is talented! I must admit, I was proud of my little girl.

Although our years on the mission field have been challenging, they have also been great years. Our children will never forget the life we lived for the sake of reaching souls for Jesus. I wish every Christian kid could experience what mine did. They had to learn to die to self. The pleasantries of America were gone. They learned to survive on new turf. Our kids experienced first hand what their mom and dad lived for. We not only lived out our Christian life before them but we took them into the center of it. We gave them reality. Our desire as parents is to see our kids serving Jesus with passion. If they are called to serve Jesus on the foreign field, even in a hostile, Christian hating country, then I say, “Let God’s will be done.” We have dedicated each of our three girls to the Lord. They are His to use, as He desires.

Friend, go on a train ride with Jesus. Let it be a ride for destiny. Release your kids and release yourself to do His will and obey His voice. Life is too short to be playing evangelical games. Is

your life centered on getting more things, on playing church, or are you living with eternity in mind?

## **Chapter 18**

### ***Pioneering Churches***

Pioneering churches is nothing new but neither has it gotten any easier to accomplish. From the pioneering days of Apostle Paul until now, history is covered with martyrs' blood. The devil hates the spread of the Gospel. Although none of our staff to date have been killed, we have been chased out of villages by violent and angry mobs: there have been beatings, robberies and rape.

One such incident happened during the final week of one of our two-month missionary boot camps. We require our students to evangelize the city on weekdays and villages on weekends. This particular Saturday we loaded them into a bus and went to a village an hour away from the base, a village that can only be accessed via washed out dirt roads.

As our students walked the streets witnessing and inviting people to our meeting, the church bells rang out as a warning for the villagers not to talk to us. At about 6:00 p.m. the local priest, carrying a large crucifix and a large incense burner, showed up with a mob of angry people and rowdy drunks. I was outside at the time and could see the mob coming. The drunks were rude and purposely trying to turn this into a physical confrontation. Others were loud and obnoxious. The priest and his confederates portrayed the Pharisee attitude at its best.

It was a stand off and unfortunately, one we would not win. These people wanted nothing to do with Jesus and their anger was intense. Two things happened that spoke volumes to me concerning the deception of the devil. First, when I placed my hand on the priest's shoulder as a friendly gesture, an extremely violent lady knocked my hand away with a stick and shouted, "Don't you dare touch 'the Christ.'" "Lady" I said, "he is only a man." Screaming into my face she retorted, "He is 'the Christ' for he carries 'the cross.'" Wow!

Secondly, I repeatedly asked the following question in hope of getting a response other than the one that I received. I asked, "Do you love Jesus Christ?" I asked them the question several times, at which they tersely responded, "We love our faith." They could not even acknowledge a love for Jesus. They cursed us, called us blasphemers and after awhile, even the children were joining them. As always, the drunks were there trying to be big shots. The bus drivers were verbally threatened by them and pleaded with us to leave so that their bus would not be damaged. They also pressured the woman who rented us the hall. She also pleaded with us to leave. She ran to the platform and shouted, "Please go before something terrible happens." As the crowd continued to grow so did the intensity of the situation and it was obvious that no one was there to hear our message. The atmosphere was electric: the air was thick with anger and hate; demons were working overtime. The scene was getting ugly and I told our team it was time to wipe the dust from our feet and move on. The drunks and more serious agitators were on the prowl, grabbing girls, pushing people, cursing, desiring to see something violent erupt.

Before we departed, I raised my hands and voice in an attempt to capture the people's attention. I told the people that we only wanted to help bring deliverance through Jesus, and set people free from alcohol, drugs and Mafia influence. They only became more violent, saying, "We are happy the way we are. We do not want you or your Jesus—we have our faith." It reminded me of that spirit of rage during the trial of Christ that said, "Let His blood be upon us and our children."

We shook the dust off of our feet and left. No, it's not easy pioneering new works for Jesus but then He never said that it would be. It was a good baptism into reality for our students and for that, I thank God. I also thank the Lord for my involvement. Because incidents like these help to keep me on the cutting edge. We have been given a mandate from the Father. It is a mandate for all Christians. It's a "Missions Mandate." Jesus lived to do the will of the Father, which was to "seek and save the lost." Jesus passed on this mandate to every Christian. Missions is not an option or simply an extension or program of a local church. The body of Christ exists purely to fulfill the will of its Lord. And the Lord's will is that He is "not willing that any should perish" (2 Peter 3:9).

Several months after this episode our team was met by another angry mob. These people went so far as to physically attack our mobile evangelism team. Our team had to physically fight their way back to the van. With the exception of one member being thrown to the ground our people made it out safely. The verbal abuse is always the same; vulgarities, cursing, and blaspheming the name of our Lord.

This took place in the village of Kamoshovka where we had planted a church. Why would our missionaries go through these ordeals for a mere \$120.00 a month? Friends, it is not about money, but about Jesus. Kingdom expansion is the center of our lives. Souls and church planting are our passion. God's heart pounds with an intense passion for the lost and this passion has found its way into the hearts of our missionaries. It must not begin and end on the streets of Ukraine. This should be the heartbeat of Christians everywhere. We must be willing to forsake all for the sake of the lost.

Even after this incident several of the crowd gathered in a church member's yard to hear the Gospel and many repented. It does not always have to end up in a total loss. In this case God gave us victory in spite of the opposition.

I can still recall the time we were planting churches in the Kotovsk region of the Odessa Oblast. It was a region we felt compelled to reach for Christ. Little evangelism had taken place and none since the doors opened to the Gospel in the early 90s. Our mobile evangelism team arrived at dusk to set up equipment. Within a few minutes, a crowd could be heard coming our direction. When they came into view our team members noticed that they were carrying sticks, hoes, shovels, and rocks. Most appeared to be drunk. They were violent, screamed curses and threatened our team with severe harm to person and equipment. Our missionaries were

completely surrounded and ready to be attacked. Only a miracle could get them out of this situation. These people were violent. Why? It always gets back to the simple truth that they hate Jesus. Simply the mention of His name raises the vile head of the religious and sends shock waves into enemy territory. We were chased out of this village too. Victory did not come as we had hoped. The name of Jesus was not preached and souls were not saved.

Although we did not succeed in this village, we have been able to plant churches in surrounding villages and cities of this region. By God's grace and leading we did not give up. We did not throw in the towel. When we are rejected in one village we simply move on to the next. Jesus said this in Mark 1:38:

*"...Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth."*

It is not only mob violence we face. Various other tests and trials come against us too. One test we faced early on was that when we showed up for a church planting crusade, we found that the auditorium had no lights. It was pitch black. The only light we had was one small candle. The only way I knew anyone was in attendance was to ask, "Is anyone here?" "Yes, we are here" was the reply. In darkness we preached, and out of darkness came the people when the call to repent was given!

*"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." (1 Peter 2:9)*

This has since happened to us dozens of times and many times the local authorities shut off the power to the building on purpose. They think it will cause us to quit. Not a chance. During a church plant in 1999, the power was shut off before I was to preach. Again we preached in total darkness and more than forty people responded to the altar call! God is not limited because we have no lights, heated buildings or modern conveniences. At a recent crusade in Kilia, a town near the Romanian boarder, even though we paid rent for the building, Communist officials would come and pull the power just when we would begin the praise and worship. Every night they would do this. But in these situations one truth is confirmed: we do not need electricity to worship Jesus or preach His Word!

One thing the Holy Spirit promised for those who obey Him was persecution.

*"So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure:" (2 Thessalonians 1:4)*

Many of our students, evangelists, and church planters are willing to face persecution for the sake of the Gospel. They are willing to go where others will not. Thank the Lord for these young radicals!

### **What we need are helping hands**

The body of Christ in the former Soviet Union is looking for believers in the West who will stand with them both prayerfully and financially so that they can effectively reach their own people with the Gospel. With your help, 52 million Russian speaking people of Ukraine can be evangelized. Churches can be pioneered. Hundreds of Western missionaries have given up and returned home. The battle became too great. We have refused to give in to the pressure. By God's grace we will fight on. Our missionaries are prepared to go and do the work that they are called to do. But without our help, it is nearly impossible. The economy has collapsed and they can barely feed themselves and their families. You can help fulfill the Great Commission by sending national believers into the harvest fields of Ukraine and Russia. An empire founded on hate and murder has left millions of people living in a spiritual vacuum—a black hole of despair.

Jesus said, *“As my Father hath sent me, even so I send you”* (John 20:21). The Great Commission reveals the reason why we are here on earth. Our supreme task as believers is to evangelize the world, making disciples of every ethnic group on earth. Disciple making is a long-term process that we could simply call—church planting! It is not about large crusades and simply asking people to pray a prayer. Western evangelists have actually done a great disservice by coming in with their big three day crusades. They preach the standard “Jesus loves you and will make you happy gospel, ask for a show of hands, have the people pray a prayer, take numerous photographs and shoot video footage, then blow out of town. Real Gospel work is more than that. Gospel work is hard work. 100,000 villages across the landscape of former Soviet Empire are in desperate need of a New Testament church that preaches the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Ukraine alone has 20,000 villages in need of a church.

In the former Soviet Union we can easily send national missionaries. Our ministry alone could send out one hundred missionaries tomorrow if American believers would simply loosen the purse strings and join us in reaching the lost. Thousands could be won to Jesus overnight and churches planted in every state of Ukraine in a year's time. Why stop there? We need a thousand missionaries in Ukraine alone and ten thousand throughout the former Soviet Union. We should not rest until the task is complete.

Crazy you say? In America the body of Christ spends hundreds of millions of dollars each year building temporal structures that will perish. Where has the fight for souls gone? Paul said in 2 Timothy 2:3-4:

*“Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.”*

Are we Christian soldiers or not? What pleases Jesus? He is pleased when we obey and fulfill the Great Commission. He is pleased when we take up our cross daily and follow Him. He is pleased when the lost are saved and disciples are made.

Our missionaries are waiting to evangelize villages. Our mobile evangelism teams are ready to blaze a trail across the landscape of the former Soviet Union. Our apostolic church planting teams are ready to plant churches in unreached villages, but they need your help. Please, will you take up your cross and stand with them in battle?

“When you did the crusade in our city my middle son and his wife and their two kids got saved! My son was also healed! Praise God! Before the crusade in September we used to have only two cell groups but the next day after the crusade we opened the third cell group at my home. Thank you so much!”

*Nicoli Kurbanova*

## Chapter 19

### *It All Began in a Garbage Can*

Through a friend I heard about a ministry that had recently trashed their correspondence Bible school program. They had 160 people signed up from Ukraine but lacked vision to build further. They were surprised when I asked for their list because in their own words “We do not see any potential.” They had officially canceled their school. They didn’t even send out a letter to notify the students, it was just canned.

“I’ll take the list!” That was my response. I saw a future in someone else’s garbage and was not about to let it slip away. We had been praying about how to launch a correspondence Bible school that could effectively train up leaders in one thousand villages throughout Ukraine. But how? My wife and I were the new kids on the missionary block. Others still looked at us as if we were wet behind the ears. When I first came to Christ I was radical and full of joy about sharing my faith, praying, worshiping and evangelizing. The advice that I had received from more than one of the church brethren was, “Slow down a little and gain some wisdom. When you do, you won’t need to be so expressive about your faith.” As dumb as this advice is that is the feeling I was getting from veteran missionaries in Moscow.

I believe the saying goes something like, “One man’s garbage in another man’s treasure.” Jill and I have a vision to raise up 1,000 churches in Ukraine. It was not going to happen without leaders, and with the economic situation the way it is in Ukraine, leadership training via correspondence Bible school was one of the tools that we had to develop. It was not an easy road to travel. It took time, years actually. But since our humble beginnings almost 10,000 students have enrolled in one of our two correspondence schools. From these numbers, hundreds have gone out to evangelize the lost and thousands are involved in church leadership of some kind. We have since re-tooled the school. It is now more leadership orientated, more intense, and more effective in developing people of passion with a heart for the lost. Our desire is not to fill students with head knowledge. They must feel the heartbeat of Jesus. We want them to clearly understand the call of our Lord to a life of surrender and service. We teach them that to follow Christ requires a price. This teaching is almost forgotten in the West. Actually much of the Western church teaches the opposite.

Sacrifice and death to self is the message and meaning of the cross and it is this spirit that we try to impart into our students. It is not about us, it is about Him! Maybe you have a dream that others have criticized. You have been told to “Forget it, it’s too big” or “You do not have the skills or education.” If you believe your dream is from God, do not let man keep you from fulfilling it. I was told by another missionary “Your correspondence Bible school will never get to 500.” What a shame it would have been if I put my faith in his words instead of God’s Word.

“A few years ago when there were only a few Christians in our prison studying in your correspondence Bible school we received two of your

tapes on praise and worship. We didn't have a tape player at that time but we started praying. After a while God gave us one but that wasn't all. He also gave us a church of 116 people in prison. This church was started because you cared." *Nicolia Shramko*

"After studying your lesson on healing, my faith became strong for my own healing and I threw away my crutches and prayed for God to strengthen my legs. Everybody around me was laughing but God did His part! I am totally healed!" *Brother Vashenko*

"I received healing from tuberculosis without any medicine while studying in your school! *Sergie Gurenkov*

"Using the materials given by Peter Mehl, we evangelized drug centers, hospitals, universities and performed personal evangelism. Once our church read and studied the materials we began to grow spiritually. Almost all the people in our church went through your correspondence Bible school and felt the call of God on their lives because of that. During evangelism many people are getting healed from diseases like bone marrow cancer, colds, bronchitis, heart disorders and a 20-year smoker was set free immediately. The church continues to grow in numbers and spiritually. Our vision is to evangelize the enemy's territory and bring the light of Jesus." *Egor Karpof*

## **Chapter 20** ***400,000 Licks***

How can we reach 1,000 villages for Jesus? How can we effectively reach into this many villages? We presented these questions to the Lord on more than one occasion. He is always faithful and He told us how to accomplish the first step. Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) had been airing their Super Book television program in Russia and Ukraine. Millions of people had written them asking for additional information.

I contacted CBN personnel in Kiev, Ukraine and shared my plan with them. It included mailing a cover letter, a questionnaire, a correspondence Bible school application, and a Gospel tract to over 400,000 contacts representing at least 1,000 villages in Ukraine. CBN gave us a “thumbs-up” and we were off and running. We had neither staff, time, nor money to pull off such a project. Nevertheless, we took it on as a Word from the Lord. We stepped out in faith believing that He would make a way where there seemed to be no way.

In all it took us eighteen months to complete and cost \$40,000.00. For eighteen months we folded, stuffed, licked and prayed. For us it was an immense job. In order to keep costs to a minimum we had couriers bring loads of letters from Moscow, Russia into Ukraine because of the cheap mailing costs. This in itself was not easy because we always had the customs people to deal with. Our workers were constantly hassled, but every load made it safely to the post office!

Over the months we received thousands of responses of people being born again after reading our Gospel tract. Thousands responded to our correspondence Bible school and hundreds came to our conferences to be trained. We dubbed the project Operation Mail Out, (OMO). It became the catalyst for much of what we did in Ukraine. Yes, OMO was a big undertaking for us but it produced much fruit in the harvest.

You plus God are a majority. Don't let “vision killers” detour your destiny. Speak life and call your vision into reality. Stay faithful and walk out your calling one day at a time. What God starts He will finish.

“Your ministry has helped me to have hunger for the Lord. I now have peace that I never had before and I know the purpose for my life. I know many other people that have received hope, started to understand the Gospel better and started to make right choices because of your ministry. I know of four different churches that were started in villages because of your work in Ukraine.” *Nicolai Alimov – Berdichev, Ukraine*

“Your ministry has helped me in my spiritual growth. Many people were changed because of your ministry. I know one guy who used to be a hooligan but God made him rich in Jesus and has changed his life completely. I have a desire to raise up churches in the villages. My church

in Suma was started with your help. Also I know one church in Mariupol that was started because of you...” *Alexander Diagterenko – Suma, Ukraine*

## Chapter 21

### *Producing Radicals...*

We learned early in our missionary life that we had to train up the national believers for the work of the ministry. Ephesians 4:11-13 became our theme:

*“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; ...For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: ...Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:”*

Yes, we believe apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers still roam the landscape of planet earth. Yes, we believe that their piercing eyes still search for new domains to conquer, as Kingdom expansion remains the lifeblood of their souls. We must get back on track concerning Christ’s gifts to the church. Jill and I set out to impart more than head knowledge into our disciples. We had to impart passion, purpose, destiny and truth. We cannot impart truth while leaving out four of the five offices Jesus gave to the church. Russian Harvest Ministries is out to produce radicals for Christ. Those who will sacrifice, pay a price and if need be die for the sake of the Kingdom and their Lord.

These men and women we are raising up may not speak well, look nice, or pray with great oratory ability but they are called of God, anointed of God, and will fulfill all that God calls them to do. They will hazard their lives for the sake of their Lord. They will love not their lives above serving the purposes of their King. They will be 100 % consecrated to the Kingdom call. They will do His bidding and follow His orders as He builds His church through them.

We have not seen anything yet. The Glory of the Lord is about to sweep across planet earth and anoint young and old alike. Our daughters shall prophesy. Our old men will dream dreams. Our young men shall see visions. Our children shall rise up to speak the Word of the Lord in power; lay hands on the sick and see them recover! A new, fresh passion for the nations is about to invade the hearts of thousands of believers. Will you be one of them?

This is the burden and passion that we try to impart in every person who we train, whether on site or through correspondence. Since 1993, we have constantly encouraged leaders to launch their own in-church training centers. We tell them, “Train your own people, train up your own youth. Do not send them away to be trained by people you do not even know.” We should not let an organization train and send our disciples, we need to do that ourselves. The church is a living organism not a bureaucratic organization many assume it to be.

The day is upon us, when the body of Christ must be less focused on building para-church mega-ministries and more focused on building the Kingdom of God via the local church. The day is

coming when the Glory of God will fill the local church and from within ministries will rise up to be sent to the world, not mega-ministries sent to save the local churches.

God has apostles and prophets prepared for a day and an hour in such as we live. The power of God is ready to explode upon the scene because the Lord said, “The glory in the latter house shall be greater than the former.” The glory of God upon the earth in the coming days will make the present day believers look like spiritual midgets. “Who will He use?” People like you and I: those willing to pay the price and follow their King into every village and town on earth. I’m talking about “Great Commission” minded people.

It’s not about us. It is about God and His plan and His timing. It is not about Baptists, Methodists, Charismatics or Pentecostals. It’s not about 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, or 3<sup>rd</sup> wave movements. It’s about Jesus, His church and Kingdom expansion.

The world trembles in fear because of AIDS, cancer, crime, wars and famine. Yet, regardless of what we may see, God is lifting up a standard in these last days and though a black cloud of doom may invade the heavens, God is forming the church of Jesus Christ to be the last line of defense. Though every man-made, denomination-made and government-made defense mechanism may fail, the church of Jesus Christ shall not fail. There is a holy remnant that refuses to bow to the pressures of the old wineskin and the painless, self-serving gospel of the modern church.

Where are those who will stand as the saints of old recorded in Hebrews?

*“Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.” (Hebrews 11:33-38)*

These saints of old represent the people of God we desire to raise up in these last days. You have these people in your own church. Maybe you are one of them. Rise up and find your place in the Kingdom. Live life to the fullest as you serve Jesus with passion and purpose.

Only men and women like those listed in Hebrews 11 will be able to stand up against the onslaught of the devil and reach the former Soviet Union for Jesus. Hundreds have already been trained but thousands more wait. We have hundreds, who could be trained right now, but are unable to do so. “Is it desire they lack?” No! “Is it potential?” No! The problem is support. They have no one to stand with them financially. Hundreds of churches could be planted now if the funds were available. Tens of thousands of souls could be reached for Jesus virtually over night.

The answer is not in the sending of missionaries from the West. That worked in the past but it is not the answer now. Only as we train up nationals and release them into their God ordained ministries can we ever expect the Great Commission to be fulfilled in our lifetime. We must help raise up people who care nothing about their own glory, name or life. Those who will lift up a standard in these last days and refuse to take God’s anointing and consume it upon their own lusts. These end-time warriors will go forth across the planet performing the greatest signs and wonders the world has ever known. Radicals for Jesus! This is what we are out to accomplish and by God’s grace, it shall be done!

I think of Roma, a former drug addict whose life has been radically changed by the power of God and now he is out winning people to Jesus! Then there is Volodia, trained in Chernigov, sent out and is pioneering a wonderful church and winning many to Jesus! Or Kolia, a former prisoner trained in our missionary training center who now oversees our regional drug rehab center and is involved in setting many drug addicts free from bondage. There are so many others doing the same and it is wonderful. The backgrounds of these young men and women are rugged but their future looks bright—they are doing exploits for their God!

It’s time we stop relying on oratory abilities, hermeneutics and Madison Avenue slogans and begin living in the dispensation of end-time apostolic power from on high. We must get a vision from God. We must get a burden for the lost. We must get a burden for the nations of the world. In spite of evidence on earth that may seem otherwise, God has a plan, His plan is good and His plan is on time. Even though the devil is trying his best, God’s plan will not be stopped. It may be hindered, it will be slandered, but it shall not be defeated.

God’s Word and His destiny for the church are right on track. His apostles are arising and taking the Gospel message to the ends of the earth. Do not send your children to some dead liberal arts Bible school and expect them to become radicals for Jesus. If you do not have your own training center then send them to a Holy Ghost anointed radical training center that is serious about fulfilling the Great Commission. Being a success in Christ or in ministry is not about making the front page of Charisma magazine. It is not about making the top ten of the Christian’s rich and famous, or raising the biggest offering, or building the biggest and best building, or wearing \$2,000.00 suits or driving Bentleys. It is not about building an empire on earth—it is about building the Kingdom of God in the earth!

It is not about the Almighty dollar, it is about the Almighty Himself. Much of Christianity is run by nothing more than a huge greed machine. Is money needed – yes – but it is for the expansion of the Kingdom of God. God wants His people back. He wants you back. He wants everything about you. He wants your life. He desires today to have everything about you under the Lordship of Christ. We cannot make a deal with God. He has already done the deal and it happened 2000 years ago. Get on fire for Jesus and into the race that really counts.

*“And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.” (Luke 9:23)*

God’s true disciples are those who forsake everything for the love of the Master. You cannot be His disciple unless all you have and all you are and all you ever hope to be is laid on the altar of God and you become a living sacrifice.

*“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” (Romans 12:1)*

If we do not get back to the cross immediately and start seeing the hurting, helpless, sinful, humanity across the earth: if we do not begin reaching the lost in other nations in fulfillment of the words of our Master, how can we ever say that we are truly His disciples?

*“And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple...So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” (Luke 14:27; 33-35)*

Radical believers must be raised up and sent to perform Gospel works. The world is ripe for someone who really cares about them. The lost are sick of the soothsayers, astrologers, and slick-talking preachers. The world is ready for something real. And we are entering an era where mighty men and women shall walk once again. Samuels are rising once again. Deborahs, Abigail, and Ruths are on the scene once again. Teenage Davids are beginning to arise out of obscurity once more. Young Timothys are on the scene by the thousands and will rise up to establish powerful end-time apostolic churches and take entire cities and regions for Jesus Christ of Nazareth. But if this is to take place, everyone must be involved. That includes you! What a privilege!

The restrictions that millions of believers in the West have placed on their money must be lifted if this is to occur. Forget about building bigger barns and begin building the Kingdom of God around the world. People are dying without Jesus and entering an eternal Hell, never to be seen again except at the Great White Throne Judgment where they will walk off into the eternal “Lake

of Fire.” It’s not too late, we can still do our part. We can still reach thousands, tens of thousands, yes, even millions, but we must raise up an army to do it. Let’s unpack our rapture bags and hit the world by storm. If you and I don’t do it—who will?

## Chapter 22

### *The Future Looks Bright*

The last eleven years of my life seem like a blur, like a dream? However, the tests, trials, and persecutions have all been real. Has any good come out of it? Absolutely! What about the pastors who backslid or the disciples who forsook Jesus and us? Is there justice? Of course there is but our pain will cease. Our hurt will heal. And by God's grace our friends will come back home to serve a living King! We have not given up hope.

It has not been easy. The opposite is true. These last eleven years have been both the most rewarding and yet the most challenging and painful. Our children have paid a great price. As far as world's riches go, so have Jill and I. Yet, how should we really measure riches? The soul of one man is of more value than all the wealth of the world. Surely, compared with the thousands who have come to Jesus, our lives have not been in vain. There is a "reality check" as I call it that helps me keep focused. Maybe it will help you too. Ask yourself the following questions:

Do I really believe there is a hell?

Will every person without a personal born again relationship with Jesus go there?

Do I really believe the command of Jesus to go into the entire world and make disciples of all nations?

Do I really believe the words of Jesus to take up my cross and follow Him? And that those who do not cannot be His disciples?

Do I believe it is my responsibility to reach the lost for our King before they drop off into an eternal hell?

The answer to every question for every person who claims Jesus to be Lord must be "Yes!" If for any reason you answered no to any of the above questions I suggest you do a re-check of your own salvation. *"Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves..."* (2 Corinthians 13:5). If your heart is right with God then there is one issue yet to address. Your dedication to the One Who died for you—Jesus. Do you really love the One Who rose from the dead? Do you have a love relationship with your Lord?

It's not too late. If you are still not sold out on the idea of simplifying your life so you can invest in world missions then do this. Ask the Holy Spirit to ignite your heart with a fresh and radical passion for the lost. Ask Him to birth in you a vision for the nations of the world.

Friend, it's not about us. It is about Jesus! You must not waste another minute. Do not pass up another opportunity. You have but seventy or eighty years on this planet and "poof" it's over.

Hebrews 9:27 says:

*"And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:"*

If you are a believer, then, you will be in heaven but what about your works? Here's what the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 3:13-15:

*“...Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.”*

The entire body of Christ must be activated in world missions if we expect to complete the command of the Captain of our faith. Thousands of national missionaries are prepared to go into the harvest fields now if only Christians in the West will supply the needed prayers and finances. The average North American Christian gives meagerly to missions. To be honest with you this must be insulting to God. The primary task of the church is missions. Jesus died on the cross to launch His great missionary movement.

The supreme task of the church is to evangelize the world and make disciples of all nations. If this is correct then why is such a large percentage of Western missionaries involved in social work? Are we missing the mark? Yes! I am not saying we should neglect the poor. But I am saying it does no good to meet the social needs of people on earth only to see them walk off into an eternal Hell.

Only 1 of every 171 Western missionaries actually focuses on apostolic work, which is the pioneering of new churches. All others are involved in social work or existing churches. Less than 5% of church money in America makes its way overseas. Of this 5% only ½% goes towards pioneering new churches. Please let this truth be forever branded on your heart. Of the meager few dollars per year the average American believer gives to missions, most was spent on projects other than evangelism and church planting. Based on the commands of Christ, His purpose for dying on the cross and our lack of zeal for the Great Commission—is it possible that the church in America, on this issue, is living in rebellion and sin? Could it be that we need to repent? I dare say we need to wake up and shake ourselves off. We in the West have been greatly blessed of God for the purpose of world evangelization, but have neglected our call and duty and are guilty of consuming our resources upon our own lusts.

We must not only repent of our lack of missionary zeal, but also re-evaluate how and who we give to. If we ever expect to reach the world for Christ in our generation, we must begin supporting missionaries native to their own countries. Since Jill and I began work in the former Soviet Union over eleven years ago, we have withstood the temptation of bringing in Western missionaries. All of our staff, leadership, evangelists, missionaries and volunteers are Russian or Ukrainian nationals. They can best reach their own people. Our vision is to raise up 1,000 churches in Ukraine. We will do this by establishing a Church Planting / Mobile Evangelism Team in each of Ukraine's twenty-six states. A missionary training center will be launched at each location. Local missionaries will be sent to evangelize the villages. A Leadership Training

Correspondence Bible School has been established for believers in villages. Tens of thousand who will never leave their villages can still receive this valuable training.

Does it work? Yes! But unfortunately not like it could. For you see, it is hard to do when Western believers give so little to pioneering missions works. The church—God’s people—need to make a dramatic shift to support national missionaries who are paying a great price in the harvest fields of planet earth.

Statistics from varying Western missionary agencies reveal that the costs to keep a Western missionary on the field range from \$30,000 - \$80,000 per year. Compare this to \$1,200 - \$1,800 for a national. Have you ever thought to yourself, “*I wish I had the money to sponsor 100% of the cost of a missionary?*” Now you can! National missionaries already know the language, the culture, and the conditions of the country. There is no better investment for your dollars than to support a national missionary indigenous to their own country.

I am not saying that Western missionaries are not needed because they are. There is a tremendous need for apostolic people from the West dedicated to front line Gospel work: pioneering new churches, launching missionary training centers and releasing disciples into the harvest fields of the world.

The choices you make after reading this book need to be based on the leading of the Holy Spirit. Ask Him what you must do. Perhaps God has spoken to your heart to begin supporting one or even several of our needy Russian speaking missionaries in the former Soviet Union.

The opportunities to reach thousands for Jesus right now are plentiful in this former Communist country. We have hundreds of missionaries willing to go but they are waiting for someone to stand with them in the battle.

I am told that in the catacombs of Israel there are still ancient torches that still decorate the walkways: The passages where saints of old would walk in route to fellowship and worship the Lord with others of like faith. Three types of torches adorn the walls and they parallel the lives of current day believers.

The first torch still looks new, never having been lit. It portrays something that has incredible potential to give both heat and light. Heat to warm the weary and light to illuminate the path for those seeking to find their way through the narrow passages of life: In hopes of finding salvation at the end of the tunnel.

The second torch is one that had been lit at one time. For a season it burned bright, gave hope and direction and pointed many toward eternal life. For a season this torch produced life and energy and was willing to serve in order that others could be helped. But for whatever reason it stopped its life-giving glow and is now but a fading memory of days gone by.

The third torch is the one that has been burned down to the socket, leaving it charred and scorched as if it fought valiantly to the very end. This torch burned bright and refused to allow anyone to dim its life-giving destiny. Heroically, it stood tall and bright as if to say, "I have a God given purpose to show people the way to eternal life."

The choices you make as a believer will determine which of the three torches your life will ultimately represent. Let your choice be to "Forsake all and follow Jesus." Pick up your cross, burn bright and red hot to the socket and never look back!

*"And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:62)*

### **Prayer of Destiny**

Jesus, please forgive me for having such a shallow expectation of Christianity and of my life in Christ. I have confessed You as my Lord and Savior but my very life, speech, and actions have said otherwise. I have been storing up treasures on earth without regard to eternity. My passion for the lost is minimal. Forgive me, Lord, I repent. Help me to lose my life that I might gain it again. I forsake all, I deny myself, and I choose to pick up my cross and carry it daily. Help me to be the radical Christian You desire me to be. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, Amen!

### **Prayer of Salvation**

If you have read this book and do not know Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, He will forgive you of all your sins if you repent and ask Him into your heart. If you do, He will save you and make you clean. Pray this prayer:

God, I know that without Jesus I'm lost. Without Jesus in my life, I'll die and go straight to Hell because I am guilty, but God, I do not want to be lost. I do not want to die and go to Hell. I want to be saved. I want to go to Heaven. I repent of my sins and turn away from my old life and I turn to you, Jesus. Save me and be the Lord of my life. Come into my heart, Lord Jesus. Save me and fill me with Your Holy Spirit. I believe that You are the Son of God. I believe that you died for me and that God raised you from the dead. By faith, I will trust in You alone as my Savior. I will live my life for You. Amen.

If you prayed one of the above prayers please contact me and let me know of your decision so we at Russian Harvest Ministries may rejoice with you. Contact me at: [russianharvest@aol.com](mailto:russianharvest@aol.com)

**You Can Become a Sender!**

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## Back Cover

Undaunted by death threats, sniper bullets, face-offs with military police, KGB interrogations and a dramatic chase through the country; Peter Mehl remains passionate about bringing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the former Soviet Union!

Drawing from fascinating real life incidents encountered on the mission field, Peter Mehl challenges Christians to examine their lives in light of the command of Jesus to “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.” The gripping message in *Behind Enemy Lines* will dramatically change your life!

“I have been to Ukraine with Peter Mehl nine times. I was there when military police came with their machineguns in hand. I saw the bullet holes in the window. I’ve slept in the mice infested apartments. It’s heroic ministry—a must read.”

*Sr. Pastor Steve Quernemoen*  
*Country Bible Church*

“Peter Mehl has paid a great price to bring the Gospel to my people. This book is filled with gripping accounts of how he did it.”

*Sr. Pastor Vladimir Lazuka*  
*Salvation Church – Ukraine*

Peter Mehl, with his wife Jill, walked away from a successful business and a small fortune to pursue their destiny in God on foreign soil. They launched Russian Harvest Ministries with the vision of pioneering 1,000 churches, in the most remote and neglected areas of the former Soviet Union. Twelve years later, they are still winning the lost, raising up disciples and pioneering churches.