

July 2014

*“But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the Gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24).*

I am winging my way home from Ukraine after ministering with pastors there, and preparing to preach tomorrow for Father’s Day. And it is with our heavenly Father in mind that I write you this ministry update. Sure, we study the Word of God, and in some measure can appreciate the depth of God’s love in forgiving our sins against Him. But to understand the depth of the selflessness of God in sending forth His Son might be a stretch. With our human limitations, it would be hard to imagine the incredible relationship of the Father and Son, yet the Father was willing to sacrifice His Son to accomplish His work of redemption. Consider the parallel challenge of Jesus in declaring . . . *Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me* (Matthew 10:37-38). Are you willing to sacrifice time with family—even never seeing them again—for the sake of the Gospel? Tough question. So let me share with you the account of one such father with whom I spoke in Kiev.

This father and his son were near a separatist checkpoint on their way from one city to the next. They are abruptly stopped with automatic weapons at their backs. One man holds a revolver next to the ear of the father, and slowly reloads the chamber. He whispers, “I am paid to kill . . . Ukrainian, Kazakh, whoever, it does not matter to me.” After the papers are reviewed, they are allowed to pass. Once home, the son tells his father, “I have peace in my heart in Christ, but my legs are still shaking.” Later, this same father travels with his daughter to the capital city. After arriving, he asks her to stay and find a job. Speaking to his wife (who remained behind during his brief trip), she tells him of sleeping in the basement, listening to gun and mortar fire all night long. He must make his way back home.



We had a moment to speak with this father, and found that he had spent the last of his funds to drive to a pastor’s meeting in the capital city, praying he would find funds to return. After receiving assistance from Slavic Gospel Association, he said, “With these funds I am able to help a woman in a village on the way home whose heart is not functioning well, and needs medicine.” This father who seeks to protect his family, who sees personal gifts as a means to bless others, and who remains in the most difficult of conditions out of dedication to

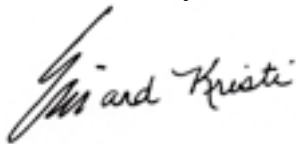
his calling, is a Ukrainian Baptist pastor in eastern Ukraine. In a church with half of the congregation missing, as most have fled the region, this Ukrainian pastor—not unlike many Baptist pastors in the eastern regions of Ukraine—see such hardship as opportunity for the Gospel and are undaunted by the conflict around them. Some have left, but these faithful shepherds remain.

Christ gave us this witness and contrast . . . *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them* (John 10:11-12). Not mere hired hands or professionals seeking personal gain, these Ukrainian pastors who can barely put food on their own tables, are braving gunfire and overwhelming intimidation. Facing propaganda that frames them as harmful to the national good, and living in constant stress and fear, they follow the model of the Great Shepherd in laying down their lives for the sheep.

Many of the eastern cities have seen a majority of the population leave for Ukraine's western regions. Food is hard to find, water is scarce, and banks open an hour a day, if at all. Yet these faithful shepherds, following in the Great Commission of their Master and Lord Jesus, minister to those that remain. And now in the midst of hardship, they pray that new open doors will be furnished for the sake of the Gospel, and that new resources will be provided to continue their ministry. The more difficult life becomes, the more vibrant their witness for the sake of the Gospel. Rather than defeat, the Gospel message resounds. This is our God, and these are His people who are willing to pick up their cross and follow Christ.

Thank you for supporting Kristi and me, and our family, as we continue as an extension of your hearts for Christ. There is no greater joy as His ambassadors than to serve Him, for our time here is so short and temporary. We are also in the midst of a wondrous summer with SGA, and also with River's Edge. Our family is doing well, and we so love time with our grandchildren. We are blessed as well by our church, River's Edge Bible, but our mission field here as well is difficult. We went old school with River's Edge, and our college kids are leading a twice-weekly backyard Bible club that is currently attended predominately by unchurched, lost children from broken homes. We chose to do this instead of sending our kids to summer camp or conducting a VBS. Instead, we have so many serving that we have one-on-one discipleship occurring with the kids we are reaching. Please pray! Thank you for sending us out as missionaries with SGA, to encourage and equip Bible teaching churches, and proclaim Christ crucified wherever God places us.

Much love to you all,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Eric and Kristi". The ink is dark and the writing is fluid and personal.

Eric and Kristi Mock