



a very urgent request from Ukraine

January 23, 2009

Dear saints,

We will be so very, very grateful to you if you will take the time to read this, and then to pray!

Honestly, our lives aren't an unbroken chain of crises! I am aware that it must seem so, because we've sent a number of urgent prayer requests to you over the past months. I will likely send you a more "normal" newsletter tomorrow or Sunday . . . but this message shouldn't be delayed.

Perhaps you remember that we began the 2007-2008 school year with a couple from Turkmenistan; they were new students. We call them "River" and "Hope" instead of using their given names. After less than two months here, they had to return to Turkmenistan, in Central Asia. They were not allowed to remain in Ukraine because of visa difficulties. Last May, "River" returned with another Turkmen pastor, "Eagle". These two pastors were with us for 3 weeks of intensive training, and it was wonderful! Our students and workers love these folks with what seems to me to be an unusual fervency.

We began this school year -- 2008-2009 -- with another, younger Turkmen student named Shatlyk, but he, too, was required to leave after less than 2 months of classes. (Those two months were more than enough time for us to fall in love with him, as well!) We made repeated attempts to solve his visa problems so that he could return. But it has now become clear that he cannot return, but will be drafted into the army in his country. He will have no possibility of returning to us for the next two years. What's more, we were also attempting to secure visas for two other fellows from Turkmenistan. We ceased those efforts when one of our brothers in ministry had the opportunity to meet and interview them, and determined that they lack the spiritual maturity to begin this pastoral training at this time.

All of this has been exhausting and frustrating, but even more, it's been saddening. We meet these brothers and sisters, have the joys of fellowshiping with them and learning from them, begin to train them . . . and then lose them. We are sure that our God is working out His perfect will, and we rejoice in that. If you could hear the testimony "River" gave last month at a meeting in Turkey, you'd be compelled (as we have been) to praise God through tears of joy and wonder!

But there is very dangerous opposition. I'm including -- below -- the email our fellow laborer in Turkey sent to us this afternoon. He had called to our home earlier, and Natalie relayed this message to me at the college. Our students went to their knees with broken hearts, to plead with God. Here's the message:

We have received a very serious prayer request for our brothers and sisters in Central Asia. Two days ago I felt like I needed to make a phone call to brother River. I did so and found out that it was a very timely call. River said, "Tim please pray for us, I can't share with you over the phone what is going on, but we really need your prayers.

There is a very serious situation here." I assured him that we are and will continue to pray for him and even more so in light of the phone call. Today I found out what is going on there. One young lady was involved in a fatal car wreck. She was about 25 years old, and was the maid of honor in Hope's wedding. She was a believer, and this is where the problem begins. In Central Asia there is one big reoccurring problem when a believer dies there is nowhere to bury them. The cemeteries are Islamic and the Imams hold the keys to them and only allow Muslims to be buried there. They view any non Muslim as an infidel and to bury an infidel in their cemetery would corrupt their "holy ground". There are no other cemeteries, and the government will not allow Christians to buy land to bury their dead, or even allow them to bury them in their own yards. Through much arguing, pleading and more than likely a big transfer of money and possessions the Imam allowed her to be buried in the cemetery. He performed the ceremony according to the Islamic traditions and then gathered the entire village to a special meeting, with the village elders, Imams and Mullahs from surrounding areas were waiting.

At this meeting he again told the villagers that these Christians are a curse to the people, and that they are corrupting the ground of the ancestors and defiling the culture. Once they had worked the crowd into a tether the Imam urged the people to put an end and eternal silence to the leaders who have been spreading their foreign faith. The villagers were commanded to harass the believers in every way possible, and to kill those whom they find spreading the Christian faith. This all took place in the village where Eagle lives, but also spreads to the village where River lives. These two men are in essence wearing targets on their chests.

There are other leaders within the Christian community who also have become targets, as well as the churches as a whole. The government will not do anything to protect these men, as they too want to put an end to Christianity in their country.

Pray for God's intervention and protection in this manner.

Pray for the believers to find hope and comfort in their God. At this point the believers are all living in complete fear. They are not meeting, and even personal fellowship with one another has stopped.

Pray for the leaders to have a spirit of power, love and a sound mind to exercise God's wisdom during this trial.

Pray that they will have boldness in the face of the opposition.

Pray that these Imams would come to faith in Christ.

I began to write to you that I don't want to burden you. It's not the truth. I do want you to be burdened, to carry this burden with us! We cannot be there to stand with River, Hope, Eagle, and the others who have come to Christ, but we can take their burden upon our own hearts and carry it to God as if it were our own. And we can pray for them, believing that our God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.

This battle is not River's, nor is it Eagle's, nor is it ours; this battle is the Lord's! We can pray that the schemes of the enemies of the Gospel will be overturned . . . that the precious Gospel which is setting men free would not be silenced . . . that Satan will not be allowed to keep this nation, these villages, and these precious souls in that gross darkness which so long has enclosed them.

Thanks for your fellowship in ministry, and for your prayers. You (and they) are precious to us!!

Your servants,



Bruce and Natalie Tuttle

“Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worked in us, unto him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Ephesians 3:20-21).

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