

I noticed that flowers are just beautiful.

Flowers simply spend their short lives reproducing themselves in a delightful way....being a bright spot of color where ever they are.

Their effort is unchanged by their location.

The flower behind the barn is no less beautiful than the one in the front yard.

If I have, for whatever reason, been planted in a barely noticeable place,

oh may it be that I glorify God, reproduce His love and bless others where I am!

Shied – He used to lead the rowdy crowd. He was a gifted musician whose skills & personality brought him applause and many invitations. But, the company he kept was far from God and payment for the show came in bottles. For many years he staggered under the weight of talent without God. When he came to the end of himself, he recalled a friend he had had in his childhood. Shied remembered how his friend's family was different – a good different and he sought his friend out.

I really regret not writing Shied's story down while I had the chance. I got to hear it several times and enjoyed just listening to his voice inflections as his heart went back over all the God had done for him. I'll have to wait to hear it again because God called his servant home on June 5th. A loss for us because, besides his wonderful wife and 4 kids (ages 17 to 2) that had to say good bye so quickly, Shied was a church planter with a special fire.

A facet of this diamond that sparkled so beautifully was that he came from a mslm background and he had a heart for those like himself. About 6 years ago, he moved his family to a tiny village specifically to reach the mslm people there. Just like that flower behind the barn, Shied spent his short time there being a God glorifying and neighbor blessing man in this out of the way place. Door to door outreaches, medical outreaches,

Vacation Bible Schools, Sunday services, always ready to drop what he was doing to talk with a neighbor...even his funeral was evangelistic outreach that he had thought through...that was Shied.

They never did figure out what he had but he suffered a great deal these past 3 years and he was in extreme pain these last 8 months. Over the years I had the privilege of being able to help as I could with his medical needs. I am grateful to God that mom and I got to see him 3 weeks before he died. I'm so glad Shied is no longer suffering but a bunch of us are really gonna miss him.

The faith that can't be shaken is the faith that has been shaken.

Randy Alcorn

Retreat – Perhaps it sounds strange but I really wanted to be at Shied's funeral – for Shied's wife sake, the Lemke's sake and my own. It was God's gift to me that I received the sad news the day before I was to leave. I quickly changed my bus ticket and left the day after the funeral for a wedding.

I work with 3 churches that have medical outreach ministries and in each place I have taught a Ukrainian Christian nurse how to help patients with wounds or ostomies. The city of Berdansk is about 5 hours away from where I live so I

only get there 2 to 3 times a year. Era is the name of the nurse I've taught in Berdansk and besides being colleagues we are also good friends. She and her husband invited me to the wedding of their only child – Artom. I've already been to a lot more weddings and funerals in Ukraine than I have in the states so maybe I don't have much to compare by. But, it's my opinion that *here* you are much more a participant verses a spectator in the event. I like that.

It was another gift from God that I could go but God had a 3 for 1 special going on that trip. First, from literally the start to the end of my 5 day trip, God had planned a personal retreat for me. I hadn't tried to create it or even thought to. But my Heavenly Father blessed me with hours of spiritual food, no work (not even any phone calls!), lovely sleep, a relaxed schedule and play. Second, the wedding was special and very fun. And third...well it is difficult to explain because you don't know how much fear I lived under before....how hard it used to be for me only a few years ago.

I was several hours into my trip when it dawned on me what was happening. I was doing things I had never done before and I wasn't scared! For me completely changing plans in 60 seconds in route, exchanging bus tickets & making bus transfers – alone and in Russian – that is huge! Sounds silly written down but I don't care. I never want to return to those shackles of fear. I love the freedom, peace & joy that I have now. Thank you Lord! With all my heart – thank you!

Days ahead – I did not return directly home from the wedding but rather took another day and went to visit a Vacation Bible School (VBS) that was going on about 2 hrs from where I live. Even though I have been supporting VBS's for 14 years now, I work with 24 churches and many of the churches hold VBS's in various villages. Someday I'll have to stop and count how many villages the ministry reaches, but for now it is enough to say that there are some VBS's that I have not yet visited and Cheerful Village was one of them.

It is tiring, time consuming and there are the related travel costs but there is nothing like seeing it all with your own eyes. Making the effort to go where the local church is working answers a lot of 'what, where, how and why' questions, shows support and allows me to stand with confidence before those who financially give. Tomorrow I'll travel 3 hrs by train (and return by bus) to visit church planter Anatoli who is holding a VBS in

Butter Village. On Saturday I'll go to Kerch (3 hr round trip by bus) to see a patient, get VBS funds to the Central church and visit a VBS that is going on in an outlying village.

Over the next 2 ½ months I hope to travel out to one or more village each week to visit a VBS that is going on. It will be a chance to touch base with the local pastors /church planters and take photos. I intend to share VBS stories with you in the next update.

Prayer requests:

*Comfort for Shied's family.

*Health & safety for all those involved in summer outreaches; wisdom for the leadership; open hearts for the children/teens and their parents.

*My travel safety & wisdom in ministry decisions.

Blessings, June