



November 19, 2018

Dear Friends and Family,

I had a busy September and then spend nearly the entire month of October in Latvia and Germany – but before I get to summarizing those two months, I'd like to start off by wishing you a wonderful Thanksgiving! We are off to Kentucky to spend the holiday with my parents while also getting to see our daughters.

WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT

This past Sunday during worship I found myself thinking of the story of the Ten Lepers – let me share some thoughts that I think will bless and encourage you! Here's the story from the Gospel of Luke in chapter 17, verses 11 through 19:

On the way to Jerusalem He was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. And as He entered a village, He was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." When He saw them, He said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed.

Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus answered, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return to give praise to God except this foreigner?" And He said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."

Isn't it interesting that it says that ten lepers stood at a distance and lifted their voices, but when Jesus responded he didn't have to yell or lift His voice. We may never have suffered from leprosy, but we all have needed help of some kind. Ten lepers standing at a distance and yelling for help – for Jesus to have mercy on them. Probably too often we neglect our relationship with the Lord – our Bibles on a shelf, our prayer closets empty – and then something happens in life and once again we begin to pray – but we pray like we're at a distance worrying that God's won't hear our prayers – we think maybe we've gotten too far from Him to hear or He's not listening. The ten lepers stood at a distance – a physical distance, but it was also relational – as lepers they were used to keeping a distance from others – and in this case, even keeping a distance from Jesus. So, they lifted their voices – yelling to him so he could hear. For them the distance was real – they felt it.

But God lives outside time and space – it's impossible for God to be far from us – He's always near! In the story Jesus only had to speak – not yell his response – because even though the lepers sensed their distance – he heard and responded as One near – I used to have sticker on the dash of my first pick-up truck that read: "God is as close as a whispered prayer."

It's encouraging to see all ten lepers were healed of their leprosy – when you're in a critical situation it is absolutely critical you turn to someone who can really help – turning to Jesus in all our situations is always the best decision!

But only one returned to give thanks – we may be able to pray from a distance – but we need to get close to say thank you. This one healed person – no longer a leper – no longer an outcast – came and drew near to Jesus and gave thanks. When Jesus responded and said, “your faith has made you well,” something even greater than his physical healing occurred – something the other nine did not receive. In the original Greek, the word translated “cleansed,” relates to physical healing. The phrase “made well,” refers to total wholeness in the sense of restored identity, healed emotions, peace, and total well-being – body, soul and spirit – a foreigner brought into the family – in that one day he went from feeling so far away to experiencing probably an overwhelming closeness.

This Thanksgiving week – make sure to take the time to draw near to the Lord and spend time saying thank you for all the things you can think of – as you do, God will draw near to you! It's nice to have a holiday to remind us to be grateful and extend our thanks to God!

Now back to summarizing the last several months 😊

WHAT'S TAKEN PLACE

CCC, Woman's Retreat, and Friends from Latvia




During the month of September, the other pastors at Celebration Community Church got to take some well-earned time away – I was able to help by leading praise and worship and sharing the messages. MaryBeth and I also had the honor of ministering at Celebration's annual Women's Advance with the other pastor's wives:



We also had the treat of hosting our friends from Latvia, Kristaps and Lana Aboltins, their two daughters, and Alesha Nutter. Kristaps is the leader of History Makers and pastors a church in Riga. Alesha is an American missionary living in Latvia, serving on the History Makers Team and in the church. During their visit, Kristaps shared the Sunday message at Celebration – you can listen to it on the church's website.

Kristaps's wife Lana was a student of at BSM and is also one of the worship leaders of History Makers. During Celebration's Sunday service she helped me lead worship – I'm grateful to have the opportunity to minister with former students and help serve them as they serve the Lord!



 **Alesha Nutter**
Oct 2 at 11:16 PM •  

Such a fun week we had with the Linsers! Thank you Doug and MaryBeth for being the best hosts to help us adjust to America time. And thanks boys for giving up your rooms for us to sleep in! 😊 safely in our next stop on his crazy 4A 😊



The Baltic School of Ministry

I flew out to Latvia on October 2 and spent the first five days meeting with pastors and students and ministering on Sunday at Word of Truth Church in Riga.

I then spent a week teaching and ministering at the Baltic School of Ministry (BSM). I taught on the Holy Spirit – hard to believe this is my ninth-year teaching at the school – below is a picture of the 2018/2019 class of students.

I had a full week at BSM since a local teacher became sick and I picked up additional classes (24 classes in all not counting chapel services and Thursday evening service). On Wednesday evening I ministered at Salvation Church in Jelgava. Unexpected meeting but very grateful for the request to come! This church is normally a little reserved but after the message I had many coming forward for prayer! Straight faces turned to smiles - God encouraged several people walking through challenges.



Outreach Ministry in Ventspils

On Friday I jumped on a bus and took a 3-hour ride to the city of Ventspils. My friends, Mauro and Julia, moved there last year to plant a church. Before that, they served at BSM. Mauro oversaw the day to day running of the school while also teaching one of the courses. Julia was a student the very first year I taught there and then after they married joined the school helping with administration.

Before moving to Ventspils, Julia had met and ministered to a young girl at one of the summer youth camps. That girl ended up being from Ventspils and Julia contacted her after arriving. Then the girl's mother Tanya came for coffee to meet them. From that they had the start of a Bible Study. After a few months, Tanya brought her friend Natasha - and the group had grown to 5.

A church about 1.5 hours away began to send a few couples once a month to be in the meetings and help Mauro and Julia and encourage the small home group.

During my visit this group had their first official outreach service with the task of inviting unbelieving friends. We rented a facility in a nearby park and planned for fellowship and BBQ after the service. I've attached a few pictures.

We had 20 people which included two families sent from supporting churches - but Natasha's two sons came along with another friend of Tanya and stayed the whole time! We had worship, I shared of message of God being able to deliver us from any problems but most importantly taking care of the biggest debt that we could not pay - our sins - on the Cross!

Natasha's husband (an unbeliever) who works as a cook on a ship - told her he is looking forward to sharing coffee with Mauro once he returns to land.

Please continue to pray for these individuals and their small beginning - for hope and encouragement and direction.



Ministry in Cologne, Germany

I then flew to Cologne, Germany to minister at the church our friends Sasha and Vera Rodionov are now pastoring. While there I taught a Friday evening and Saturday seminar on the Word of God, along with ministering at their Sunday service. In addition, we spent time ministering and fellowshiping with the members of this church during a home group meeting and during meals – what a great group of people who have been without a full-time pastor for many years now. Sasha asked me to come back early in the new year to teach on the Holy Spirit and minister to the leadership group.

WHAT'S AHEAD

Latvia/Germany in January and February: I will be heading back to Latvia to teach my second semester week at BSM the last week in January. From there I will head back to the church in Cologne, Germany.

Botswana, Africa: It's been over ten years since I went to Botswana to help my friend Michael Tomasulo plant a church in Mahalapye, Botswana. The church has grown over those years and now has a small bible school, children's outreach and feeding programs, along with other various ministries. Pastor Gabantshephe (we call him Pastor Tex) has done a great job and he has been asking me to come back for several years now. I plan on going towards the end of April.

Grateful and thankful for all!