

PARTNERS IN MISSIONS

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"In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now."
Philippians 1:4-5

Jesus bring hope, ...

In the time of Jesus, there was an ongoing racial tension between the "Jews" living in Jerusalem and the ethnically mixed people living in the region of Samaria. In John 4:9, the Samaritan woman that Jesus met at the well responds by saying, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" Then the biblical author adds, "For Jews do not associate with Samaritans." Our modern world is filled with the same ethnic and racial bias. As one who lives outside of the borders of our "homeland," we are acutely aware of the vulnerability that Americans face living abroad. We are also acutely aware that many in the world view Americans with suspicious motives and even as "evil," and therefore wish us harm. But in the fourth chapter of John, the author notes that Jesus, "... **had to go through Samaria.**" It was certainly possible for Jesus to avoid contact with the potentially threatening Samaritans, as most Jews did in his day. The problem was that in Acts 1:8 Jesus would say to his followers that they would be his, "*witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*" How could Jesus avoid the dangers of engaging the peoples of the world if he was going to command his followers to risk their lives by going to the ends of the earth? I find it interesting that Jesus's encounter with the Samaritan woman ends with the people of that Samaritan village saying, "... *we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.*"

I recently spent two weeks teaching in the former Soviet country of Armenia. The country of Armenia is surrounded by the Islamic countries of Iran, Turkey, and Azerbaijan, and is not far from Syria. Two students caught my attention this time. Both of them were not from Armenia. The first was named Jacob, and was a refugee from Syria. He had been a Christian pastor before fleeing Syria with his family. When he found himself in Armenia, he felt it natural to start a new church among Syrian refugees. I visited with him and his family and preached in his new church. He told me that 30 members of his congregation had been resettled in other countries during the past year, but even with this loss his congregation was still growing. He jokingly told me that war was good for the growth of the church. When the service was over he was excited to show me his modest office. He was especially pleased to show me his new communion set, which he said they would use for the first time next Sunday.



Ray and Pam Trantham:

Missionaries in Odessa, Ukraine for the past 22 years

"Training National Leaders for Ministry"

Following the evening worship service, he and two of his elders took me out to eat. Of course, it was in a restaurant owned by two other Syrian refugees. It was a small family run restaurant. Jacob ordered a wide selection of dishes which were sat in the middle of the table as everyone shared in a family-style meal. As we ate, he told me one of the restaurant owners had owned an auto parts business and employed 150 people before fleeing Syria.

A second student always sat on the front row and looked ethnically different than the other students. I noticed his Bible was in a script that I did not recognize. He was a Christian from Iran. Maybe his ethnic identification made him feel like the Samaritan woman. But like that woman from Samaria, he was telling his own people the good news of God who loved the whole world. At the end of class he gave me large (and expensive) box of candy from Iran and thanked me for the class.

I preached at a different congregation on Sunday morning, and following the service I had lunch in the home of Tigran, who was one of my first students 18 years ago. Tigran is about my age and had just undergone heart catheterization procedures. He is currently involved in a new church planting project, where I preached during the afternoon. As we ate lunch together he was eager for me to meet his son, who he said would be entering the Bible college next year.

It is because of you that students are trained for ministry. You are a part of the work of training national leaders for ministry in Ukraine, as well as in Armenia and even beyond. We appreciate your financial giving to make this work possible, but

we also ask that you remember these students and their work in your prayers. Pray that God would use us to reach people like the Samaritan woman and that even those who are now hostile to God would come to know him.



Tax-deductible contributions:
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