

REPORT FROM MARIUPOL, UKRAINE

December 8, 2005

Dear Brethren,

Many apologies for neglecting this report for so long. From the time of my last writing, the pace of the work here has quickened dramatically, sweeping me along with it. To say I have struggled to keep my head above water would be an understatement.

As I mentioned previously, Vera, my interpreter, agreed to study. We did so, three times per week (which more than doubled my regular workload, but I'm not complaining), according to the following outline:

1. Truth about reality is knowable.
2. The opposite of true is false
3. It is true that the theistic God exists. This is evidenced by the:
 - a. Beginning of the universe
 - b. Design of the universe
 - c. Design of life
 - d. Moral Law
4. If God exists, then miracles are possible.
5. Miracles can be used to confirm a message from God
6. The New Testament is historically reliable. This is evidenced by:
 - a. Early testimony
 - b. Eyewitness testimony
 - c. Uninvented (authentic) testimony
 - d. Eyewitnesses who were not deceived.
7. The New Testament says Jesus claimed to be God.
8. Jesus' claim to be God was miraculously confirmed by:
 - a. His fulfillment of many prophecies about himself;
 - b. His sinless life and miraculous deeds
 - c. His prediction and accomplishment of his resurrection.
9. Therefore, Jesus is God.
10. Whatever Jesus (who is God) teaches is true.
11. Jesus taught that the Bible is the Word of God.
12. Therefore, it is true that the Bible is the Word of God (and anything opposed to it is false).

Each time, I was increasingly encouraged with Vera's response to the material. Many of these concepts she had never considered before. Those that she had, she had not seen a compelling case for. As we discussed these things she admitted that this must be the truth. However, once we completed the outline, she persisted in objecting to Christianity on the grounds that human suffering counts against God (and apparently, therefore, she is excused from doing what He says). It is my suspicion that what she really objects to is having to make certain changes in her life which she knows becoming a Christian would require.

Having gone over the material, I then had Vera prepare written translations based on our studies together. Thus, she received a second exposure to the material and I now have a booklet divided into 11 lessons that I can use in home Bible studies.

This turned out to be a timely development as my landlady, Olga, asked me if we could study together. Right now, the only day she has time to study is on Monday. Consequently, for the past five weeks, we have been meeting on Monday evenings to go over the material outlined above. I asked Vera if she would be so kind as to interpret for me at these studies and she agreed. Thus, she is getting a third exposure to this material.

If Vera's response to the material was positive, Olga's has been absolutely enthusiastic. I don't know when I have been involved in a study that has gone

so well. I am praying that this continues. I also can't help but think that witnessing just how positively Olga is responding to the material is having a good effect on Vera as well. Please pray for them both as we continue to study.

Some of you will remember Natasha who was baptized shortly after I moved here. In the months that followed, it came to light that she had been married previously. Furthermore, she had a child from that relationship whom she had shoved off onto her old mother-in-law to take care of without doing anything for the child herself. When some of the sisters here confronted her about this (I was not present), Natasha became upset and ran off. This would not have been a problem since she lived near the flat where we meet. However, she chose to disappear completely. Thus, no one knew where she was staying or how to get in touch with her. Three weeks ago, she suddenly reappeared at worship after an absence of nearly a year.

At the risk of sounding cynical, very often when this sort of thing happens, the person who comes back has gotten in some sort of trouble or is looking for benevolent help. Thus, I was pleasantly surprised that neither appears to be the case. However, Natasha has not exactly been talkative since her return. She appears just as worship is starting and makes tracks for the door as soon as it is over – so far thwarting my attempts to speak with her. This is at least progress for her considering her prolonged absence.

This past Sunday, another neighbor by the name of Vladimir decided to visit our worship and expressed a desire to get his life straightened out because he “has a lot of sins.” He was not interested in studying or taking any printed material I offered but said that he was sure that he would “in the course of time.” Apparently taking care of his many sins does not seem to be an urgent matter for this gentleman. He did promise to return and we all hope that he does so. Valentin and Galina were instrumental in getting him to come in the first place and it may very well be that their good example more than anything I say or teach will help this man to find the right path.

Compared to last year, visitors to Mariupol have been rather scarce. Although Lee Fenner had hoped to visit in October, he was unable to raise the necessary funds and was forced to stay in Lithuania. Thus, since my return in May, no one has visited Mariupol for the purpose of teaching. A few have expressed interest in coming to help out, but have not mentioned any specific dates.

However, I am blessed that my fiancée Amanda and our friend Rachel Davis are arriving next week to spend their winter break here in Mariupol. Their presence will certainly be a big boost to me personally as well as to the brethren here. As you are well aware, Mariupol is not exactly the vacation spot of the world (especially in December). Thus, I greatly appreciate their decision to visit and brighten an often bleak time of year.

Additionally, Shane and Mary Frances Gillespie who are members at Westvue (where I used to attend and who contribute significantly to my work here) have decided to spend a week here in February for the purpose of teaching. I have long said that folks merely taking a vacation over here and doing some teaching would help out tremendously. There is especially a need for mature Christian women to visit as the majority of most congregations here are comprised of women who have had either no or very limited contact with their American counterparts. Thus, I am very excited at this development and am sure that much good will come from it.

Finally, as many of you know, Amanda and I are planning to get married this coming June. This fact combined with the steady decline of the Dollar against foreign currencies (7% since I move here) and steadily rising prices due to 11% annual inflation here in Ukraine compel me to ask for an increase in monthly support beginning in June of next year. If you are interested in helping with this need, I will be happy to send you the specifics upon request.

I apologize once again for my delinquency in writing this and assure you that it will not happen again. Thank you all for your patience as well as your prayers for me and for the work here. Although the work is keeping me busier than it ever has, I am also more excited about the way things are developing than I have been at any point during my stay here. I pray that all will continue to progress for the growth of the kingdom and glory of our Father.

In Him,
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