

ACTS OF ADVOCACY



Galya



Sveta

Greetings in Christ!

This month we'd like to share a little about a couple of the individuals God has brought into (back into) our lives in recent weeks/months:

Galya – Three times a week, for almost 3 hours Charlie and I are in Russian language class. During that time, a beautiful young lady named Galya comes to teach, sit, and play with Isabel.

We met Galya through friends of ours who are running a Christian transitional home for orphans who are seeking to come out of the orphanage system and to learn to live well in the society as adults. (Note that most kids coming out of the orphanage system do not choose a transitional home route because (1) it typically requires a level of discipline to which most of these kids do not want to adhere (very similar to American kids at that age) and (2) there really are very few transitional homes in St. Petersburg because they require so much private funding.)

One of the adventures of the relationship between Galya and Isabel is that Isabel speaks (spoke) no Russian, and Galya speaks (spoke) no English. I think they are both learning a lot from each other, and I can only imagine what Galya must think on some days when she comes in early and I still haven't had a shower and Isabel is running around in her t-shirt and underpants! We have had a couple of rough days during which Isabel has become very frustrated that Galya will only speak to her in Russian, but overall this has been an amazing experience for all of us!

Galya is only 17, and actually has one more year in the orphanage. She is only able to stay at the transitional home this summer because a couple of girls who live there are away until September. This month, she had an opportunity to go to a women's retreat for 3 days, during which she seemed to have developed a deeper understanding of the love of Christ in her life. She has said that she wants to be baptized, and we've invited her to join us in the monthly prayer meeting we are starting at our home in September. **We are not really sure what will happen when Galya goes back to the orphanage in September and begins her school there. I do hope you'll pray for her and for our relationship, that God will lead us according to His will and to His glory.**

Sveta – I first met Sveta on my first trip to St. Petersburg, back in 2001. At that time she was 15 years old. When Sveta turned 18, she was sent with a group of other girls her age to work and live at a nursing home in St. Petersburg, where they each cleaned one of the floors of the home in exchange for a room in which to live, food to eat, and a small salary. Coming out of a "disabled" orphanage, this was considered to be a good opportunity for these girls.

Since that time, of the five girls who were originally sent to live at the nursing home: one was sent to an adult facility due to drinking and other behavior issues, and has since become pregnant and lost the baby prematurely, one is struggling with blindness due to a correctable problem in her eyes, but has been turned away from doctors due to her "disability", and a third – with whom Sveta was the closest - passed away a couple of years ago due to kidney failure (many of you may remember us writing about Tanya).

One major distinction between Sveta and these other girls is that Sveta has always had a source of consistent support – an aunt - throughout her life. She has occasionally spent periods of time staying with her aunt, and in the past couple of years has been able to find a job and rent a single room in a flat where she's now living with her 3 month old baby girl. (We understand that the father of this little girl is occasionally there also.)

This month, we invited a few girls, including Sveta and her baby, over for dinner. You can imagine how surprised I was (and how much it meant to me) when Sveta gave me a beautiful tea jar for my birthday, which had already passed at that time. We also found out that her and Isabel have the same birthday, so we invited her back for a birthday party for both of them. It was such a blessing as she and Isabel both blew out the candles on their cake! **Again, we ask you to say a quick prayer for Sveta and her family, and to pray God's anointing on her and this relationship, for His grace and peace to be upon them in her life.**

I recently said to Charlie (using a friend's metaphor) that I sometimes feel like an onion made of an endless number of layers, all of which are weighing me down and are keeping me from being able truly know God and to understand who I am in Him. Since being in St. Petersburg, the Lord seems to be specifically working on a few of those layers, some of which I had been totally unaware existed until recently. I wanted to share a couple of these with you this month:

One – Recently, God has revealed to me that I approach a great majority of my walk with the Him from an entirely physical – as opposed to spiritual – point of view.

For example, despite all scripture to the contrary, I still tend to approach God as though evidence of His grace in my life is primarily provided by His blessing me with financial and physical comfort. A reduction of either of these in my life makes me immediately begin to question what God is doing or whether I've done something "wrong".

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The second example I've noticed is in my approach to the scriptures. So often in my efforts to see what God may be saying to me through His word, I concentrate so much on what the words might mean to the physical (in many ways, the temporary) state of myself and the church, that I almost completely neglect to seek what the scripture may be saying about our spiritual state. I believe I do this constantly, but I'll look at just one verse for example: Isaiah 25:11-12 – *“God will bring down their pride despite the cleverness of their hands. He will bring down your high fortified walls and lay them low; he will bring them down to the ground, to the very dust.”*

Now my bible notes say that the writer of this verse is probably literally referring to the city of Moab. Every time I've read this verse, I've wondered if perhaps this was a prophecy describing what the Lord plans to do to the cities and nations who have not sought to obey and honor Him.

When I read this verse recently, however, for the first time the following question occurred to me so clearly: Father, are You saying that this is what you want to do to **me**? Do You desire to bring down my pride and my “fortified walls” not because You want to punish me, but instead because You want to set me free? And is that what You also want for Your church?

Just to emphasize with this example, this new view of these 2 verses has led to more questions: When God allows these deep, dark, painful times in our lives, which sometimes leave us absolutely broken, is this pain sometimes due to His stripping down the “fortified walls” we've built around ourselves? I'm so afraid of feeling pain in my life. Am I missing a deeper walk with God (and deeper freedom in my life) because of my efforts towards being comfortable?

Another layer – It's occurred to me recently that I carry this insidious, ridiculous assumption that God is paying more attention to the work of the church in the U.S. than He is to the rest of the world.

This is wrong to me on at least 2 counts:

First, the “church” - in scripture and in my life I see over and over again that the majority of the work of God's Kingdom is actually not done in a building formally known as a “church”, but is done “on the street” as they say (i.e. at dinner with friends, at home when only around our spouse/children, at the parties we attend, the way we spend our money/free time, etc.)

Second, the “U.S.” - Recently, the most amazing realizations of the nature of God for me have come through individuals who have never been to America and/or who have little/no experience with an “American” church whatever. Scripture is also pretty clear on this (I've underlined for emphasis):

At Pentecost: Acts 2:4-6 - *“All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit enabled them. Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language.”*

Rev. 7:9-10 - *“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”* (Note that while

my translation of this verse is from an English bible, that should not be meant to imply that these people from every nation, tribe, people and language will all be crying out to the Lord in English!)

It's amazing how through the grace of God, both (1) my appreciation for the blessings of peace, freedom, family and prosperity into which I was born, and (2) my respect and desire for understanding the views and hearts of my brothers and sisters in Christ who were not born into such things can grow so peacefully together!

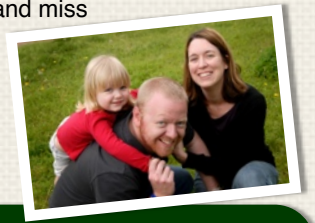
A sister living with her family in South Africa recently suggested to me that, especially since I'm in St. Petersburg, I should read Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, which is set in St. Petersburg. I have to say that this story has had a significant impact on my view of Christ's love for me and for His church. One line from the book: “They were renewed by love; the heart of each held infinite sources of life for the heart of the other.”

The heart. All hearts - from every tribe and nation - united with one another. Or further, all hearts united with - in love with, giving up all else in the world for - the heart of Christ. Letting our hearts be so truly devoted to His that not only do we have fullness, truth, and healing in our own lives, but our allowing these things to flow through us brings *Him* delight. Seeking to let Him know that WE LOVE HIM. I'm thinking more and more that this may actually be the place where His church resides.

His word says that every tribe and nation will praise Him in the end. I challenge you this month to ask the Lord to begin to show you the role He has for you in His church. Ask Him to begin to take down the walls you've built around yourself and your church. Seek to chase after Him as your first true love, and then ask Him to strengthen you to go to the place where His heart beckons you.

Thank you all so much for the amazing love and blessing you've brought into our lives. We love you and miss you and hope that you'll be in touch to let us know how you are!

Love, Charlie, Miki and Isabel



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