

## TO RUSSIA WITH LOVE

How does one describe the thrill of seeing God's hand at work? We had prayed we would get our Bibles through customs in Leningrad. We had been making jokes and laughing on the plane to Warsaw. At the airport in Warsaw, it was drab, the people were unfriendly, and I couldn't get the girl who took our boarding passes to even look me in the eyes, let alone return my smile. There were a few Western-style ads on the walls for perfume and cigarettes, but we could feel the oppressive spirit of communism. Someone said Poland is the freest of the satellite countries and Russia would be twice as bad. On the way to the plane, two of us asked a girl where she was from. She looked at us with what seemed to be cold and steely eyes. "Russia," she said. There was a pride in the darkness of that steel, and she was so cold and withdrawn that it was extremely difficult to maintain any conversation with her.

In the plane I sat next to her and persisted, wanting to break through the layers and layers of defensiveness. I learned she was a photojournalist living in Poland, her husband living in West Germany.

As the plane flew to Leningrad and as I talked to her, my head began to sense the seriousness of the country we were about to land in. Her grandparents had been communist party members and she wasn't sure there is no God, but not sure there is one either. After three generations of official atheism, she still was not certain. We talked about many things. "*Glasnost*"? "We'd like to believe, but there have been lies in the past, and we don't know if there really will be openness."

Our group had really been laughing and joking on the way to Warsaw. We joked that when we got to customs with our Bibles, we would just go up and put our necks outstretched to the border guards so they could easily cut off our heads. We were laughing and cutting up and having a great time, mostly out of nervousness.

But now as we approached Leningrad, we became more serious. What would it really be like to take my 16 Bibles into the Soviet Union? We had been well-briefed in Amsterdam by Brother Andrew's group—Open Doors. Some would take in just a few Bibles. Three of us would take in a larger number. And one Dutchman would try to take in twice as many as I had. The plan was that those of us with the larger number would stay back and go through last, with one person with no Bibles behind each of us who had them.

There were ten in the American group, and about 20 in the Dutch group. The briefing in Amsterdam of the American group took about three hours one evening. We all told why we had come, and we received information and maps of Leningrad and Moscow. They told us what a miracle it was that we were still to be going. There had been nothing but problems—the trip was cancelled at one point at the Russian end and then was back on again. Other trips to the Soviet Union had been cancelled, but miraculously the trip was now on, and if the blessings were going to be commensurate with the difficulties to that point, we were in for a great trip indeed.

Plans had changed, however. Originally, we were not going to be taking in any Bibles, but merely visiting the underground church. Now, we would be attempting to get over 200 Bibles inside and would not be visiting the underground church. I *really* wanted to visit the underground church. I would be very disappointed if we couldn't do that.

At the briefing, we sang and prayed together. The following night, we met together again for a final briefing and final prayers and singing together. The next morning we flew by the Hungarian state airline to Warsaw and from there by Polish state airline to Leningrad.

We went through passport control. I told the girl behind the control window I liked the red star on her cap, but there was no real communication between us.

Next, we filled out customs declarations. How many dollars was I bringing in? Weapons? There were lines leading through customs. There wasn't any joking now. This was it. I was praying, "Lord, just let these Bibles get through for your children. Lord, let these Bibles get through." One by one our group joined the lines. We were briefed that customs could take several hours, but it looked like things were going pretty quickly. Soon it would be my turn to move into the line. I would be the last person except for a girl from Holland who would follow me in case there were problems with my Bibles.

The trip to the Soviet Union had started for me about six months earlier when I was invited to join a small team going behind the Iron Curtain with Bibles and to visit the underground church. I had never been interested in the Soviet Union, and yet I felt the Lord saying, "Go." Even up to a week before leaving, I really could not get excited about it, but I felt the Lord wanted me to go for His own purposes. It would be a two-week trip, ten days of which would be inside the Soviet Union. My suitcase was more than half filled with clothes, jeans and coffee to give to Christians who had been persecuted for their faith.

We left Friday morning June 3, 1988, from San Diego and then after a layover in Los Angeles, we flew non-stop to Amsterdam on KLM, arriving Saturday morning. We left Monday for Leningrad. We had gone to church near Hardervijk in the Netherlands. The sermon was translated for us.

Well, there I was, getting into line. It's fine to talk about it, pray about it, even laugh about it, but now it is here, and it is real. This is not a game. This is deadly serious business. I took my camera and film out and placed it on top of their X-ray machine. The X-rays used by the communist block nations are much stronger than what we in the West use for security, and we were told it could damage the film. I prepared to put the carry-on pieces of luggage on the conveyer belt and my suitcase as well. I was nervous and thought, "Oh, let's go to another line." Then I asked myself, "Did God direct you to move?" "No." "Then stay where you are. Just do what God tells you to do."

The fellow in front of me was beginning to have trouble. I felt the Lord saying, "David, move to another line; you won't be able to get through in that line." So I took my camera and film and went to the next line over and once again put them on the top of the X-ray machine. My three bags went through the X-ray. They looked at each piece carefully. I put the first piece of carry-on luggage in front of the lady inspector. (All my Bibles were in my second carry-on piece.) I began to explain to her that on my customs declaration form, I didn't know for sure how many dollars I had brought in—that I would need to check in a shirt pocket in my suitcase to give an accurate amount. She marked something on the form and then said she wanted to inspect the first piece of carry-on luggage. I opened both zippers and took almost everything out. Several items inside also had zippers so I was unzipping everything, trying to be as helpful as I could in a very honest straight-forward way.

She said that was fine, so I started zipping everything back up and putting it all back together. She spread out her hands over the second piece of carry-on luggage and my large suitcase and said, "They're OK." I said, "Thank you very much." Then a ripple of joy began to well up in my body. I thought, "Oh, Lord, I don't believe this—she's not checking the one with the Bibles." So I finished putting the first carry-on piece all together and started moving all three bags away from the inspection table. That joy just continued to well up inside of me—more and more and more. I thought I was going to explode—"Lord, we got them through!" "Oh, Lord, I can hardly believe it." I was almost jumping for joy. I had seen God do a miracle, and he did it for all but one of the others, too. One fellow got caught. O Lord, O Lord, how great thou art! I had seen a miracle and it was so easy. I had seen God's hand move in a marvelous and effortless way. praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

## RED STAR OVER RUSSIA

Outside the airport I met our Intourist Guide, an attractive young lady who spoke very good English. We learned later that her husband was an engineer and they had a place in Leningrad to live and a summer *dacha* (country house) which they had built on a plot of land they had bought from the state, although the state still owned it (!). She had visited India the year before. She looked more western in dress and appearance than most Russians. She was very pleasant.

I also spoke with a sixteen year old girl who was outside the airport with her parents. Her father had been a communist party member for 30 years. She spoke very good English, and her knowledge of modern Russian history and the communist revolution was impressive. I'm afraid her American counterpart could only tell you about the latest rock stars, teen fashion, and movies. She was serious-minded and seemed to have a grasp of real issues. She said she did not believe in god, but that she was free to believe if she wanted to. She liked *glasnost* and Gorbachev and said Gorbachev was pronounced with the emphasis on the second syllable. In a sense I believe she typifies the youth who believe they are living on the vanguard of history and are truly committed to their cause. She had grasped hold of the Marxist-Leninist vision and believed it is the wave of the future for all humanity—that communism is the future. She knew her Leninism well and could express it well.

We would meet other youth who were disillusioned with the party line, who could see the contradictions in their society and don't buy into it. Their grandparents fought the revolution, but to this third generation, there is no firsthand experience and they are interested in material things—the better things in life and aren't so willing to sacrifice for the future of the state.

I told this girl I was a believer. She said the history of Russia is the history of the church, the Russian Orthodox Church. I asked her what the sign of the clenched fist means. She said, "A broad front." I clenched my fist and said, "We're with you on a broad front. We love you and we are bringing you our love." I hugged her father before getting on the bus. We don't love your system, but we love you.

We went to the hotel, located on one of Leningrad's many river ways. Leningrad has been called the Venice of Russia. Many canals, many bridges, and forty islands—all make it a very beautiful city. Very old European architecture is everywhere.

After checking in, we had a lot of nervous energy and exhilaration to burn off. We had gotten 200 Bibles into the Soviet Union! We found a room with a piano. Pastor Leo Giovinetti of Horizon International Fellowship played the piano, and we sang and laughed until the sun went down—about 11 p.m. Leningrad in June is known for its "white nights"—nights when it never gets dark because it is so far north (further north than Stockholm) and the long summer days that stretch from one to another in twilight. We felt almost drunk with excitement and were having a "blastnost"! It was a celebration to the King of kings and Lord of lords—who had gone before us, worked miracles and gotten in 200 Bibles for his children. In the next two days, we began to get a picture of Russian life. It is a very orderly country—there are lots of cars on the streets, but people drive relatively slowly and carefully, nothing like in the West. Rarely a horn is honked. I was surprised to see the relative lack of police, guns, etc., that I expected. Nor did we see on-duty military anywhere. I didn't doubt it is a police state, but you surely didn't see it openly in Leningrad (it would be different in Moscow). The pace is relatively slow and laid-back. There is not the hustle-bustle of the West.

It is a poor country but without the poverty we see in the Third World. They have, perhaps, exchanged political freedom for freedom from hunger. Politically, they are not free, but everybody eats. And everybody dresses pretty well. You also don't see wealth. I found it to be an amazingly egalitarian society. People all live pretty much the same--something that exists nowhere in the West. There are no beggars; nobody has his hand out wanting a handout.

But it is a poor country. It seems pretty rundown, and they do not seem to take any pride in their work. Since they get paid the same whether or not they do a good job, they don't have the incentive to do a good job. Still, you do not see the slums, the lack of sanitation, the sickness, the degradation that marks the Third World.

On the other hand, the decades of harsh, communist rule have taken their toll on the human spirit. It was next to impossible to make eye contact with strangers. They looked away so as not to get involved. "Don't be looking around—just mind your own business." Thus, they came across as very unfriendly—maybe like in New York City.

Leningrad has a fine subway system—about eight or nine stories underground. You take a long escalator ride down, down, down into the ground. I tried to take a picture. A guard slapped me on the shoulder. Forbidden. Part of the civil defense system.

I spend an afternoon traveling all over the city by myself. I saw flower sellers holding out flowers to buy—private entrepreneurs making a little money on the side.

I went into many, many stores. They have very little selection and not much quantity either. And what there is tends to be only the basic bare necessities. I checked out the camera department of the large G.U.M. department store. They had hardly anything there. Even if you have money, there's nothing much to buy.

Bread is cheap, but only a few kinds of unwrapped loaves are available. You want tools? No problem. Here's a nice screwdriver and pliers set. If they walked into the tool department at Sears & Roebuck, I don't think they'd believe it. In the Third World, the problem is the people can't afford the things. In the USSR, they just don't have the things.

Virtually no restaurants. Service stations may have a couple of pumps—maybe just one—and a line of cars waiting. You want an ice cream bar. No problem—just a line of maybe 75 people to get them. Twenty or thirty people gathered around a sidewalk merchant selling his own things—legal apparently, now, if done on a small scale. I managed to squeeze in and see what treasures they were gawking at. Ugly, little decals, carvings, plastic jewelry, stuff you might, maybe, interest one of our six or seven year olds at home—and these adults were really interested!

We tries to give things to the Russians—chewing gum, postcards, anything—they are afraid to take them. One lady helped me find my subway train—I was obviously lost, looking at my map for some time, but nobody stopped to help me. This lady did and looked like she knew she was doing something forbidden. I tried to give her a postcard. No way. After 70 years of communism, they are afraid, they have no peace; they just live their own drab little lives and stay out of trouble.

If there is one word to describe the people, it is "closed." They certainly need *glasnost*. I was walking along and passed three young men. I looked at one and surprisingly, he did not look away. This was most unusual. I kept looking at him and he said, "Do you believe in God?" I said, "Yes, do you?" He said, "Well, I'm not sure, but I know you believe in God." I asked him how he knew and he said, "I could tell by your eyes." If the eye be light, the whole body is full of light, but if the eye be darkness, the whole body is full of darkness.

The Russian turns away from your gaze, because it is light shining into their darkness. They turn away, for the darkness does not agree with light. If he meets your gaze, he will receive light, and the True Light is antithetical to his Leninist experience and teaching. But for some, there is just the beginning of this openness to the light. But it is forbidden, even if it is allowed, because a system built on darkness cannot survive the light.

With our guitar, our group of 30 sang praise songs in front of the Atheistic Museum (what

used to be Our Lady of Kazan church). People would walk by and some would give a half smile as if to say, “I’m for you, but I can’t show it.” We had scripture printed in Russian on a large poster and we were displaying it. If someone would walk by, I would look at the person and he would look away; then he would look back, and I’d still be looking at him. He would again look away. But he would look back again, almost as if to see if it were true—that someone would be willing to get that involved with eye contact on a personal level. We were showing them what true openness is.

We went to a registered Baptist church and the people were very open and wonderful. The Light was in their eyes. They were happy to receive a Children’s Bible. Church meetings are televised by the state—not to rebroadcast! but to control. That way they know if the preaching gets too threatening. Mostly old ladies, but the music of the choir was heavenly, and the choir had more middle-aged people in it.

### **NIGHT TRAIN TO MOSCOW**

Thursday morning, we took our Intourist bus to Novgorod—a trip of about three hours. Through the Russian countryside on an asphalt highway, we saw lots of houses and gardens. They were rundown, old and poor, like you might see in some poor rural areas of America. The land was flat and green.

Novgorod is a city of a quarter of a million people, with 40 beautiful Orthodox churches, dating back over the centuries. They were all closed, of course, except for one Russian Orthodox congregation. We attended an evening service. The people stand and do not participate. The priests perform the services in front of the congregation—much ritual. The icons, the candles, the gold—all quite foreign to a Westerner.

The people on the streets were much friendlier and more open as compared with Leningrad as a smaller town in America is more friendly than the larger cities. Some of our group had evangelized a group of boys in their late teens and early twenties and given them Bibles. They in turn converted some of their friends for a total of fourteen new believers. They were quite open to the gospel.

Later we had a meeting with about eight or ten of them and took them through scripture concerning baptism. Three were willing to take the step of baptism, and we went down to the Volhov River nearby. With a boat going past displaying the hammer and sickle, the three were baptized into Christ. Then we went back to our nearby spot and took them through scripture regarding the Lord’s Supper. We took the Lord’s Supper with the three who had been baptized.

Friday night we went to the train station for the night train to Moscow. We were all in a sleeping car—four to a compartment. I slept in the top bunk. Some windows were open in the aisle. Pastor Leo led devotions and we tried to sleep.

In the morning we pulled into the railway station of Moscow, the center of Soviet power and what was to be for me the entrance to the underground church. Our Intourist guide had been open to the gospel after her time with our group. She had accepted a New Testament and although she had not accepted Christ into her heart, she had accepted us into her heart and for three days she had the love of Christ ministered to her. She like our singing of gospel songs and her communistic, atheistic view of life had been greatly challenged. We had by the Holy Spirit broken down the walls of her heart.

It is well-known that Intourist guides have to be strong communists because they come in contact with foreigners from the free world. This contact is very dangerous to the communists because they see the truth about the free West and unless they are very strong, they can be swayed from their views. We truthfully felt that our guide had been swept off her feet by God’s love flowing through us. She had expressed a desire to be our guide one more day in Moscow—I believe she was really feeling God’s love. But such was not to be. I believe they

knew our group had gotten almost 200 Bibles through the border and probably received regular reports from our guide. They may have learned about the baptisms. Our guide was relieved almost immediately upon arriving at our hotel. We checked into our hotel—she was debriefed—and she blew us kisses goodbye after breakfast as we headed out for a city tour with our new guide.

Our new guide as hard as nails, assigned I believe to get our group back under control. He had just gotten back from spending two years in Nicaragua as a translator. Having just been on the front lines of the international communist revolution, he was tough and aggressive. We felt in him the beginning of the oppressive power that we would feel more and more in the days ahead. And before we left Moscow five days later, he, too, would have felt the love of Christ and had his views and his life deeply challenged by the love of this bubbly group of loving Christians. He would also be frustrated in his efforts to keep us under control. Moscow was to become a game of cat and mouse as we delivered Bibles and made conversions on the streets and searched for the underground church.

Sunday morning we went to the only open protestant church in Moscow—a city of eight million people. It is a Baptist church on Sunday, and the Seventh-day Adventists use it on Saturday. It is a “registered church” which means it is under state control. We were naive at first, believing this was a little pocket of religious freedom in the Soviet Union, but we were to learn later that it is really little more than a front for the KGB (secret police). The pastors drive fine black cars—the symbol of power in the Soviet Union. They live in nice houses. The church is a showcase to the West, and if we look below the surface, it is a complete sham. It is a valuable sham in the sense that it is a place where Russian Christians can come and make contact with Westerners, but only under surveillance. Still, without it, we would not have met the underground church. At the service we attended, two pastors from the West spoke—one an Australian, by the name of Voss, perhaps of the Baptist World Alliance, and another Baptist from Denmark. Their sermons were lifeless. The music of the choir was beautiful but not really alive. The choir director was dramatic in his emotiveness, but we were later to find out he is a colonel in the KGB. I spoke to him after the service. He has been to America six times. This in itself would show he is a strong communist. True Christians are not allowed to travel abroad.

In the middle of the services, a side door opened. We were seated opposite in the balcony, and I was on the front row so I had a perfect view. Billy Graham walked in, garbed with black ecclesiastical or professorial robes. He climbed to the podium with some effort and shortly addressed the congregation. He had arrived in a KGB car and was surrounded by KGB, we later learned, but it was the only way such a visit would be possible.

We were also told later that the translator did not translate his message correctly. He brought greetings from the West and looked forward to a new day under *glasnost* where there would be religious freedom. There was no response on the part of the people. The gospel part of his message was about five to ten minutes I would guess. Even though we were ten Americans in the balcony, the church did not give us a chance to bring greetings to the church or make our presence known to Billy Graham. After a short time, he went back to the KGB car and left. I would guess he was there thirty minutes. It was a token appearance and to say he preached that morning was true, but also an exaggeration. Earlier, he had visited the Danilov Monastery, where we learned that about 100 KGB in monk’s robes were present.

When President Reagan the previous week had left the Kremlin and crossed Red Square, a large group of KGB dressed like typical Russians formed a crowd to wave at the American president. As a kind of “black humor,” the Soviets had President Reagan standing on the spot in Red Square where thousands of peasants had been decapitated under Czarist rule.

### **CAT AND MOUSE IN MOSCOW**

It was a cat and mouse game. The object of Intourist is to keep control over you to keep you from reaching the people, while at the same time making you feel you are free to do so. We

were already a problem to them—we sang praise songs wherever we went. We had scripture in Russian on a poster we carried around. We talked to people. Intourist would take us places where there were few people. We would request to go to places where there were lots of people. They would comply with our request to keep up the pretense that we were free. We had one poster that said, in Russian, “We bring you our love from America and Holland. God loves you.” People would smile and gather around. They loved our singing. They would read our scripture poster (John 3:16 and John 14:6) with great interest as if they had never heard of such a thing before.

Our Intourist guide had eyes like a hawk—watching everything we did. Once when one of our group gave away a Bible to a Russian girl, he saw it and gritted his teeth. The bus driver acted like he spoke no English, but I believe he understood everything we said. One of our group asked him the number of our bus. He said, “Nyet English” and started fumbling around with sign language with his fingers. Then he said very clearly, “6-1-8-“Our guide had said his first assignment was Bangladesh, then realized he shouldn’t have let that slip out.

When we wanted to talk in our hotel room, we would turn on the radio, the TV and the shower in the bathroom. In one room we discovered a speaker behind a grate. Later another speaker had been added and they had failed to screw in completely one of the screws on the grate. There were phone calls with no one on the other end—knocks on the door in the night.

The “floor ladies” would write down the times at which we came and left. The hotel took our passports and gave us hotel passes to enter the hotel. No one without a ticket could enter the hotel—just one more way they always tried to keep Russians out of contact with us.

Whenever we would sing as a group in public, our guide looked like he wanted to disappear. He couldn’t really keep us from singing and yet being a tough communist, he did not want to be associated with it at all.

There were two pastors in our group. One night a lady just happened to walk into their room asking for a light. They felt this was an attempt to compromise them—to create an incident. Once on the street near the Lenin Museum, a drunk lurched toward me. My Russian friend from the underground church warned me to watch out. “Provocation,” he said, “to create an incident.”

I think they didn’t know what to do with us. Most tourist groups visiting the Soviet Union just go on the tours, see the sights, and stay in the hotel. Every time our group went out, we were like a YWAM group hitting the street. And when we didn’t go out as a group, we headed for the trolley or the metro, and I feel we really challenged their ability to keep track of us all—especially because of God’s blessing and protection. I believe He blinded their eyes on numerous occasions.

We got a picture of the Soviet Union that most groups would never see. One small group accidentally stumbled onto an area that was poor like the Third World and where they felt in definite physical danger—an area of drug traffic and crime. We saw disaffected youth—hippie types—obviously alienated from the Marxist-Leninist myth.

Yet there seemed to be little Western-style crime and drugs, generally. The streets seemed safe at any time of day or night. Troublemakers just “disappear,” so everyone stays pretty orderly. It is a drab existence. Nothing to do—a real scarcity of food except for the very basic necessities. Even basics, sugar, for example, were very hard to come by. Meat, too, was scarce or non-existent. An apple was two rubles—that’s almost \$4.00 at the official exchange rate.

Things didn’t work very well—from electric lights to shower hoses. They seem to just barely have it together—and I know we were seeing the best they had to offer. From an economic, development point of view, they are terribly behind the West and probably dropping further behind each year. They really need *perestroika* and *glasnost*—it’s their only hope to ever

catch up with the West.

I did appreciate the total lack of advertising—we are overwhelmed by this in the West and it was a bit of a welcome relief. You would rarely hear a horn or a siren—and unlike the Third World, where the cars are all dinged and dented up, the cars in Russia reflected their moderate style of driving. I think the people are so afraid to be individuals, they just really take it easy. In the West, we abuse our freedom.

The money situation reflected their poor economy and their great need of “hard” Western currency. It was illegal to exchange dollars on the street where could get up to five rubles per dollar. You could only make the exchange at the official rate of approximately one-half dollar per ruble. However, if you tried to spend the rubles they had just exchanged for you, often you would be met with a requirement to pay in hard currency, i.e., Western money. They wouldn’t even take their own money! One in our group, a radio talk-show host in San Diego, tried to exchange his rubles back into dollars upon departing the country. He was refused, so he had to take the rubles out of the country. Ironically, he would not be allowed to bring them back in for this is illegal.

### THE UNDERGROUND CHURCH

I felt the Lord telling me to go to the park near the Baptist church on Sunday evening in order to find a contact into the underground church. I went with two Dutch fellows and we sat on a park bench and prayed for nearly an hour. Finally, an old lady (*babushka*) approached us. She spoke no English, but love shined in her eyes. She told us we should go to the church. This we did and at the end of the evening service we stayed inside, again hoping someone from the underground church would contact us. Finally, everybody had left the church. We went outside, and the first man I talked to said he was from the underground church. I said, “How do I know you’re not KGB?” But the longer we talked, I felt in my spirit that he was a true Christian. He offered to take me to a registered Jewish synagogue—also completely infiltrated by the KGB. In fact, one of the headquarters of the KGB was in a building adjoining the synagogue, and they shared a common gate. Inside some Jewish men in yarmulkes were studying the Torah. As we talked, I discovered he was a pastor in the underground church. We went to Red Square and prayed, and the Spirit blessed us greatly. We agreed to meet again at 9:30 the next morning at a certain park and I would bring Bibles and clothing for the underground church.

The next morning, as I headed for the park, one woman in our group, a talk-show host on KBRT, who had a lot of clothes for the underground church, came along with me.

Our Russian pastor friend and brother in Christ took us by trolley, then by metro, then by train to the Moscow city limits and beyond. Since foreigners weren’t allowed to go this far, we had to stop talking—our English would give us away.

We walked to the house of his family—wife and two small children, actually two rooms in a house that they rented because their flat had been taken away by the state for his religious activities. There was a common kitchen with another man who lived in another room in the house and with the owner. There was no hot water. The outhouse was about 75 feet away in the other direction. A flat rented from the state would be only about 25 rubles per month, but he felt greatly blessed to have this place at 100 rubles per month. His own job paid only 80 rubles per month since the job he had earlier, which paid a normal salary of about 200 rubles per month, had been taken away from him because of his religious activities. For six months, before he found his current flat, he, his pregnant wife and child had to sleep on the floor in a house. Thankfully, his mother had a pension and paid the 100 rubles per month rent. His 80 rubles per month went for food.

Yet they were so strong in the Lord. He did not consider all this as a sacrifice for serving Jesus—but merely the price he had to pay. His wife was beautiful, with deep open blue eyes radiating the love of Jesus.

He said he pastored an underground evangelical-charismatic church that meets in small groups in homes and sometimes in larger groups out in the forest. They usually meet on Saturday, keeping the Bible Sabbath spiritually, not slavishly or legalistically. If they are caught, each person in the group is fined 50 rubles the first time, and 100 rubles the second and third times. For the fourth offense, a jail term of one year could be meted out. Thus meeting in large groups could be economically very risky. The state read all his incoming mail electronically without opening the envelopes. The state prevented him from receiving any parcels. He said the KGB can kill a person just by talking to them. “How?” I asked. They will strike terror into the heart and cause a heart attack. Yet he, his family, and his church refuse to conform to the demands of the state.

We had a *koinonia* that was pure and precious. After some soup, we said goodbye to his wife and headed back for Moscow where we would catch another train to go outside Moscow again and visit a family in his church.

He arrived in the evening—again we spoke no English on the way. He told us this area was absolutely forbidden to foreigners—even to diplomats and ambassadors it was forbidden. It was surrounded by military zones and the next train stop was an atomic plant.

We appeared as though we were from Armenia where the popular thing is to dress in Western style clothes. As we walked along, the pastor would speak in Russian to us, “Armenia is such a great place, isn’t it!” We would nod and say, “Da!” (Yes!). Just like the Russians, we never looked around but just kept our eyes to ourselves so as not to arouse suspicion. We had to exchange our normal cultural eye contact habit for theirs.

We went past the floor ladies in the flat, went up several flights of stairs and knocked. No one was home. This couple and their two children had a new flat they were renovating, and we went there. They opened the door, and we went in. The man said, “Is he a brother?” “Yes!” He embraced me and kissed me on the cheek. The man had worked in building construction for seven years on the dangerous high girders to earn the right to get this flat—a bit like Jacob earning the right to have Rachel! They had all prayed that the flat would be such that they could sing without fear of their neighbors. Their prayers had been answered. They were on the first floor with no neighbors on the side. Above them lived alcoholics, so they felt safe.

The man played the guitar and they all sang beautiful songs of the underground church—songs forbidden to be sung in the registered churches. Why forbidden? Because when people would hear them, they would come to Christ! They were songs of revival that struck into the heart. The time flew by. They wanted to know about the church in the West. Was there revival in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. They wanted details, specifics—they were hungry for information about the rest of their body.

They asked me to preach. The pastor translated as I preached from II Timothy 2,3. Then we prayed and headed back for the train. The last train for the night was just pulling out of the station. We had missed the last train and would have to spend the night there. Doubly forbidden, but the Lord protected us. The woman who accompanied me stayed up all night talking with the pastor. We caught the train the next morning just as the sun was coming up. The pastor went back into Moscow with us. He was so fresh, and I asked him, “Aren’t you tired from staying up all night?” He said, “We do that often when we are doing spiritual work. Sometimes we go without sleep three nights in a row when we are doing spiritual work.” !

Our plan now was to meet him again at 11:00 a.m. with all the remaining clothing and Bibles which our group still had. Our group was very thankful to be able to get it to the underground church. Since we would have to leave at 3 p.m. to catch our plane, anything still undistributed would have to go back home with us—and we certainly wanted to leave it all in the Soviet Union.

We would meet at the G.U.M. department store in Red Square—in the archway across

from the Lenin Mausoleum. Little did I know that our tour group also planned to be there at that time. This presented a grave problem. If our tour guide saw me meet the pastor there, it would be a very bad situation. Yet we needed to go on the tour to allay any suspicions of our guide who was already watching us closely because we had missed all our meals the previous day.

I skipped breakfast and gathered everyone's Bibles and clothing in several large bags and five of us took them onto the Intourist bus. Since we were to be going shopping, we knew it looked quite strange to our guide and driver that we should be entering the bus with full shopping bags!

When the group exited the bus, five of us with the bags stayed with the group for a little ways and then went down a stairs to the Metro. We hoped the guide hadn't noticed, but it was a bit obvious. We went into the metro and went a few stations, got out and discovered we weren't where we wanted to be. We walked around a block and re-entered the metro station. Perhaps the Lord had allowed this mistake to lose anyone that was following us. We got to a park where I would leave the other four and go back to Red Square and meet our pastor.

Now the problem was that if I met our guide and he saw me without the two bags I was carrying earlier, it would be obvious that something was going on. And I could not let him see me meet the pastor. Now, what I was wearing when I got off the bus was a bright yellow jacket and beige pants, and I was bald. In my waist-pack, I had a dark blue set of a plastic rain jacket and pants. I also had a cap. I put these on as a disguise as I headed to the archway for the 11:00 a.m. rendezvous. Nothing about me except my footwear looked like me! My bald head now had a cap. My yellow jacket was now dark blue, and my beige pants were now dark blue. Anyone looking for a bald fellow with a bright yellow jacket and beige pants would never see me. With the visor of the cap pulled down, I could look out and see members of our group, but they could not see me. 11:05, 11:10, 11:15, 11:20—the time went by painfully slowly. Finally the pastor arrived out of breath, having missed an earlier train. We headed off toward the park. We passed within two feet of Pastor Leo and some of our group singing "When the Saints Go Marching In," but my own friends didn't notice me because of my disguise. We got to the park where the four others were waiting with all the Bibles and clothing. We didn't approach them directly but walked around them and finally sat down next to them. After a short time, the pastor said, "This is not good; the men watching us are not good. Let's walk further along in the park." We did. But again he said, "This is no better—now there are other men watching us that I don't like. Let's walk further." We crossed over to another park, passing a big black KGB car with a man watching us. A little further and we sat down again. "This is not good," he said, "I see a man talking into a radio." It seemed like they were closing in on us. Police kept going by. Military kept going by. It was getting thick. Every thirty seconds, police or military would walk by.

We walked to a trolley stop. A KGB car pulled up along side of us. We couldn't get into a taxi because they would stop the taxi. If we took the trolley, they would radio ahead. He decided against getting on the trolley. We would walk to a church—there would be nothing wrong with that. We walked past more police and military. Black KGB cars everywhere. One backed up next to us as we were walking along—we were walking forward, but he was going backwards, staying even with us! At the church, police and KGB drove by watching us. We were really feeling the pressure of the police state. We were virtually helpless and praying constantly. I could see the struggle in heaven—good angels and evil angels fighting—pushing and shoving.

We decided to try the trolley once again but a few blocks further down. Then into the metro changing from one metro to another to another to another, attempting to lose any who were following us.

For the past hour, another problem had been relentlessly pursuing us—time. We had to

start heading back to our hotel no later than 1 p.m. to prepare for our departure. It grieved us greatly that we might have to take everything back to the hotel and take it all back home with us. If the pastor couldn't take it from us, we'd have no other choice.

Finally it was 1 p.m. and we had to start heading back. So we got a metro train headed for our hotel. What could we do? We were praying so hard—please, Lord, let this get to the underground church. At the metro station, where we would get off for our hotel, the pastor said, “I don't like this—I believe they're still watching us.” But nothing could be done. He said, “Outside, I'll get a taxi.” Once outside, he flagged down a taxi, we put all our bags in, embraced him goodbye, and off went the taxi. No one followed him and we felt in our spirits the angels in heaven smiling at this victory. God had done the impossible again—just like he had done at customs, bringing the 200 Bibles in. God is in control! No way was He going to let his church be without these Bibles and clothing. This was important to Him! He had pulled it off—somehow he had blinded the opposition.

Again, that wave of joy began welling up inside of us. Again, I felt like I was going to explode. I had seen God's hand work a miracle. I had seen the power of the Soviet state pressing down on us, but God made a way where there was no way! What a great God we serve! He is not to be outdone! There is victory in him.

When I walked into the hotel dining room where the rest of our group had just had lunch, our Intourist guide looked at me with daggers. If looks could kill, I would have been dead. He knew we had won and he had lost. He knew his attempt to control us and keep us from our mission had failed. How had we succeeded? He could not figure out these Christians. He knew he had been undone. I believe he knew what we were up to. I believe he had our Intourist bus followed so when we left the group, we could be followed. And I believe God foiled their plans. The power of the Soviet state is nothing to God and He worked a miracle before our eyes.

In spite of all the daggers from our guide, however, he was still my brother and he needed Christ. In the airport, I say, “I invite you to be my brother in eternity—not just in this life.” He didn't know how to respond. When he gave me my boarding pass, I said, “You can have eternity through Jesus Christ.” I gave him an embrace and said, “I love you.” Everyone gave him so much love. Our group leader had given him a New Testament and powerfully witnessed to him. He said he would read it and think about it. Before his five days with our group, I believe he was a devout atheist. Now we had pulled him into the center of the controversy of the ages. He could never be the same again—he had heard the gospel and he had to do something with it. Like so many people we met, he had never seen *agape* love, and he didn't know how to handle it. Even the hardest communist has a heart that God made. And God has made the heart in such a way that *agape* love can enter it and change it. Praise be to the Lord!

—David G. Marmon