

## **Sambir, Ukraine Mission Campaign**

### **August 3-11, 2001**

“It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the **nations** so that My salvation may reach to the *end of the earth*.” Isaiah 49:6

#### ***Day 2 – Saturday, August 4***

Day 1 for me occurred on July 21. This is when I began my journey to Ukraine to spend some time with my close friend Oksana Fedatova, who served as my translator during the prior year’s campaign. Most of this journal has been written in the past tense since I recorded the activities of each day immediately before going to sleep.

I met my fellow Americans at 4:30 p.m. at the Baptist Church of Sambir. The team consisted of: Ed Sterling (Global Missions Fellowship team leader from Missouri), John Blank from Texas, Erin Ferry from New Jersey, Tom Franklin from Alabama, Jeff Hamm from Texas, Diane LaBarr from Missouri, Robyn May also from Missouri, Magdalena Miranda from Texas, Curry Moore from Alabama, Bruce and Peggy Perry and Keith and Sandy Robson from Michigan, and Doug Turner from New York. Quite a few states represented. Needless to say, it was very nice to see everyone. After speaking English for two weeks with people whose native tongue is not English, it was great to converse with the US team members simply because I did not have to **constantly** check my grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary for accuracy and complexity.

As I had done throughout the previous two weeks, I returned to Andriy and Ira’s apartment for dinner and rest. I cannot express how much my Ukrainian host family means to me. Andriy doesn’t speak English except for the words ‘hello’ and ‘crazy’. He often used the latter term to describe me. Ha. And Ira’s English competency is somewhat elementary. But I can say with much thankfulness and joy that God took our limited means of communication and used it to tightly knit our hearts together. Including the 2000 campaign, I lived with them for four weeks of my life during which time they always, wholeheartedly gave of themselves (Romans 12:10-13).

#### ***Day 3 – Sunday, August 5***

All the Americans met at the Baptist church at 9:00 a.m. for a team meeting. The format and topic of discussion was similar to that of last year. Ed had us again think about all the verses in the Bible that speak about feet. The main text for us to contemplate was Exodus 3:5. Like the land upon which Moses stood, the land we were about to tread had no doubt been consecrated by God for the propagation of the gospel. Before we finished our time together, everyone removed their shoes to further impress the theme of our discussion. Fitting message for the work ahead.

Corporate worship lasted from 10:00 a.m. to 12:45 p.m. Doug Turner first delivered a sermon about the parable of the sower as recorded by Matthew in chapter 13. Much of his message was accurate, timely, and edifying, but as is the case with most modern-day sermons, it was built upon Arminian, man-centered soteriology. My life as a Christian has taught me that few professing believers in the Lord Jesus Christ know the meaning of the terms ‘Arminian’ and ‘soteriology’. Having then used these words to negatively criticize another Christian’s exposition of God’s word, I suppose it is incumbent upon me to give a brief definition of each as well as the biblical grounds for highlighting this incident from the trip among the many.

Much about the tenets of Arminianism has already been written by more knowledgeable theologians so I shall only give a brief synopsis of this position. Resources to better understand the history and details of the position are readily available. As opposed to that which God has revealed in His word, Arminians purport the following:

1. Man is not totally depraved and evil from birth. Although he is sinful and sick, his will is still “free” to do right or wrong including the exercise of faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sin.
2. God chose who would be saved on the basis of their foreseen faith. (Romans 8:29 is often the misexegeted verse used to support this erroneous point.) He loves all men equally and gives everyone an equal “chance” to be saved.
3. Christ died for the sins of all men and thereby made it possible for all to be saved yet He guaranteed salvation for none. This teaching is perhaps the most egregious of the points.
4. Saving grace is resistible because God cannot interfere with man’s “free” will. Man is only born again after he believes, for faith and repentance are not gifts of God.
5. Because the “free” will of man is ultimately responsible for the salvation of the soul, Christians may falter to the point of losing their salvation. Arminians are divided over this point.

When all is said and done, these heretical doctrines rob God of His glory in the salvation of men and give it to man’s “free” will. As Paul stated in Ephesians 1:5-6, salvation is “according to the kind intention of **His will**” ...why?...“to the praise of the glory of **His grace**,....”

Soteriology is simply the study of the doctrine of salvation. It is derived from the transliterated Greek word *soterious* which means salvation.

Few Baptists today, including Pastor Doug, are thoroughly Arminian but the vast majority do unashamedly espouse that which leads to the main points of Arminianism, the unbiblical doctrine of the “free will of man”. For a scholarly treatment of the will of man as taught in the Bible, purchase a copy of Martin Luther’s The Bondage of the Will and *reread* the following passages from the Bible. These verses, though many, do not comprise all the texts that speak about the natural, unregenerate state of man and his bound will.

Genesis 6:5 – “Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was **only evil continually**.”

Psalms 51:5 – “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.”

Psalms 58:3 – “The wicked are estranged from the womb; these who speak lies go astray from birth.”

Ecclesiastes 9:3 – “This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men. Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are **full of evil** and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives. Afterwards they go to the dead.”

Isaiah 1:5-6 – “Where will you be stricken again, as you continue in your rebellion? The **whole** head is sick and the whole heart is faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head there is nothing sound in it, only bruises, welts and raw wounds, not pressed out or bandaged, nor softened with oil.”

Jeremiah 17:9 – “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”

Jeremiah 13:23 – “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then you also can do good who are accustomed to doing evil.”

Ezekiel 11:19 – “And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the **heart of stone** out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh,....”

Matthew 7:11 – “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!”

John 6:44 – “No one **can** come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.”

John 6:65 – “And He was saying, ‘For this reason I have said to you, that no one **can** come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.’”

John 8:34 – “Jesus answered them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the **slave** of sin.’”

John 8:44 – “You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

Romans 3:10-18 – “There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, **there is none who seeks for God**; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one. Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving, the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their paths, and the path of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

Romans 8:7-8 – “Because the mind set on the flesh is **hostile** toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is **not even able to do so**, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”

I Corinthians 2:14 – “But a natural man **does not** accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he **cannot** understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.”

II Corinthians 3:14 – “But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ.”

Ephesians 2:1-3 – “And you were **dead** in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of **wrath**, even as the rest.”

Colossians 2:13 – “When you were **dead** in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, **He made you alive** together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions,....”

II Peter 2:19 – “Promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is **enslaved**.”

Man apart from the supernatural, effectual work of God the Holy Spirit will not and cannot “receive Christ as his personal savior” or “accept Christ”. Men “freely” choose God only after the Holy Spirit has *rebirthed* (John 3) them, thus giving them a desire for the blessed Savior. Much more could be said but this must suffice for now.

In the following texts, note the Apostle Paul’s words. He often encountered individuals (even the Apostle Peter on one occasion) who were teaching false doctrine. He was quick to make them known *by name* to the brethren. Why are Christians to expose false teachers? To warn other believers of them. The desire of the Christian is to please the Lord (II Corinthians 5:9). As we believe and proclaim the truth of God as revealed in Scripture, He is pleased and we are blessed and fulfilled as true worshippers of Him. Error on the other hand dishonors Him and grieves His Spirit in us.

All of Galatians 2, specifically verse 11 – “But when Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.”

I Timothy 1:18-20 – “This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. Among these are **Hymenaeus** and **Alexander**, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme.”

II Timothy 3:16-17 – “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for **reproof**, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped

for every good work.”

II Timothy 4:7-15 – “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing. Make every effort to come to me soon; for **Demas**, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service. But Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments. **Alexander the coppersmith** did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. **Be on guard against him yourself, for he vigorously opposed our teaching.**”

Titus 1:7-11 – “For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, **holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.** For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain.”

I hope it goes without saying that doctrinal purity is the prerequisite for God-honoring worship, personal sanctification, prayer, and most certainly evangelism. We can be wrong about a lot of things in life. The person and work of Jesus Christ isn't one of them. We must be diligent to present ourselves approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth. Jesus tells us in John 8:32 that the truth shall set us free – not error. And for biblical worship to take place, it must be “in truth” (John 4:24). My point at this juncture in the journal is not to provide a complete critique of modern-day evangelism. It is my purpose now and later to only address certain kingpins of the problems.

After Doug's message a national (Ukrainian) believer stood up and shared a few words with everyone about the need to constantly pray. Good exhortation for us to start the week.

To conclude the worship service, Ed Sterling delivered an application of the parable of the unjust/unrighteous steward as recorded by Luke in chapter 16 of his gospel account. He tied his message to his ancestors, who happened to be Ukrainian. It was obvious that Ed has a real passion for global missions for much of what he conveyed was accompanied by true tears of compassion and love for people devoid of God's saving grace.

Once the services were over, most of us quickly changed clothes and then reconvened at a local restaurant often frequented by GMF (Global Missions Fellowship) folk. After lunch the team returned to the church for about three hours of evangelism training led by Ed. Several items were discussed including the GMF gospel tract, using the Evangecube<sup>®</sup> to share the gospel, the fundamental elements of the believer's testimony that should be shared with the lost, various questions and answers posed and given from the lost throughout the years, and basic tactics for dealing with Roman Catholics. Roman Catholicism has a strong presence in Eastern Europe so

knowing how to give them “an account for the hope that is in you” is important. It is helpful to know the core doctrines of cults and false religions but knowing the “sword” and how to wield it is by far what is most needed by the believer.

At this point I should thank everyone for their many prayers. I believe one way that He answered them was by granting to me clarity of mind as I attempted “to make a defense to everyone” who asked about the Lord Jesus during the week. One disconcerting comment that was made during our training concerned how we should respond to people who claim to be Roman Catholic. The suggested response for us to employ was “Oh, you’re Catholic. That’s wonderful.” I fully understand that the point may have been for us to get beyond their Catholicism so we might share the gospel but a Christian should never tell a Catholic, “That’s wonderful!” Should Christians tell Muslims and Buddhists their faith is “wonderful”? Of course not. Another very disturbing statement likened salvation to a Tootsie Roll (and thereby trivialized it). “To obtain it,” it was said, “we must take it.” Sounds reasonable, right? It certainly does if God had ordained a man-centered gospel! The awesomeness of the gospel is not that man is able to reach out and “take” salvation. It is that the thrice holy God of heaven has chosen to reveal and save sinners through the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ **alone**. Salvation, as Charles Spurgeon said, is all of grace. The receiving of Christ as Savior (John 1:12-**13**), the gift of faith (Ephesians 2:8-9, Philippians 1:29), and repentance from sin to Christ (II Timothy 2:25) are all products of God’s grace **alone**. Yes, man should be told that he must lay hold of Christ but not before he has been completely abased to a state of utter helplessness and hopelessness in his total inability to do anything pleasing to God, especially choosing to believe on Christ for the forgiveness of sin.

Once we finished our training session, Erin Ferry (a teammember from Princeton University) and I had a good conversation about the nature and extent of Christ’s atonement. The proposition in essence was “Who limits the atonement – God or man?” We know from Scripture that God does by His election of particular individuals to salvation while passing over the rest of humanity. A general or universal atonement, sadly, is the belief that is embraced by most professing Christians today. These URLs will direct your browser to a few well-written articles on this crucial topic:

<http://www.cmfnow.com/articles/pt004.htm>

<http://www.cmfnow.com/articles/pt014.htm>

<http://www.graceonlinelibrary.org/calvinism/full.asp?ID=266>

On the way to Andriy and Ira’s place that evening, I ran into a young guy named Oleg as I ascended the stairs in their apartment building. Oleg is an interesting fellow with a slight mental condition according to those who know him. I met him one evening at the church, prior to the arrival of the rest of the campaign team. Nice guy but a little eccentric. Maybe that’s why we got along. Anyway, while in the stairwell, Oleg happily greeted me and proceeded to share all the English he knew. Immediately after I said hello and “How are you?” in Russian, his grandmother quickly came out of their apartment and began talking to me in a loud, energetic manner. I just thought she was a lively lady who was happy to see me so I tried to give her a hug. Wrong. Andriy nearly burst out of his apartment and pulled me inside just a few seconds after grandma began her monologue. He explained to me via Ira that she was very upset! In

Ukrainian she had been telling me, more or less, to leave Oleg alone and that “Baptists are like animals that eat everything. Leave us alone.” Evidently, grandma knew that Oleg had been hanging out at the Baptist church.

#### *Day 4 – Monday, August 6*

The team again met at the church at 9:00 a.m. for our morning meeting. Rustique, Victor Solos, Curry, and Andriy performed a role-playing exercise to demonstrate a typical visit. While discussing likely discussion ‘road blocks’, I asked Ed how we should deal with Roman Catholics who question our Bible since protestant ‘versions’ do not contain the apocrypha. His cynical response was, “I’m not gonna go there.” I truly believe renowned atheist Bertrand Russell accurately described most Christians when he said, “Christians would rather die than think.” Was my question not valid? I was a bit humiliated but I also understood why he so quickly dismissed my question.

Oksana and a middle-aged lady named Lilya were designated to be my translator and national Christian. Last year Victor Provozyuk, Oksana, and I worked solely in Sambir. My team and I were assigned to Stari (Old) Sambir this year. Andriy has been working with the youth in this town for quite some time. Two vehicles were used to transport everyone who would be working in Stari Sambir. Curry, Ox, and I rode with Volodya’s father Demetro (sp?). I enjoyed getting to know Curry during the drive. Neat girl. Upon arriving at the town after about 25 minutes, we swung by a local restaurant to schedule our lunches for the week ahead. We then proceeded to the building used by Andriy to conduct his youth events. Ed, Tarras (our professional translator who also worked with us last year), and Volodya met us there to go over the plans for the day.

Our main area of focus for the week was a group of apartment buildings. The first woman with whom we spoke was too busy to talk so we promised to visit her the next day. Our next visit before lunch was with an old lady named Ivanka. She spoke with many tears about her family, death, and the R.C.Ch. but had no real interest in the gospel.

At lunch, which was quite tasty, I enjoyed talking with an exuberant ex-priest named Michael. He served as one of the national/native Christians on another team. Great guy who obviously loved doing the work of an evangelist. He showed me an impressive picture of himself when he was much younger. One of his previous gods was bodybuilding. Through a translator he told me that he now disciplines himself to do the infinitely greater work of building the kingdom of God. Wow.

Having returned to the apartment buildings, we knocked on several doors but no one was interested in speaking with us. This was unusual since a lot of Ukrainians last year would talk with us solely due to my being an American. A lot of the people who wouldn’t give us an ear were Catholic so their disinterest was understandable. We learned not to mention our church affiliation unless specifically asked about it. At the entrance of one building, we met an 89-year-old woman with a poorly healed broken arm. She talked with us for only a few minutes. Her sad plight made me again think about the devastating effects of sin in general. The pervasiveness of it and its horrific impact to nature and mankind make me long for heaven. Revelation 21:4 –

“And He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.”

Next we had the blessing of meeting a 31-year-old married woman named Tanya who was very interested in talking with us. She graciously invited us into her apartment and refreshed us with coffee (I hate coffee! Ha.) and cookies. She told us that she wanted to talk about the Bible! She also made us aware of her deep distrust of the Catholic and Russian Orthodox “churches”. Because her husband was not home, we only stayed for a short while but promised to return the next day to talk with both of them.

We then met a man working on his vacuum cleaner outside. We were able to briefly share some small talk before his deranged wife came outside and sat on a bench with him. She quickly let us know how much she detested Baptists. She giped us saying, “We all worship the same God. Why do you come here claiming to know the truth?” I attempted to respond to her remarks but didn’t get very far before becoming flustered.

Near the close of the day, my team and I proceeded to the complex courtyard to regroup with the other teams. There, Oksana was pleasantly surprised to hear an old friend calling her from one of the first-floor apartments. Helena called us over to her window. As a paraplegic she was unable to meet us outside. Being a Christian and knowing our purpose in Stari Sambir, she informed us of her daughter’s possible interest in meeting with us on Wednesday. We were very thankful for the contact.

As was the case last year, all of the GMF teams in each village or town convened in the evening to participate in a simple Bible study/worship service. All of the Ukrainians with whom each team spoke during the day were invited to attend. The evening meetings are particularly geared for new believers in that we are able to immediately begin fulfilling the great commission in their lives. As we know from our Lord, the greatness of the ‘Great Commission’ as we call it is not taking the gospel to those who need it. The greatness of the commission is to “make disciples” and to teach all that our Savior has commanded. Jeff Hamm, the Stari Sambir teams’ leader, had asked me on Sunday to lead the Bible study on the first night. Everyone met in the upper room of an old building used by Andriy to teach youth Bible studies. Darya, who was a believer, was our only visitor that evening. After an opening prayer and brief introduction by everyone present, we read through Ephesians 2:8-10 which served as our primary text for discussion. I felt like this portion of Paul’s epistle was very appropriate for our devotion due to its lucid declaration of who saves us, how we are justified, and the certain products of a true believer’s new life in Christ. I had prepared three questions to cause us to think about Paul’s words. My second question was, “What is the origin of saving faith?” While I was giving the textually supported answer to this simple question, Volodya (pastor of the Baptist church), Ed, and Tarras entered the room. Once they were seated, I reiterated my point, at which time Volodya began to speak. Up to this point in our study, participation was good; everyone seemed interested in what was being said and the Spirit of God seemed to be present. After speaking for a much longer period of time than that which was translatable, Vita (another team’s translator) tried to summarize Volodya’s thoughts for everyone. Briefly stated he disagreed with Paul’s teaching of the source of faith (i.e., God) and maintained that every human is born with a “measure of faith” and that he or she freely chooses to exercise it whenever they choose to trust Christ as their

savior. Typical Arminian hogwash. Part of me wanted to publicly reprove his heresy. But another part of me determined that, in the interest of maintaining team focus and unity, I should postpone my reproof of his error until we were able to meet in private. So, by God's Spirit, I conceded that varying interpretations of the text are held by Christians. Recognizing Volodya's perversion of I Corinthians 12:8-9, Oksana posed a question to Volodya about the spiritual gifts that Paul lists in I Corinthians 12. I disagreed with part of Volodya's answer so I calmly stated that not all Christians agree with his understanding. At this point in our dialogue, Ed Sterling, in an acerbic manner said, "I think you're being contentious and you need to move on." My only reply was that Volodya, not I, was the one being contentious and that all was fine until he showed up. It was obvious to everyone that there was enough tension in the air to play it. During Volodya's verbal tirade, the translators declined to even translate due to the speed at which he spoke and the quality of his words. I brought the lesson to a close with a few remarks about the necessity of fruit in the life of a Christian based on Ephesians 2:10.

While exiting the room, I told Ed that I needed to speak with him once we got back to the church in Sambir. The ride home was a somber one for me. For about an hour at the church, Ed and I had a good discussion about many things all of which concerned Volodya. It was common knowledge to many in the church and a few of us from GMF that Volodya could be "quick-tempered" and "pugnacious". He confirmed these characteristics earlier in the evening. Although worthy of our time, it was not my desire to focus on his foul attitude or the multiple allegations against him that I had received from several members in the church. His sins of doctrinal error and lying, most of all, needed to be addressed. The former sin was made evident during the evening meeting. Sadly, I believe few people understood the gravity of that which we discussed. Months later I was informed by members of the church that he is at least a consistent Arminian for he believes and teaches that Christians can fall from grace. In other words he teaches that a true believer in Christ can lose his or her salvation, which naturally follows the doctrine that man is ultimately in control of his salvation. But the supernatural power of God's saving grace is not up for various 'interpretations'. When God saves a sinner, He saves to the uttermost (Hebrews 7:25) and to Him alone be the glory. May God use the following scripturally-supported articles to affirm this truth in our hearts.

[http://www.pbministries.org/books/pink/Security/sec\\_02.htm](http://www.pbministries.org/books/pink/Security/sec_02.htm)  
<http://www.founders.org/library/sermons/howell>

Heretics ought not be pastors. Titus 1:7-11, II Timothy 2:15. As I said in the beginning of this journal, I had been living in Ukraine with Andriy and Ira for two full weeks prior to the start of the evangelism campaign. I spent almost all of this time with Oksana and her family and friends. At some point near the end of the two-week period, Volodya for some unknown reason told Zhanna Marchak (Tarras' wife) that I had not been spending any time with Oksana and that nothing would become of our relationship. Others were in Zhanna's presence when he told this lie. Several weeks after the GMF team left Ukraine, Volodya apologized to Oksana and admitted that he had sinned against her.

Verbatim bedtime thoughts: Why am I here? What have I done? Have I not yet learned the application of Amos 3:3? "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" Not until this day. Praise God He taught me now. Many people back home exchanged part of their lives for me to

be here. They gave me significant amounts of money so that I could come here and share the true gospel of God's grace to lost and dying sinners. This is good and I'm thankful. But in whose hands am I leaving the babes if God so chooses to save some? Heretics! False teachers! That's right. Volodya Hrishko teaches "doctrines of demons" (I Timothy 4:1-2). I will **never** again work for or support a person, church, or organization that does not teach the doctrine of God's free and sovereign grace as revealed to us in the pages of holy writ. The demonic ecumenical movement (which dumbs down doctrine for the sake of superficial 'unity') that has crept into most evangelistic parachurch groups like GMF makes me want to vomit. Why? Because it makes God want to vomit. False doctrine breeds luke warm churches and church members which **nauseate** the Lord of glory (Revelation 3:15-16). Deeds, such as evangelism, not done in truth are spurious and thereby revolting to God. The watered-down, anthropocentric, seeker-sensitive, synthetic gospel of our day is a sham. We must either proclaim that salvation is all of grace, as opposed to the false gospel of man's libertarian will, or sin before God. For those of you oblivious to much of what I am talking about, please refer to the following web sites. These resources concisely summarize some of the issues at hand.

[http://www.eternallifeministries.org/wc\\_myth.htm](http://www.eternallifeministries.org/wc_myth.htm)

[http://www.eternallifeministries.org/awp\\_evang.htm](http://www.eternallifeministries.org/awp_evang.htm)

[http://www.eternallifeministries.org/awp\\_sov.rtf](http://www.eternallifeministries.org/awp_sov.rtf)

Please understand that my goal in writing this journal is not in any way to discourage anyone from participating in global evangelism. The Scriptures are clear that Christians are to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation". One of my reasons for writing this journal is to candidly share with you the real world of short-term missions. It's not always "pie in the sky". Real struggles, even with fellow Christians, can and do occur. Believers considering overseas missions need to know this fact. Christians also need to know that doctrinal purity is a vital prerequisite for **any** type of evangelistic work. Would you consider uniting with a Mormon to spread the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ? Am I comparing Mormonism to Arminianism? The root of both systems is the same – Satan. Each system espouses a man-made 'gospel' and its high time that Christians come to grips with this truth. No, we can't just "get along" and move past our differences. Walter Martin got it right when he said, "Controversy for the sake of truth is a divine command."

That evening Olya (Ira's younger sister), Andriy, Ira, and I enjoyed another delicious dinner at the apartment where I would stay for the remainder of my time in Ukraine.

### *Day 5 – Tuesday, August 7*

We had a good day today. It began with our usual morning meeting at 9:00 a.m. Ed shared a few pertinent words with us from Oswald Chamber's book My Utmost for His Highest. Then a few team members talked about the previous day's adventures. To close our meeting, Doug delivered a very encouraging message derived from part of Acts 13. Oksana, Lilya, and I then mapped out a game plan of whom we would visit before we left the church but our plans obviously weren't God's plans. Proverbs 16:9. Our initial visit was with a 52 year old man named Zynoviyuh. He seemed genuinely interested while we spoke with him for over two

hours. He often stopped talking and seriously pondered the questions I posed. About midway through our conversation, he told us in somewhat of a bewildered manner, that he couldn't understand how God could just forgive sinners on the basis of faith alone. I told him that I couldn't either if He hadn't given me His word. With one eyebrow raised, he said, "No works! How can this be? I must study the Bible to see if these things are true." I nearly shouted for joy because I knew God's word contained the awesome truth that true faith in the Christ resulted in perfection before the just and holy King of kings.

Before leaving the cafe where we enjoyed another tasty lunch, Michael (the ex-priest) grabbed a guitar from his van. He, Oksana, and Demetro then sang a few songs to the cafe owners. Pretty neat way to minister the joy of the Lord. Psalm 126:2 – "Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, 'The LORD has done great things for them.'"

Our next visit was to a middle-age woman named Anna. She works as a math teacher in a local school. After getting to know a bit about her, I directed our discussion to my reason for being in Ukraine. The majority of our time talking and thinking about God revolved around His holiness and His requirement for complete perfection to have a relationship with Him. Her only comment at one point was, "I want to do good works so He will forgive me." We, of course, used this as a nice platform to continue sharing the gospel with her. Before we left her, Lilya had her fill out the contact information part of the GMF tract where she checked the "I received Jesus as my Savior" box.

Our last visit of the day was at the home of Sasha and Tanya. We had arranged yesterday to meet with them at 4:00 p.m. I believe this couple alone was worth my coming to Ukraine. For two solid hours, we discussed God's word. No fluff, rather, meaty stuff. Although each of them was at least my age, neither had ever heard the gospel! What a privilege to be here for them. Praise the Lord. At the beginning of our time together, Tanya said, "I am happy you are here to teach me the Bible." God used her statement to again remind me of the seriousness of what we were about to do. We were about to talk about...God! Tanya told us a rumor was spreading around the complex. My team and I were supposedly buying converts for \$15 each! We all laughed. To start us out, I asked them, "Who is God?" This question allowed for an explanation of God's nature and some of His attributes such as His holiness, sovereignty, love, and wrath. When discussing sin and its effects, Sasha said through Oksana, "I like how you call yourself a sinner along with us." He also told us he believed good works could not save anyone but he wasn't sure what could. Time was beginning to run short for us so we decided to meet again the following evening. But before we left, I shared with them some pictures of my life here in the states. Sasha is an avid coin collector so he brought out his oldest three – one from the 1600s! We then talked about our occupations. Sasha has a degree in art but works in the market selling products for a business owner. Tanya has a good job with the post office in Stari Sambir. To practice his English skills, Sasha asked if he could write me so I gave him my Lennox business card. (He has written me twice.) We might have talked longer but Oksana nearly collapsed from translating. I understood why. We had covered a lot of ground. She said, "I cannot translate anymore. I'm just too tired." What a trooper.

Sasha had to leave for work so the rest of us headed to the area courtyard for our evening meeting. There, Jeff led some singing, prayer, and a short gospel message. Attendance was great with about 45 adults and kids having gathered around us. Sad to say, Zynoviyuh showed up to the meeting drunk and overly-friendly. I later learned from Oksana that Zynoviyuh died a few months after our visit with him. During the return trip to Sambir, Veta and I had a good discussion about spiritual gifts and the charismatic movement.

For dinner that evening, Ira made ‘Chinese’. Let’s just say it was unique. :) While we ate I shared with them a few now-funny stories from my teenage years. They had a deeper appreciation for the grace of God in my life by the time I finished. I also told them that the past 2.5 weeks of my life had been among the best and worst. They fully understood the reason for my statement. Andriy asked (through Ira) if GMF would return to Sambir in 2002. I didn’t know. So they asked, “If not, what about you and us?” My heart was broken. They are severely burdened by the poor leadership of their church and there is nowhere else for them to attend. I promised to pray for them often.

### ***Day 6 – Wednesday, August 8***

What a full and blessed day! My team and I were able to complete four visitations today, two before and two after lunch. We first evangelized some guys sitting at a picnic table just outside the building within which they lived. Mikola, Igor, and Artem were their names. Igor and Artem were young men around the age of 18. To get to know them, I asked them what they planned to do with their lives, if and where they wanted to attend college, and what they did in their spare time. Then we talked about America and my occupation as an engineer. I began to steer our conversation towards “things above” by talking about my life as a university student since God chose to save me while I attended the University of Arkansas. Soon, I asked them if they had ever thought about their need to be forgiven of their sins. Mikola, the father of Artem, told us that he wasn’t a sinner. I was so stunned by his audacious reply that I had to verify it with Oksana, thinking that she may have mistranslated his answer to my question. I assured him that he was indeed a sinner, not because I thought it to be true, but because God in His word has told us that sinfulness plagues all the sons of Adam. I tried to explain to him the biblical definition of sin (I John 3:4) and its consequences (Romans 6:23) but he kept interrupting me with random criticisms of the church and God, although his worldview gave him no grounds for such accusations. We left them a tract and a sober warning of the impending doom that awaited each of them if they did not repent of their sins and look to Christ for forgiveness.

Before we broke for lunch, we were able to meet with two businessmen in their apartment for about 35 minutes. Knowing we didn’t have much time to spend with them, I minimized the casual conversation and almost immediately entered into a gospel presentation. Intermingled with a few arresting questions to keep their minds captivated by the grave situation of their unbelief in the Lord Jesus, we delivered a pithy, to-the-point explanation of the gospel. Our time with Volodya and Liohnya was brief but a seed was definitely planted. It is a wonderful truth to know that “God gives the increase”. We left a tract to remind them of our words.

While at lunch today, I enjoyed getting to know Veta some more. Diane, Jeff, and I then talked about the churches we attended in the states. Diane and Veta again told me they enjoyed the Monday evening meeting devotional that I led. Their commendation was a needed encouragement.

As promised to Helena on Monday, we made our way to her apartment to visit with her daughter Tanya. Our appointment with Sasha and Tanya (another Tanya) was not for another two hours so we were able to get to know a lot about the lives of Helena and Tanya. Among many things Tanya spoke with us about her job as a teacher and her being married to a man who works in another country to make money for their family. Sadly, many spouses (husband or wife) in Ukraine temporarily leave their mate to work in another country or region because jobs are so scarce. This obviously puts a lot of strain on marriages and families. After I shared my pictures with them, they broke out several albums. While they talked about the photos, mostly of family members, I realized how odd it was for me to be there looking into the personal history of people so distant from me. What a great God we have to orchestrate such events. One perk of witnessing to Ukrainians is their insistence that you enjoy the snacks they provide. On this occasion we were given doughnuts, chi (tea), and **homemade** cherry liquor. As soon as Tanya offered the liquor to us, I Corinthians 9:22 popped into my memory register. Oksana sheepishly asked, "Can we have some?" I confidently replied, "Sure, 'all things to all men' – right?" She giggled and gave the nod for Tanya to start pouring. I am by no means a liquor connoisseur but I thought the concoction was pretty nasty. After spending much time getting to know one another, it was somewhat awkward segueing to the gospel but the Lord gave us grace to do so. I only spoke for a few minutes about why I had come to Ukraine and what God had done in my life a few years ago. Lilya and Oksana then spoke at length about the Lord and the one way He has provided for man to be reconciled to Himself. One admirable goal of GMF is to teach and mobilize national Christians to share the gospel more since we (the Americans) are only around for a week. My primary role on our team near the end of the week is to be "bait". An American in Stari Sambir is a novel thing to almost all Ukrainians. This allows the nationals to get into many more homes than they could otherwise. Once in a home, a relationship can be established, which in turn may lead to more contacts. Lilya and Oksana's gospel presentation was clear but Tanya's eyes remained blinded (II Corinthians 4:3-4).

The last stop of the day was again the home of Sasha, Tanya, and their daughter Youluh (sp?). Cute little girl. The next few hours of my life turned out to be one of the most memorable blessings. During our visit with this Russian (not Ukrainian) family, the events seemed surreal as if our time was extracted from a missions storybook. Although I had only known this unsaved family for a day, I loved them. I wish I could say I have loved everyone to whom I spoke on this trip, certainly the lost, but I cannot. There is much to be said for 'relationship evangelism' as it is sometimes termed. Why do I feel more for these people? Neither of them can even speak English! Jesus was and is a friend of sinners. To love with God's love, I must be a friend of sinners too. And friendships take time, at least a little.

As soon as my team and I sat down in Sasha and Tanya's living room, we gave them a Bible. They did not own a copy of both testaments. Next, as planned, we packed up Sasha's car with a picnic supper and headed for the Carpathian Mountains. After about a twenty minute drive during which time Sasha and Tanya pointed out some special sites, we arrived at the foot of

some lush, green mountains. Nice! We then began a short walk to a shady area overlooking a shimmering waterfall. On the way, a family about 100 yards away called to us for help. We quickly set our stuff down and proceeded towards them. Their car had developed a flat tire. Bo and Luke Duke would not have been impressed with the time it took Sasha and I to change their tire – about 45 minutes! Having spent a good chunk of time, we made our way back to the picnic area where we played in the nearby stream, ran around for a while, and then chowed down on some chicken and fish. Per Tanya's request, we had intended to spend the majority of our time studying God's word. But time escaped us. We agreed to **again** meet with Sasha and Tanya the following evening, the last day of the campaign.

We did not return to the courtyard area until 7:30 p.m. By this time, the evening meeting was over and Demetro was waiting on us. No biggie.

The Provozyuk's (Victor, Luda, and Vadim) hosted a party for us at their place this evening. Had a great time. Watching Tom Franklin (Jenni Hamm's brother) and Curry Moore perform a Backstreet Boys karaoke was very entertaining to say the least.

### *Day 7 – Thursday, August 9*

On a few occasions earlier in the week, I teased Luda (one of Victor Provozyuk's daughters) about serving as my translator before the end of the trip. Knowing today would more than likely be the last day I would ever work in Ukraine, she agreed to work with me until lunch, provided I keep my sentence structure simple and use "small" words. Luda has a great sense of humor.

We first witnessed to a small group of people outside of another apartment building. Ivan, Michael, and Anna along with a few others intently listened to us for several minutes. My team and I were seated on a park bench the entire time while the Ukrainians stood in a small circle around us. I remember giving them two options when discussing heaven and hell. To get to heaven, I asked them if they wanted to trust in their own 'good' works to merit salvation or have the perfect righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ laid to their account and thus take away their sins. Michael spoke up and chose option #1! I used his response as proof of the universal desire of man to want to exchange his supposed goodness for God's reward of heaven. After we progressed through the gospel, I closed our discussion with a reminder to our listeners of the eternal payment that awaits those, like Michael, who choose to trust in their own works to pacify the infinite justice of the Lord. Only the work of the Son can propitiate God's wrath for only the shed blood of the perfect Lamb can atone for the transgression of God's perfect law. Of course, the way in which I shared the aforementioned truths was distilled in order for Luda to translate. My constant challenge in working with a translator was simplifying the weighty truths of God's word.

The Stari Sambir teams met around noon at the same cafe for lunch. The special was chicken, pork, Julienne carrots, french fries, salad, and Coke.

After lunch Oksana rejoined me and Lilya. A very old lady named Genya was the next person with whom we were able to share the grace of God in Jesus Christ. She told us that she didn't

have time to talk when she first met us at the door. But with a little persistence (that reminded me of Luke 14:23) from my teammates, she let us into her apartment where we stayed for the next thirty minutes. Genya knew the gospel well but also knew she did not possess true, saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. She also knew if you seek the Lord, you will find Him because even the seeking is an effectual, Spirit-wrought work from God. I was taken back by her knowledge of the Bible and her honesty with us. Before we parted she sincerely thanked us for talking to her.

For our last visit of the week, we arrived at the home of Sasha and Tanya at 3:30 p.m. We were fairly certain that the Lord had much work for us to do with them so we carved out a lot of time in our day for them. We had discerned the Spirit correctly for He did have a lot of 'spiritual ground' for us to cover with them. Much to my surprise, we began our talk considering the Seventh Day Adventist and Roman Catholic 'churches' and the main ways in which these groups are doctrinally aberrant. Some of the Bible passages we studied included Hebrews 11, Ephesians 2, Romans 1 & 3, II Corinthians 5, and II Samuel 11. Tanya struggled to understand what might be called future grace. She asked, "How can you remain a sinner after you're saved?" Our answer for her entailed the difference between practical and positional holiness before God. They seemed to understand what we said. Sasha asked us if a true Christian could commit murder. Reading about the life of David answered his question. Lovingly, we pressed upon Sasha and Tanya their need to repent of their sin and "confess with their mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in their heart that God raised Him from the dead" before we left. They told us they would like to study the Bible more before making such a commitment. I complemented them for their desire to do this because Jesus Himself told many when He walked the earth to count the cost before taking up his/her cross.

Having finished our study of God's word, Sasha and Tanya presented some gifts to me: a nice coffee cup and several, old coins from the days of the USSR. The gifts were sweet but their words to me were sweeter. Through Oksana, Sasha said, "You are the first American I've ever met. I have appreciated your genuineness and servant attitude. You got dirty with me in the Carpathians (when we changed the flat tire). You respectfully opened the Bible with me. Thank you." Crying, Tanya kissed me and Sasha gave me a big hug. What would cause the Lord to have such affection poured out upon me? I'll never know in this life but I thank Him for it.

This evening, everyone involved in the work throughout the week met at the church for the Victory Service just as we did last year. The names and addresses of everyone with whom we had spoken during the week were handed over to the Ukrainians. The nationals will carry out discipleship efforts with each new convert in the three villages/towns within which the GMF teams worked. We sang several songs and then heard a few testimonies from Victor Solos (sp?), Demetro, Tom, Doug, and Ed. Pastor Volodya then took the contact sheets and handed them over to Victor Provozyuk and said, among other things, "These people are your responsibility if you want them." Luda, Victor's daughter, then stood and publicly said, "When the Americans are here, you behave one way, but when they leave, you will rescend what you've just said." I learned what she said later from Ira since no one translated her comment during the service.

On the way to Andriy and Ira's apartment, Oksana and I stopped by Sveta's (a lady that had become a Christian from last year's campaign) home to say farewell. She and her family

presented me with a nice porcelain pot. We then went next door so that I could say goodbye to Oksana's parents and her upstairs neighbor. Above Oksana's family's apartment lives a very old widow. Since my first visit to Ukraine in 2000, she has asked about me several times so I knew I had to see her. When she opened her door to let us inside, she just stared at me and then gave me two kisses. Had a short visit with her knowing I needed to get back to Andriy and Ira's apartment for dinner. The old lady sent me away with four more kisses! Yes, the fringe benefits of missions. :)

For dinner Andriy prepared *verenicki* and stuffed peppers. Real good! They gave me a very nice tea set for a going-away present. Ira again pricked my heart during our mealtime conversation by saying, "More Americans may come but not my family. When will you return?" I could only say, "The Lord knows."

### *Day 8 – Friday, August 10*

For the last breakfast with my host family, Andriy, Ira, and I enjoyed stuffed bell peppers, fried eggs, bread, and tea. Finger lickin' good! Later, while getting ready to leave, Katya (a friend I had made from last year) stopped by so that I could give a gift to her. Sherry Smith, one of the members of First Baptist Church of Parker, TX, had given me **several** articles of clothing to give to the Ukrainians. One item was a nice, blue dress which I thought would fit Katya well since her frame is similar to Sherry's. My GMF shirt from 2000 did not fit me very well any more because I had lost a little weight so I decided to give it to Andriy. He exclaimed in English, "Thank you very much Tony!" Later, Ira told me how much Andriy had wanted a shirt like the one I had given him. Praise the Lord for how He works.

Later, all the Americans met at the church to talk about the return trip and ask questions about anything. There, we said goodbye to everyone. Very difficult. Victor Provozyuk and Oksana took me aside to give a few gifts to me. It was a special time to say the least.

Oleg, the young man who lives next to Andriy and Ira, gave me an 'alcohol horn' and his home address so that I could write to him.

During the time that had passed since arriving to the church, Andriy and Ira had been meeting with Ed and Pastor Volodya about many issues. Afterwards, Andriy told me (through Ira) that some things had been resolved but many had not. I must always pray for them **and** Pastor Volodya.

Tonight, like last year, we stayed at the Hotel George in L'Viv. One of the van drivers who took us to the hotel was Michael, the ex-priest. After helping us with our luggage, he gave me a bunch of carved wooden eagles to pass on to all the Stari Sambir team members and Bruce and Peggy Perry.

Overall, the campaign was difficult for me. But that which I learned and experienced is exactly what I needed because my Father loves me and has ordained only that which is good for me

(Romans 8:28). What bliss it is to rest in the fact that my Savior is sovereign over all, salvation **and** sanctification.

Quotations to contemplate:

“Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from **every tribe and tongue and people and nation.**”

- The Apostle John (Revelation 5:9)

“If any man ascribes anything of salvation, even the very least thing to the 'free will' of man, he knows nothing of grace and has not learned Jesus Christ rightly.”

- Martin Luther

“As a Christian, you have only three options when it comes to missions. Go, send, or disobey!”

- Dr. John Piper