

THIRD UPDATE 2012

Dear praying friends,

Welcome to more insights from places where past affluence often intersects at crazy angles with devastation and seemingly random appearances of the latest technology or building materials.

I have returned to Kiev but the images and sounds of Georgia continue to dominate my thoughts. Sergii and Vitaliy felt that the many challenges we faced on this trip only underscored the significance of our efforts - hence the opposition. The main opposition came in the form of a bad virus that gradually reduced the group of 22 to 13. One day, we reached a low of 10. The virus, not a flue, usually manifested itself among our students with high fever - 39/40, bad coughs and congestion. Dr. Levan was at a loss to explain the many viruses with their rapidly changing mutations present in the country in the past year.. The strong assault on the body was feared to cause death among the weak, elderly or young.



Although quite sick at times, students wanted to attend if at all possible. Many wore masks and we often joked about teaching in a hospital. Sergii suggested that I would be more appropriately dressed as a doctor. Sergii and Vitaliy stayed healthy but by Friday, shortly after finishing the main part of my teaching, I succumbed to similar symptoms. Immediately my doctor hosts subjected me to a combination of traditional herbal, cultural and modern medicine. Saturday afternoon was spent sleeping, Sunday I fought a headache but I was otherwise spared the full effects of the virus. Despite that I conducted two numbers and preached twice.

Translation was also a challenge. A mixture of sickness, location and a general dearth of suitable translators in the evangelical community left us with only student resources. We did the best we could but in my case, the translation often had to go through two languages English to Russian, Russian to Georgian before being understood. Even the simplest exchange with the students involved a laborious four step process. Although often exhausting, this reality combined with the very basic level of knowledge possessed by the students, forced me to new levels of creative teaching. Each main section needed to be reduced to its essential core and presented as simply as possible. By the second day, I found myself reducing most of the seminar to three simple symbolic drawings that would not be limited by language barriers. "Thank you Lord, both insights and graphics will be valuable for years to come."

I enjoyed the "tag-team" approach to teaching with Sergii and Vitaliy. Suddenly, I found myself dusting off my most fundamental conducting lesson plan. Soon I was teaching eager students to 'take off', "fly" and 'land' using a fundamental four pattern. Our time together provided meaningful times of talking about effective teaching. Eager to improve their teaching, they observed, asked for critique and eagerly embraced new techniques. In some ways, this was as meaningful to me as teaching the students and was certainly another reason for being in Georgia. In addition, I sensed that another exposure to my teaching on "Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs", was moving them to a deeper level of integration of the powerful teaching of Colossians and Ephesians.

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The 'morning' was my responsibility which in Georgian time was 10 am to 2 pm. Following a one hour break for lunch, Sergii and Vitaliy taught music theory, vocal ensemble, conducting, voice lessons and choir from 3 to 7ish. Then home for the evening meal which took place anywhere from 8 to 10, depending on the situation.

Sunday morning the students lead worship in Gurjanni as well as singing as a choir with some student conductors. Then Vitaliy, Sergii and I headed to Tbilisi, the capital for an afternoon service. One more brief oasis of peace and beauty at an apartment before waking at - yes once again 4AM! - for the flight to Kiev.

Monday and Tuesday provided a chance for rest, reflection and bringing closure to this trip. The need for theologically sound resources for church music leaders was repeatedly underscored during these weeks as I talked, looked at nonexistent sections in Bible college libraries and book stores. Sergii's terse response to my work, "We needed this yesterday." No shortage of work for me for the years to come.

Monday night - a fun two hour evening Masterclass with the Union Kiev Youth Choir (youth from many different city Baptist churches). Sergii and Vitaliy lead this choir.

Tuesday, some intensive moments working on the textbook. A steep learning curve and many questions but an exciting clarification! I appreciate your prayers for work that is currently being done.

So I close with these prayer requests.

Pray for the editor who is working her way through more than 200 pages of text.

Pray for Guennadi who will be doing the graphic layout work. He brings a wealth of greatly needed experience to the project.

Pray for challenges in finding appropriate and pictures, graphics and relevant quotes needed to make the written material attractive, engaging and accessible. If you know of good sources of royalty free images related to worship, the Bible, music, music history and history in general up to 1750, please let me know.

Pray for work being done on a DVD version of my "Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs" seminar. This will involve extensive work during my return trip May 9.

Pray that the many church worship leaders who were exposed to my teaching in the past three weeks will have the wisdom, love and patience to make appropriate responses in God's time.

Time does not allow me share all the exciting developments in Ukraine. However, be assured that all your prayers and support continue to energize many of the brothers and sisters in Ukraine.

Walli and I found each other in the massive Frankfurt airport as planned and have begun the long awaited renewal time in Germany, Switzerland and England. Pray for health and safety. Pray for God's blessing on a great variety of encounters with friends and relatives.

In His Service,

James

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