

SECOND UPDATE 2012

Dear friends.

Less than two weeks since I last wrote, less than three weeks since I left Canada but it could be months in terms of what I have experienced, living in three different counties with widely divergent cultures.

In my last communication I was two hours away from my departure to Zaparochoye. During the trip to Zaparochoye I felt like an executive as I relaxed in the roomy backseat of an older dark navy blue BMW. Urih, a wonderful conductor with a powerful deep bass voice and successful business man from Western Ukraine was driving



Olexandr Kreshchuk and me from Kiev to Zaparochoye. At the end of our journey we were welcomed into a lovely almost finished new home. After "chai", the focus of the evening was time in the home built sauna. With the exception of one, the men were friends from past visits. A hole had been cut through the ice in the small back yard pool allowing us participate in the obligatory invigorating immersion.

It was preparation for a full day of teaching to approximately 30 music leaders from the region. The age spread (my guess 18 - 65) resulted in interesting dynamics in receptivity and questions. On Saturday, I was asked to give an overview of my teaching to pastors. Considering that the material normally requires a minimum of 6 - 8 hours to teach effectively (1/2 the time without translation), a one hour summary was a challenge, greatly increased when the Russian notes could not be photocopied for the 100+ pastors. But God gave strength and Olexandr felt that the pastors received valuable new perspectives to think about a different paradigm of holistic worship. Most important, it was the first time in teaching this material that pastors heard at least a summary of the teaching that their music ministers and choir directors had received. In a culture, where the pastor often makes the primary decision concerning the singing of "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs", this was a very significant event.

Saturday night the BMW alternately roared, then crawled, then roared as we drove to Donetsk never knowing when the wonderful road would turn into a pothole nightmare. Although some of the logistics of a trip to Donetsk in terms of a transition to Georgia never made sense from a human perspective, the visit was a God appointed stay in the home of Irina and Pavel. Irena is a sensitive caring spiritual choir conductor who is responsible for the music in the churches in the Donetsk region. I recognized her from past seminars. This time I had the opportunity to see her work in the church. Since it was her birthday, the choir showed their appreciation through gifts, song and tributes. The pastor also expressed his appreciation. The photo album in the house showed creative Christmas and Easter outreaches that were taken to various parts of Ukraine. As she, with great appreciation, make a direct link between my teaching and what I was observing, I realized that God had brought me here to be encouraged and see the long term impact and ongoing urgency of my ministry.

Early, early Monday it was time to depart for Georgia. Oh my, oh my, oh my! So many early airport runs on this trip. Getting up at 4:00 in the morning and being urged to eat a good Ukrainian breakfast has its challenges.

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I was not prepared for Georgia. Like Latvia, I listened again. I heard the same void, except here, compared to Latvia, it was a silent excruciating scream.

The information I received upon arrival consisted of my name on a card and my being ushered to a car with the terse words, "You are going to a village." The couple that met me vanished as quickly as they had appeared and I was on my way to an unknown destination in an unknown country with a driver whose identity was a mystery. With bits of my Russian and bits of his English, my driver told me about his family and described himself as a missionary in the villages. For two hours, we saw countless deserted homes with missing doors and windows, buildings with gaping holes, rusted metal and crumbling concrete. Many places did not seem inhabitable and the predominately grey colour seemed to cover everything with a cloak of sadness. Spring had not yet come. Undoubtedly, when all the fruit trees begin to bloom and the abundant vineyards are green, it will hide a lot of the devastation. Considering civil conflicts and war with Russia, this country has experienced the equivalent of five wars since 1991. Destruction of all aspects of the basic infrastructure needed for living brought economic ruin.

Rebuilding has begun. Glimpse were seen in the villages. But in downtown Tbilisi, the rebuilding displayed a breath taking beauty and vibrancy. But not where I was travelling. More than a week would pass before I would see the capital city. As we drove, I wondered where I would land up and what the conditions would be.

But once again, when darkness came, the grey cloak was lifted as I was ushered into a small warm clean dining area - the home of a wonderful husband wife doctor team. Truly amazing servants of God! Levan, is not only a doctor but also the head pastor for the Baptist churches in Georgia. Not only has he lived through the devastation of his country but also the devastation of the Baptist church in Georgia. False teaching has reduced the 70 churches, many with good buildings, to 20 or 25 - mostly small groups often without their own church building. It was humbling and inspiring to watch this servant of God and his wife respond as best they could to huge physical, spiritual and social needs.

Sergii and Vitaliy, the former students who invited me to join them, met me in the village with an enthusiastic welcome. Two years ago they started work at Ground Zero - literally. Many students had only one thing to bring to their studies. A love of music and a desire to serve in the church. Performance skills, musical knowledge, biblical knowledge, confidence and leadership skills were usually close to non-existent. It was a joy to assist these two wonderful young men in their efforts to rebuild the church. Now in their third year of regular teaching visits, they are establishing a sense of music ministry that is almost non-existent among the Baptist churches at this time. Their efforts will undoubtedly help to shape the direction of worship for the resurrected Baptist church in Georgia.

More to come.

Thanks for your prayers.

In His Service,

James

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