

A 30-Day Devotional

Life Lessons from “Unwanted” Orphans



Stories of God's Restoration in the Lives of
At-Risk Children Hurt by War & Heartbreaking Hardships





Slavic Gospel Association

Sharing the Gospel, Equipping the Church, and Helping the Forgotten

For more than 90 years, SGA's (Slavic Gospel Association) ministry has reached across 8.5 million square miles the former Soviet Union to share the Gospel, equip the church, and help the forgotten. Because of the prayer support, kindness, and financial generosity of many Christians like you, SGA-supported missionary pastors are able to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ.

SGA's Orphans Reborn Ministry

It is estimated that 50,000 children become orphans each year—including “traditional orphans” who have no parents, and “social orphans” who have a parent or parents who are unable or unwilling to care for them.

Yet out of this tragedy, the fields are ripe for a harvest of young souls! Every year, SGA helps biblically sound churches reach out through our *Orphans Reborn* ministry. Trained and loving volunteers give orphans humanitarian aid, love, Bibles and literature, and often meet for weekly discipleship. This is how God is restoring the lives of unwanted children!

[Visit our website to learn more about *Orphans Reborn* »](#)

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| Day 1

It seems a part of our nature, our sinful nature, to exalt men and women. People cheer on athletes that seem to do what no other person could do. We cheer them and pay to see them excel. Movies of heroes and superheroes capture our imagination and praise. Even famous writers are those that get exalted and many want to pay for their books. But they are a small few people. Most of the rest of humanity lives ordinary, relatively unknown lives. And then there are others who don't even live ordinary lives. Orphan children that people have forgotten. Those with disabilities and others. These would not be the ones who others cheer on, who are idolized. But they are not forgotten of God. He sees them all, and knows them. He knows their broken hearts and their sense of despair. And He has raised up His church to reach those that the world has passed by. God sends His faithful to orphanages, to those with disabilities, to those that the world has forgotten. And with love, they hear that they matter, they are not alone, and that Christ is their Savior too. As Jesus assembled His team from the small village of Capernaum, not from Rome, not from Jerusalem, and with no one of importance, let us also never neglect to minister to all peoples. Certainly this is the heart of our Father in Heaven who alone is worthy of our praise.

Ivan has led a ministry to orphan children for many years, and is supported by *Orphans Reborn*. He reaches out to those the world has passed by. “In March we organized a meeting for disabled children. More than 50 people came to this event! We try to organize such meetings once a quarter. These families need support, fellowship, comfort, and a kind attitude without superstitions. We had a good fellowship along with a short sermon about God’s love. We discussed the traditions that they have in their families and shared about Christian family traditions. The children’s choir from the church took part in the concert. They sang Christian songs and later had a fellowship with the invited children. The disabled children had an opportunity to show their talents. They read poems, sang songs. It was important for them to feel confession, love, acceptance. At the end of the day each family got a present that will be useful at the family tea time and several questions for them to discuss with all the members of the family” Ivan and the team from the church reached these kids and their families. They discovered a wealth of capacity. They loved and valued them and pointed them to our Christ, who is a Savior for all peoples.

Ivan also spoke of one young man that God had laid on his heart, one whom was often marginalized by others. This young man was an orphan, who aged out of the orphanage, but was not forgotten. “Leonid is an “older orphan” whom we still speak with. He is Roma and he comes across many

pre-conceived ideas about him because of his ethnicity. But Leonid is a very positive thinking boy. He is an orphan, his parents have no parental rights. After the orphanage, he went to a special school to learn a profession to support himself. The government has given him an apartment in Smolensk. So now we can be in touch. He found work here. He came to Sergei's home (one of our team members), and they had a very good fellowship. We discovered his apartment is absolutely empty. He bought only a bed. We gave him blankets, pillows, and sheets. On Sunday he came to church and liked it very much. Now he wants to come regularly and to visit our youth meetings. We hope God will touch his open heart. Keep him in prayers." Already alone as an orphan, Leonid was more alone after leaving the orphanage. But God sees him, and connected him again with the *Orphans Reborn* supported team to let him know that he matters, he is loved. And most importantly, that Jesus gave His life for him, to save him from the wrath to come. Truly Jesus is a hero for all peoples, and alone is worthy of our praise.

Today's Scripture Theme:

And God heard the voice of the boy, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, 'What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is' (Genesis 21:17).

Everything was going wrong. Ishmael and his mom, Hagar, were suddenly homeless. They had been forced to leave the only home they had ever known. They lived the life of Bedouins, traveling from place to place with the great patriarch Abraham. They had been witness to some mighty working and provisions of Yahweh, the God whom Abraham and his wife Sarah, worshiped. After Ishmael and Hagar pushed the envelope of respect for Abraham's wife Sarah and her son Isaac, they were told they had to leave. Some provisions were provided and they set off into the wilderness around them. Soon they were low on water and out of food and the wilderness was unrelenting. Hagar was sure that her son would not live much longer. She left him with what was left and went far enough away so she would not have to watch her son die. Ishmael was calling out to someone, perhaps to God, perhaps he was only talking out loud, we do not know. Regardless, God heard the voice of the boy. God had compassion on Ishmael and Hagar, and assured them that He would provide for them and that Ishmael too would become a great nation. When no one else seemingly heard them or cared, God did, and He rescued them from their terrible plight.

God continues to hear the cry of those who are forgotten, or whose life situation is desperate. They are in some sort of wilderness, figuratively speaking, and they are alone. God sees and hears and moves His people to address their needs.

For Hagar and Ishmael, He sent the angel of God to convey His attention, care, provision, promise, and direction. In the current era of human history, God sends someone from His family, one of His children, His servants. Ivan, a member of God's family, one of His children and a faithful servant, is being used by God to convey to Leonid that he is not forgotten. Through Ivan and his ministry team, God is ministering to Leonid. Even though he is forgotten by most around him, he is not forgotten by God. God sees him, hears him, and responds to him through His faithful servants. It is such a blessing to know that you are praying for faithful servants like Ivan. God is using your prayers to connect Ivan and his ministry team with the Leonids—the Leonids that He sees and hears, and to whom He responds.

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Please pray today:

- Praise God for His love of all peoples from all nations, even those the world might just pass by. Pray that all will turn to Him in saving faith through His Son Jesus.
- Pray for orphans, those with disabilities, and those most of world has forgotten. Pray that God will raise up faithful churches who will minister to them with love, pointing them to the hope we have in Jesus Christ.
- Pray for SGA's *Orphans Reborn*-supported churches as they reach out to many who are marginalized in their communities, that they will be faithful, encouraged, and have access to even more such people.



Day 2

One of the frustrating realities we can experience is not knowing what tomorrow will bring. You might quickly say that we have God's Word and through faith in Jesus, we can know that we will ultimately enter eternity in heaven. True. But from day to day we truly don't know what will come next. The pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and much more were not predictable and were life-altering. If we trust God, however, we can leave the future in His hands and focus on being faithful today. We can let go of speculation, even the imagination of future events that leads us to worry, fear, and withdrawal. We can be certain that today, as we tell of His Word and show the world Christ in our actions, that God will be at work in and around us. God declared through Isaiah . . . *My word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose* (Isaiah 55:11). It is this day that truly can matter. This day is ours to honor God, to declare His goodness in Christ Jesus. And maybe, just maybe, those words and actions today will forever change another life that did not even know how they would make it through the day. Several stories have come to us from Luda, who ministers in Russia through support from SGA's *Orphans Reborn*. She had poured her life into a young man and his future

seemed bleak. He drifted away for a time. But then one day she unexpectedly saw him. “One day, I went with Bogdan to the store. In the store, I met Andrei, who worked there as a promoter. I asked him how he was doing and what he was doing. He gave us some leaflets, and I told him, ‘Thank you,’ and Andrei said, ‘You’re welcome, thank you for my happy childhood!’ Andrei is now 26 years old, and he is a graduate of a boarding school. His mother died from alcohol, and his father hanged himself. A woman took custody of him and his brother, and they lived in the house next door to me. He used to come to my house in the evenings out of desperation (for food and warmth) because his guardian mistreated them. My children gave him toys, and he always went home late at night. When I met Andrei, he asked if I still visited boarding schools and orphanages. I told him that I continued to visit them. He asked to accompany me.” Luda saw only a little boy in the midst of great hardship. Each day she sought to invest in him not knowing what his future would bring.

Luda did not hesitate to seize the day and invite Andrei to visit other orphans with her. “I took him with me on my next trip. The topic of discussion with the children at the orphanage was the Lord’s Prayer. Together with the children, we studied this prayer and learned it by heart. Andrei also took part in the discussion. His words conveyed great sadness about how he had lived on the streets and about the

mistakes he had made in life. He wished that God would protect them from evil when he spoke about temptations. Andrei also strongly encouraged the children to beware of bad actions that always have irreversible consequences, to trust God, and to always be in prayer. It was a great blessing to me, and I was amazed at how God showed us the fruit of our ministry. I realized that everything was not for nothing; everything was not in vain. The children at the orphanage became friends with Andrei since he was one of them. The director of the orphanage was present during our meeting with the children. Tomorrow, we will attend the boarding school where Andrei studied. He is also coming with us.” Luda could not have seen this day coming. But through her faithful, daily investment in Andrei, she is now able to see fruit. Nothing was in vain. Capture your day—and each day—for God’s glory, leaving everything else in His most capable hands.

Today’s Scripture Theme:

Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry (2 Timothy 4:11).

This is one of the great encouraging passages of Scripture. It is not merely a story, but a wonderful story that sets the historical backdrop for Paul’s request to Timothy. The story is found in Acts 13. Paul and his ministry team were on their first missionary journey. After their first stop, they

were going to set sail from Paphos bound for Perga. John, that is John Mark, left them and did not continue on the trip. It must be understood that every person who was on Paul's ministry team had a vital role. John Mark's departure meant that others had to cover his responsibilities. The story then moves to Acts 15 at the end of the chapter. Paul said to Barnabas that they should return and visit the brothers in every city where they had proclaimed the Word of God. Barnabas insisted on taking John Mark, Paul insisted that John Mark not come along because he had abandoned them on their very first trip. Barnabas declined to go with Paul and invested himself into John Mark. A number of years later, Paul was confined in prison, and he requested that John Mark come for he had become useful. Paul did not have a personal vendetta toward John Mark, it was rather that John Mark at that earlier time had not been useful in ministry, but he had since become so, and Paul requested his presence and ministry. Paul recognized the change and growth that God had accomplished in John Mark's life.

It is a blessing to read of Luda and her experience with Andrei. Having invested in his life as a child, Luda lost contact with him for a number of years. Andrei had made choices that took him down a path in which he was useless to God. He had become indifferent and was living a very fleshly, worldly life. However, Luda, upon reconnecting with Andrei in God's providence, happily took him along on a visit to an orphanage. She was pleasantly surprised by Andrei's

desire to speak about making good decisions for God. She observed that Andrei spoke well to the orphans, having been one himself, but he spoke encouraging the orphans to always trust God and be in prayer to Him. Andrei, who had lived according to the flesh and the world, now sought to live for God and encouraged young orphans to do the same. Andrei, by God's grace, and Luda's investment in his life, had become useful. We thank God that He is faithful to do His good work in us until the day of Jesus Christ. Thank you for praying for faithful servants such as Luda.

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Please pray today:

- Praise God for His faithfulness and His leading, for He is always working all things together for His purposes and for good.
- Pray for those orphan children who struggle so deeply with terrible life circumstances that have come upon them. Pray that God will raise up a faithful believer like Luda, maybe like you, who will speak truth with love into their hearts.
- Pray for faithful believers who serve daily to not lose heart, to trust daily in God's purposes even when at the moment it seems hopeless.



Day 3

Most all of us ask ourselves fundamental questions in life. Who am I in this world? Do I matter anyway? Sometimes we answer these questions through career advancement, and strive ever harder to prove or validate our worth. Yet careers can come and go, so our relative worth rises and falls. Sometimes we seek it through relationships, maybe health, or even wealth. We surmise that the more we make and the more others affirm us, then the more we are worth. Yet in all these cases our value and worth are found in the hands of others and things passing away. Consider an orphan child and these questions. They wrestle deeply, feeling rejected and devalued. They feel alone and worthless. But then the message of God through the people of God is proclaimed. An orphan who has no family finds a family. An orphan finds infinite value through Christ. No money can buy this joy nor can it be secured by one's own effort. This is the amazing grace of God and life's questions then find their answers in Him.

Luda has worked with orphan children for decades and is supported through the SGA-supported *Orphans Reborn* ministry. She has seen the endless stream of orphans and their searching. "Vlad is 10 years old. His older sister and brother were taken to a family living in the Murmansk

region, which is very far away from Vlad. That family didn't want to take Vlad. I don't know why they didn't want him. Vlad then fell apart. He began to fall into hysterics and say that nobody wanted him and that nobody loved him. The director at the orphanage shared her concerns with me. And I suggested to her that I would take Vlad to my house on weekends." Vlad had only known rejection and hurt. He could only conclude that he was worthless and never would be loved. He only drew his view of himself from the way others treated him and how others seemed to thrive. Luda had compassion upon Vlad and wanted him to see the love of God. "I started taking Vlad to my family on weekends, and Bogdan became friends with him. We started praying together before going to bed and before eating. Vlad and Bogdan started going to Sunday school at our church together, going shopping, and buying him food and toys. Vlad "came alive" and there was a twinkle in his eye. Even though we warned him in the principal's office that I would only take him to visit me on weekends, he started calling me "Mom." Every weekend, he says the word "Mom" so many times, as if he wants to make up for all his lost time, "Mom, Mom, Mom!" He tries to include that word in every sentence. Every time I come to pick up Vlad, there are 12 other children looking at me with a questioning look that says, "What about me?" God, if only I could, I would take them all to my place." And Luda knows the answer is so much bigger than her love alone. Only the love of God can

answer life's questions apart of our personal circumstances and difficulties. Luda adds examples of this. "Ekaterina, a graduate of the orphanage, was baptized recently. Another orphan graduate, Katya, already has two children and brings them to our Children's Christian Club because she wants her children to study the Bible too." Luda sees those who felt no worth, those who saw no value, find their answers in Christ. In Christ, we find our purpose and our value, and that for the glory of God.

Today's Scripture Theme:

*In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins
(1 John 4:10).*

Elsewhere in John's inspired writings, he marveled that we and believers in Christ Jesus are loved by Him and are called the children of God. In this verse, the Apostle John takes us back to the love of God. John emphasizes that God's love for us is not driven by our love for Him. He loves us because He has chosen to do so. That does not mean that God's love is nothing more than a choice. With God's choice to love us comes the full expression of His love. He loved us, knowing our sin, corruption, defilement, guilt, and unworthiness, and knew that the only way to be restored to Himself as our Creator, was to provide the way. The way is uniquely bound up in His Son, Jesus Christ. So God, in His love, chose to send His only, uniquely begotten son, to be the propitiation

for our sins. Our sin was and is the problem. The only way humanity's sin can be legitimately addressed is through the propitiatory sacrifice of His Son bearing the punishment for man's sin. God in His love chose to send His Son to be that propitiation. By God's choices and actions, we know of His infinite and profound love for us. We must be adopted into His family through a new birth, which He accomplishes, by His grace through faith in His Son. The believer is adopted into God's family, and we stand secure in His family knowing that He loves us because of His choices and actions.

It is a moving story to read of Luda's ministry to the orphans. The children are deprived of the fundamental and foundational love that comes from parents. It is difficult to see this in the life of orphan children. We are grateful for the ministry of those such as Luba who give themselves, in the name of Christ, to make the choice and take the actions consistent with the choice to love the orphan children. With their choice and action, a platform is provided to speak of the eternal love of God for the children, and the desire that they become a member of God's family. God's love is a choice expressed in action and thrives in the context of God's affections and purposes. It is that love that Luda speaks of when ministering to orphan children. It is God's love in and through Luda that motivates her to minister to the orphan children. They not only need to know genuine, wholesome love from other people, they especially need

to know of the unique love of God for them. They need to know that nothing can separate them from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, the Lord. Thank you for praying for those who faithfully serve God among the orphan populations in the countries SGA serves.

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Please pray today:

- Praise God for His matchless love of us, for the honor of being adopted through Christ into the family of God.
- Pray for those who are lost and hurting in this world, living apart from God. Pray that God will shine the light of the Gospel into their hearts.
- Pray for faithful believers who minister especially to orphan children, that God will grant them great love and strength in ministry to the many children the world has simply tossed aside.



Day 4

Life at times can be hard. Most of us have suffered the criticism, harsh treatment, and even a level of violence against us in our lives. Be it in school, in the workplace, or even in the home, the sinful words and actions of others can destroy our hearts. For some, it is overwhelming. Despair can lead to depression— all hope appears gone. To say that life in this world is hard is an understatement. For some, it is difficult beyond comparison. Yet even in this, Jesus knows your pain. He has experienced constant harassment, felt abandonment by others, and even endured violence against Himself. But even in this, He loved even those who persecuted and failed Him. We truly have the best of friends in Jesus, a mighty Savior and yet One who understands. He is faithful when we are unfaithful, He never demeans us, never laughs at us, but for those who are His children, He walks this road of life with us. He not only guides us, but understands our grief and pain while leading us in love, joy, and peace. Oh what a friend we have in Jesus!

Sergei is an SGA-supported missionary pastor in Belarus who ministers to broken families and orphans as well. He has seen many whom the world disregards and marginalizes for various sinful reasons. He shares about one boy he recently met. “I want to tell a little bit about a boy named An-

drei. Andrei ended up at the orphanage because he skipped classes at school and ran away from home. I asked him why he did that and Andrei briefly told me his story. ‘I’m just humiliated by everyone. My mother calls me a moron, the teachers at school call me an imbecile, my classmates also mock me. It’s insulting. That’s why I don’t want to be with them. I’m better off alone.’ The boy is impulsive, touchy, and he is now in a transitional age—he is 13 years old. Well, it is noticeable that he is behind his peers academically, and it is likely for this reason he is teased and humiliated by everyone. The sad thing is that those who were supposed to support him and stop the moral bullying were themselves involved in it.” Andrei has struggled much in his young life. Not only was he bullied at school, but was humiliated at home. He continues to flee and has not found a place of peace. He struggles mightly and is isolated.

Sergei’s heart was broken for this boy, and the hardships he has endured. And so he pointed Andrei to Jesus. “Later in our conversation, I told Andrei about God who loves him. God who does not humiliate or insult anyone, who wants to be a true friend to everyone who turns to Him and wants to have a relationship with Him. The topic of God’s faithfulness came up. I read to him a verse from the Prophet Isaiah . . . Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you (Isaiah 49:15). Andrei replied

to this, ‘I wish God was my friend, too.’ That was the end of our conversation. I don’t know how our meetings will go on and what they will lead to, but I really want Andrei to believe God and have his heart opened for Jesus Christ.” We have a friend in Jesus, who will walk with us when the world seems to taunt and harass us. We find in God a comfort and peace that the world cannot provide. When most of the world seeks self, God instead, through Jesus, loved us more than Himself (Philippians 2:5-9). The greatness of Jesus is expressed in His selfless love. He knows our trials, and yet is victorious.

Today’s Scripture Theme:

*She said, ‘No one, Lord.’ And Jesus said, ‘Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more’
(John 8:11).*

She was but a pawn in the hands of the Pharisees. She was caught in an act of adultery and the Pharisees had no real interest in following the law of Moses, nor in doing what was truly righteous. Their sole aim was to use this woman as a means to entrap Jesus. They were scheming for a “gotcha” statement from Jesus. They knew what the law said about someone committing adultery. They also knew that they could do nothing about it, other than shame and deride her. They could not inflict any form of capital punishment since they were under Roman law and governance, and adultery was not a capital crime under Roman law. The woman was

brought to Jesus in a public place, and there He was asked what should be done with this woman. She was a spectacle. Her immoral conduct was publicly put on display by the Pharisees. She was further humiliated. In reality, the Pharisees did not care about the law. Instead, they were motivated by the perceived opportunity to entrap Jesus. After Jesus responded, every Pharisee who was part of this scheme melted away. The only people who remained were the adulterous woman and Jesus. Jesus asked her, “Has no one condemned you?” The answer was obvious. Not one Pharisee condemned her. Jesus graciously spoke to her and said, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.” We are not told what became of the woman, but in that moment she heard and experienced the grace and love of Jesus Christ. He did not excuse her sin, but He did let her know that there was, and is, a path forward if a person is willing to deal with their sins in Christ.

It is a true blessing to read of Pastor Sergei’s heart for those who are often mistreated and misrepresented. His ministry to Andrei was not centered around any particular sin Andrei had committed, rather it was centered around the sin that others have, and probably still, commit against him. Andrei has obvious limitations and he has been, and is, shamed, humiliated, derided, mocked and used as a source of sinful humor. Sergei is providing hope that not all those around Andrei are going to treat him the same. Sergei has a

love for him, and his desire is to point him to Christ, to the love of God in Christ Jesus. He wants Andrei to know that God loves him with a faithful, nurturing love. Through Sergei's friendship and ministry of God's Word, Andrei desires that God would be his friend too. Others are willing to use Andrei as a pawn for their corrupt humor, but Sergei brings the message of hope to Andrei that he—and Jesus Christ—love him and desire him to know true friendship. Andrei has not yet come to repentance and faith in Christ Jesus, let us pray that he does. Also, thank you for praying for faithful servants like Pastor Sergei who see others as God sees them.

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Please pray today:

- Praise God for the friend we have in Jesus, who knows our pain and leads us in paths of peace for the sake of His glory and by His grace.
- Pray for children who are suffering, bullied, isolated, and alone. Pray that God will lead their hearts to Him, to find hope and peace in Jesus.
- Pray for SGA's *Orphans Reborn* ministry as believers seek to reach even more orphan children with the hope of the Gospel, turning hearts of despair into lives of hope through faith in Jesus Christ.



| Day 5

In SGA's monthly print newsletter—the Good News Report—we often share stories of the *Orphans Reborn* outreach across the former Soviet Union. But in addition to ministry to children living in orphanages, several missionary pastors supported through SGA are also engaged in foster care outreach to children, many of whom come from dysfunctional homes.

Artyom is a dedicated missionary pastor in Russia's Irkutsk region, which is in Siberia. Sharing and displaying the love of Christ to such children is a vitally important part of his ministry, and as he shares, these young ones are responding to the love they receive, and there are also impacts on their parents. "Glory be to Jesus! Our natural and foster family continues to develop and grow in ministry to the Lord. Three of the children with whom we are working are still in the orphanage. We are not yet allowed to become their tutors, as there is not enough room in our home. But we believe it will happen in due time. Mikhail will stay with us for about a year, and then we will take him to his birth mother. His mother is close to repenting and being baptized. Another boy named Oleg has been with us for two months, and we are happy to have him! Oleg had a hard time in the orphanage because of his kind character—the other chil-

dren often teased and hurt him. He feels happy with us now. He is obedient and tries to please my wife and me. He is a good example for us how to please our Heavenly Father. The main thing is his attraction to God, as he knows that the Lord loves him and Oleg urged us to take him to our home. My wife is also expecting, so we will add yet another child to our family.”

According to Artyom, their family life is devoted to the ministry. As he describes it, it is really a round-the-clock type of work. “My wife is busy with Sunday school. Children often visit us at our home—they come to stay overnight, or just to play. My wife and I devote much time to the children from the orphanage. I have become a member of the Trustees’ Council of the orphanage, which is a miracle from the Lord! I continue to coordinate work with prisoners, addicts, hospitals, orphanages, and with people who find themselves in a hard life situation. I also preach in the church and lead a home group in a local village. We pray for the planting of a church there. We thank you, our dear people, for your prayers and participation in the life of our family, which brings forth so much fruit!” What a remarkable example of a family living daily life as ambassadors of Christ, and making an eternal difference in so many lives! We pray that God will open many more doors for their faithful ministry, and enable them to reach even more lonely, forgotten children with the Gospel.

Today's Scripture Theme:

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ (Colossians 3:23-24).

The above Scripture passage is also reflective of what King Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes about whatever our hands find to do, we should do it with all of our might. Our time under this sun is limited, and for those of us who know Jesus as Lord and Savior, it is so important that we do not waste our time—making the most of the opportunities He grants us to be witnesses for Him. Artyom's brief account that we shared demonstrates this life on mission, from waking in the morning to day's end. They have been granted a remarkable opportunity to foster and disciple boys and girls who have come out of incredibly difficult situations, showing them that there is a God who loves them and is willing to redeem them. God opened the door for Artyom to be on an orphanage council, which affords him the opportunity to add a biblical, wise voice that will impact the lives of the children there. Then add to this the regular, ongoing ministry of a busy missionary pastor—visiting villages, evangelizing, teaching small groups, and planting the seeds in hopes that another new church will take root and grow. This is how God works and is glorified, changing hearts that were once hopeless, drawing people to Himself as Christ is

shared, and building yet another link in His endless chain of grace.

We are all in different situations, and we all do not have the same gifts. All of us are not called to be missionary pastors. Yet the Lord has planted us where we are, and has given us the specific gifts that we individually have for His glorious purpose. Our lives and ministries might not always be on the grand scale that often gets celebrated in the culture. In a given day, we might not have the opportunity to do more than offer a cold cup of water in Jesus' name, as He illustrates in Matthew 10:42. Yet even that will not go unnoticed by Him, and will have its reward. He wants us to be faithful in whatever He gives us to do in the time that we have. And we leave the results in His sovereign hand. May we ever be thankful for the opportunity of a new day, and the eager anticipation of what God will do in redeeming the lost for His glory. One day at a time.

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Please pray today:

- Pray for Pastor Artyom and his many other fellow laborers in the Gospel as they reach their communities with the Gospel. Pray especially for the orphan children who are hearing that they have a future and hope in the Lord.
- Pray that God will work in the hearts of even more municipal authorities across the former Soviet Union, moving them to grant favor to local churches and church workers in their ministries.
- Ask for God's continued blessing and encouragement for missionary pastors laboring in difficult regions like Siberia. May there be a bountiful harvest of new believers as the Gospel is proclaimed.



Day 6

There is nothing more heartbreaking than seeing a child suffering in a broken home. They so desire to be loved and to learn and grow, but experience only suffering, frustration, and anguish. Not only is this widespread in the countries of the former Soviet Union, but also in all countries. Children grow up without loving, godly parents and then think that as adults, this is normal. In this the cycle continues. For most of us, our hearts break when we see these kids. We want to tell them it's okay and show them love—a godly love that they have never seen. But in many ways, we feel the pain that God feels. We see this in Jesus, who saw people as . . . harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36). Therefore, God gave His Son Jesus so that God's children would experience and know the love of God the Father, to know a love that even exceeds the bounds of our human capacity. Praise be to Jesus! And for those earthly children who are harassed and helpless, God raises up people who intercede for them, who point them to their Father in Heaven and show them the godly love that our Father has shown us all in Jesus. Therefore, we praise God for His love, His forgiveness, and His adoption of us, and that He sends us to seek to show the same love to others. Luda is a dear sister in central Russia who ministers to orphan children along with a team from her local church.

She sees their broken hearts and desires that they see and experience the love of God. Most of them have suffered greatly. Luda shares, “Ruslan met me in the corridor when I came, greeted me, and we chatted a bit. He offered me his headphones to listen to his music. It was very hard and aggressive. We agreed to talk after the program. Indeed, Ruslan came up to us. He said that this music is evil and he will stop listening to it eventually. He is 12 but had suffered lots of stress and shock in his life. He said his father is a drug addict and his mother is an alcohol addict. He saw his parents doing harm to each other and still can’t forget it. He said that this music somehow helps him not to think about it and get sleep at night. He said he can’t forgive his mother and doesn’t want to come back home. We tried to comfort him and call him to forgiveness, and we told him about God’s good news for Ruslan. So far he isn’t ready to trust God he said but promised to think about what was said. I am glad he could share his problem with us as it was his need and that’s why he came up to us after the program. I hope we helped with attentive listening and sympathy. Sometimes it works like good treatment. I hope to meet and continue our fellowship with Ruslan.” Luda and her team see children like Ruslan who have seen and experienced so much tragedy that they just want to hide and withdraw. But when they see the loving-kindness of these local churches, they become more open to hearing the Gospel. Regretfully, every day a child is taken from a broken home,

a child who just wants to be loved. And for many, they end up even lonelier. In some cases, there is a local church, supported through the *Orphans Reborn* ministry, where loving believers are waiting for them. Luda adds, “I learnt that Ma-sha’s and Yana’s parents lost custody of their children, and now the girls will be sent to an orphanage. The good news is they will be sent to the orphanage where we plan to go on Easter. Looking forward to seeing them there. I tried to encourage them by reminding them of Esther’s story. God has plans for each of our lives; the ultimate plan is for us to become His children through trusting Jesus as our Savior and Lord.” For a brief moment, Luda ministered to their hearts, and by God’s grace this will continue. May each of us be ready to share the same love that God has shown us in Jesus to a people who are harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Today’s Scripture Theme:

For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died
(2 Corinthians 5:14).

Paul speaks eloquently of the love of God and love for God as he speaks about being ambassadors for Christ and going to population centers proclaiming the message of reconciliation with God. Paul emphasizes that he and his team do so because of what is in their hearts, not for the sake of outward appearance. The Corinthians lived in a city—and

regional culture—that very much focused on outward appearances. There were those among the Corinthians who accused Paul and his ministry team of doing ministry for the sake of outward appearances. In other words, they accused Paul and his team of being superficial and insincere in their motives for ministry. Paul responds in a variety of ways to these false representations. In this portion of his response, he stresses that the love of God controls them, or compels them to do what they do in ministry. Paul was stressing that they were not concerned with impressing people, but rather in reaching people for Jesus Christ. This governed their ministry because it governed their motives. Therefore, Paul and his team went to everyone of any social, economic, and ethnic status. Paul asserted that Christ had died for all, therefore all have died, and they must preach the message of reconciliation to all, the controlling, compelling love of Christ powerfully motivated them to do so.

It is this same controlling, compelling love that we read of in today's story. Luda is moved by God's love to focus on orphans. She does not do so to impress anyone or to look impressive in the eyes of anyone. She loves her Savior, and she loves people, especially orphans who have been abandoned by those who are supposed to love them. It is a difficult ministry but a very needed and blessed ministry. Luda invests herself into the lives of orphans, seeking to communicate clearly, by life and by word, the love of God in

Christ Jesus. To introduce the orphans to the One who loves them and is calling them into an eternal love relationship with Himself. Luda communicates that they can be forever and inseparably connected with God through faith in Jesus Christ, they can be reconciled to their Creator. Luda, and those who serve with her, are controlled and compelled by the love of God to go to the “least of these” and make known the love of God for them. Thank you for praying for faithful servants like Luda who respond to the love of God by proclaiming the love of God in Christ Jesus.

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Please pray today:

- Praise God for His love, the love we have in Jesus Christ!
- Pray for those little ones with no love and hope in the world, that God will both send a local church to love them and minister to them, and that He would open their hearts to His Gospel.
- Pray for God to raise up even more faithful churches who give of their time and love to orphan children and those in broken families.



| Day 7

In Matthew 9:36, we read that Jesus had compassion on those whom he saw. He looked on their condition and saw that they suffered greatly. He saw that they were “harassed and helpless.” And this word translated as compassion means a feeling of pity deep down in your heart that moves to action. It is not just seeing something heartbreaking and pondering it, but it is moving out to do something about it. And in this case, Jesus sought to turn many hearts to Himself that were lost and unguided in this world. The plight of children who suffer brings about this same response in most of us. We see these young lives; we hear of their suffering, and we need to take action. And that action is not just to comfort and love them, although this is essential, but to also point them to hope, the hope we have in Jesus. In Christ, the lost are found, those with no hope find lasting hope. And so, with hearts of compassion, we see faithful believers moving out to comfort such children and point them to Jesus with love and compassion.

Alexander ministers in the region of Omsk, and ministers to children in orphanages, children in impoverished homes, and also in a cancer hospital. He is supported through *Orphans Reborn* and has a huge heart of compassion for these children. “There are many new children in the oncology department in the Regional Hospital, where the

children from different parts of the Omsk region are taken, and we have the opportunity to invest in these children and communicate Bible truths through games, songs, crafts, and personal conversations. We have established a very good relationship with children and their parents. There is a special need for prayer about a boy [name withheld]. He is three years old, and now he suffers from serious complications. He is taking hormones as he prepares for a bone marrow transplant in St. Petersburg. This boy needs special support and care, and because of taking hormones, he loses the desire to live, is very sad, and feels down. Our work is to be there for these children, to help them be in a positive mood, and teach them to trust God in all things.” It breaks our hearts to read of such a young boy who is losing desire to live. He suffers so greatly. And God has raised up Alexander, who loves on this boy and points him to the hope we have in Jesus. With a heart of love and compassion, and through the support of those with the same love and compassion, Alexander ministers to this boy and many others.

Alexander shares of another young boy, not in the hospital, who suffers and has disabilities. “Our friend Anton is under our care and has already gotten used to the fact that we pick him up twice a week and bring him to the church for fellowship. We also take him to medical treatments. The child is developmentally challenged, but through our care for him, his sister and mother have become interested and are ready to listen to the Gospel. Even their neighbors, who see that

we are consistently participating in the life of this family, showed interest and ask questions. This is a single-parent family; the children are raised without a father and they live below the poverty line. Our ministry to them is in giving them opportunity to survive and get hope.” When we see such suffering and trials, it moves us to action. And together we can bring hope into a young life who had no hope, a measure of joy where there was only sadness. May God be glorified through the many faithful like Alexander and those who support him through *Orphans Reborn*, who with hearts of compassion and love minister to those in great need.

Today’s Scripture Theme:

*And behold, a leper came to Him and knelt before Him, saying, ‘Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.’
And Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, saying, ‘I will; be clean’ (Matthew 8:2-3).*

Jesus never tired of being compassionate. The needs of people were great and unending—needs of every kind imaginable. The population knew that Jesus could address their needs when no one else could. They knew that He genuinely cared, and that He would act with compassionate care. This day was no different. A man who was afflicted with leprosy, as many were at that time, humbly approached Him and believed that Jesus could heal him, if that was what He was willing to do. Jesus looked upon him with great compassion.

He not only was attuned to the man's leprosy, He was also attuned to his humble disposition and faith. The leprous man professed that Jesus could indeed heal him. He had every confidence, based upon the many others whom Jesus had healed, that Jesus could heal him. Jesus, without fanfare, simply stretched out His hand and touched him declaring, "I will; be clean." The man was immediately healed. Jesus recognized the man's need, and responded by taking action and doing what He could do to address the man's need. Not only was the man's body ministered to that day, but his mind, heart, and soul also. Jesus demonstrates the true and pure nature of compassion.

It is a blessing to read of faithful followers of Christ like Alexander who see the ongoing need of children with great needs. He sees not only their physical and emotional needs, but the needs of their souls. With compassion, he helps to address physical needs, directly or indirectly. He knows that they also have need of loving care and he invests in them. Alexander brings to each of the children whom God places in his life the message of the hope of salvation in Jesus Christ. As a follower of Christ, compassion means that the actions necessary to address the needs of those with whom God connects us must be engaged. The greatest need is the need of the soul, and only Christ can address the needs of the soul. As followers of Christ, we are privileged to min-

ister with the compassion of Christ. Thank you for praying for faithful servants, like Alexander.

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Please pray today:

- Praise God for His compassion upon us, that while we were sinners, suffering in this world with no hope, He gave His Son Jesus, that by His grace we would have hope unshakable.
- Pray that God raises up even more faithful believers with hearts of compassion to enter into orphanages, to minister to children in broken and impoverished homes, and to reach kids suffering from various medical conditions so that they will find hope in Jesus.
- Pray for those that minister to suffering children, that they will be steadfast and endure in their ministry even when they might be discouraged or brokenhearted over what they see and experience.



Day 8

The Apostle Paul declares . . . *So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand* (Romans 7:21). He recognizes the battle that rages in our hearts. Even in Christ, our desire is to honor Him alone, but sin lies close at hand. The battle is real. The sin within remains in the life of a believer. In Christ we are set free from the mastery of sin, and through the Spirit we can have victory over sin. But the reality remains that after coming to faith, the battle remains. In Christ we find our power, our victory over sin. We cannot and should not make room for sin or excuses for sin, rather we must humble ourselves before the mighty hand of God. We need to know that sin lies close at hand. And for those that have suffered under the mastery of sin—an addiction—the battle can be even harder. Praise be to Jesus that though we battle with sin, He and His promises are firm and true.

Mikhail is part of a church-based team and dedicates his life to serving orphan children in Siberia. He is supported in this ministry through *Orphans Reborn*, and wanted to share a story with us that helps us understand the joy of salvation and the battle that remains. “When I first saw Roma, I really admired him, and we made friends right away. He was 16 when he, along with his two younger brothers named Kirill and Sergei, ended up in the orphanage. Roma was into

sports, we trained together, and then we talked on various topics. He denied God, and felt offended for the death of his stepfather. However, six months later, Roma started asking specific questions, through which I realized that God was working with him. Roma began to change and opened up to me, as he could see his life through other eyes. When Roma was about 11, his mother's roommate hooked him on the hardest drug that was used in the whole country. The addiction to it is almost impossible to overcome, and as statistics say, the chance to overcome equals one in several hundred. Roma would hide his addiction from many, including me. He told me he did not want to be a drug addict and a thief; that he wanted to be like me and go to orphanages, helping children. Roma was the first orphan who told me such things. I took Roma from the orphanage and placed him in a Christian rehabilitation center, where he stayed for two months. In the center he repented and received Christ. After rehabilitation, Roma wanted to go to the adaptation center, which is located at the Ungut campsite where we run various camps, including working camps. Roma stayed there for six months. You can imagine his character—an 18-year-old boy in the company of those who are over 40, working hard, then doing the Bible study and praying. Roma wanted to glorify God.” By God’s grace, Roma found hope and life. In Christ he was made new and adopted into the family of God. He hungered for Christ.

Yet even with saving faith in Jesus Christ, the struggle with

sin and old habits remained. “On Sunday, I was to stand in the pulpit with Roma. I wanted him to share his testimony of the miracles that God had performed in his life. I wanted everyone to see Roma—a tall and handsome boy from an orphanage—who decided to follow the Lord. Instead of a pulpit, I found myself standing by his coffin and did not understand how and why it happened. Why did it happen that a 19-year-old boy who was full of strength and ideas was lying lifeless? We arranged his funeral in our church, and many children and orphanage graduates came to say goodbye to him. His mother was there, sobbing by the coffin, and his brothers looked at him for the last time, not believing their eyes. When I found out that Roma had died, I could not find a place for myself and was just walking up and down, looking for an answer. God saw my pain and gave me the answer through prayer. He said that Roma was with Him, that we had to move on, that Roma had been saved! He managed to reconcile with God, he realized his guilt and need in the Lord. Not everyone is capable to do such a step, but he did. Roma chose the right path, but it turned out to be a slippery road, and he stumbled. After he left the adaptation center, Roma settled in the church, where they provided a room for him. On Tuesday, he got a job, and on the same day, he found a drug. He brought it to his room but, unfortunately, no one was around. Roma closed the door, used the drug and died! No one was around when the life of a young boy with the biggest and kindest heart I

have ever seen, ended. It would be over, if not for the One who was next to Roma. Only He hugged Roma for the last time, only He, knowing that Roma would stumble again, nevertheless forgave him, only He, only Jesus. It seems to me that this tragedy was not accidental, just as the short life of my friend Roma and our encounter with him were not accidental. I so love Roma.” Only through Christ can we rise above the pain and hardship of this world. Only in Christ can we know that through His grace we have hope. Even when we are faithless, He is faithful. Sin is close at hand, but victory can be found daily in Jesus. Fix your eyes upon Him (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Today’s Scripture Theme:

Then Samson called to the Lord and said, ‘O Lord God, please remember me and please strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes’ (Judges 16:28).

Judges is a book that is filled with great disappointments, deliverance, and victory. The contrasts are dramatic. After the great conquest by the children of Israel under Joshua’s leadership, they plunged into 300 years of disobedience and judgment followed by repentance, and God granting deliverance from their enemies through a series of judges that He raised up. One of the judges was Samson. Samson, like all the other judges, was imperfect. If God had to have perfect people to work through He would have none, past

or present. This realization does not excuse our sin or our imperfections, but it does highlight God's grace, mercy, and wisdom. Samson was raised up by God to deliver Israel from the abusive rule of the Philistines.

Samson had a glaring area of weakness, he loved intimacy with beautiful women. His desire for sinful immoral encounters led him to the prostitute Delilah. Through repeated badgering she finally coaxed out of him the reason for his strength. He was subsequently overpowered by the Philistines and reduced to an object of mockery. At a great celebration, the Philistines had Samson brought out so that they could mock him and be entertained. It was at this celebration that Samson prayed and asked God one more time to strengthen him that he might have vengeance upon the Philistines. God granted his request and the whole edifice upon which and in which the Philistines were gathered came crashing down at the hands of Samson. The account of Samson is indeed a very sad one. His life could have been so much more, but he caved into the sinful weakness which he had. It cost him his life.

It is equally tragic to read of Roma who grew up in difficult circumstances. He was introduced to a very addictive drug as a boy, by the provision of his own mother's roommate. The drug had the reputation of causing a lifelong desire for its use. The next period of his life found him in an orphan-

age. By God's grace, Roma was befriended by Mikhail, a faithful servant to the orphans, and Roma subsequently repented and trusted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. He was growing in grace and had great potential for serving the Lord. However, the weakness he had created by the powerful addictive drug his mother's roommate gave him years earlier proved too much. Roma was an imperfect child and servant of God, as we all are. Let us give thanks to God for His grace toward us, imperfect followers of Jesus Christ.

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Please pray today:

- Praise God for the hope we have in Jesus. In Him we can find victory and hope that is not contingent on our works and failures, but secured by His power and love.
- Pray for the forgotten and suffering children in this world. Pray that God turns their hearts to Jesus in saving faith and raises up even a greater number of believers willing to reach out to them.
- Pray for faithful believers who minister to orphan children, that they will be strengthened and encouraged in this most difficult and important ministry.



Day 9

As it was in the days when Jesus walked this earth, so it is today that people still look for great signs and wonders to be convinced that God exists. And as it was then and is today, the greatest miracle that we see each and every day is when a single heart turns to the Lord Jesus in faith. Jesus taught this in Capernaum when the people asked for another sign . . . *This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent* (John 6:29). These miracles are powerful evidences of the work of God in our day. Of course, as Psalm 19:1 says . . . *the heavens declare the glory of God*. But the special act of a person truly seeing that Jesus is God and Savior is an act of God alone. As we walk through this day, filled with its highs and lows, let us rejoice that we know Christ and for each life that God turns to Him in faith.

Pastor Alexander is an SGA-supported missionary in Belarus who is overwhelmed with what God is doing in these days. He sees the mighty hand of God at work around him. “Pavel first met believers when he was a teenage orphan at a state-run boarding school. Brothers and sisters from a nearby church came to visit the kids and tell them about Jesus. And God planted a seed in his heart. After graduating, or aging out from the boarding school, Pavel still attended Christian youth camps and the seed germinated. He was in-

vited to Brest for a project with orphans, where they studied the Word, learned to pray and work. Then he went back to his hometown. The brothers gave me Pasha's phone number, telling me there was an orphan who had heard Christians witness about Jesus. We called and invited him to church. It has been a year since Pavel had attended every service, periodically going to teenage camps and being actively involved in church life (singing, delivering invitations, praying). All this time the church has prayed for Pavel. And God gave His grace, for repentance has happened." Pavel had heard the Gospel and had enjoyed the sweetness of Christian fellowship, yet had been unchanged. And then in God's timing, the seed that was originally planted bore fruit.

And then at the same exact time Pavel came to faith, Alexander saw another miracle. "Andrei grew up in a Christian family and attended Sunday school with his mother as a teacher. From the age of 13, he consciously attended services and participated in the church's reading of the Word. Little by little, we asked him to pray over food, for studies, for classmates. At first, he was shy, then slowly he began to consciously pray. Praying a prayer of repentance right after Pavel on the same day at the same service was great, and the hearts of brothers and sisters rejoiced." The seed was planted, Andrei heard the Gospel, saw God at work around him, and yet was unchanged. In God's timing, He alone gave the growth, opening the eyes of Andrei's heart to the truth that Jesus is God and Messiah. Along with Alexander, may we

also be encouraged that even in this chaotic world, with wars and rumors of wars, God is building His church and daily, supernaturally turning hearts to His Son Jesus in faith. This is the greatest evidence of God and our need to glorify Him. Be encouraged.

Today's Scripture Theme:

*For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.
To Him be glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:36).*

At the conclusion of Paul's extensive writing on the salvation that God has provided through Jesus Christ, he concludes by stating that it is from Him, through Him, and to Him. Salvation from sin is uniquely from God, through God, and to God. He, therefore, is to be glorified forever. All that can be said to God's great, gracious, and glorious redemption in Christ Jesus is—Amen! Paul made it abundantly clear in his letter to the Romans that redemption in Christ Jesus is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. It is God's provision and God's work from beginning to end. Man's responsibility is to believe, or trust, in Christ Jesus. No work, apart from God's work, can be done to attain the righteousness of God, which is by faith in Christ Jesus. God calls upon man to trust Him and His provision in Christ Jesus. Therefore, as Paul concludes, redemption is from God, through God, and unto God. God's glory is vividly and uniquely expressed in the redemption He has

provided. Each person who turns from their self-centered self in repentance toward God and trusts in Christ Jesus alone for redemption is an expression of God's glory, and His glory alone.

It is a great blessing to read of two young men under the ministry of Pastor Alexander who have turned to God through Jesus Christ in repentance and faith. God's glory was again on display as each of the young men—Pavel and Andrei—repented and trusted in Christ for salvation from their sin. To God be the glory for the great work of redemption He has accomplished in their lives. Pastor Alexander was faithful to proclaim God's Word, specifically the Gospel, to these young men. In God's timing He worked within them, using the uniquely powerful Gospel of Jesus Christ, to accomplish within them His work of salvation. This was evident in their repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. To God be the glory for these additional expressions of His glory in redemption. We rejoice together in God's great, gracious, and glorious redemption. We thank the Lord for His faithful servants like Pastor Alexander. Thank you for praying for the furtherance of the Gospel through the ministries of faithful SGA-supported churches, pastors, and missionary pastors.

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Please pray today:

- Praise God that even though we are wretched sinners, He opens the eyes of our hearts to saving faith in Jesus Christ.
- Please pray for those who have heard the Gospel, felt the warmth of Christian fellowship, and yet remain unchanged. Pray that God will, in His timing, give them the growth so that they might believe in Jesus.
- Please pray for all the SGA-supported missionary pastors to be encouraged, and with open eyes rejoice over God's work in their midst in turning wayward souls to His Son Jesus.



Day 10

Much like a storm changing the landscape around us, the world we live in is always in motion. Society is in change, our age, health, and even friends and family are changing, and it can be overwhelming at times to navigate these changes in our life. Yet there is hope. The certainty we have is that God is not changing. His Word and His promises are true and solid. This is why God and his Word are often referred to as the Solid Rock. We can count on Him—we can count on Christ. This gives us a sure and steady anchor in the storm. We are able to press on through the winds of change and trials knowing that God is with those who believe in His Son Jesus. We . . . *walk by faith, not by sight* (2 Corinthians 5:7).

The *Orphans Reborn* team in St. Petersburg, Russia, sees many children that struggle with trials in their life and constant change. One such girl is Diana, who in fact grew up in a Christian home. “A year ago, Diana visited one of our activities held on Saturdays, and there she heard again about God. After our winter camp, Diana began to think that she wanted to be with God, although she would not dare to reveal it to anyone. Diana grew up in a Christian family and changed places of residence many times, since her parents often moved from one place to another. They arrived in St.

Petersburg a year ago, and it is not known how long they will stay here. For this reason, she never had any friends. Diana was lonely and insecure, constantly being silent, and she could not understand why everyone around her was so happy. Like any other child, of course, she enjoyed having fun. But at the same time, Diana trusted no one because any new move to another place of residence would have brought her pain.” Diana is not an orphan. She grew up in a Christian home, and yet the constant change had worn her out. She felt alone and isolated.

The same medicine for a tired and weary soul is available to us all. It is the hope of the Gospel, the love of God in Christ Jesus. “At one of our events, Diana heard again about Jesus, that He would never abandon her, never leave her, never let her be alone. Her heart melted. Diana wanted this so badly. Even though she had never understood her parents’ faith and had gone to church with them just for company, this time Diana was able to meet Jesus in person.

After her prayer of faith and repentance, her heart was filled with light and she felt truly free. Her laughter is now sonorous, and Diana is open to new acquaintances and always ready to be the first to show friendliness. They have begun reading the Bible with her, and she is growing spiritually.” Those who build their lives on the solid rock of Jesus Christ find a constant hope and presence that will never leave them, a sense of belonging and family. The company

of brothers and sisters in Christ surrounds them. And this hope and joy is eternal, and nothing, absolutely nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus! (Romans 8:38-39)

Today's Scripture Theme:

And He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God. (Luke 13:13).

The woman was at the synagogue on the Sabbath and Jesus of Nazareth was teaching. As He taught the Scriptures, He noticed a woman bent over and unable to straighten herself. This was her normal existence, at least it had been for the past 18 years. She greatly desired this to change, but there was no realistic hope that it could or would. However, Jesus noticed her and called out to her. He simply declared, "Woman, you are freed from your disability." Lack of change had been her experience, and all of a sudden through no bidding of her own, she was freed from her disability. Jesus laid His hands on her, she was immediately cured, and she was able to straighten herself. It was no mistake that Jesus had done this, He had laid His hands on her, and she was made straight. She recognized that Jesus had healed her, and she immediately gave glory to God. Now the woman had a new normal. Now she her life was about giving glory to God for what He had done in her body and her life. Jesus is the difference-maker in one's life.

It is such a joy to read of Diana's change after she repented and placed her trust in Christ. He became, and continues to be, the difference-maker in her life. Her normal was that of constant change due to her parents' frequent moves. She was untrusting and insecure due to the almost seemingly constant change. After hearing about Christ in a different way through the SGA-sponsored *Orphans Reborn* ministry in St. Petersburg, she had a great desire to know Christ and to be with Him. In Him is security. He is a constant friend who never leaves or forsakes His children. Her heart was stirred by the Holy Spirit, and Diana repented—putting her trust in Christ. She extended trust to and in Christ when she was very cautious of trusting anyone. Now she has a new normal, it is an eternal relationship with Jesus Christ. She is joyful, happy, and secure. She is growing in her grasp of the great truths of her salvation. She is giving glory to God, just as the woman who had a terrible disability for 18 years. We also thank God for the faithful servants who comprise the *Orphans Reborn* teams and minister to these children.

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Please pray today:

- Praise God who is unchanging and faithful, who will never leave nor forsake His children.
- Pray for those who endure the torrents of change in our world with no anchor and no hope. Pray that our Lord God will open their hearts to Christ.
- Pray for those that minister to children who struggle in this changing world. Pray that God gives them compassion and wisdom as they point to the hope we have in Jesus.



Day 11

Family is a beautiful thing. But it means different things to different people, and often based on their experience. When a person is raised in a stable, loving, and godly home, their family is their comfort, protection, and at times, source of wisdom. An orphan from a broken home or family might bring with them images and feelings of heartache and disappointment. For that orphan, family might just be the other orphans. But there is one family that unites both those from stable homes and those that have suffered at the hands of parents. It is the family of God. By God's grace through Jesus Christ, people of all ages, cultures, and backgrounds can find a common hope, a common support system that rises above the frailty of human sinfulness and failure. The family of God welcomes orphan and widow alike, and pronounces all as brothers and sisters. For those that turn to Jesus Christ in saving faith, they find family in many places of the world, family who will love them and care for them. A local church on the other side of the world, loving and praying for those they have never met. All through Christ who destroys the walls that divide and creates a single, eternal family in which to behold and rejoice. In Christ, all is made new. Little Igor has seen his family fly apart. Pastor Vladimir tells of the little boy in Russian-occupied eastern Ukraine who

now lives with his grandparents. And yet in the hardship that created, Igor has now learned of a much bigger family. Vladimir shares, “After Igor’s mother abandoned him to his father’s care, he was then abandoned by his father. The boy’s grandparents took up raising him. It was not an easy decision for them, as Lyudmila, the grandmother, had already endured several strokes, and the grandfather, due to his advanced age, had some chronic conditions. For this reason, a major part of their minimal pensions has to be spent on medicines. There is not much left for life and essential foods. The family accepts the food assistance that we bring them with great joy, and this in turn encourages our friendly conversations.” Igor had experienced heartache—a deep ache through being cast off by his parents. His grandparents stepped up to care of him, but struggled. Yet by this struggle, and through a faithful local church, Igor heard about a much bigger family that he had never heard of before. Vladimir shared of how they ministered to Igor and his grandparents along with seeing to their needs. “This time we managed to talk about salvation, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and His blood, which He shed on the cross for our sins. In fact, even though we talked about this not long ago, the couple could not remember much from that time. We gladly repeated it again and made it clearer for them than what was said before. We see a good progress with each visit to this family. Igor is a great joy and encouragement for us. He likes attending children’s activities in the church. On

Sunday, and in the middle of the week, he comes to us to his delight. We continue to work with this family and hope that salvation will come to this household. Thank you very much for your beneficial work that you do. It is very valuable for us as believers, and for our townsfolk.” Igor has discovered that beauty and love of the family of God. He sees people he had never known before, united in their care of each other and their worship of Christ. And we pray through faith in Christ, Igor and his grandparents will know our eternal family through faith in Christ Jesus.

Today’s Scripture Theme:

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God (Ephesians 2:19).

The redemption that is uniquely provided through Christ Jesus is amazing and extensive. The salvation of Jesus Christ transforms every reality about us. Paul is appealing to this great salvation as he teaches the Ephesian believers that they are part of a new humanity that Christ is building. He states that the Ephesians should remember that at one time, they were known as Gentiles in the flesh. Paul goes on to stress that is no longer the reality in God’s eyes and purposes. They are now in Christ, which means they are near to God and that Christ is their peace. He has done all that through His death, burial, and resurrection. Now, the Ephesians,

along with every other believer from every ethnicity, male or female, without age restriction, is being created in Christ as one new man, one new humanity. This is the truth that leads Paul to state that we are fellow citizens with all saints and all members of God's household. We still have the identifiers of the flesh, but one day the fleshly identifiers will fall away. For, we are new creatures in Christ Jesus, with a new citizenship and a new family as members of God's household.

Little Igor and his grandparents are learning this reality through the truths which are being taught to them. They are increasingly open to the great truths of God's love for them. Pastor Vladimir speaks freely and clearly of the salvation provided in Christ Jesus, His death on their behalf, the shedding of His blood for their sins, and that salvation is found in Him. Igor and his grandparents see the love of God in Vladimir and his church family. They are learning there exists a greater family than the family we know according to the flesh. It is a very real family and is part of the incredible new man, new humanity, the new body of people that Christ is forming with everyone who repents and believes. Little guys like Igor, and his ailing grandparents, hear these truths in light of their battered and fractured family dynamics. It is a message of hope, love, peace, and security to learn that there is a family that is eternal. We thank God

for faithful servants like Vladimir who faithfully proclaim the great truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Thank you for praying for such faithful servants.

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Please pray today:

- Praise God that He takes wayward and sinful people, and by His grace makes them family through faith in His Son Jesus Christ, who gave His life to redeem us from our sin and adopt us into His family.
- Pray for those families, especially children who suffer in broken homes. Pray that God turns their hearts to Him through faith in Jesus Christ.
- Pray that faithful believers will not neglect the gift of the family of God, nor miss the beauty of God's design in taking sinful people, and making them sons and daughters of our living God through faith in His Son. To God be the glory!



Day 12

Ever tried to be kind to a person who is not very nice? This can be really hard. Some people can be closed off, abrasive, unloving, and combative. Just being nice to someone like that might take all of your strength. Most avoid such people. Yet it might be that such people are the way they are as they have suffered greatly in the past, and have long been bypassed by others. Your love might be just what is needed, but it will need to be a long-suffering love. This is the same love that God has with us. Rather than casting us off, He showers us in His grace and long-suffering love even when we are unlovable. And He does that in Christ Jesus, and such a love cost Him His only Son. Yet as God loves us, He in turn calls us to the same, to love Him with our hearts, souls, and minds, and to love our neighbor, to love others as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-39). And that one whom we are called to love might just be the most unlovable person you have ever met. But God's command is not conditional. Rather, our love of others is an extension and expression of His love for us.

Sasha and Diana are faithful servants who labor in the SGA-supported *Orphans Reborn* ministry as they tirelessly reach out to orphan children who can be quite unlovable. Diana shares, “Julia is now 14 years old, but she has lived

in the orphanage since she was 3. Her parents are alcoholics and deprived of parental rights. All this time she was in another city and experienced various emotional and psychological difficulties. Julia has made three suicide attempts over the past few years. Julia's character is strong-willed. She often has conflicts with teachers and peers. She got into a fight and ended up in a bad environment. For caregivers, she was an "uncomfortable child." This was the reason that Julia was transferred to another orphanage. Julia herself says, "I was influenced by other girls from the orphanage. Each time they set different tasks for me; it was difficult for me to cope with them. I saw no way out. I was in despair." Julia moved to our city and visited our Christian camp for the first time. On the first day, she was quite withdrawn and irritable. She was not attracted to communication or games. She looked like a prickly hedgehog. Day after day, our entire team tried to give her love and care, especially tried to celebrate her achievements, and praise her for her success." Julia was a "prickly hedgehog" to those around her. She was just not easy. But that did not slow the leaders and team from loving on her and pointing her to the One who loves us even more patiently than we know.

And through their long-suffering love, a softening of her heart began to show. "Later, on her continual angry face, the outlines of surprise, and sometimes interest in everything that was happening, began to appear. She began attending Bible classes. Later she started asking questions. Day by day,

she began to blossom. We just can't find another word for her change. It really looked like a withered flower, which began to be watered with love and warmed. Julia began to smile and became open to hugs. It is valuable. Orphans are very fond of hugging, but Julia is different. Julia said, "In the beginning, everything seemed very strange to me. I haven't seen anything like it before. Everyone was very friendly and hospitable. I have never received such attention and care. I saw their sincere intentions and understood that I had nothing to give. Later I got to know Sasha and Diana better. We talked a lot. They told me about themselves and their family." We started talking with Julia a lot. During any free time, she would immediately run up to ask about something. In the evenings, we walked together, and she shared a lot of experiences and began to open up. Lots of questions about God and Jesus Christ. Day after day, God did his work with her heart. On the last day of the camp, she asked us to help her pray to God. She opened her heart to Christ." Just imagine if Diana, Sasha, and others had been put off by Julia and not showered her with love. She likely would have gone from bad to worse, as she has only known pain and suffering. Rejection and disregard would have only deepened her anger and despair. Now immersed in the love from others and the love of Christ, the prickly demeanor is slowly giving way to sweetness and joy. A smile is found where a frown existed before. May we each love others with the same patience in which God loves us.

Today's Scripture Theme:

It is He who remembered us in our low estate, for His steadfast love endures forever. (Psalm 136:23)

The Psalmist was moved by the love of God when writing this song of praise. The refrain to the song is always, “for His steadfast love endures forever.” The Psalmist declares that thanks is to be given to Yahweh, the Lord, for His steadfast love and that it endures forever. He speaks about the unique nature of God and His great wonders, Who has unique understanding, Who has delivered Israel from Egypt’s oppressive hand, and Who struck down powerful kings so that Israel could settle the land promised to them by God. The Psalmist then comes to the absolute marvel, in his eyes, that God remembered the children of Israel in their low estate. God’s love is unique. His love is steadfast, it remains fixed according to His purpose and choice. Nothing and no one can deter God from demonstrating His love. Though Israel was in a low estate due to their own sin and stubbornness, compounded by the sinful purposes of the nations around them, God’s love for them never ceased, never diminished. This is why the Psalmist includes this lyric in his psalm of praise.

God’s love for humanity continues unabated. He has demonstrated His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Only God’s unique love could

motivate Him for such a sacrifice. To give His uniquely begotten Son for humanity's sin was, and is, an incomparable sacrifice. The Father did this, however, while we were yet sinners and punished His own Son for our sins. His steadfast love endures forever. It is this same love that was directed toward Julia, a teenage orphan who attended one of the summer camps. Two faithful servants of Jesus Christ, Sasha and Diana, were determined to show Julia the love of Christ. It was difficult because Julia was prickly toward everyone. She trusted no one, and especially did not trust their motives. By God's grace they patiently and persistently loved Julia in the name of Christ. By the end of the week Julia opened her heart to Christ. Indeed the steadfast love of God endures forever. We thank God for faithful servants like Sasha and Diana who, in the love of Christ, lovingly minister to orphans who desperately need to know the unique love of God. Thank you for praying for such faithful workers. This too is an expression of the steadfast love of God that endures forever.

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Please pray today:

- Praise God for His long-suffering patience in loving us even when we are at our worst and the most unlovable.
- Pray for those who are angry and walled off, who have suffered much in their lives and seem to be lacking in anything lovable at all. Pray the love of God and the love of others will be showered upon them, and that they will experience the love of Christ through faith in Him.
- Pray for faithful believers to not withhold the same love that God has for them from those that seem unlovable, showing them instead the love of God and lovingly pointing them to our Savior Jesus Christ.



Day 13

Have you ever marveled at a newborn baby? It is startling to think that from a few cells come the little life in your hands. Of course, there are actions we can take to care for the unborn child, or regretfully neglect it, but the growth of the baby is out of our hands—much like a vegetable garden or even a rose bush. We can care for them or cause harm to them, but the growth is outside of our hands. It is in God’s hands. This is true with the Gospel. We can tell many of the Gospel, even live it out before them, yet it is God alone who gives the growth. In the same way, and even more stunning at times, it is God who gives the growth even when all others around a person discourage them in following Christ. In all these things, we see the truth of the words of the Apostle Paul . . . I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth (1 Corinthians 3:6-7). This is why we can share our faith in Jesus with confidence, for God is at work per His plan, building His church and turning hearts to His Son Jesus. This is why we should not lose heart, but press on in declaring the Gospel to all.

Vyacheslav is a faithful SGA-supported missionary pastor in Russia who is zealous to share the Gospel with everyone he

meets. One place he loves to visit is an orphanage in a nearby village, but COVID had blocked him from visiting them for a long time. “When Gennady and I shared the Gospel in a nearby village, we visited an orphanage for children with behavioral problems, to ask about their success in learning and their prayer needs. We used to visit them often in 2020 and even earlier. But then COVID began, and right after that, I had problems with my leg—I had part of my leg amputated. Our meetings with the children and caretakers had stopped. We thought we lost contact with them.” Vyacheslav and Gennady visited these children who were unruly and difficult. They shared the love of God and the Gospel, but had not seen them in several years. They feared that without their visits, there had been no progress at all.

Finally the doors were opened once again to visit these children. “When we came to meet with the leaders of the orphanage, they became very happy. They said they had missed us for such a long time. They said, that when we came and planted the seeds of faith in the Lord Jesus in the hearts of the pupils and caretakers, the children changed greatly. They read the Gospel, their relationships were based on friendship and mutual understanding. They were completely new children. It was easier for caretakers to find common ground with the children. I was glad to hear such words. The leadership of the orphanage took the initiative and invited us to hold an Easter meeting for the pupils. New teachers began to work here. New children came.

Those who were little children have grown up noticeably.” By God’s grace, and completely apart from the ministry of Vycheslav and Gennady, the children and teachers grew, and it seemed some had come to faith. They had scattered the seed, provided initial watering, but in their absence, it was God who gave the growth. So let us not lose heart in spreading the seed of the Gospel and living for Christ before others. In due time per God’s design, growth will follow. Just be faithful – share Christ.

Today’s Scripture Theme:

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace (1 Peter 4:10).

The communication of the Gospel is not limited to pastor/teachers and evangelists. The Gospel is communicated in a variety of ways by a wide variety of believers. The Spirit of God equips and gifts believers to accomplish the ministry of the Body of Christ. We should, therefore, not be surprised when the Spirit of God uses believers in situations that are unusual. In speaking of spiritual gifts, the Apostle Peter stresses that each believer has received a gift, or gifts, and we should use the gifts to serve one another. We should do so because as children of God, we are stewards of His varied grace. He has entrusted ministry to us and calls us to serve Him by serving one another. This also includes serving those who do not know Christ, and as stewards of

God's grace, being engaged with proclaiming the Gospel. It is God the Holy Spirit who takes the message of the Gospel of grace, and causes it to resonate in the souls of those who do not know Christ. Our responsibility, as good stewards of God's grace, is to serve. It is an amazing reality that God the Father has made each of us stewards of God's grace.

It is a joy to read of Pastor Vycheslav and Gennady and their faithful ministry for Christ. Before the pandemic, Vycheslav and Gennady proclaimed the Gospel of God's grace in a nearby village and the orphanage located there. They were being good stewards of the Gospel of grace by proclaiming it to those in the village and the orphanage. Time passed, and they wondered what the attitude and disposition of the orphans and staff had become. To their delight, they discovered that the Spirit of God had been using the Gospel of grace that they had proclaimed to begin moving staff and orphans toward Christ. There was a difference made in the lives of the staff and the orphans. They desired more of Vycheslav and Gennady's ministry. Vycheslav and Gennady used the gifts given them by the Spirit as good stewards of the varied grace of God. Thank you for praying for faithful servants like Vycheslav and Gennady. Thank you for being faithful stewards of the varied grace of God extended to you.

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Please pray today:

- Praise God for His constant work of growing His children in the knowledge of His Son Jesus, building His church by His Spirit and through His grace.
- Pray especially for orphan children who have heard the Gospel, that their hearts will be turned to Christ and transformed daily by His grace.
- Pray for faithful believers to not lose heart, and faithfully declare the Gospel to all who will hear, knowing and trusting that it is God who will give the growth.



Day 14

There might be times in which you wonder about the extent of the grace of God. We might think about some of the cruelest people in history. Some have killed thousands upon thousands. Could even these men be forgiven of their sins? Jesus answers yes. It almost seems unthinkable. And then we turn to our own hearts. Some struggle with unforgiveness for something that another person has done to them, while others are filled with anger and rage. We might reason away that we have not hurt another person physically, and somehow that makes how we feel okay or justified. But then Jesus challenged the Pharisee's view of anger by teaching that anger stored in the heart is akin to killing a person in your heart (Matthew 5:21-22) and liable to judgment. God sees our hearts! Oh how amazing the grace of God that extends to both thoughts and actions, to forgive what in human thinking is unforgiveable! And that grace of course leads to peace. Only in this grace are we forgiven, and able to forgive to the same depth that we are forgiven, to forgive the seemingly unforgiveable.

Many of the orphan children that churches across the former Soviet Union meet have endured incredible pain and seemingly unforgivable acts. One church-based team who has been supported by *Orphans Reborn* for more than 20

years has seen children whose hearts are full of pain and rage. “When we come to the orphanages, we see smiling faces of the children, we see eyes filled with the joy of seeing us, we hear the children laughing, singing. We send you the pictures of these cute children and teenagers, but it is so important to realize that there is so much deep sorrow, pain, and not just childish worries inside. Once we had a Bible lesson about God’s forgiveness. And after the lesson one of the teenage girls came to Sergei (a member of our team) and asked a question, ‘Does God forgive any sin?’ ‘Yes. He does,’ answered Sergei. (He realized that it was not a question of yes or no, and he should have a talk with her). He then asked, ‘What sin are you talking about?’ And she responded, ‘If I kill my dad and ask God for forgiveness, will He ever forgive me?’”

“It is not a question you expect to hear from a girl who had been singing children’s songs 10 minutes earlier. Sergei asked her to sit and discuss the situation with a bit more detail. And it was not an easy conversation. This girl said that her dad killed her mom. He beat her until she died. And the girl was a witness. She was screaming, she was crying, she was trying to save her mom, to protect her, but it was impossible. Nothing helped. Both of her parents were alcoholics. She grew up in a problematic family, but she loved her mother very much. And that day, she watched her dying at the hands of her own father. Her dad was sent to

prison, the girl was sent to the orphanage. And as she said, she was waiting for him to be released from prison, because there was nothing else in the world that she wanted to do more than to kill him.” No child should ever endure such pain, ever. The hurt and anger she is carrying in her heart is so great that she doubts that God could even forgive her for the thoughts she has, and even the act she desires to do. She sang about the grace of God, maybe even about forgiveness, but her anger and hurt ran so deep, and the concept of forgiveness seems not even a consideration.

Sergei, of course, did not stop there, but continued to minister to this teen girl. “Sergei had a serious talk with her. Not only that moment, but every week they spent a couple minutes talking. And in several months, she came to him before the lesson and whispered, ‘I managed. I have forgiven him. I do not hate my dad any more. I despise him. I do not want to see him ever in my life. But I am stronger than him. I can forgive.’ Such phrases give us the feeling that our visits are not worthless. Sergei is not a man who cries, but that day you could see tears in his eyes.” Forgiveness. It can set you free to new levels of peace and love. A lack of it can consume your soul. The amazing grace of God through Christ Jesus knows no bounds, to not only forgive, but to empower those who believe in Jesus to forgive the unforgiveable.

Today's Scripture Theme:

And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide His garments.

(Luke 23:34)

Jesus uttered these words as he hung on the cross, His life slowly ebbing from His body. He had been placed there under the authority of the Roman authorities in Jerusalem, at the insistence of the Jewish leaders who hated Him and desired to permanently silence Jesus Christ of Nazareth. They framed Jesus with their false accusations before the legal authorities of Jerusalem and Judea. This alone was cause for great outrage, that the legal system would be so abused to put an innocent man to death. Added to the abuse of the legal system was the hatred, the deep desire to put Jesus to death, and the satisfaction that they had finally overcome the One they considered to be a blasphemous Jew from Nazareth. Once dead life could return to the way it was before, at least that is what they thought. For Jesus to utter such words with such genuine expression was absolutely amazing. Before Jesus gave up His life, watching the evil spectacle in front of Him, He uttered these words. This kind of forgiveness can only come from God. Jesus, being God, demonstrated the reality of forgiveness. Much later, the Apostle Paul said to the Ephesian believers that we are to forgive one another as God in Christ Jesus has forgiven us. Jesus is our pattern and power of forgiveness.

It is powerful to read of the teenage girl to whom Sergei ministered. The young lady had experienced much evil in her own family. The very reason she was in the orphanage was due to the murder of her mother by her father. To witness a murder is traumatic. To witness the murder of a mother by one's own father is even more traumatic. The trauma brought to the mind, heart, and soul of this teenager was deeply embedded and a source of murderous hatred. She dreamed of the day of murdering her father. Due to the faithful and wise ministry of Sergei using God's powerful Word as it pertains to forgiveness, the young teenage girl finally arrived at the place where she could say she forgave her father. The forgiveness of God for sinners, like all of humanity, is the foundation of our forgiveness of one another. We thank God for faithful, sensitive servants like Sergei who are used to communicate the forgiveness of God in Christ Jesus. Thank you for praying for those faithfully laboring among the children and teens among whom they labor.

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Please pray today:

- Praise God for His amazing grace, that He can even forgive the darkest and deepest of sins.
- Pray for the many orphan children that have seen one parent kill another parent, or suffered untold levels of abuse. Pray that God grants them peace through faith in Christ Jesus, that they too can forgive as they have been forgiven.
- Pray for those that minister to orphan children, that their hearts will be encouraged and strengthened as they love and minister to children that have endured so much.



Day 15

The Apostle Paul reflects on his personal life and the struggles he sees in the world around him, and then compares this to the ever growing and renewing work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer. He writes . . . So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16). Paul recognizes that through aging, disease, and even persecution, our flesh tends to waste away. But our spirit is renewed day by day in Christ, so we are not discouraged. Rather than a focus on the externals that are temporary and passing, we focus on the internal life—our walk with Christ that is eternal. And in this we don't lose heart. But what about those who are born with disabilities and have suffered from the beginning? They have only known their bodies failing them, possibly people failing them. Discouragement might seem an understatement in light of all that they have experienced. Yet nothing in this world, nothing we have experienced, no matter how hard will limit the work of God in our lives. God through the Lord Jesus and the work of the Spirit can make all things new! So we do not lose heart.

Pastor Pavel is a faithful SGA-supported missionary pastor in Belarus who ministers to people with disabilities. He was recently blessed to baptize two people with disabilities who

have only known hardship in the past, as both people and their bodies failed them. He shared of one of them, “Sveta is a disabled orphan. Her parents abandoned her after she was born. She was born disabled. Her legs can’t bend, and her left arm is missing almost to the elbow. Sveta is now 53 years old. I’ve known her for about three years. At first, she lived in an orphanage 43 miles from the city until she was 45. Then she was transferred to a nursing home a short distance from Grodno. Then she got a social apartment, where our brother Maxim (also a disabled orphan) lives. And I took Max to the group and Sunday services. So, Sveta started coming with us to group and church, as well as to Christian camps for youth and adults with disabilities.” Sveta had only known rejection and hardship. Not only was she born with disabilities, but her own parents cast her away when they learned of her condition. She has only known isolation and loneliness. Now older in age, God has led her to other believers who shine the love of God into her tired life.

God never cast Sveta off, and neither did the people of God. “At camp she met our church doctor and sister in the Lord, Julia. They became friends and Julia became her spiritual mentor. Sveta began to read and study the Bible. God worked in her heart and she repented. Sveta began to ask me about baptism, and she began to attend a baptism preparation group. Every Sunday she strives to go to church, and I

also take her when we go to visit churches and area groups. Sveta compares all Christians with Jesus Christ, whether they act like Christ, whether in their lives they are like Jesus Christ. Sveta's mother repented in her old age at the Baptist church in the Dyatlovo district and was baptized. Sveta began to visit and see her mother. Praise God!" Praise be to Jesus that He makes all things new. Regardless of age, physical condition, and all the things of this world, God can take a tired soul and make it new. He can fill us with joy and peace that surpasses anything we have known before. And with Paul, we can see that as our body even fails, our soul can be daily renewed by God's grace and through His Spirit.

Today's Scripture Theme:

When one of those who reclined at table with him heard these things, he said to him, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God." (Luke 14:15)

Jesus made this statement and then told a parable to illustrate the blessing it will be for everyone who will eat bread with Him in the Kingdom. He spoke of a great banquet that a master planned. He sent invitations and found that there were those who made excuses not to come. One said he had bought a field and wanted to go see it. Another said he had bought a yoke of oxen and wanted to examine them. Yet another said he had married a wife and could not come. The servant of the master reported the responses to the master.

The master said for the servant to go quickly and bring in the poor, crippled, and lame. The servant had done so and still there were empty seats for the banquet. The master then told the servant to go out into highways and hedges and compel people to come in that his house may be filled. The blessing of the Kingdom is upon those who respond favorably to the invitation to come to the Master's house and recline with Him. They are the ones who will break bread with Christ in the Kingdom of God.

It is a joy to read of Pastor Pavel and his heart for the disabled. This is a portion of the population that is often overlooked, forgotten, abandoned, and mistreated. Pavel has a passion for those with disabilities. He sees them as God sees them and invests his time and effort on behalf of the Master to serve them. His desire is to introduce them to the Gospel and lead them to faith in Christ. The Lord worked through his effort, and now Sveta is now part of the Body of Christ. She now knows Christ and belongs to Him. Sveta has known rejection and abandonment due to her disabilities. Sveta was in her 50s when Pavel, by God's leading, was introduced into her life. Pavel engaged her with his local church, and she began attending Bible studies. Through the ministry of God's Word, Sveta came to repentance and faith in Christ Jesus. She was in the highways and hedges of life, and God's servant found her. Now she will eat bread with Christ in the Kingdom of God. We are grateful for faith-

ful servants like Pavel who have a passion for those in the highways and hedges of life. Pavel brings the Gospel, which brings real hope to the lives of those who live with disabilities. Thank you for praying for faithful servants like him.

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Please pray today:

- Praise God that in Christ and through His Spirit He makes all things new.
- Pray for those who are suffering apart from God, and their bodies are clearly failing them. Pray that God will open the eyes of their hearts to Him, finding new strength and encouragement through faith in Jesus Christ.
- Pray for those who minister to people with disabilities, that they will be patient, loving, and faithful, never failing to reach out to those the world has cast away.



Day 16

Have you ever prayed fervently for people to come to faith, done everything you could imagine doing, and yet they continue to destroy their lives? It is truly hard. Out of the love you have for Christ, gratefulness for salvation through Him, and the promises we have by God's grace, you want all people to share in this joy. The Apostle Peter writes, *The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance* (2 Peter 3:9). Yet there is also the reality that many will reject this hope. With the understanding that God alone knows His children—those who will be given ears to hear and eyes to see—we press on that all might hear and know that Jesus is Lord and Savior. We tell all of Jesus with long-suffering patience and love. We show them the love of God. And we can do so in peace knowing that our labor is never in vain when all is done for the glory of God alone. Therefore, when the ground is hard and responses are few, we do not lose heart. We press on so that God will be glorified in the telling and preaching of His Word and the Gospel.

Pastor Vitaly knows of this commitment to tell all people of our Savior and to exercise amazing, long-suffering patience among the lost and hurting of this world. He recently wrote

to us about one woman he met at their SGA supported Crisis Center for women in Siberia. “I would like to tell you about the work of God in the life of a young woman named Katya, a single mother of two little kids. It is impressive! Katya grew up in an orphanage, where she ended up soon after her birth when her parents abandoned her. Upon “aging out” of the orphanage at the age of 18, she was dating a man. After he heard about her pregnancy with his child, he left Katya all alone. Katya fell into depression, wanted to commit suicide several times, and was about to abandon her child. The staff of our Crisis Center contacted her and offered help, which she immediately accepted. After spending some time in the Center, and after having given birth to her first son, Katya started dating on the Internet with a man who was 30 years older, who then invited her to live together. He told her he loved her, promising mountains and marvels. Katya left the Center and moved in with the man. Things got even worse this time than in her previous relationship. Katya gave birth to her second son, and her life became a nightmare. The man was terribly jealous of Katya, beating her and the children. He kicked them out on the street, threatened to murder her and the kids, and began abusing her morally. Eventually, Katya decided to go back to the Center, where she was accepted and provided aid again.” Although she heard the Gospel and experienced the love of God, sinful desires led Katya back to her own ways. Although she felt and saw the love of God, her sin kept her

shackled to her old patterns of living until again all hope was lost. And at the very bottom, she again reached out. There was no critical spirit, but instead a readiness of the local believers at this Crisis Center for expecting women to point Katya to Christ. “We actually got more acquainted with her in the Center, and God immediately placed in our hearts a greater burden to serve and help her. She accepted our help and started going to the church with us. The Lord Himself was blessing her. A few months later, quite unexpectedly Katya received a free apartment given to her as she was an orphan. We were there for her, helping with the move and with things that she needed. Katya’s new apartment was five minutes away from the local church, and we introduced her to the believers from that community. She and her children began to attend meetings and a small group. Of course, her soul is still terribly wounded and she has a hard time trusting people, but we see how the Lord is gradually softening her heart. She communicates mainly with Lena, a woman who herself was at the Center. Lena came to faith a year ago and is preparing to be baptized. I am glad that she is developing new relationships with the believers in the local church, and Katya seems close to repentance and asking questions. We pray and ask you to pray with us to God for her conversion.” Still a “work in progress.” Katya seems more open to the Gospel, and there is evidence of God’s work in her life pointing her to Himself. The requirement for the local church and this Crisis Center is

merely to be faithful, to love Christ and lovingly make Him known to others. And in due course, per God's sovereign plan, some hearts will come to faith. Please do keep praying for Katya and the far too many women who have suffered terrible abuse and abandonment.

Today's Scripture Theme:

Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. (Romans 13:10)

The Apostle Paul applied the rich truths of redemption in Christ Jesus in a wide variety of ways as he wrote the final chapters of his letter to the church in Rome. Redemption in Christ Jesus is a life-transforming reality, and is to be applied by the follower of Christ. Followers of Christ can apply the salvation due to the fact that they are new creatures in Christ, possess a new nature, and are therefore a new person in Christ Jesus, and have the indwelling Spirit of God to enable the application of the salvation possessed. One of the important areas of application deals with relationships and ministry to others. As Paul spoke of interacting with various authorities and others in general, he emphasized that the love of God is foundational. Love for God and others is key to having fruitful, effective ministry to those who do not know Christ, and the love of God that has been demonstrated through Him.

It is an encouragement to read of faithful servants in Russia who invest into the lives of women who have suffered at the hands of others and show up at their “Crisis Center” for women. Katya is one such young lady. She has experienced rejection and abuse a lot in her young life. She found her way to the Crisis Center at which Pastor Vitaly has some ministry. The staff at the Center cared for her, ministered to her, and loved her. At the Center she found not rejection, but a sustained warm welcome and believers who loved her. After a period of time, she left thinking she had found someone who would love her and provide a good home. She was utterly disappointed due to the horrific abuse she experienced, along with her two children. Katya made her way back to the Crisis Center and found that she was still warmly welcomed and loved. She now attends church and has been assisted in getting her own apartment. The staff continues ministry to her. The love of God is being demonstrated through the staff of the Crisis Center. Katya had experienced much wrong at the hands of others, but through the staff of the Crisis Center she has experienced the love of God, the love that does no wrong. Now Katya is very open to the Gospel. Thank you for praying for those who labor in such ministries through SGA that minister to those who have been greatly wronged by others in their lives.

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Please pray today:

- Praise God for His long-suffering patience, His love, and His matchless grace in Christ Jesus.
- Please pray for women and their children who are shackled to their sins while suffering terrible abuse and rejection. Pray they will soon believe in Jesus, and both feel and know the hope of God in Christ Jesus.
- Please pray for all believers to have long-suffering patience when ministering to wayward souls, lovingly pointing such souls to Jesus so that in God's timing and per His will, they would be saved.



| Day 17

Fear and discouragement seem to go hand in hand. As we encounter life's challenges, we face discouragement. Our expectations of people (these could be children or friends) can run contrary to what we had hoped or had invested time. We can labor at a job with limited results. We can serve a church and it seems that no one appreciates our efforts. This discouragement breeds fear. This fear shackles us in place. Fear that nothing will change. Fear that you are inadequate. This fear can be so overwhelming that you stop moving forward. Yet both fear and discouragement find the same root. They are products of judging the way forward based on our own capacity and wisdom, and not through faith in Jesus. God knows no limits and is able to equip us and empower us for all He asks of us. Rather than holding to our own expectations, views of self, and the world around us, fear God rather than man, trusting in His ways above yours. No journey in life is easy and is fraught with challenges, but possible by Christ as He works in us.

Dmitri is an SGA-supported missionary pastor in Belarus who, along with his wife, faced such fears. These fears flowed from discouragement and became shackles. "I had been praying for a long time for a ministry with orphans, but my wife was very afraid of it. I prayed to the Lord for

her. You see, a year and a half ago we decided to try foster care, we started processing the papers, and a half year later everything worked out. We took Nastya for the summer. But in the fall, she and her cousin went to a sanatorium and didn't want to come to us anymore.

My wife and I started praying about what we should do next, although Sveta, my wife, was still very afraid. I prayed that we would serve the Lord as a family, and at the usual prayer meeting, our oldest daughter Evelina (for whom we had prayed and worried) cried and said she wanted to talk to her grandfather. I was at work at the time. Then the Lord prompted my wife and she said: "I'm afraid to say no to God." So, we started collecting papers to become a foster family. We were told the preparation was about 3-4 months, and we were planning to take two kids closer to the summer. But on the second class, the supervisor came in and suggested that we get a foster care arrangement, since there are five kids from one family in the orphanage. They asked us to think about it. And that week, our Evelina repented. The Lord answered our other prayers and we were ready to serve as a family." Dmitri and his wife were discouraged and fear followed. Fear of rejection, fear of being overwhelmed, and feeling inadequate. But they both found the fear of God as a turning point to empower them to move past all other fears.

Yet fearing God and pressing forward by faith does not mean an easy and perfect path will follow. In fact, the way forward can remain difficult. “On January 27, 2023, we took the children from the orphanage (Oleg is 10, Zhenya is 9, Tanya is 6, Dima is 5, and Sofia is 4). WE STARTED A VERY DIFFERENT LIFE! We prayed that the children would not be opposed to our going to church, and thank God, they quickly got used to it and accepted it. Please pray for us, as there are many difficulties with their temperament, bad habits and disobedience, that the Lord will help us to be an example of the Christian life, and see all the children walking in the truth.” By God’s grace, Dmitri and his family pressed forward. Five children cast off from their family now had a family. From the outside, it sounds like a beautiful thing. And in part it is. But the impact of neglect on these children in the past loomed large. The road will be hard. But God is leading the way and they are pressing forward in His strength and for His glory. In this their path forward is in God’s hands and they trust now in His wisdom regardless of the outcome and obstacles faced.

Today’s Scripture Theme:

For it is God Who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13).

In the section before the Apostle Paul’s affirmation that it is God Who works in us to will and to do of His good plea-

sure, he speaks of Christ humbling Himself.

Jesus Christ humbled Himself in taking on the form of a servant, in becoming a man, fully human. He did this in order to bear the sins of humanity in His own body. Jesus Christ did what no one else could do or even would want to do. He bore the punishing wrath of God for humanity's sin in His death on the cross. It was an infinitely fearful course to walk. He humbled Himself and obeyed the Father, even to the point of death on the cross. Before His arrest, He pleaded with the Father that if there was any other way that the sins of humanity could be addressed, may the cup He was about to suffer pass from Him, but if not, let the Father's will be done. It caused Jesus to sweat great drops of blood. But, Christ in obedience was strengthened by the Spirit to obediently follow the will of the Father. Through Christ's humiliation and suffering, He atoned for humanity's sin, and pardon of guilt and forgiveness of sins was extended through faith in Jesus Christ. The Philippians had, by faith in Christ, been gifted salvation in the name of Christ. Paul exhorted them to work out the salvation they possessed in Christ, because it is God Who works in us to will and to do according to His good pleasure. It is totally doable to obey and follow the will of God.

We, as followers of Christ, must overcome a variety of fears and discouragements in doing the will of God. God has put

us on the path of following Christ. It is a path that clearly includes hardships, discouragements, disappointments and yes, fear, real fear. But our Savior is guiding onto and down the path chosen for us. As we journey, we must face all the realities of following Christ with the confidence that it is God Who works in us to will and to do according to His good pleasure. Just as Christ was strengthened to will and to do according to the Father's good pleasure, so too are we. We must have the same mind, or thinking, as Christ and humble ourselves and obey.

It is a realistic encouragement that we read concerning Dima and Sveta as they prayed and sought God's direction regarding being foster parents. They sought the Lord, and experienced uncertainty in the process. She was being realistic about the situation and opportunity, wanting God's clear guidance and enablement. She humbled herself before the Lord and accepted that this was the course God had for them. The realities of having five additional children in their home have proven to be filled with adjustments and blessings. It is He Who works in them to will and to do as foster parents to the five new children in their family. Thank you for praying for faithful servants like Dima and Sveta who are willing to humble themselves and embrace the will of God.

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Please pray today:

- Praise God for He is with His children, leading them and guiding them even when the way forward is shrouded and filled with discouragement.
- Pray for those children who have suffered so much, that struggle with life and its constant pains. Pray that God will both turn their hearts to Him and place them in a godly home.
- Pray for faithful believers to fear God rather than the trials, difficulties, and discouragement of this world. Pray that each of us would be faithful in whatever God places before us, trusting in His power and purposes.



Day 18

Have you ever heard the expression, “*the apple does not fall far from the tree*”? Truly we are influenced by those around us, especially our parents. At a very young age, the actions and words of our parents have a profound impact on our lives. This can be very good when a parent invests in a child, especially in teaching them about Christ and His Word. But in broken homes, this influence can be terrible. A child raised in a home filled with alcoholism, abuse, and neglect is likely to learn those same habits and live them out. So does this always mean that children are destined to be like their parents, and in homes of brokenness, live out the same pattern of destruction? Not if that child regardless of age turns to Christ in saving faith. Certainly new patterns of living will need to take root in time, but God can make all things new. And by His grace, we see young lives, including orphan children, stop the cycle of destruction and walk anew.

Vladimir is an SGA-supported pastor working with churches in the Russian-occupied region of Luhansk, providing aid to struggling families through support from Compassion Ministry. Many of these homes are in great poverty due to the sinful living of one or both parents. Yet the children can walk a different path. Vladimir shares, “We have known Ka-

rina since she was a kid. She came to our Sunday school. At first, everything was fine, but then her mother was deprived of parental rights and Karina, along with her brother, were sent to an orphanage. Soon after graduating from the orphanage, she entered into relationships with her boyfriend. Today, Karina is a single mother, raising her two-year-old daughter and living at her mother's, who has not quit abusing alcohol and holding noisy get-togethers at her home. This time, when we came with groceries, we were able to talk not only with Karina, but also with her mother, who likewise 8-10 years ago, does not want to change anything in her life. She still thinks she is on the right path.” Karina had only known a path of destruction, so it is not a surprise when she seemingly followed in her mother's footsteps. But over a very long period of time, the church continued to minister to her.

It is altogether stunning when that pattern of sinful living is broken, and a sliver of light pierces the darkness. “The conversation during our visit with Karina was surprisingly delightful for us. In general, each of our meetings with her makes her more open to God's Word and the Gospel. This time, Karina wanted to talk about whether she would be able to change her life, and whether she would have enough strength for that. We reminded her that without God, our strength is not just insufficient, we will simply lack it. We also said that each of us ended up in the church only by

God's grace and we live our Christian lives only thanks to Him. On the next day after our visit, Karina came to the church for the youth fellowship and said that she would try to come on Sunday to the worship service. My prayer is that this girl, after having such a difficult childhood, would have a better life, and that her household would be saved. We are very grateful for the help that you provide. May the Lord bless you, your ministry, and your loved ones!" By God's grace we can all be made new. Rather being defined by those around us and our society, even the more negative parental influences, we can be defined by Christ and His Word. God be praised that we can walk in newness of life through the power of the Spirit and the testimony of God's Word.

Today's Scripture Theme:

But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible"
(Matthew 19:26).

What was Jesus talking about? He was talking about the work of God in salvation. He was not only stressing the truth that it is impossible for a rich man to come to repentance and faith in Christ, He was stressing the truth that nothing is impossible with God. If we assess the probability of someone coming to faith in Christ on human assessments, we would conclude that certain groups of people are more disposed to being saved. We would also assess that

certain kinds or groups of people are far less likely to come to come to faith in Christ and not concern ourselves with them. Jesus was answering the question, “Who then can be saved?” Jesus made it clear that salvation is an impossible reality for any human being. It takes no more of the grace of God to redeem those who are living out their depravity in evil, destructive ways, than it does to redeem the person who is living out their depravity in the false veneer of moral goodness. Salvation is an impossible reality for anyone—it is only by God’s work of grace that any and all of us who have turned to Christ have done so. This is our guiding light, our encouragement as we minister the Word of God expressed in the Gospel to those who do not know Him.

This truth, and others, are guiding truths Pastor Vladimir relies upon in proclaiming the Gospel to those around him. Karina is one who God has placed on his path. She has been on his path for a number of years. She has not yet turned in repentance and faith in Christ, but Vladimir continues ministry into her life knowing that the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation, it is His work in her heart, not Vladimir’s. So, Vladimir continues to minister to Karina and pray for her salvation and that of her family. With man it is

impossible, but with God it is certainly possible. Thank you for praying for faith servants like Pastor Vladimir and their faithful ministry of God's Word in their part of the world.

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Please pray today:

- Praise God that He makes our life new, to conformed into His image and for His glory.
- Pray for those seemingly destined to follow the sinful patterns of their parents. Pray that God will open their hearts to Christ, that they would be set free from sin to walk in newness of life in Him.
- Pray for faithful believers to hold fast in their faith, walking with Christ and not slipping back into old patterns of living.



Day 19

One of the very visible signs of brokenness in our world is suffering. There are a number of people in every society and in every country that suffer in poverty and despair. Some suffer because of their sinful choices while others—often children—suffer due to the sinful choices of others. Some suffer due to natural disasters. Out of a deep love for God and for others, we strive to be a blessing to those in need. We see their suffering and it breaks our hearts. We provide food, shelter and in some cases work and a future. Yet in our broken world, poverty remains. Jesus remarked, “... *the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me*” (John 12:8). In other words, our focus needs to remain on the Gospel—and the focus on Christ for ultimately this is all that eternally matters. As much as we strive to help others physically and to minister to those in need, the focus and priority must be extending the message of the Gospel, for poverty has always remained. If we keep people warm, but not give them hope in Jesus, we have not really helped them much at all.

Alexander is an SGA-supported pastor in Belarus who ministers to orphans and those in need. He has tended to their needs, but remains focused on pointing them to Christ. “About 31 miles from us is a boarding school for orphans.

Our first visit to this orphanage was about 10 years ago at Christmas. We provided a performance and gave children Christmas gifts, and also to the teachers. Everyone loved it, but to our surprise they would not let us even pray the Lord's Prayer. Of course, we left in disappointment. But the very next year we were able to pray the Lord's Prayer without any interference. And now 10 years later, we visited the boarding school with accordions and a contrabass. We could sing and preach about the birth of Jesus Christ and there was a performance, everyone was happy, children got sweet gifts." They might have been encouraged in bringing sweet Christmas gifts to the orphan children, but they knew they needed more—they needed the hope of the Gospel. So they persevered. Near 84 percent of these children will never get adopted, but 100 percent of them need to hear of adoption into the family of God through faith in Jesus. Alexander has seen far too often that this has not been the focus of others. "We visited a nearby nursing home. Actually, a Christian organization started this ministry to take care of the elderly. There are 40 elderly people there, the youngest is 75 years old and the oldest are over 90. The organization invited us because our music is a blessing to the elderly. Also, there was a sermon, singing, and a performance. But we were shocked when we started asking questions. They couldn't answer the simplest questions, such as what brought the wise men to Bethlehem. We asked, 'Was Christ sinful?' One lady exclaimed, 'Yes, He was!' It was

very painful, as they say, to have lived a full life and never be taught about God and salvation. The Christian organization took care to warm and feed them, but no one told them about salvation of the soul. This is not the first year we have visited this nursing home. And we see the same story all the time. They invited us in again and we left with tears in our eyes. Our next outreach is this Saturday, and now see we must come more often. Please support us in our prayers.” Although there are many who are moved by compassion to help those in need, there are far too few who are workers in the harvest, who point people to Jesus and His Word. The greatest act of compassion we could ever show is to share the Gospel with another. Therefore, as we minister to the very clear physical needs of many, and out of love we are compelled to do this, we must have as our aim the presentation of the Gospel and disciple making.

Today’s Scripture Theme:

*That is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation
(2 Corinthians 5:19).*

The Apostle Paul, in writing to the Ephesians, declared that the redeemed are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works. Paul emphasized the vital importance of good works in the plan and purpose of God. The good works must obviously minister to the very real temporal

needs of people. In addition, they become a platform for the declaration of the Gospel. The unredeemed not only need to have the needs of life addressed, more importantly they need to hear a clear proclamation of the Gospel. In the Scripture passage quoted above, Paul was stressing to the Corinthian believers that they needed to be engaged with the needs of the people of Corinth, but that always the priority was to proclaim the message of reconciliation to God through Christ Jesus. They needed to know that they had sinned against God, and that God was calling them to be reconciled to Him. It is to His church that He has entrusted the message of reconciliation. Paul was passionate about and committed to the message of reconciliation. The ministry of good works by the child of God always must have the message of reconciliation in view. Paul would settle for nothing less, and he taught the churches he established to do the same. This is the message that the unredeemed need to hear, and with which we are entrusted.

It is a wonderful testimony to read of Pastor Alexander and his passion to proclaim the message of reconciliation to God to those who do not know Christ. Significant good works are extended to children and adults alike, but all with the aim of proclaiming Christ. Pastor Alexander is not satisfied to do only good works in the name of Christ, he is compelled to proclaim the Gospel of Christ to those who are recipients of the good works. All to whom the good works

are directed gladly receive and appreciate them. However, not all respond in a repentant and saving manner to the message of reconciliation. But that is God's work and that of the faithful servant is to extend good works in the name of Christ and proclaim the message of reconciliation. Those upon whom the Holy Spirit is working turn in repentance toward God and trust Him as Lord and Savior. We thank God for those who have repented and trusted Christ. We thank you for investing in the ministry, through gifts and prayer, of faithful servants such as Pastor Alexander.

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Please pray today:

- Praise God for the joy of serving Him, ministering to the needs of others, and telling them of the hope we have in Jesus.
- Pray for those who suffer in this world and have no hope, that they will hear of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and turn to Him in saving faith.
- Pray for faithful believers who minister to those in deep physical need, that they will never fail to be Gospel witnesses to all whom they meet, for our time is short.



Day 20

The region of Khanty-Mansiisk is located in western Siberia—a region known for its sub-arctic climate. Temperatures can reach well over 90 degrees in a summer that is all too short, yet plunge to double-digits below zero in winter. A harsh climate indeed, yet it does not deter faithful SGA-supported missionary pastors, who are intent on reaching the unreached with the Gospel.

Alexander is one such pastor, and he recently wrote to share about reaching remote villages via motorboat, beginning in Khanty-Mansiisk followed by a flight to Beriozovo, and then on the boat. “The next morning, I flew to Beriozovo from Khanty-Mansiisk. Another brother met me at the airport and we went to the river port together, and then went to Tegi by his motorboat. On our way there, we struck the river bottom and had to begin to row due to the lack of rain and low water. When we arrived in Tegi, brothers and sisters were already waiting for us. We were having worship services daily for two weeks. Unfortunately, not all could be present, as some were ill, some were in the woods due to the season of picking berries and mushrooming. Those who missed our fellowships had personal meetings with me, and some of them called me and asked for a meeting. They shared their worries and asked for prayer. We studied

the topic of sin, God, Jesus, and mercy. I exhorted them to strongly believe in salvation through Jesus Christ at our group meetings.”

Alexander’s ministry did not end there, but also branched out into discipleship and evangelism with individuals. “Andrew and his family used to be steeped in Orthodox beliefs. He asked me questions, and we checked them with the help of the Word of God. They have one child of their own, and four adopted children. Andrew also grew up in an orphanage. He used to rear adopted children (before his repentance). He brought them up the way he saw it in the orphanage, but he did not receive the expected result. When Andrew repented, the Holy Spirit convicted him, and he asked his adopted children to forgive him. He did it with tears in his eyes. He visited me and asked for advice, as our lives are similar. Daniel, an older son of Andrew, expressed his wish to talk with me personally. He is 16. He said that he has never met his native father, though he is alive. Their native mother (now dead) abandoned them and left them in the orphanage. He still remembers how she drank alcohol and invited different men to their house. He had a deep resentment. I explained to him the meaning of sin and how it dominated the lives of his parents. That is why they did it to him. I told him how the devil held them in his hands and destroyed their lives. I, then, told him about God’s love, His deed on Golgotha, and that Jesus could heal his soul like He

did in my life. If he believes and receives Jesus into his life, then Jesus could release him from sin, which lives in him and destroys his life. He understood that he needed Jesus, although, he did not want to repent and come to Jesus, as he has been having adult relationships with a girl for two years already. Before I left, I preached about the prodigal son from Luke 15 and gave an invitation at the end of our service. As soon as I said it a native brother of Alexander kneeled and called for the Lord—“O, Lord! Forgive me my sins and accept me to You!”

Yet again, we see the wonderful example of faithful men going forth to lovingly share the Gospel of Christ and reaching one life at a time. The labors can be long and painstaking, but the Lord moves in His own time and brings forth the harvest. And yes, His harvest field is vast. Pray as He commanded for more workers to go forth and gather!

Today’s Scripture Theme:

As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

(2 Timothy 4:5)

In the Apostle Paul’s words to the young pastor he had been mentoring—Timothy—we can see an excellent pattern laid down for all of us as believers. While it is true that not all of us are called to be pastors, teachers, and large-scale evangelists, we are all called to be faithful witnesses for Christ,

and to share with others the hope we have through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are to be sober in all things, and this doesn't mean a constant severe, grim attitude. Rather, it means to be serious about what God has called us to do, discerning the times and our surroundings, and always being ready to move in reaching someone when the Lord prompts. We are called to endure hardship, following the example of so many other believers who have gone before. It can be hard to remember at times in our relatively affluent culture, but none of us are guaranteed ease and comfort in our lives. In fact, too much ease and comfort can be deadly if taken for granted or to extreme. Faith can be easy in times of plenty, but what happens to our faith when hard times come? Maybe we are desperately strapped for funds to pay the bills, or struggling with a chronic or even potentially terminal illness. Perhaps we feel alone where we are, surrounded by critics and enemies who mock what we believe. Or possibly we have labored for years in a ministry, and visible fruit seems scarce at best or maybe invisible. It is in those times when we must cling to Christ all the more, trusting in Him instead of ourselves and our own efforts. He then gets the glory He is due when at last we begin to see and yield some fruit in our lives and ministries.

Alexander and his team have a difficult ministry environment in harsh, forbidding Siberia. Getting where the unreached are isn't as simple as just climbing in the car and

driving on a well-maintained highway to their destination. They have to surmount considerable obstacles and challenges to get to the people who need to hear of salvation in Christ Jesus. Yet they know what God has called them to do, and they do it. They trust in His gracious provision, and trust in His promises to do what only He can do in His sovereign timing. They trust in Him even when they can't see the outcome. As the beloved old hymn says, they "trust and obey." May we also follow their example as we fulfill what God has called us to do in our own lives, for His glory.

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Please pray today:

- Pray for Alexander and other missionary pastors like him who face incredible hardships and difficulties in their ministries, yet do so with joy. Ask for God's provision and encouragement.
- Lift up the many in these remote towns and villages across Siberia and other regions where believers are scarce. May God open their hearts to the Gospel as faithful believers visit them.
- As winter gets ever closer, pray for the health and strength of our brothers and sisters, as well as for God's daily provision for them and their families.



Day 21

One of the greatest joys of the Christian life is the family of God. Much like air and water, we do not appreciate it as much until we don't have it. There are some who grew up in churches and may not know anything different, but for some it is a new experience. Suddenly there is a group of people from many walks of life that care about you, and desire to know you – or at least that is how it should be. Too often, like water and air, we can take the church family for granted. Some choose to simply livestream church services, reasoning it's easier than “dealing with people.” Or maybe we are like the story of Goldilocks and the three bears, and we want to find the church that is “just right.” But what if there were not a lot of church choices—maybe only one? And what if you grew up in a broken home with parents that had disregarded and abandoned you? Would you value the church more as a precious gift from God worth cherishing? Those in the early church hungered to be together. The family of God was their safe place, a place of love and teaching, as vital to living as air and water.

Elena is a longtime and faithful minister to orphan children through SGA's Orphan's Reborn ministry in Siberia. She has seen the destructive effects on children who grow up as orphans or in dysfunctional families. “Nastya is 12, her

brother Vlad is 14. For the last 6 months, this family has been going through difficult times. Their mother was abusing alcohol heavily and almost all the benefits she receives for taking care of her children she spent on alcohol. If Vlad still manages to get at least something, some cash or demands his mother to buy him something, then Nastya is not that persistent. The girl turns to her mother with a request but does not always receive something. Faced with such a problem, we began to pay more attention to this selfless and sincere girl in her difficulty. Our team leader was inviting her to come to her place and stay overnight. One time, Nastya stayed with them for Saturday and Sunday. On Sunday morning, as the family was gathering for the church, Nastya was told she could stay at their house until they came back. But Nastya wanted to go with them.” For Nastya, the thought of being alone was like living in a desert and constantly searching for a cup of cool water. She got a small sip of that water spending the weekend with a loving family and was not able to consider being apart from them.

And in the moments that followed, Nastya discovered the beauty of the family of God as well. “From the first time, Nastya liked so much to be in the church. She was assigned to the senior Sunday school group and made friends with the children very quickly. Even when she, like a child, oversleeps and gets up late, she still hurries to the church. At first, our team leader thought that she came to church

because of her, but there were days when she could not be at the worship service. On such days Nastya would still be in the church. You can see Nastya's keen interest in knowing God. She always asks after the service what the sermon was about and asks questions, showing genuine interest in this. And our hearts are filled with joy! This little girl is not able to enjoy love from her family, which she deserves, yet while in the church she feels safe and accepted. She is not left alone with her problems, and she appreciates that. The Lord recoups that missing love through His church!" Nastya experienced the beauty of the family of God. She cannot be with the church enough, to feel the warmth, love and acceptance of brothers and sisters in Christ. Much like water and air, may we also never take for granted as believers in Christ the gift we have in the family of God.

Today's Scripture Theme:

*So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.
(1 Corinthians 13:13).*

The local church in Corinth had significant questions about spiritual gifts, their use, and application. Paul was addressing the sovereign distribution and use of spiritual gifts so that the believers in Corinth could make corrections and begin to serve in a manner consistent with the gifts given. Paul devoted three chapters to this matter—that's a lot of print for one topic. The middle of the three chapters is a

chapter that famously addresses love. It is often referred to as the 'love chapter.' Paul defined love as he penned this chapter. This passage is often referred to in modern churches at weddings and on special occasions like Valentine's Day. However, the context is one of the ministry of spiritual gifts. Paul is stressing that the core of ministry is God's love. God's love is to be prominent in the Body of Christ as we serve the Lord with the gifts sovereignly distributed to each believer. Love is one of the defining characteristics of the Body of Christ. Therefore, Paul stressed the centrality of God's love in fruitful, effective service for Christ. The genuine demonstration of God's love will have a far greater impact on someone attending a worship service than the use of the sign gifts. Paul stressed this as he concluded his remarks at the end of chapter fourteen.

The same holds true today. It is a true encouragement to read of the team leader and her church family. Elena and her entire team have a great love for orphans. One orphan, Nastya, became the focus of their concern and love. The team leader invited Nastya to her home to spend the night on weekends. Part of the leader's life on Sunday was, and is, going to her local church for fellowship with other believers and their mutual worship of God. Nastya was provided the option to stay home or go. Nastya decided to go. Upon going to church, Nastya began to discover a local assembly of people that loved God, loved one another, and loved her.

Now Nastya's leader and her local church are a magnet to Nastya. That which Nastya desires, namely love, is being experienced through her leader and her local church. The greatest gift and impact her leader and her local church are providing Nastya is a visible expression of the love of God. Indeed, the greatest of these is love, specifically the love of God. Thank you for praying for faithful servants like Elena and other *Orphans Reborn* leaders who lovingly invest in the orphans in their part of the world.

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Please pray today:

- Praise God for His design for the church, that we would not only be forgiven, but also adopted into His eternal family.
- Pray for those children in dysfunctional and broken homes and orphanages, that God would move their hearts to faith in Him, that they would find the beauty of inclusion in the family of God.
- Pray for all those who work with orphan children, that they would be faithful and patient in working with such children that they would see and experience the love of God in Christ Jesus.



Day 22

Very often it takes a crisis moment or a broken life to jar us from self-reliance. At times, even with the legacy of our choices leading us down a path of destruction and regret, we do not wake up to the reality of our mortality. We have a very real tendency in our sin to live like immortals. We put off for tomorrow the need to choose a different path today, the need to choose to honor God today. Even as believers we can tend to put off God-honoring choices we know we need to make, always assuming tomorrow will come. But when we face a crisis like cancer, the trauma of an accident, a violent event, or even war, we must come face to face with our mortality, our humanity. And in that moment we are at a crossroads. Will we turn and embrace the hope of heaven in Jesus Christ, trusting that life with Him extends from this world to the next, or merely grasp at the last fading earthly desires to validate our existence and worth? Sounds simple and crazy to choose wrongly. Even a child can see that life with Christ is the right choice, to know their Father in heaven. Yet many still wrestle with this choice, shackled to their sin. Praise God that by His Spirit these shackles can be broken.

Olya has faithfully ministered to orphan children for de-

cares, supported by SGA's *Orphans Reborn* ministry in Russia. She has loved these children. One girl captured her heart and they became pen pals. Olya shares this excerpt, "Thank you for your letter, for your postcard and warm, kind words. I am so glad to receive your letters. Thank you for just being you. All members of your team are so kind, good people. I love you very much. You bring us joy and faith when you come to such children as we. I love you so much and want to tell you my story. When I was six years old I was at home. My mum and dad drank a lot, but I loved them so much. I always tried to help at home because mother could not do it. When I began to go to school, at the age of 8, my teacher began to tell me about the orphanage. I did not know what it was, but she told me only good. So, when people from the department came to our house and offered me to go to the orphanage, I agreed at once. I did not know that it was forever. I was in several orphanages. But this one was the first, where I heard about God. And I began to believe in Him, thanks to you, Olya. If you had not come, I would never know that I have a daddy in the heaven. I want to have a daddy so much. I always wait for you so much, Olya. You are the kindest people. And I think you can help me in my problem. I do not know what to do. My mum is very ill. She drank too much and now she is dying. She is at the hospital, and the doctors said that she would not live long. But I want her to live so much. I love her. Despite that she does not come to me, does not give me presents. I love

her. My elder sister told me about her, that she was at hospital. I believe that she will live, and I will pray for her. Will you pray with me?”

Kristina heard of the love of Christ, and her daddy in heaven through Olya. And she had a foundation when crisis came. But with childlike faith, she saw only her daddy in heaven and the desire for her mum to know Him too.

Kristina’s mother became terminal, dying from years of alcoholism. And with urgency, she wanted her mum to know Christ. Olya shares, “They went to say good-bye to their mom, that drunk, sick woman, who never showed her love to this nice girl. But Kristina came not to tell good-bye. She came to tell her mom about God, about Jesus. She said, ‘I did not spend life with her, but I want to spend eternity with her.’ And the last minutes with her mother she spent telling her about God. ‘Mom, you are dying. And I will never see you again. Because I believe in God and love Him, I will be in the Heaven after my death, but you will not be there. I want to spend eternity with you. If you want it as well, you should sincerely ask God to forgive you and to take you into His Kingdom.’ The woman began to cry, to pray, embarrassing this little Christian, she asked God to forgive her, she asked Kristina and her other children to forgive her. Soon she died. Soon after the death of her mom Kristina was adopted by a Christian family.” Facing death, facing crisis,

we are always at a crossroads. What will we choose? For a mostly abandoned orphan girl, the choice was clear – faith in Christ and the hope of heaven with her daddy.

Today's Scripture Theme:

*That I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.
For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off
from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen
according to the flesh. (Romans 9:2-3)*

Paul is expressing his heart as he engages the great truths of God's elective purposes in Christ. This is the capstone of Paul's proclamation of the great truths of salvation. God's elective purposes in Christ did not dampen Paul's passion for evangelism, for proclaiming the Gospel and calling those who heard to come to repentance and faith in Christ. It inflamed his passion for making Christ known. He begins by declaring his heart for his own people according to the flesh. Though he was often strenuously opposed by his fellow Jews, the great doctrines of salvation motivated Paul to express his sorrow and anguish of heart, wishing that he could be accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of his fellow Jews believing in Christ. This is one of the most passionate expressions of the Apostle Paul, as it pertains to his fellow Jews, that is recorded in the letters of Paul. This is the expression of one who has a genuine love for those who are lost and do not know Christ.

It is a joy to read of Kristina and her genuine faith in Christ and love for her parents. Kristina knows little, most likely nothing, about the great doctrines of God's elective purposes in Christ. She does know that she is justified, or saved, and secure in her hope of being with her Father in heaven. She possesses a similar heart for her mom that Paul had for his brothers in the flesh. Kristina knew little or no love from her mom and dad. Paul, after trusting Christ, knew the greatest opposition and hatred in his ministry from his brothers in the flesh. Yet, Kristina had a great love for her mom and wanted only to tell her about God and Christ that she, too, would be saved and have the hope of heaven with the heavenly Father. For Kristina, the faithful servant used by the Father to tell her of salvation in Christ was Olya, one of our faithful Orphan's Reborn servants. Thank you for praying for faithful servants like Olya who are used by the Father to make Christ known to orphans. We rejoice in Kristina's testimony. May we too have the same heart for those who do not know Christ as Lord and Savior.

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Please pray today:

- Praise God for the hope of heaven through His grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone.
- Pray for those facing death apart from God, that God would move their hearts to faith in His Son Jesus.
- Pray for those that work with orphaned and abandoned children, that they would be faithful throughout the long term, that these dear ones would experience the love of God and hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ through them.



Day 23

Even though we are several months after Easter, we are still getting reports from the missionary pastors we support across the former Soviet Union reporting on their fruitful Easter ministries. For their churches, it is the holiest day of the year and a vital day for preaching the Gospel to the lost.

Pastor Sergei K. serves in Belarus, and his church is rejoicing with thanksgiving for the way God moved in their Easter outreaches. He wrote to share his thanks with you—our partners who helped make it possible. “Thank you for your prayers! God blessed our Easter services earlier this year. Our church invited unbelieving relatives of our church members, and more than 100 people came. The service lasted three hours and no one wanted to leave. We had also invited the Korolevs, who operate a “family style” orphanage in our region. The father of the family, Alexander, shared with us the following testimony. ‘I have lived my life attending a church, but I did not know the real meaning of the Easter holiday. I knew that Christ is risen, but I did not know why He died. At the service, we were told the meaning of the holiday. Today I know for whom the Son of God died! Our family in years past prepared for the feast in a different way. But today I know that all these preparations

were just traditions of men that God does not need. Thank you for the invitation and the attention you have given us!”

Pastor Sergei went on to describe another service he led at another congregation. “God blessed the service at Yakubovo as well. At the service there were unbelieving neighbors; also the Korolev family came too! Children from their orphanage recited poems and participated in the holiday service. During the Easter holidays, we visited Alexei’s family—he is raising two young children alone. The children received gifts in the form of food packs and sweets. We prayed together, thanked God for life, for the gifts, and were able to tell the children about what Easter means in a way that they could understand it, and told them that God loves both adults and children. We thank God for the opportunity to evangelize our neighbors and the children at the orphanage. Please pray for the orphanage—Svetlana and Alexander and their seven children. Pray also for the upcoming children’s camps and for the continuation of our ministry!” So many individuals and families looking for hope in a world where darkness seems to be increasing by the day. And hope is exactly what Easter—Resurrection Day—is all about. Because of what the Lord Jesus Christ did on the cross by dying for the sins of His people and rising again from the dead for their justification, all who believe in Him have that wonderful, certain hope. May the Gospel seeds that were planted take root and grow in many more lives—with the Holy Spirit drawing them to believe in the Lord Jesus and repent.

Today's Scripture Theme:

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death (Romans 8:2).

In the testimony above, Alexander briefly recounted what his ostensibly religious life had been in the years prior to him hearing a biblical presentation of the Gospel. For him and his family of orphan children, it had been a life of ritual and tradition, but the true meaning of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection had been veiled. It was yet another "law" that was being kept with effort, but had no bearing whatsoever on his standing before God and his salvation. But by God's grace and mercy, the Lord graciously led Pastor Sergei and his church into the lives of Alexander and his family, as well as the many unbelieving relatives that had been invited to participate in the Easter celebrations. The Gospel was boldly proclaimed, the Word of God had been faithfully taught, and the Holy Spirit did what only He can do. He worked through the Word of God proclaimed, and drew men, women, and children to Christ. And for that, we join Sergei and his church in rejoicing!

As believers, it can take a great hindrance off of our minds as we realize that it is not up to us personally to save a soul. We must indeed obey the Lord and proclaim the Gospel to the lost, but we are not the ones who change hearts and open ears to hear. Only God Himself can do that, and He

will in His time. We just need to be faithful to what He has called us to do. We lovingly and joyfully share what God has done for us, and that we want others to have the same joy and knowledge of forgiveness that we have. He takes care of the rest. God be praised!

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Please pray today:

- Pray for those who have heard the Gospel, whether it be at events such as Easter and Christmas, one-on-one witnessing from a believer, reading a Gospel tract or hearing the Word of God. May the Lord grant them faith to believe and His great salvation.
- Lift up the many new believers who have come to faith across the former Soviet Union. Ask God to firmly root their new faith and enable it to flourish as they are discipled.
- Ask for God's ongoing provision for the faithful missionary pastors as they labor in God's harvest field.



Day 24

It is true that our walk with Christ is transformational, that the old life has passed away and a new life surrendered unto Him has come. Jesus takes a life riddled with sin, suffering, guilt, and shame, and turns that life into a beautiful picture of grace, hope, joy, and peace. Truly it is amazing and brings us to our knees. God does this through His Spirit and by His grace alone through faith alone in Jesus. But there is more to this transformation, for it does not stop with us. That same message of hope, the Gospel, is now to be shared by all who believe (2 Corinthians 5:20). Although the work of Christ is amazing in each individual life, Christ also sets us apart for His purposes to be workers in the harvest. This is part of the amazing transformation. Once we were centered on ourselves, turning inward at every opportunity, but now have turned outward to love God and love others more than self (Matthew 22:37-29). Whereas we sought out our own benefit, in Christ we seek His glory. Even in this, an orphan child who was forgotten and marginalized can become a true witness for others.

Perhaps no greater example of the work of Christ can be seen than in a life with orphan children. The local churches who carry out the SGA-supported *Orphans Reborn* and Summer Camp ministries have seen this work of Christ in

many lives, and even in their own. One such story comes from Russia. “My name is Dmitri and I’m 39 years old. I am married with two children. I have worked as a teacher at a technical school since 2011, and I have been involved in organizing and conducting camps for orphans, but I was also an orphan who grew up in an orphanage. God brought me to Himself 20 years ago. My soul has been heavy for the “graduates” from these orphanages—like I once was. I always tried to help them in any way I could. I realized that I could visit them, talk to them about God, and pray for them. I served God at camp this summer with them. I spoke a lot with the children and the camp staff. Every morning, we got up before everyone else, prayed for the children, and then praised God in songs. This is the second year that boarding school “graduates” like me have been working also as camp counselors. They believed in God when they also were in our camps. And every year they go on a vacation to serve God in camps. Half of our team is made up of orphans. We consider it a blessing! Every evening, one of them shared their life story with the other orphans. It was incredibly touching.” Orphans, often lost and cast aside in this world, are now set apart in Christ to reach those cast off. Before, Dmitri only was trying to survive and find his way in this world, but now—by God’s grace—he is a blessing to others who suffer as he once did.

And from this camp may come another orphan child who

will become an ambassador of Christ as well. Dmitri adds, “I saw orphans sitting in the audience reacting during each session and asking questions. One orphaned teenager cried very often. I decided to speak with him. It turned out that his closest people had left him, and he had no friends at the boarding school. He felt as if no one cared about him. I offered my friendship to him. His face immediately changed. He was always by my side during the last few days of our camp. Max is his name. His soul is wounded. Please pray for him. One day, an orphan girl ran up to me and began to recite a Bible verse. I commended her and told her that we had not studied this verse in our camp yet. She said that Sergei regularly visited the orphanage, with whom they read the New Testament and memorized Bible verses. I enjoy watching God work with orphaned children to change their lives.” It all starts with faith in Jesus, and then moves forward from there. Through the love of an older orphan caring for a younger orphan, or the zeal of one young orphan girl to speak Scripture to anyone else, God is raising up new ambassadors for Him. Maybe even this summer!

Today’s Scripture Theme:

And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:11)

The Corinthians had real issues with allowing their region's culture to influence their walk with Christ. Rather than elevating the teaching of Scripture to inform them in certain critical areas, they easily embraced the Corinthian culture. Prior to Paul's statement in Chapter 6, he rebuked the Corinthians about taking one another to court. Rather than applying biblical principles to settle disputes, they used the Corinthian court system instead. Paul rebuked them and called upon them to settle their disputes using the truths of Scripture. He said some of the Corinthian believers wronged and defrauded their own brothers in Christ. Paul rebuked them for their unrighteous behavior and attitudes. Paul reminded the Corinthians that God had redeemed them out of a variety of sinful lifestyles. He called upon them to remember that God had redeemed them out from the unrighteous lives in which some of them had lived. He was calling upon them not to forget those who are often forgotten or dismissed because of their lifestyle or their life circumstances. God had washed them from their sin, was sanctifying them, and had justified them in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ by the Spirit of God. They were not to forget, and they were to continue to go to those who had been as they were. They were to live a transformed life by applying the truths of Scripture.

It is a joy to read of those who had been placed in an orphanage, had come to repentance and faith in Christ, and

now as adults desire to reach those who are as they were. It would be easy to leave the orphanage and forget about those who remain in the orphanages. They are often devalued in the eyes of others simply because they live in an orphanage. It is a joy to hear of faithful servants like Dmitri who have a heart for orphans. He remembers, in a meaningful ministry-oriented way, that he was one of them and extends the love of Christ to current orphans. They are recipients of the same cleansing of sin, along with the sanctifying and justifying work of the Holy Spirit as those who are not orphans. God's grace is extended to everyone. Orphans need to hear and know that God's love and grace is just as much for them as it is for those who are not orphans. Dmitri has not forgotten the grace of God toward him, and now is a steward of God's grace to the orphans around him. Thank you for praying for faithful servants like Dmitri.

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Please pray today:

- Praise God for the joy of both knowing Him and telling the world of His grace in Jesus Christ.
- Pray for the forgotten and marginalized children, that from them will come new ambassadors for Christ, telling of His mercies and grace to all who will hear.
- Pray for those believing orphans who minister to orphan children, that God will use the story of their lives to open the hearts of other orphans, setting them apart for His purposes and glory.



Day 25

There is an expression, the “tyranny of the urgent”. It seems in life that we have a daily battle between the things we know we should do, and the things that seem to scream at us for our attention. Many of these demands on our time seemingly pop up unplanned, and often redirect our day. Regretfully, most of these urgent things are often temporary needs and wants, and the things of God fall by the wayside. We know we should be in God’s Word more, should pray, and should attend Bible studies—not to mention Sunday worship—but it seems life daily is filled with distractions. It could be children demanding attention, work, extended family, or even health issues, financial issues, addictions, and more. There are so many things that demand our immediate attention. But as James reminds us very bluntly . . . you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes (James 4:14). Therefore, although there are many things that demand our attention, only the things of God truly last. If you had only one day to live, why not live it for Christ and making Him known? As we draw closer to Christ, and spend time making Him known, we dwell on those things eternal. The Word of God, the promises of God, and eternal life with Jesus will not fail or pass away. This is the mindset of many in harm’s way who are reaching children this sum-

mer. Whether in the midst of war, persecution in a predominantly Muslim community, or in the throes of deep poverty, faithful believers hold fast to the work of ministry, declaring the Gospel. Let us too be challenged by their witness to order the things of God first, and all others after that. There is joy and peace found in seeking Christ and telling of His Good News for all to hear.

Vasily is a faithful servant of our Lord in Kiev, who ministers with SGA's support to orphans, local children, and those in poverty through various ministries. You might ask, are summer camps even possible in Ukraine? His answer is a resounding yes! "By God's grace, there was only one 30 minute air raid alert for the whole week, whereas before we had them every day and night. We also were blessed with wonderful weather. In all these circumstances, we felt that you were praying for us. The campers, as well as their parents, thanked us every day for the opportunity to attend the camp. Due to the ongoing war in Ukraine, for the second year now children have not been able to spend their normal summers having fun. The camp that we were able to hold with your support gave them such an opportunity. Some children have been at our camp for the second year in a row and are looking forward for more events like camps. For this reason, for the rest of the summer our church plans to hold activities on Saturdays for the children who were in the camp, sort of one-day mini-camps. It is something new that

we are trying out, as we want to invite these kids to our Sunday school in September.” Even in the midst of the war, the constant threat of missiles and drones, they press on. Vasily and those on his team have a love of Christ and a deep burden for lost children, and will not let even the threat of death itself slow them down.

Through their prayers and yours, God did mighty things through their faithful efforts, including the efforts of orphan children who assist in ministry to others. “It was a delight to see among the leaders serving in the camp, the four young adults from our Kiev group of orphans from families with difficult life circumstances, namely Dima, Timofey, Yulia, and Alexandra. They successfully went through from start to end of the camp serving as leaders and helpers. Thanks to the support of our sponsors, we were able to run the camp activities at the highest level. There was delicious food, the children could create edible and non-edible but useful crafts, and various interesting skill-learning activities were held. All the activities were instrumental for the children to be confident in action-oriented games, contests, and sports competitions. And most importantly, being the main purpose of holding the camp, we held interesting Bible lessons, navigating through the Bible (therefore we called our camp this year “TRAVEL”). We could see the fruit of our efforts, as about 30 children made professions of faith at the end of the camp. I believe some took this step based on emotions

or for company's sake, but even if two or even one child repented sincerely, it was worth your (and our) material, physical, and spiritual efforts.”

God be praised that the Gospel went forth and seeds were planted. We pray that the profession of faith in Jesus made by these children will be real and bear fruit in time, as it did with four orphans. If Vasily and his team were more worried about the war, the constant barrage of missiles and the economic issues, the camp would not have been held and the children would not have heard. But praise God that Vasily and his team chose the most important tasks, to know Christ more and make Him known.

Today's Scripture Theme:

Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. (2 Timothy 2:10)

The Apostle Paul did not face the circumstances and realities of war, but he did know the realities of almost constant opposition, persecution, and harassment. Hardship was not all that characterized Paul's life and service for Jesus Christ, but it was a prominent characteristic. He embraced it all for the sake of proclaiming the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ and the whole counsel of His Word. Obviously, there were those who wondered why Paul continued on in his service

to Christ. The Apostle Paul, as he wrote to Timothy, stated very clearly that he endured everything for the sake of the elect, that they may obtain salvation that is in Christ Jesus. Paul had no idea of who comprised the elect, that is known only to God. Paul did understand that on the human side of God's working, he—and every believer—are responsible for proclaiming the Gospel. We know that as we engage in the proclamation of the Gospel that God will use the Gospel to call men, women, and children to Himself. Therefore, Paul endured everything knowing that God would work, as only He can, on His side of the salvation equation.

It is such a joy to read of Vasily and those who are laboring with him in the context of much hardship due to the war in Ukraine. Many obstacles and hindrances have to be overcome in order to provide summer camp ministries in Ukraine and other children's ministries. Doing ministry in a war zone presents unique hardships that go beyond physical difficulties. Yet, Vasily and his ministry team endure everything for the sake of the elect. They have no idea who among the children will turn to God in repentance, and place their faith in Christ Jesus. Their side of the ministry equation is to endure while proclaiming the Gospel, that children in whom the Father is working may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus. Thank you for continuing in prayer for the faithful service of believers in Ukraine.

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Please pray today:

- Praise God that we have His Spirit testifying to our hearts moment by moment that we can choose the right tasks each day that honor God, and lay aside those of lesser importance, even more so those sinful habits that cling to us and rob us of joy.
- Pray for those who are overwhelmed by life and apart from God. Pray that God would turn their hearts to Him, especially all the children this summer in SGA-supported summer camps.
- Pray for all the SGA-supported children's camps this summer, as many faithful believers face a myriad of trials while ministering to children and their parents, making Christ known to all.



Day 26

There is an old expression, “the fish doesn’t know it’s wet.” Simply put, we are all conformed to some degree to our culture and life experiences. In fact, over time our life seems so normal compared to all others around us that we might not realize how much we are shaped by our surroundings, our experiences, and even the human wisdom of the day. The way we live becomes a comfortable set of clothes. We still deal with the highs and lows of life, but see it all through the lens of the culture we are in. That is why it was so radical for the Apostle Paul to write . . . Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17). No barriers of race, culture, or social status. Completely something new. So, it is only with the Word of God that we even know what the new is, and only by the power of the Spirit, through salvation in Jesus, that we can even make needed change. When does the fish know that it was wet? When it’s out of the water. When we see God’s Word, and fellowship with followers of Christ, we can see the path forward to the new, leaving the old behind and following Christ.

Yuri is an SGA-supported missionary pastor who held a summer camp where teens and young adults were taken

from their normal lives and exposed to something completely new. “Nastya, a girl from a family-type orphanage, had hit a girl from her group in the face with her fist for making a remark to her. As a result, both girls cried. After talking to Nastya and calming her down, we learned that she had been taken from a family where the parents drank. Her little brother is in a psychiatric hospital, and she was there too for a time. Her parents kept promising to take her and her brother home, but they could not give up alcohol. Children in the orphanage often offended Nastya, so she behaves defiantly and reacts aggressively to any remark against her. We talked to her for a long time in an accessible language about sin, God’s forgiveness, and the possibility to change. The girl calmed down and a smile appeared on her face. After our conversation Nastya decided to apologize to the girl she hit. At the end of the camp, she repented and turned to God, she prayed with me. Praise God for His work in the hearts of children!” Nastya had known only heartache after heartache. She only encountered people who failed her and provoked her. Anger and sorrow had become a way of life until she was brought “out of the water.” At the camp she experienced love, patience, clarity, and by God’s grace, was made new in Christ.

And newness is not found by just adding Jesus to your life. Yuri adds, “One day at the camp when we were talking about the Gospel, there was a quest that helped the teens

immerse themselves in different events from the life of Christ, and in some ways feel more vividly what He felt. Emilia, who declared a new faith in Jesus after the sermon that evening, testified as follows: ‘I used to go out to repent at children’s camps too, but it was more of an unconscious thing, for company. Now I really understand what Jesus did for me—after the quest I realized the value of His sacrifice in a special way.’ Over the following days, we talked about growing in faith and what it means to live a new changed life. As a result, she said: ‘It’s cool that the camp didn’t end there, as it often does. During these days, I had time to understand more about how to build a relationship with God now, and what I need to do now so that things don’t go back to the way they were before the vacation. Now I am sure that I have a new life with God.’”

Emilia had even made professions of faith in the past, but it was more of a cultural expression to be counted among her peers rather than true life change. Yet in this camp, she was truly transformed. She began to see her life through the lens of God’s Word, and now seeks to leave the old life behind. May we too not just add Jesus to our lives, but truly leave our old lives and ways behind, and follow Him in newness of life (Luke 9:23).

Today's Scripture Theme:

But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. (1 John 1:7)

The Apostle John answered an extremely important question for the first century church. How could one know if they truly possessed eternal life? John explicitly expressed this toward the end of his letter. The apostolic-era church had a mix of genuine and false professors of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. To make a verbal profession of Jesus as Lord and Savior was an easy thing to do, as it is in the 21st century. The issue was whether or not the profession of faith in Christ for salvation was genuine. Paul too, expressed this in his letter to the Romans . . . because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved (Romans 10:9). John emphasized that there are clear evidences that mark a true believer's life. It can be summarized by saying that one who truly possesses eternal life has a changed life and a life that is changing in specific ways. A mere profession of faith in Christ without belief in the heart will not produce the kind of change that is consistent with eternal life in Christ Jesus.

It is a joy to read of a couple of young girls, Nastya and Emilia, who repented of their sin and confessed Jesus Christ

as Lord and Savior. They are experiencing changes in their lives, which began while they were still at camp. Nastya had never confessed Jesus as Lord and Savior prior to the week at camp. Emilia had “repented” on prior occasions but did not understand what she was confessing. After the clear ministry of God’s Word as it pertains to the Gospel, Emilia confessed Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior with clarity of understanding, and now she is on the path of a changed and changing life. This is the journey of every true child of God. Having confessed Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and believing in our hearts that He was raised from the dead, our lives began to change and continue to change as we follow Christ through obedience to His Word. It is an unparalleled blessing to know that we possess eternal life. It is a blessing to know that you faithfully pray for the Gospel to take root in the hearts of those who hear the Word of God in the countries we serve. Thank you for praying.

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Please pray today:

- Praise God for the hope we have in Jesus, turning us from our old lives to new ones in Christ, set apart from this world by His amazing grace and through His Spirit.
- Pray for the children, teens, and young adults in Christian camps this summer, that in this special time away, God will turn many hearts toward Himself that they will be made new indeed.
- Pray for faithful believers to not just profess Christ, but to be truly set apart from this world as true witnesses of Christ, living out His Word and their faith in Christ before a lost and hurting world.



Day 27

We should not be surprised when we see the amazing transformation of a single life, a turning of their hearts to God. But it is a wonder to see. In each case, God orchestrates the circumstances as only He can, softening a heart as only He can. So, what is our part as God leads, directs, and guides sinners to saving faith in Jesus Christ? Simply, it is to be faithful. Rather than deep focus on the method, we are called to be focused on the means. God opens the heart, and we proclaim our only hope in Jesus. But this comes in two parts, and both parts are needed. The first is to tell—to teach and declare the Gospel and the Word of God. And the second is to live it out. It is vital that the Gospel we share, and the Word we proclaim, is our solid rock and resonates with the life we live. We love others, teach others, and show them the impact of God at work in our lives. And then we must be ready “in season and out of season” (2 Timothy 4:2) to see the wonders of the work of God in a single human heart.

Maxim is an SGA-supported missionary in Far East Russia who is devoted to reaching young adults with the Gospel. Time and time again, he sees God at work in extraordinary ways. His role? Faithfulness. “Peace be to you, people of God. I really want to share with you what the Lord is doing

through our ministry for Him in the Far East of Russia. Today is a quite difficult time when the hearts of many people are filled with fear. Yet we understand that the Lord is calling us to be light and salt for many people who live here. I want to share with you wonderful news. Our adopted son Zhenya became a father. The Lord gave them a son whom they named Timothy. His wife Sasha had some complications during labor, and we prayed a lot for her. Now she is in hospital and Zhenya is alone with his son at home. He proved to be a good and caring father. Their lives are a wonderful testimony for many people in our village. A boy from an orphanage has a wonderful marriage! And now he cares for his wife and son! He works! And lives a Christian life! The staff of the orphanage in Nadezhinsk are amazed every time they meet us, and they express their gratitude for our ministry and involvement with the children. Zhenya visits his orphanage and talks to the children, he tells them about his family and about God.” Maxim invested in an orphan boy, a young man that previously had no hope and now has hope. God placed Zhenya with Maxim and his family, and Zhenya learned what it meant to be a godly man. And now he lives it out before others and those distant from God even see it.

And because Maxim invests in others in Word and deed, those he has discipled do the same—again even from his own family. “Soon we will have a baptismal service in our

church. In the picture you can see the group of people who are getting ready for baptism. Each one of them has a story to tell of how God brought them to Himself. I want to share the story of Igor, who is 23. Three years ago, he got a job as an administrator at a Chinese cafe in our village. And a year ago, he became the owner of that business because the previous owner got sick with cancer and could not do the work. My oldest daughter Diana took the position of the administrator in that cafe. Igor had never interacted with real Christians in his life earlier and he had never heard the Gospel. He viewed himself as an atheist and he mocked churches. When Diana started her job at the cafe she shared a lot about the church, about God, and about her faith, but most importantly, she lived a righteous life and was never noted to participate in any ungodly deeds. That really surprised Igor. Once he came to our church during a prayer meeting. He did not understand much, but he made a decision to investigate faith. Since that time, he comes to church every Sunday and the Lord touched his heart. Igor received Christ and he witnesses that God has completely changed his heart, his thoughts, and his life. Presently he helps a lot in our church ministry, and he is an active participant of all the church events.” Through Maxim’s faithfulness to invest in his daughter, Igor was moved by her testimony of Christ and the way she lived her life. God was working everything together, and all that was required of Maxim and Diana was faithfulness. And the wonders of God were again on display.

Today's Scripture Theme:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9).

The Apostle Peter experienced the most growth in Christ during the periods of suffering that he endured. He had denied the Lord Jesus Christ—his Lord—when confronted at Jesus' trial. He utterly failed. He did not want to experience what he saw Jesus Christ experiencing. However, after realizing his utter failure in the face of potential persecution, he grieved deeply of soul and repented of his denial of Christ. After seeing the resurrected Lord and being endued with power by the Holy Spirit, Peter joyfully embraced the suffering and persecution that was directed at him. He knew that following Christ involved suffering, not only for the verbal proclamation of Christ as God come in human flesh, but also for living life on mission and living the new life he possessed in Christ Jesus. Rather than viewing himself as a victim, he correctly viewed himself as part of a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation who was part of the possession of the Lord Jesus Christ. With great passion and zeal, Peter proclaimed the excellencies of Christ, who called him out of darkness into His marvelous light. He, therefore, taught believers during the apostolic era of the church to joyfully embrace suffering for doing the will of God, for

living life on mission for Jesus Christ.

It is a great encouragement to read of Maxim and his investment into the lives of Zhenya and Igor. Maxim has not experienced the kind of suffering that Peter encountered, but he has lived life on mission for Jesus Christ. Maxim pushes past those who would discourage him for investing in young men like Zhenya and Igor in order to declare the excellencies of Christ. Zhenya and Igor both came to saving faith in Christ Jesus because of the ministry in word and deed of Maxim, a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. Maxim invested in his daughter who, in turn, invested in her boss, Igor. He is a contemporary example of living life on mission for Jesus Christ and making known, to those around him, the excellencies of Jesus Christ, and how He calls us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

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Please pray today:

- Praise God for providence, that even in His transcendence, He lovingly cares for His children, seeing them even before time began and leading them in triumphal procession.
- Pray that God will place each of us who follow Christ in an ever-increasing number of places where we can testify to the goodness and graciousness of God, and live it out before men.
- Pray that faithful believers in Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine will keep their eyes fixed on Christ in the midst of these difficult days, proclaiming hope in Him alone and living it out before others, even in the midst of personal suffering.



Day 28

For those who have a loving family, most can testify to the simple value of a supportive family. Whether it be encouragement, counsel, safety, or a helping hand, it does not take much to realize what a blessing a loving family can be. In contrast, a destructive family can be heartbreaking, and having no family at all can be overwhelming. Life in this world is not easy. Issues of health, money, relationships, and even the lack of friendship can be so hard to endure. Regretfully we often take those close to us for granted. We don't stop and thank God often enough for those who we count as family. But for those who have no one, who have known only suffering, a kind word and sweet fellowship are like a cup of cool water in a desert. These are the lives of orphan children, and also the responses when they discover the family of God.

Valery is an SGA-supported missionary pastor in Belarus who has met many who have not experienced the sweetness of a loving family. He held a recent VBS and met a young man who lived such a life. Yura is 21 years old and shares, “I grew up in an orphanage. I suffer from various diseases, but especially from a short stature—because of which nobody takes me seriously and does not hire me. My mother was killed when I was still a child, and I do not remember my

father at all. An Orthodox priest from Gomel took me into his family, then I went to Rome with them. After I reached the age of 18, he and his wife brought me to Belarus, then bought an uninhabitable house in the village of Bakuny and said to me, ‘Here is God, and here is the threshold! You can take it from here!!!’ Since being asked to leave, I have to literally survive on my own. Thank God that the world is not without kind people, but sometimes it can be exceedingly difficult for me. I get discouraged and hopeless, because of my small stature and developmental delay nobody takes me seriously and does not take me to work. How am I to survive without money?” Yura truly was alone in the world. Even the family he was born with and the one who adopted him truly abandoned him. He had no one to turn to other than the kindness of strangers. The idea of a family was purely a thought or dream.

But God saw Yura and heard his cry. “The pastor of the church, Valery, invited me to a VBS. I liked it very much—here I was taught to love my neighbor and God. The most important thing: I realized that in this world only Jesus, Who died for me, really cares about me. I learned about it at Aunt Luda’s lessons. It’s very fun here, interesting lessons, interesting games that Aunt Olga conducts. It is also great that the slide, trampolines, cotton candy, and popcorn have arrived. I am ready to come here every day! The food here is delicious, the counselors are friendly and kind, not like in

other camps where they swear and yell at kids for nothing. Also, I really liked to help and now believe in Jesus. I want to serve God, help everyone, and praise Him.” In a moment, Yura found an eternal family and was no longer alone. In Christ, he found the love he had always ached for. In Christ, he found a loving family in the church. May we pause in this day and praise God for His family and His Son Jesus. And if it also applies, praise God for the family you have.

Today’s Scripture Theme:

By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:35)

The disciples were men with like passions with us. They struggled with the same temptations of the flesh with which we struggle. They jockeyed to be in positions of favor, at times even among one another. There are several occasions where Jesus had to correct such attitudes. After all, following Christ was not about the disciples, it was about the will of God the Father. Who was greatest among the disciples was not to be a concern. Such a concern diminishes love for God and love for one another. The fundamental truth that Jesus’s disciples needed to learn and embrace was that of love. Love for God, first and foremost, and love for one another subsequently. Love for God and one another would, and did, suppress the desire to be the greatest, to be elevated, to be recognized and honored. It was about serving God

and serving one another, and the key disposition was that of love for God and then love for one another. This is how those who do not know Christ can know that followers of Christ truly are His disciples. Love for God and love for one another is the foundation for extending the love of God to those who do not yet know Him.

It is a joy to read of Yura and his journey to Christ. His journey took him to a local family of believers. Imperfect, yet the love of God was evident among them. They loved Yura where others had diminished and dismissed him. Among the disciples of Jesus Christ, Yura found love, God's love. He carefully watched and listened as the Word of God was taught. He was drawn to Christ through the loving ministry of His disciples in the local church family. Yura who had known nothing from others but a low estimation of his worth due to his circumstances, and quite literally his stature, found the love of Christ being expressed in the local church family and the camp ministry they conducted. We are grateful for faithful servants like Pastor Valery who consistently engage those around them with the love of Christ. Thank you for praying for the loving extension of the Gospel through faithful servants like Pastor Valery and his church family.

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Please pray today:

- Praise God for the gift of family through Jesus Christ, that we all might know the joy of Christ-centered fellowship and eternal hope in Him.
- Pray for the forgotten and marginalized children, for those that have no family, that God will turn their hearts to Him and surround them with His family through faith in Jesus.
- Pray for those who minister to orphan children, that God will grant them love, long-suffering patience, and peace in ministering to children and young adults with broken hearts, whose lives have been destroyed in broken families.



Day 29

The family of God is a beautiful thing. God takes people of different nations and lives, and makes them into a family. They are united through their faith in Jesus, and there is always room for the family to grow. At times, entry into the family of God through faith in Jesus means that actual family by birth becomes distant. This is very often the case when a traditionally Muslim family discovers that one of them is now a follower of Christ, or one that embraces a very worldly lifestyle. Yet this bond with Christ, this adoption into the family of God, becomes a new and better safe place. Too often the family of God is neglected. People see the family of God as people with whom they connect with on Sunday morning. In this case, the family is more of a social connection. Yet for an orphan, for those in persecution, the family of God is everything. Let us not neglect our adoption, and in fact glorify God for the family He has built by His grace through His Son Jesus.

Sergei is an SGA-supported missionary pastor in Central Asia who lives in a city that is predominately Muslim. He knows first-hand of the cost of coming to faith in Jesus. Yet His joy in Christ flows to all. This includes one orphan girl whom he met. “My wife Olesya and I were visiting the Children’s TB Sanatorium, which essentially was a Chil-

dren's Distribution Center, where orphans and children from disadvantaged families were housed. We would bring sweets, small gifts, and clothes to the children. We paid special attention to a girl named Sevilya. Both of her parents died and they were going to place her in an orphanage. According to Sevilya, she had other relatives, but they could not adopt her. A short time later, we were forbidden to visit this center. Our communication with Sevilya was severed. But the little smiling girl was not forgotten. Even back then, I called her Sunshine—once you look at her, you involuntarily start smiling! One day after six months, quite by chance I met Sevilya and her grandmother in a store. It turned out that we were acquainted with her grandmother; she once came to our church. During our conversation, I learned that Sevilya was going to be placed in an orphanage. As we spoke in the store, we agreed that our family would take Sevilya to our place and that we would start an adoption process. A few days later, she was in our home. Sevilya started calling us her mom and dad from the first day. This was the summer of 2016.” In a moment, Sevilya had a family who would love her and provide for her. But God has something more planned for her.

God was moving in Sevilya's heart to become a member of His family. “We attended the church together with her, participated in the life of the church to our utmost, praying together every day, reading and studying the Bible. Gradu-

ally Sevilya began to be deeply interested with the ideas of Christianity. As a teenager, she repented in church at one evangelism service. Later Sevilya faced strong opposition from her grandmother, who is Tatar by nationality and a Muslim. Sevilya is also a Tatar and is considered a Muslim just by belonging to the Tatar nation. From time to time, her grandmother would take Sevilya to stay with her for a couple of days. She would literally set the girl against our family and myself, against our faith; she had the girl visiting Muslim shrines with her and wanted her to wear a hijab. She repeatedly filed complaints with the Children's Services office, which is why I, being a custodian, was called there for preventive conversations.”

“Time was passing by and the girl grew up. She was socializing with her peers at school and in the church. Sevilya willingly attended church with our whole family. She participated in the church services along with other church youth. Sevilya wanted to be baptized, but I did not support her until she was 18 years old. If Sevilya was baptized before reaching adulthood age, we could have been accused by her grandmother for the forcible conversion of a minor child to Christianity. In May, she turned 18 and in June, she received water baptism. It was a very joyful day!” Sevilya had no parents, and relatives could not care for her. Therefore when she had a family, she embraced it fully. And now with the family of God, she was all in and could not be dissuaded.

May we too be grateful to God for His family, not taking for granted the gift He has given us through adoption. God be praised for the hope we have in Jesus!

Today's Scripture Theme:

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. (Ephesians 2:19)

The Apostle Paul taught Jew and Gentile believers alike that the distinctions they had maintained no longer existed in Christ. In the great provision of salvation, that which divided them had been abolished and they were now of the same family. To the Jewish believers, he stressed that the middle wall of the Law had been broken down. To the Gentile believers, he stressed that they had been adopted into God's new household called the church, the Body of Christ. Based upon these truths, they were to conduct their lives by setting aside the divisions established over the millennia and live according to their new reality. They were, and are, now fellow citizens with the saints, and are of the household of God. This truth was also applicable due to the fact that both Jew and Gentile believers of that era often experienced being ostracized by their family and friends. The Body of Christ became a place to belong and connect with those who also followed Christ. They were to know that they had a new family that loved and cared for them. Mutually they grew in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ and contin-

ued to proclaim the Gospel in their part of the world, and to regions beyond their own.

It is a blessing to read of Sevilya and her new family. She had known the difficulties of being a child who no longer had parents, and an extended family that believed they could not care for her. In God's timing, Sergei met her and developed a special bond with her. When it was discovered that Sevilya was going to be put in an orphanage, Sergei and his wife adopted her into their family. There she found genuine love and a family that deeply cared for her. She shared their lifestyle which meant family time in prayer, the Word of God, and attending church for worship, the ministry of God's Word, and the activities of the church family. She, in time, understood the Gospel and her need to repent, and believe on Christ. She became a follower of Christ and was connected to her adopted family in a new way, and gained an extended family of the other believers in her new church. She is now a fellow citizen with the saints, and a member of the household of God. Thank you for praying for faithful servants like Pastor Sergei who minister to the forgotten in their part of the world.

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Please pray today:

- Praise God for our adoption into His family, a precious gift beyond comparison.
- Pray for those children who struggle as orphans, desperately seeking a family. Pray that they will learn of the family of God, turning in faith to Jesus and find an eternal family.
- Pray for faithful believers to not neglect the family of God. Rather, to be set apart like Pastor Sergei to see many come to God's ever-growing family by His grace through His Son Jesus.



Day 30

Loneliness can be one of the most difficult of trials to observe. When we are alone, we face battles around us and in us with no support system. Working as a team is more productive, and having another to share our thoughts and fears is helpful. All of these benefits fade when we are alone. King Solomon writes . . . Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)! The word “woe” is an expression of great distress or sorrow. Solomon sees the pain and struggle of those who are alone. This is even more pronounced with orphans, and for children who have been abandoned. Not only are they alone, but they feel the abandonment. They wonder whether they matter at all. Such thoughts lead a person to overwhelming despair and depression. Yet in Christ, all can discover the beauty of the family of God. In Christ, we are adopted into His family. No longer alone as Christ is with us. Orphans who even questioned their existence find that God loves them and seeks them. Those alone are alone no longer.

Vycheslav is an SGA-supported pastor in Samara, Russia. He recently learned of a young man who was alone, but not forgotten. “A brother asked me to help a girl from Moscow

find her native brother who was in slavery, and could not leave. He did not have his official papers. The people who brought him into slavery took the papers away from him. His sister came to know that her brother was in the Samara region and asked for help. She asked for someone who would accompany her and help her get her brother from the farmers who held him against his will. She had no one to ask for help. Daniel, my son, and I went to the railway station to meet the man's sister. Daniel and I prayed, met the girl there, and went to the farm. At first, we went to the local police office, and explained the situation. The policemen went there with Alina (the sister). They came back together with her brother, Dmitri, in 30 minutes. We thanked the Lord for providing us with the assistance of the local authority's representative. When they came, the policeman warned us to leave the district quickly. We thanked God and headed to Samara immediately." This young man Dmitri was alone and trapped. But God saw Him, and moved Pastor Vyacheslav and his son Daniel to help. In this moment, Dmitri—who felt so much alone—was found.

And it seems there was even more to the story. "On our way back, Alina and Dmitri told us that they were young when they lost their parents. They did not have relatives. Daniel and I shared our testimonies with them. We traveled for two hours; and I told them how the Lord found and saved us. I said that our meeting was not by chance, that I also grew up

in an orphanage. God had never left me, as He is the God of widows and the fatherless. We told them much about the Lord. Upon our arrival at Samara, we prayed for them and gave them a copy of the New Testament. They promised to find a similar church in Moscow and attend it. Hopefully to come to know the Lord. Everything is in His hands. I think they will not forget our meetings and the help from the Lord. Please, pray for these orphans, as there is no one in the world who needs them.” Those cast off by the world are redeemed in Christ. For all who feel alone, there is One who will remain closer than even the best of friends. May Alina and Dmitri find Christ through faith, for He is the God of the widows and the fatherless, bringing those far away into His family by His grace.

Today’s Scripture Theme:

Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. (Ephesians 2:12)

The Apostle Paul, in teaching the Ephesian believers about their new relationship with God in Christ Jesus, exhorted them to remember what their state was before believing on Christ. Prior to trusting Christ, they were separated from Him, alienated, strangers, having no hope and were without God in this world. However, they were not forgotten. God had them in His plans before the foundation of the world.

He had chosen them to be holy and blameless before Him, in love. In due time, the message of the Gospel of Christ reached their city, their ears, and penetrated their souls. They repented and trusted Christ, confessing Him to be Lord—that is God—and believing Him to be the Savior for mankind. They were now near to God, inseparable from Him, through their faith in Christ Jesus. What was true of the Ephesians is true of humanity in the 21st century. Humanity continues to be separated from Christ, alienated, strangers to God’s promises, having no hope and without God. As was true in the Apostolic era, so it is today that faithful servants of Christ Jesus take the message of the Gospel to lost humanity. God, in His mercy and grace, works and draws those whom He has chosen to Himself and they are no longer separated, or strangers with no hope, and are now secure in their relationship with the living God.

It is incredible to read of Alina and Dmitri and their story of reunification. In and of itself it is a tremendous human-interest story. However, it is much more than a human-interest story. God, was and is, in the middle of the story. Alina and Dmitri were not, and are not yet, believers in Christ Jesus. God, in His providence, connected them with Pastor Vyacheslav and his son Daniel. With their assistance, and the police, Alina went to the farm where her brother was being kept as a slave. He had no way to leave, his documents had been taken. With the assistance of the authorities,

Dmitri was rescued and returned to Moscow with his sister Alina. In the time spent with Pastor Vyacheslav and Daniel, they heard of the hope found uniquely in Christ Jesus and were given copies of the Scriptures. They have not yet come to repentance and faith in Christ, but they are definitely open. They have been exposed to the Gospel and the hope found in Christ. They know that they no longer have to be separated from Christ, alienated from God's promises, be without hope and God, if they repent and believe on Christ. God is at work in their lives. Thank you for praying for faithful servants like Pastor Vyacheslav and his son Daniel, who stand ready to make the hope found in Christ known.

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Please pray today:

- Praise God for His love of all people, for the hope we have in Jesus Christ.
- Pray for those orphans and widows, for those children suffering in deep poverty and neglect, that God will reach them with His love and His mercy in Jesus Christ.
- Pray that believers would seek out those who suffer in silence and loneliness, pointing them to Jesus and the family of God.