

THE GOSPEL

BEHIND BARBED WIRE

Christian magazine



Topic:

Family

1st English Issue

Translated from:

Nº6.2013 (112)

The topic of this issue:

Family

*I pray for those who've done their time
In prison, Lord, who've in the past
Committed sins and crimes.
Righteous God, open up
The road of their surrender.
Soften their tough hearts
So they'll know the truth.
So their hearts will see
The life they've lived
And how to make things right
That they'll forget the way of sin.
I pray for each a family,
For homes built on love
Where sin no longer rules.
Give strength, Lord, to their faith
Through Your Word
And change their lives.
Let them, now, serve You.*

*Sent by Ludmila Buzilova
(Sverdlovsk Region)*

Contents:

From the Editor 1 • Sermon: God's Example for Marriage 2 • Testimony 5 • Poetry 6 • Sermon: The Value of Family 8 • Diary of Empress 12 • Confession 14 • Letters: Reflections on Family 15 • Oppose Something / Soul Cry 17 • The Holy Family 18 • Letters: Reflections on Honoring Parents 19 • Memories 20 • Story: Forgiveness 22 • Letters from Those with Life Sentences 25 • Life Story 26 • "Roll Call" & Needs 30 • Children Write to God 32 • RCR's Prison Magazine Ministry 33

On the Cover: Tsar Nicholas and Empress Alexandra Romanov's family

**It is the blessing of the Lord that makes
rich, And He adds no sorrow to it.
(Proverbs 10:22 NASB)**

**"By wisdom a house is built,
and by understanding
it is established"
(Proverbs 24:3 NASB)**

Marriage and family are fundamental to the human community, defining where individuals stand in relation to morality. People are stretched and revealed more fully through marriage and through family. Society is built and continues because of family. From generation to generation, the family passes on traditions, principles, the commands of God, the basics of love, and a store of human experience.

The Bible speaks about marriage and family from the first to last books. Three of the ten commandments relate directly to these concepts (Exodus 20:12-14 NASB):

- The commandment to honor your parents: "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you."
- The commandment against abortion: "You shall not murder."
- The commandment against infidelity: "You shall not commit adultery."

The family is holy, and the powers of evil are putting pressure on it to break it apart and destroy its sanctity. Abortion, divorce, homosexuality and other abominations are becoming common place. Large, united families aren't the fashion anymore, and infidelity is simply a fun game to many. The institution of marriage is being pulled down, and sin is coming out on top. The world is experiencing a deep crisis of family like never before.

This is why we present this topic to our readers. Each of us must understand our role and responsibility before God, not only for ourselves but for those around us: our parents, wives, husbands, children, etc.

The structure of marriage and family has been put in place by God to bless us. Only godly wisdom can establish a faithful, stable, love-filled home. God gives us time to correct our mistakes, to heal the wounds of others, to overcome evil with good, hate with love, and to transform the family into a dwelling of peace.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9 NASB).

Mikhail Fadin, magazine editor



God's Plan for Marriage

John Poysti

In Genesis, the first book in the Bible, God gives us His instructions about the most important human relationship – the relationship between husband and wife. And these instructions are not just a matter of good advice, but rather God's inspired instructions.

It's well known that the first chapter in the Bible is a kind of summary of God's creative work during the first decisive week in the history of humankind. We see here the Creator God creating everything: water, planets, vegetation, animals and finally, the human being, who was the pinnacle of God's creative work.

As you read this fascinating account, you can't miss the words that are repeated over and over again: "And God saw that it was good." But then in the second chapter we suddenly read these words: "God said, "It is not good..." This is the first time in the Bible that God remarks that something is not good in His creation.

These words – "not good" – are said before the Fall, in other words, before sin came into the world and had its destructive effect on God's creation. But what was it that God said was "not good"? He said, "It is not good for the man to be alone."

In God's created world something was lacking. Man was alone, and God says that it was not good. You see, God cares for the man and He cares about man being alone. God doesn't want man to be lacking in anything. And so God says, "It is not good for the man to be alone."

It seemed as if Adam had everything that he needed, and then some. He lived in a beautiful place in perfect surroundings. He had no lack of food and was able to enjoy all the beauty of the world that God had created. God had even given Adam a job, and we all know how important it is for men and women to have work. It is doubtful that Adam could complain that he was bored. And it is hard to imagine a better place to work than in the Garden of Eden!

God also gave Adam power and authority. All of the animals were under his authority and God gave Adam the task of naming all the animals. Imagine the privilege! And on top of all that, God Himself related personally with Adam: He spoke to Adam, gave him instructions and, of course, listened to him. Just think of being able to have personal fellowship with God Himself!

Yes, Adam seemed to have everything, but there was still something missing, and it was God who noticed this lack: "It is not good for the man to be alone." But God didn't simply state the fact; God didn't simply recognize the problem; He also provides the solution. And what a wonderful solution!

God said, "I will make him a helper suitable for him." Not just a helper, but a helper that would be a good fit for Adam. What does this mean? How are we to understand these words of God?

Adam, all by himself, was not complete. Adam needed a helper who was fit for him, suitable for him, able to complete that which was lacking in him. From this we can conclude that a helper who is suitable for a man, should be someone who differs from him. You see: God didn't just create a second man. In that case, there would have been two men on the earth, both of them lonely and both of them experiencing the same lack or need.

That is why God created the woman, who is, yes, different from a man, but at the same time fits him and completes him. So, we read that, "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."

The human being is the pinnacle of God's creation, and after He created man and woman, we read: "God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good." Now the process of God's creative work is complete. The world He creates is very good, because everything has been provided by its Creator. And all of creation receives God's full approval.

God always finds the best solution to every problem: "So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. The Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man."

In this way, God performs the very first marriage. He personally creates the institution of marriage, selects the spouses and brings the woman to Adam. And in the Gospel of Mark, the Lord Jesus Christ says these very important words: "What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." God joins man and woman in marriage, so we must not separate what God has done.

The Last Masquerade

*A wan new garment of young green,
Touched, as you turned your soft brown hair;
And in me surged the strangest prayer
Ever in lover's heart hath been.*

*That I who saw your youth's bright page,
A rainbow change from robe to robe,
Might see you on this earthly globe,
Crowned with the silver crown of age.*

*Your dear hair powdered in strange guise,
Your dear face touched with colors pale,
And gazing through the mask and veil
The mirth of your immortal eyes.*

G. K. Chesterton

The Lord knows that Adam needed a helper suitable for him, and so He brought Eve to him. And in the same way God selects for us the spouse that is suitable for us. When you begin to think about marriage, make sure that it is God who is forming that marriage, because that is the only guarantee for a successful and happy marriage. God brought the woman to the man. That means that God approves of marriage and it is part of his plan for humankind. And if it is God's plan, there can be no doubt that it is a good plan!

Did you notice that marriage was approved by God right at the beginning, even before sin entered the world, before man and

woman sinned? This is very important. In our day, there are people who say that marriage is not needed. If a man and a woman love each other, then it's fine to simply move in together. Marriage, they say, is an institution thought up by humans and it is nothing more than an outdated tradition.

So what about it, is marriage needed? God says: Yes! But isn't it enough if we just love each other and live together? If there were ever a loving couple, it was Adam and Eve. They had no sin. They weren't selfish and didn't have any shortcomings. This all took place before sin had come into the world. And still, God instructed Adam and Eve to get married, and God himself joined them in marriage.

No, marriage is not some old-fashioned idea! Marriage was thought up by God! It was God who instituted marriage and made it the foundation of all human relationships. And let's not forget that in God's plan, marriage was a good thing. Adam seems to agree, according to his reaction when God brought Eve to him: "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."

Adam's words as translated into English, do not adequately convey the excitement and joy that he felt at this moment when God brought him a wife. A more literal translation from the Hebrew text of Adam's reaction would be the word, "Hurray!" As soon as Adam saw Eve, the very first word out of his lips, is "Hurray!"

Adam understood that God had a wonderful plan in mind for him, and joyfully realized that God had solved his problem of loneliness in the most wonderful way imaginable. And we too should praise the Lord for giving us the fantastic institution of marriage.

When God joined Adam and Eve in marriage, He gave a brief speech. The main points are at the end of Genesis, chapter 2: "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh." And that is followed by this comment: "And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed."

This passage of Scripture describes the marital relationship as God designed it. It is very important to stress that this is a description not only of Adam and Eve's marriage, but of all marriages. How do we know that? Just look at the very first words of God: "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother..." Well, Adam and Eve didn't have a father or a mother to leave! It follows that these instructions are for all people, for all succeeding generations, who are thinking about getting married.

The first principle of marriage is: "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother." This is a matter of separation. It is both an emotional and physical separation. When young people enter into marriage, they cannot continue to depend on their parents in the same way as they did before marriage. They have now entered into a new relationship that is more important than their relationship with their parents.

Perhaps you think that it is odd that God's instructions on marriage begin with a seemingly negative statement. But that is not the case. God chooses this approach, because the relationship between husband and wife must be seen as the basic and most important human relationship, and it is more important than even the relationship between parents and children.

To leave father and mother is often a difficult process for both children and parents. But it is completely necessary. God says this step is the foundation of a successful and happy marriage.

After leaving the parental nest, the husband must "be joined to his wife." That is the second principle of marriage. This is a matter of permanency. There must be a permanent and strong bond between spouses. Marriage is permanent, while the parent-child relationship is usually temporary. The marriage relationship supersedes all other human relationships. God designed marriage to be strong and permanent. And if God says marriage should be permanent, then that is what it should be!

God's instructions include a third principle: "They shall become one flesh." This is a matter of unity. Unity is the ability to accommodate one another. Unity is when two people, most likely two people who differ greatly from each other, completely and without holding anything back, want to share their lives with each other. It means complete dedication and attention to the needs of the other person, and being ready to forgive the other's weaknesses. The development of unity in marriage is a process that requires effort from both the husband and the wife. According to God's plan for marriage, marital unity is of a very special kind.

The second chapter of Genesis ends with these words: "And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed." These words speak of the fourth principle in God's plan for marriage. It is a matter of physical intimacy.

Physical intimacy, according to God's plan, is reserved for marriage and is only permitted within the marriage relationship. So many lives have been ruined because people have abused God's gift of physical intimacy before marriage or outside of marriage. Did you notice that the matter of physical intimacy is the last thing mentioned in God's plan for marriage? And this is for good reason.

If the three first principles (separation, permanency and unity) are not given their proper place in the marriage, then there won't be any place for the fourth principle: genuine physical intimacy. This principle comes as a result of following the previous three principles. And, according to God's plan, physical intimacy in marriage should be without fear and without shame.

We have quickly gone through God's instructions for marriage, and I would urge you to read through the first chapters of Genesis once again, and carefully study these principles. Remember that if you want your marriage to be happy, begin from the beginning. In other words, the place to begin is with God's instructions for marriage. May the Lord help you to be consistent in keeping His commandments and in showing wisdom in this very important matter of marriage.

She Forgave Me!



I really want to tell you about my family. I bitterly recognize that I've lived life the wrong way; I took the wrong path and listened to no one... I couldn't care less about who talked to me and what they said. I didn't appreciate my relatives and loved ones. When my mother talked to me I answered impudently, even though she wanted to protect me from a terrible and evil world, which drew me like a magnet.

At the age of ten, I started to steal. My mother and sisters didn't even guess that I was doing it. But when a policeman came to my home and told my mother that I stole money, she was aghast at that news and cried. To me, her tears didn't make sense - big deal, I stole money!! My mom and I were escorted to the Police Department, and were kept there until morning. Then I was transferred to the Correction Center for minors. Later, there was a court hearing, and I got two years probation. But I didn't even try to change my life; therefore the probation period was replaced with real time in jail. By then I was 16 and I was transferred to Correction Center #2 in the city of Tomsk.

Our family was middle class; children weren't spoiled, but we had enough resources to live. My mother was a nurse in the Regional Children's Hospital of Tomsk. She worked a lot and didn't

have enough time for me. My father was an alcoholic. He sold things from our home to have money for drinks. Then he would wander off and stay out on the streets for a time before coming back home. My mother took him back, fed him, and sometimes gave him a small amount of money. My mother had four daughters, and I was the youngest one; she had me later in life. My sisters were in school and working, so I was left alone to myself. All my friends were older than me, and I tried to be like them. I started to drink and smoke way too early - to me this seemed cool and I wanted to look like an adult.

Unfortunately I didn't think much of my relatives, and I was callous in my dealings with them. My relatives gradually separated themselves from me, my sisters stopped talking to me, and only my mother was left by my side, hoping for the best for me. She kept begging me to stop this way of life, and asked me to start a new life. However I was drawn to evil and a criminal life; I just couldn't break away from it. Then, when I committed another crime, I understood that nobody in the whole world was as close to me and loved me as much as my mother. My boyfriend and I committed murder. We didn't have the right to take someone's life, and I had a great fear that the Lord wouldn't forgive me - I had done something too brutal and irrecoverable. When it happened, all of a sudden I began to understand the brokenness of my life and that I had caused it myself, but it was too late. Even my mother turned away from me.

In prison I learned about God. I was given a gift - a New Testament - and I began to read it. I read it and even though I didn't understand it at first, I soaked in these Words of Life, absorbing every word, and prayed that the Lord would forgive me and change me. For eight months in a row there was only silence from home... and then all of a sudden I got a letter from my mother!!!! She forgave me! Later on my sisters reconciled with me, as well!

In the prison I went to the prayer room without delay, and since then I haven't skipped any Christian gathering. I received a Holy Bible for a gift, and now I read it every day and pray. At the beginning, my relatives couldn't believe that I found the Lord and Savior, quit smoking and cussing, and was trying to live a righteous life. Of course, it's hard for me, but with the Lord everything is possible. I feel like God is working on me.

I'm very grateful to my Savior that He reconciled me with my relatives. My mother is very happy for all the changes in me. Many of my "friends" have already died - but the Lord saved me!

I'm asking forgiveness of all whom I have caused pain - please forgive me!

Yuliya Dmitrienko (Russia, Kurgan, prison)

Also I'm looking for Marina Vladimirovna Kardanets, she worked in a juvenile correctional facility in Tomsk, where I was serving a term from 2003 to 2006. Marina has believed in the Lord, and now lives in Moscow. If someone knows her or she reads this, please respond and write to me.

* * *

Often when new marriages start,
Two hearts chatter happily together.
Much enthusiasm, hope, reflection -
It seems happiness will never end.
But feelings change, and look now:
People are breaking up so soon.
Divorces, adultery - no fidelity!
And dreams do not come true.
How nice to see those couples
Who after a quarrel, find peace!
They don't bring down God's judgment,
But celebrate their anniversary feasts!
With anniversaries joyfully greet us,
Recall again the wedded bliss,
It means a spouse - a real man -
Remained faithful to his wife!
Children in such families are happy!
They grow into decent adults!
The memory of these families is lasting!
Great deeds from their children expect!
May God protect faithful spouses!
Let peace reign in these families always!
May they weather any strong tempest!
And may only good years adorn them!

Konstantin Gaidarshi
(Russia, Abkhazia)

* * *

Forgive me, mom, my heart is bleeding
You left this world without seeing me again.
Forgive me, mom, for all the tears
You had to shed because of what I've done...
Forgive me for the pain and waiting
I didn't write you often, as I should...
Forgive me for the suffering and fear
For all the years I've been locked away.
I know you needed me, but I wasn't there
To hug you or just to look you in the eyes.
I didn't comfort you and now it's too late to hear
That I'm so sorry, please forgive me, mom...
My heart is bleeding... please forgive me, God...

Sergey Bogatirev
(Ukraine, Zhytomyr region, prison)

* * *

Mommy, mommy! - Cried the unborn baby
Taken out of his mother's womb
Mommy, mommy! - His calls met dead silence,
And suddenly there's a bleeding wound

He wasn't buried with great honor
They simply tossed him with the waste
They threw him into the flames of the furnace
Without looking at his tiny face

They burned the blessing of God Almighty,
Whose tears are shedding for this fallen world -
Its stone-cold hearts are numb with fighting
His perfect will, which He unfurled

He wisely designed new life for marriage
Girls! Keep your honor for the marriage bed!
Where accidental pregnancies are not a threat
No life is killed, No blood is shed!

Yevgeniy Pavlov
(Sakhalin region, prison)

* * *

Hi, dear mom! I'm writing you a letter
I miss you, mom, so much...
I miss your wisdom and your care
Things I've carelessly ignored.
I am so sorry, mom,
That time can't be turned back.
Without hesitation,
I would have started
Every single thing from scratch...
Away from you, I started to remember
Those words of wisdom,
Which you've tried to say...
You gave yourself for me in effort
So in this world,
I could have had a place...

Vladimir Khomutov
(Perm region, prison)

To my Mother

I was young, fiery. And after my army service
I went into the world, out of my mother's nest.
Many times in the world, I saw love and friendship,
But can it be compared with my mother's? Never!
Thank you, Mom, for giving me birth,
I was the youngest of your children.
Experienced you are with the sorrow and hardship
I brought; I was not a gift in your destiny.
With no father, you "pulled" three of us through,
Teaching us friendship, obedience, kindness.
Your hopes for my sister did not disappoint you,
But my brother and I let you down ...
I'm so sorry! I grew up to be a father and now an uncle,
And still you "pull" all your grandchildren through instead of us...
You take the long road for us without looking back,
May God grant you good health, mom!
Thank you for your great patience,
For all the love you have carried through the years,
How I wish we would not bring you bitterness,
You love us, your children, always!

Roman Shevchenko
(Russia, Krasnoyarsk region, prison)

How can I comfort you?

(to my wife)

How can I comfort you? I wish I knew...
I want to hold you... But I can't!
Powerless... I'm clenching my fist,
But nothing can help...
How can I comfort you? I wish I knew...
Is there a medicine to heal our wounds?
I'm reading from Isaiah, and hoping for the best.
I pray to be with you soon.
How can I comfort you? I wish I knew...
Maybe by saying: "I love you!"
Time is my enemy, and the walls are too high,
You're carrying all the weight
Of everything I have done...
"Is the Lord's hand too short, that He cannot save?"
Not just for tomorrow, His mercy and grace
Will flow freely, to save us today...

Anatolij Serebryakov
(Komi Republic, City of Pechora, prison)

The Value of Family in God's Eyes

Victor Ryaguzov

An experiment conducted by "The Washington Post" brought about much heated discussion on the Web. Here is its essence: on a cold January morning, a man stopped at a Washington subway station, took out a violin and started playing. He played six musical pieces within 45 minutes. It was the peak hour and hundreds of people passed by him, as they hurried to work. Within the first three minutes, a middle-aged man noticed the musician. He slowed down his pace, stopped for a few moments and hustled on his way. About a minute after that the violinist received his first earnings: a woman threw some money into the case and kept on about her business. A few more minutes passed by. A man stopped for a moment, leaned against the wall to listen, but shortly after looked at his watch and hurried on. The unknown musician got the most attention from a three-year-old boy. His mother was evidently in a hurry as she pulled him after her, but the boy stopped to look at the violinist. His mother tugged a little harder and he was forced to follow, looking back as he was walking away. A similar scenario took place with a few other children, but none of the parents let them linger even for a little while.

During those 45 minutes only six people paused briefly to listen to the music; twenty more threw some money into the case without stopping. The musician's income totaled \$32.00. None of the passersby knew that the violinist was Joshua Bell - one of the best musicians in the world. He played some of the most complex and beautiful pieces and the violin in his hand was a Stradivarius, costing approximately 3.5 million dollars. Bell's concert in Boston, which took place two days prior to his performance in the subway, was sold out, although the average price of admission was \$100. The goal of this experiment was to determine whether we are able to notice and appreciate beauty in a mundane medium, when it is "inconvenient" and unannounced. Can we recognize talent in unexpected circumstances?

This story provides a good illustration for the theme of family and marital relationships. In the same way that people did not value the performance of the great maestro, they don't value the blessings of family.

Let us go to Matthew 19:1-3, "Now when Jesus had finished these sayings, He went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. And large crowds followed Him, and He healed them there. And Pharisees came up to Him and tested Him by asking, 'Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?'"

The evangelist Matthew ties this question of the Pharisees about marriage to the previous teachings of Christ about the value of the human identity. It is not to be violated by temptation, humiliation, and the torture of refusal to forgive (Matthew 18). The Pharisees decided to overthrow Christ's teaching about a merciful heart by showing that it's impractical in the realm of family relationships. They knew the weak spot that could be attacked: family relations can be reefs that oftentimes shatter human graciousness to pieces. The Pharisees' question posed a trap for Christ. If Jesus confirmed the sinfulness of divorce they would announce that he was an opponent of Moses. If He said that divorce is permissible, He would contradict His own words from the Sermon on the Mount forbidding divorce. In either case Christ's authority would be compromised. However, in His answer to the Pharisees, the Savior addressed not the issue of incompatibility, but God's design for marriage and family. He called his listeners to focus on saving marriage, as opposed to destroying it. We fight for the things we value. If we realize the value of family we will battle for its welfare, the way doctors battle for the life of a patient.

Marriage is precious because it is designed by God.

"Haven't you read," He replied, 'that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female?'" (Matt. 19:4). Marriage is not a human invention, but God's creation. There is no way humankind could have come up with such a wonderful union. In all reality, did Adam really consider his solitude a tragedy? God saw Adam's need of marriage first: "The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'" (Gen. 2:18). As Bible commentator Matthew Henry once said, "Eve was not taken out of Adam's

head to top him, neither out of his feet to be trampled on by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected by him, and near his heart to be loved by him." The first humans were created equal, yet different. On top of that, God identified the purpose for which family was created.

In the 1st 3 quarters of 2013 in Russia: 1,255,000 children were born (24.6% of them were out of wedlock) and 1,261,600 people died. There were 805,000 registered marriages and 431,700 divorces. There are about 52 million total households in Russia; 28% have two or more children, and of these, only 6% have three or more. *

If you view marriage as God's unique creation you will treasure it. Why does the Louvre Museum keep a headless sculpture of Nike Samothrace? Or Kritos without his nose, lips, and chin? The answer is simple - they were made by some of the greatest creators of art in the ancient times, and even in their damaged state they reflect their creators' genius. Marriage and family are God's creation. Because of the fall much was damaged and a mass of tragedies and conflicts has appeared. However, even in the damaged state marriage remains God's masterpiece, which must be treasured. Weren't there mistakes in the family life of Abraham, the father of all believers? Indeed there were! Despite that, he counted family as a work of God and invested a great amount of effort in order to protect it.

Marriage is precious because it gives people more than their father and mother can give them.

Parents give their children love, a roof over their heads, clothing, nutritional sustenance, education, etc.

However, a person needs something greater, which can only be satisfied through marriage.

Marriage gives a person his home.

"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother..." (Matt. 19:5). He will leave, not for the sake of adventure, but to find his own home. The parental home is a very dear place for a person - in it he feels loved, accepted, and protected. It is dangerous, however, to stay there for too long - one becomes dependent. Having one's own home is not simply walls and a roof over the head. It is a family that enriches a person with the experience of love and unity. It is a place where one can learn and practice various professions: poet, orator, singer, musician, architect, mentor, construction worker, electrician, guard, lawyer, investigator, teacher, babysitter... It really is life's greatest university!

Marriage gives one a new status.

"...and be united to his wife..." (Matt. 19:5). A man receives the status of the head of a household. It is a great responsibility! To be the head of a wife, in light of the fact that she knows her husband's flaws better than anyone else, is indeed difficult... To be the head means learning how to understand one's wife when she is halfway through a sentence, or even without words, and sometimes contrary to her words. However the most important duty of a husband is to be in submission to Christ: "Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God." (1 Cor. 11:3). More often than not, family issues are spiritual in nature and must be solved using spiritual methods. Spiritual authority is what helps the wife accept the headship of her husband. When the man does not know God, he will surely be unable to overcome temptation, which will unavoidably undermine his spiritual leadership.

The wife, in turn, receives the status of a helper. Encouraging her husband to make decisions, evaluating them in a positive way, going through his failures without complaint, and continuing to trust him, is a fine and delicate art. In A Grief Observed, C. S. Lewis remembered his deceased wife and helper with much respect, "For a good wife contains so many persons in herself. What was [she] not to me? She was my daughter and my mother, my pupil and my teacher, my subject and my sovereign; and always, holding all these in solution, my trusty comrade, friend, shipmate, fellow-soldier. My mistress; but at the same time all that any man friend (and I have good ones) has ever been to me. Perhaps more.... 'It was too perfect to last,' so I am tempted to say of our marriage."

Marriage gifts the husband and wife with the status of parenthood. Children are a great joy. Child rearing is a great deal of work, and the most important role in it is the example that is set by parents. The living example has a much greater influence than words. The fundamental calling of parents is to help their children see the importance of serving the Lord.

Marriage is precious because it teaches real love.

"...and the two will become one flesh" (Matt. 19:5). This primarily talks about the emotional attachment of spouses, which is then followed by physical unity. Love must be learned. Joshua Bell could have become a street artist. However he wanted something greater and he spent innumerable hours perfecting his talent in order to attain that. In the end, he became an expert, whose talent brings pleasure to thousands of listeners. We see a similar principle in marriage. One may neglect learning how to love and be lazy his entire life. On the other hand, one may put in effort to learn to love according to God's design, and that will turn marriage into a place of joy. When it comes to this, however, popular psychology books are of no use. The single greatest example of love is Jesus Christ. That is who the Apostle Paul was referring to when he was instructing men in Ephesus.

A man needs to learn how to express his love through sacrifice: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her" (Eph. 5:25). Christ loved to the point of self-sacrifice. He loved people despite their sin, mental and emotional poverty, and horrifying degradation. He gave Himself as a sacrifice so any sinner can receive cleansing and sanctification. Our Lord patiently waits for sinners to respond to the call and accepts them when they come. The husband needs to exemplify Christ's love. Someone once said: "The one who is ready to bring a sacrifice, will always find a fitting altar. Lofty marriage vows promising love and faithfulness need to be supplemented with vows promising to wash dishes and take out the garbage." Many people are incapable of such sacrifices, because they must be made daily, on a consistent basis.

The woman learns how to love through submission: "Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything." (Eph. 5:22-24). Every man desires to be spoken to in the love language of respect. When the woman speaks in it, he has assurance that she truly loves him. How challenging it is, however, for women to learn this language. It might be easier for one to learn twenty foreign languages, than one language of submission. Oftentimes women love themselves more than their husbands. They don't see their husbands as the heads appointed by God, and instead try to create their own model of marriage which excludes submission. The ancient temptation in Eden is still at work in the twenty-first century: "You will be like gods, knowing good and evil." Some women think they know how to "create order" in their families, and as a result of that - reap destruction. By disregarding submission to God, they are left without His protection and become victims of the devil's deception.

Marriage is precious because it is upheld by God.

"So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." (Matt. 19:6). The wise king Solomon, when talking about marriage, made a great analogy: "A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." (Eccl. 4:12). The three strands are husband, wife, and the Lord. God is the strand of marriage that gives it strength. The

47% of Russians do not believe in the strength and durability of marriage. 27% of respondents consider marriage an obsolete phenomenon. 70% believe in entering into marriage once in a lifetime and in great mutual love, but only 58% are ready for such a union. According to the majority of Russians, you should not marry until you are "well over 30". One third of the respondents did not wish to have an official relationship and believe that the institution of marriage is not necessary. *

human strands on their own are not strong, but God's strand reinforces them.

Value your family and do not upset the Lord with divorce, because He Himself guided the process of building it. Marriage and family are God's creation and only He has the right to break it apart either through death or a sinful act of an unbeliever: "But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace." (1 Cor. 7:15). By letting the unbelieving side leave his or her half, God helps the believing spouse avoid constant conflicts.

Marriage is precious because it opens one's eyes toward one's own depravity.

"Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning." (Matt. 19:7-8). The question of divorce was brought up by the teachers of the law, who were considered the holiest of people in the eyes of society at the time. Being knowledgeable about the details of Scriptures, they were also perceptive in the area of human relations. Women never lived up to their criteria of decency and righteousness, therefore divorcing one's wife was not considered sin. They looked at women from a perspective of their own right to happiness. If the wife was not able to make her husband happy in a certain sphere of life, he had the right to leave her.

A hard heart demands self-indulgence and respect; it loves to take revenge and justify divorce. It does not want to imitate God's approach to people: "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matt. 5:44-48). When a person comes to recognize the hardness of his own heart, he understands that he is more guilty than anyone else for the problems in his family. Only God can help overcome this terrible sin. Real love fights one's own egotism, accepts the other person for who they are, bears their flaws, and seeks to be filled with God's love. After realizing one's need, the great redemptive work of Christ becomes one's full desire and the heart fills with hope and joy in response to Christ's promise: "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Matt. 11:28-30). So bow down before the Savior and humbly beg:

*Teach me, O God, to love
Thee with all my mind,
All my thoughts,
To consecrate to Thee my soul
And all my life with each
Beat of my heart.*

*Teach me to obey
Only Thy gracious will,
Teach all of us here
Not to complain of our difficult lot.*

*All whom Thou came to redeem
With Thy Precious Blood
With Thy deep, pure love,
Teach me, O God, to love.
Grand Duke Konstantin Romanov*

God can restore a marriage from ashes, if your heart is filled with His love.

Russia is first place in the number of abortions: annually there are about a million abortions. Every fifth abortion is done to girls under 18. 10 to 15% of abortions have a variety of complications; 7-8% of women become infertile after they have an abortion. Each year the number of those who cannot have children increases by 200,000 - 250,000. *

* According to the All-Russian Public Opinion Research Center

FROM THE DIARY OF EMPRESS ALEXANDRA FEDOROVNA ROMANOV



On Marriage and Family Life
(Excerpts from notes made by the Royal Martyr Empress Alexandra Fedorovna)
The Empress helps us take a fresh look at the divine establishment of marriage and to value this gift in the light of Christian love:

The divine design is to have marriage bring happiness, to have it make the husband's and wife's life fuller, so that neither of them would lose, but both would gain. However, if the marriage does not bring happiness and does not make life richer and fuller, the fault lies not in the matrimonial ties, but in the people who are bound by them.

Marriage is a divine rite. It was part of God's design when He created man. It is the closest and the most holy union on earth.

After the wedding is concluded, a husband's first and foremost responsibility is to his wife, and the wife's to her husband. The two of them should live for one another, give up their lives for one another. Formerly each one of them was incomplete. Marriage is the joining of two halves into a single whole. Two lives are tied together in such a close union that they are no longer two lives, but

one. Each one bears the sacred responsibility for the happiness and greatest good of the other for the rest of his or her life.

The anniversary of marriage must always be remembered and must be distinguished among other important dates in one's life. It is the day whose light will shine upon all other days until the end of life. The joy arising from entering into matrimony is not turbulent, but calm and profound. Over the wedded pair standing before the altar, when hands are joined and sacred promises are made, angels invisibly stand and quietly sing their songs, and afterwards they cover the happy pair with their wings, as the newlyweds' mutual life begins.

Through the fault of those who have become married, either one or both, wedded life can become a misfortune. The possibility of happiness in marriage is great, but one should also not forget about the possibility of its crashing. Only a correct and wise married life can help achieve ideal relations between the spouses.

The first lesson that must be learned and put into practice is patience. The beginning of wedded life reveals both the qualities of character and nature, as well as shortcomings and peculiarities of habits, tastes, temperament, of which the other half was completely unaware. Sometimes it seems that it will be impossible to adjust to each other, that there will be eternal and hopeless conflicts, but patience and love overcome everything, and two lives unite into one – a nobler, stronger, fuller, richer one, and this life will continue in peace and tranquility.

The main requisite in a family is unselfish love. Each spouse should forget his own ego and dedicate himself to the other person. Each one should blame himself and not the other person when something goes wrong. One needs to possess restraint and patience, since impatience can spoil everything. A harsh word can delay the merging of the spouses' souls for months. There should be a desire on both sides to make the marriage a happy one and to overcome everything that stands in the way of such a goal. The strongest love has the greatest need of daily fortification. Most unforgivable of all is precisely rudeness in one's own home, towards those whom we love.

Another secret of bliss in married life is attention to each other. The husband and wife should constantly show signs of the most tender attention and love for each other. Happiness in life is made up of individual moments, of small pleasures – a kiss, a smile, a kind glance, a heartfelt compliment, and countless small but kind thoughts and sincere feelings. Love also needs its daily bread.

Still another important element in married life is unity of interests. Not a single concern of the wife should appear too trivial, even to the gigantic intellect of the greatest of men. On the other hand, each wise and faithful wife will willingly interest herself in her husband's affairs. She will want to know of his every new project, plan, difficulty, doubt. She will want to know which of his enterprises has been successful and which has not, and she will wish to be informed of all his daily affairs. Let both hearts share joy and suffering. Let them share the burden of cares equally. Let everything in life be common to both of them. They should go to church together, pray together, together lay at God's feet the burden of their concerns for their children and all that is precious to them. Why should they not discuss with each other their temptations, doubts, secret desires, and not help each other with compassion and words of encouragement? Thus they will live a single life, not two separate ones. Each one should make sure to think of the other when making plans or entertaining hopes. They should have no secrets from each other. They should have only mutual friends. In this manner two lives will unite into a single life, and in such a marriage each other's thoughts, desires, feelings, joy, sorrow, pleasure, and pain will be shared.

You should fear the least sign of incipient disobedience or alienation. Instead of acting in a restrained manner, the husband or the wife says an ill-advised or careless word, and suddenly a small crack appears between these two hearts that up to now have been one whole, and this crack widens and widens until the spouses find themselves torn apart forever. Did you say something thoughtless? Ask forgiveness immediately. Did a misunderstanding arise between you? It does not matter whose fault it was, but do not allow it to stand between you even for an hour.

Refrain from quarreling. Do not go to sleep with a feeling of anger in your heart. There should be no place for pride in family life. You should never coddle your feeling of injured pride in scrupulously trying to determine precisely who has to ask forgiveness. Those who love truly never engage in such casuistry, but are always ready to give in and apologize.

Without God's blessing, without His sanctification of the marriage, all the congratulations and best wishes of relatives will remain an empty sound. Without His daily blessing of married life even the most tender and true love will not be able to fulfill the spouses' hearts. Without the blessing of heaven all the beauty, joy, value of married life may be destroyed at any moment.

Every member of the family should take part in establishing the home, and complete family happiness can be attained only when everyone fulfills his or her duties.

One word envelops everything, and that word is "love." Within the word "love" there is a whole volume of thoughts on life and responsibility, and when we study this volume thoroughly and attentively, each of these thoughts comes through clearly and distinctly.

When the beauty of the face fades, the shining of the eyes dims, and with age come wrinkles, or when illnesses, sorrows, and cares leave their traces and scars, the love of a faithful husband should remain just as deep and sincere as before. There are no measurements on earth that are capable of measuring the depth of Christ's love for His Church, and not a single mortal can love with the same depth of feeling, but nevertheless each husband must do it to the extent that such love can be recreated on earth. No sacrifice will appear too great to him for the sake of his beloved.

There is something sacred and almost awe-inspiring in the fact that upon entering into marriage the wife concentrates all her interests upon the one whom she is taking for her husband. She leaves her childhood home, leaves her mother and father, breaks off all the ties which bound her to her former life. She leaves off all the entertainments to which she had earlier become accustomed. She gazes into the face of the one who has asked her to become his wife, and with a trembling heart but calmly and resolutely entrusts her life to him. And the husband joyously feels this trust, which engenders a whole life of happiness in the human heart that is capable both of inexpressible joy and boundless suffering.

In the fullest sense of the word the wife gives up everything for her husband. This is an important moment for any man – to take on responsibility for a young, fragile, and tender life that has entrusted itself to him, and to care for it and protect it until death tears his treasure away from him, or conversely, strikes him.

Ashamed

In 2006, I was in a Christian rehabilitation center for former drug addicts. I was enthusiastic and I was on fire, and I just could not sit still! I was determined to serve the Lord; I prayed and waited for his response. And the answer came fast. The mentor of our rehabilitation center said that a small rehab center near our city was in need of a helper. That is how my decision about serving God was identified and validated. My experience of being a construction worker came in handy as well; together with members of the local church we finished building the rehabilitation center. Although the community was small, we were able to do everything quickly and efficiently. And it was not surprising to us; God was with us and He was pleased with the work we were doing.

As time passed, there was a need to help another community, located 240 miles from our city, and the elders guided me to that church as a missionary and pastor's assistant. With God's help, I was able to find work in my profession, and my life was established. About that time, I had noticed Natasha and asked her to pray about marriage and starting a family with me. We were both concerned that the church's ministry was not growing much. It seemed to us that the church was stagnant.

A year later, Natasha and I got married. Family chores and work began to sidetrack us. In the hustle and bustle of everyday life, I began to slowly cool down. Gradually, I became "...neither cold nor hot" (Rev. 3:15). Secretly I began to drink alcoholic beverages and smoke cigarettes just to get relaxed. I regretted it, and prayed about it, but in my heart I started to feel some bitterness. In addition, I had a complicated relationship with my mother-in-law; both of us had difficult, stubborn personalities. My poor Natasha, the Lord only knows everything she had to endure. I began to hate my mother-in-law and blamed her as the source of all my problems. At first, my wife had been taking my side, but then, seeing that I was losing my common sense, she began to support her mom. My negative attitude started to affect my wife. I began losing my temper and started swearing; I quarreled with her, and then I realized the depravity of my actions and begged for forgiveness.

Natasha was pregnant. We were expecting our first child - our son. For a while our fights stopped and things settled down. I was working on remodeling the apartment and I was concentrating on my work. When my wife was admitted to the hospital before the delivery of our baby, I was left alone. At that time I was far away from God and I cheated on my wife. I could not keep my betrayal from my wife for very long. After a while, I confessed to her. My wife filed for divorce. At my trial, I asked for a trial period, and we got it. I had a wonderful loving wife, and despite the protests of her mother; she went to the reconciliation and forgave me. At that time, I had peace in my heart.

Natasha became pregnant again, and we were expecting our second baby. But now, I had only the appearance of peace in my heart. A wave of hatred literally overwhelmed me. Natasha's pregnancy was difficult. She was flown by a helicopter to the nearest city's hospital. At that time I had a car accident. The injury was not serious, but at the time of the accident I heard in my mind these words: "Why should you be stricken again? ..." (Isaiah 1:5). The Lord spoke to me through the mouth of the Old Testament prophet, and in that moment I felt fear and I realized that I needed to change some things in my life.

I thought: "Do I need to repent?" I repented. "Do I need to confess?" I confessed. "Do I need to pray?" I prayed. But my heart was unmoved... I did not feel any changes in my soul. Our new born baby lived for only two days and then died. I took that as a punishment. And I started to drink alcohol again. At times when I was sober, I realized that I was to blame, but under the influence of alcohol, other people were to blame, not me.

My wife left me. I lived alone for over a year. Sometimes, when my situation became unbearable, I would try going to one church or another. I was forbidden to go to the church in my own community. It was like I was "possessed" by evil and couldn't shake it. I committed several offenses with arrests and fines. But God's patience has its limit. God's patience was exhausted. I was locked in jail for my crimes.

The source of all the problems that surrounded me was in me, and what I discovered is that it was a mirror image of my inner spiritual state. During the investigation, an examination was conducted, and the court ruled that I needed compulsory medical treatment.

Currently, I'm in the hospital. I do not know how long I will be here. I met Sergei here at the hospital. It looks like he and I are much alike. We have the same one burning desire - to restore our relationships with God. We both understand that really there is no other way.

I'd like to have fellowship again with the fellow believers with whom I worked and served God, but I am ashamed to even write to them. I would also feel ashamed to be around my wife and son. I've written to them and asked for their forgiveness, but I have not received any response from them.

My wife told me on the phone that she does not want to see me again. What should I do in this situation? I care about my wife and my son. I love them, and I have a glimmer of hope that what was destroyed between us can be restored. After all, the Lord can do anything and everything, right? Please pray for me!

I am concerned about this issue: when I get discharged from the hospital, I definitely want to go to church, but which one? What if people will not accept me at church? What if they will not forgive me?

Vitaliy Belyaev (Russia, Tomsk region, hospital)

"... we are children of God." (Rom. 8:16)

"Family is a wonderful thing! It is a source of support, and encouragement, it is a joy and sorrow mixed together. But family is also responsibility, and giving of oneself fully and completely. Family is a place where you are welcomed, taken in and not judged, a place where you are listened to, where you can receive advice and are supported and understood. In a good family there is always the warmth and comfort to which you always long to come home to. We, who are believers in Christ are also one huge family. We all have the same Heavenly Father. When we gather together in a prison, one person's problem or need becomes everyone's problem as everyone desires to help the brother in need. And it doesn't matter in what state of heart we come to our gathering - we always leave with peace. The Lord in the New Testament always reminds us of how we ought to treat one another. It is important to control our own emotions and to be self-controlled and discerning. '...If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.' (Luke 17:3). The degrees of sins and their consequences vary, but if love dwells in the hearts of believers, then there always will be restoration and forgiveness. Our Lord God fills us with His grace and causes us to grow; in return we want to please Him in the way we treat one another.

"The Lord is teaching us to love one another as He loved us. When the love of God comes into a life - this life is completely transformed. If a family is building on the foundation of God's love and is nurtured by His Word, it will grow in faith and will always have the Creator at its center. Jesus said that in the last days '...because of lawlessness the love of many will grow cold' (Matt. 24:12), which means that there will be disharmony not only between God and man, but also between fellow men. I know little about family life, I don't have personal experience, but I pray about those who are dear to me in the spirit. Satan is always aiming to destroy our joy. But Jesus said, 'Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.' (Matt. 26:41). May the Lord bless His people with peace!"

Maksim Kiselev (Russia, Tula region, prison)

"God makes a home for the lonely; He leads out the prisoners into prosperity." (Ps. 68:6)

"When we pray, we lift our gaze to heaven with confidence that God hears us. But when we do something that is not pleasing to Him, we try to do it quietly as if He will not see. But the Lord is always near, even closer than people who are around us. He sees our every move, hears our every word, reads our every thought. And His hand is very caring - with love and tenderness He leads us on to the path of truth. I constantly feel the Lord setting me free from things that are not pleasing to him. Sometimes it is painful and hard, but God never does anything without a purpose.

"My wife divorced me... my heart is very heavy... but I am not alone; I have a family - my Heavenly Father and my brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus. How grateful I am to the Lord that He found me. He lifted me out of the dirt and to this day cares for me in a way no one ever cared for me before. Since my childhood I was left to myself. I never experienced parental love and care. I was always alone. But, praise the Lord, this is all in the past - now I am never alone. I have my Lord Jesus, He is not just with me - He is in me. And I will try not to lose Him. I look around and want to scream: 'People stop! We are in this place for our crimes and you are still persisting on the sinful path...' We know of so many people who died of drugs and alcohol outside of prison, but we are alive! Why? Perhaps the Lord is giving us another chance to stop and think. And this could be our last chance. And it will be said of us: he was, and is no more. People will talk about us whether we were good or evil, but what difference would it make? The most important thing is where will we be in eternity? I don't want to miss that chance. And regardless of how hard this path is I will stay on it. I am confident that in time, the Lord will restore all that I have lost, if this will be His will. The most important thing for me is to stay strong in the faith. And now I have everything needed in order to grow in faith and to build my life on this new foundation."

Vasily Belov (Russia, Rostov region, prison)

“For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God.”

(1 Cor. 11:12 NASB)

“God created a woman to be a man’s helper. However, the help of his wife should not be reduced only to a delicious dinner, ironed shirts and the upbringing of children. It should be manifested in all things and be as versatile as the work of her husband. A woman’s love is as comforting to a man’s heart, as when the wild vines entwine cold, bare, jagged rocks with their green garlands and delicate flowers filling all cavities and cracks.

“As physical beauty tends to fade with time, the more the beauty of the soul must shine. Most of all a wife must aim to please her husband, and the husband should give all of his strength to her and their family. Husband and wife should leave only the best for each other!”

Vladimir Chernitsa (Ukraine, City of Vinnytsia).

“In family life it is important to learn to trust each other, love each other, hold each other’s confidence, and not be afraid to ask advice from older and more experienced couples. Men - give more attention to your beloved: be romantic, give compliments, bring flowers, and be grateful for any little thing. Be kind and gentle, and a woman will appreciate it. Solve problems together, never silence unresolved issues, and always discuss and think things through. And, of course, make the Lord most important in your family. Pray to Him, come to Him with your problems, because He is the Savior and Redeemer from all sorts of trouble.”

Ruslan Mukhametov (Russia, Stavropol region, prison).

“The question of whether to marry and create a family is on everyone’s mind here. On the basis of human interest, creating a family may sound tempting and even sometimes profitable from all angles. It could put an end to loneliness, as is often found here, not to mention the dating aspect and everything that comes with it, such as packages sent with food... But is it the most important thing? And what is the will of the Lord concerning it?

“The desire to marry is inherent in every man, and God has blessed this union, giving Adam a wife, Eve, because ... it is not good for the man to be alone ...” (Genesis 2:18). This is how I understand the meaning of family: a husband must be a spiritual model for his wife; he should be the one to feed her spiritual food, and, in addition, provide for her financially, setting an example in everything. A marriage increases a person’s responsibility before God: now he is responsible not only for himself but also for his family. Jesus Christ tells us, ‘... your Father knows that you need these things. But seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you.’ (Luke 12: 30-31).”

Alexander Rozhnev (Russia, Kirov region, prison.)

“Many so called ‘love letters’ fly out to different locations, sometimes to several places at once from our imprisoned ‘Christian brothers’ to our sisters in Christ... When a man who calls himself a Christian, is engaged in this sort of correspondence, not only is he already in a trap set by Satan, but now he wants to drag along an innocent sister. Innocent women who have not previously been convicted easily fall into these ‘traps,’ most often without knowing it. I am totally against any such connection between this kind of believer and his sister in Christ when there are any hints directly or indirectly, to ‘love.’ This kind of ‘love’ simply cannot be! This is not the love of which the Scripture talks. Of course, I do not mean those couples who were spouses before the conviction and imprisonment occurred. I’m talking about the newly created families. Husband and wife should be close in person, and not only by letters. The wife should not be carrying the burden of responsibility for the young family on her shoulders alone. I am sure that such ‘believers’ who, while still in prison, are looking for wives on the outside, or in women’s camps - are only serving their own flesh. Love necessarily assumes the notion of responsibility. Love - is the willingness to completely surrender yourself to your loved one, and to sacrifice yourself. The greatest love our God has shown us, is when He sacrificed His only begotten Son for all people, including those who are looking for ‘correspondence love.’ Our God will grant us the desires of our hearts to have a family, we just need to put our faith in Him, learn the truth through His Word, and trust Him completely and irrevocably.”

Reuben Grigoryan (Armenia, released in 2011).

“... but Christ is all, and in all” (Col. 3:11)

Nothing Has Changed

It’s been quite a while since the last time I wrote to you - well, you most likely don’t even remember me because there are a lot of those like me. Last time I wrote you I was finishing up my six years of prison and got out, but it only lasted a month and a half before I was put back in. Now I’m serving five more years. There are just a couple more months left before I get out again. The only sad thing is nothing has changed - I’m still sure that we prisoners won’t be accepted into society. Last time, I did not get accepted anywhere for a job. The most hurtful thing was hearing “we don’t need any criminals,” even though I had a lot of experience in carving and everything associated with construction: wood, stone... nothing was new for me. For 23 years in prison, I was carving wood every day, and because I could draw pretty well, I created some interesting and artistic projects; but over there beyond the metal gates and the sharp barbed wire, I was viewed as someone useless because I was a criminal. Pardon my honesty, but one thing I never understood was, when I’m treated that way, which one of us is more evil? I know I am a criminal and I don’t argue that, but please don’t label me, because first of all I am a human being! I never killed anyone, and I punished those who did. I wish they showed those like us on TV, but instead they only show serious criminals: serial killers, pedophiles, and others that don’t need to be shown on the television. They should be shot publicly! Judging by all this, it looks like we are all put into the same category.... Forgive me, but with all my years, I’ve been realizing a lot. Misfortune brings people together and unites them - but we think we cannot allow it because the world is wonderful without it.

When I was still serving the other sentence, I drew a picture and sent it to you. And when you sent me a magazine, I could not believe my eyes. My drawing was printed on the cover of this magazine. For me that was probably the most wonderful day of my whole life! I still have that magazine and it brings me warmth and joy, and even though I’m already 43, it makes me as happy as a little child. I did the drawing when I was only a little over 30.

I don’t know, maybe I was made for suffering? I have no family, no kids, and most likely I will depart this earth the same way - in loneliness. May God’s will be done. I don’t want to bring pain to anyone! I believe you and trust you. For me you have become like family! Thank you that you are there for people like me. Forgive me if I’m a little harsh towards pedophiles and murderers - God be their judge! Children, in our understanding, are like little angels, and it is not they, but we, who have to learn from them, and women are our future - they bring to the world our little angels! Peace and grace to you, and the unending love of our Lord!

Sergei N. Ivanov (Russia, Chuvash Republic, prisoner)

Please Pray for All of Us!

This letter is from an ordinary Russian prisoner, one out of thousands, who is currently behind bars. Your magazine got into my hands by accident and honestly I did not even think about reading it at first. Because I was living a criminal lifestyle and doing things that are far away from being acceptable by moral standards, I didn’t consider myself to be a true believer. And since I did not regret doing the things I did, I did not repent for them. Everything I learned from reading your magazine showed me that with and through your work you bring kindness - that tiny ray of light that brings warmth to people like us and serves as a compass in the harsh reality of life.

It’s hard to admit, but I’ve lived my life in vain! After being released I did not make any changes and returned to living in the same old lifestyle. Right now I am 33 years old, and for the first time I started thinking about my life and the point of it. For some reason fear has overcome me and I have a heavy feeling of loneliness. I’m still alone, no friends, no family, no kids....

What was the reason for me not finding my place in life? For myself I have one answer: everything I did - the evil that I did to people - has taken peace away from me. With all my heart I desire peace, but I also realize the harsh reality of the future. What will it be like? I don’t know. But I’ve already humbly accepted my destiny and I’m willing to face it.

I never had to pray before, and I don’t know how to, but right now, with simple words I am asking God to show me the way. People say that to those who sincerely repent, forgiveness is given, and right now I am asking forgiveness from those to whom I caused pain. I have one request from you: please pray for me and for all those who broke the law and are now behind bars. Maybe those who still have a little bit of goodness in their soul will have strength to withstand and defeat temptation, and return to a normal life.

Alexei Shchipun (Russia, Kirov region, prison)



Holy Family

Theodor Ludogovsky

Mary holds a special place among all women from all eras and nations. In music, art and literature, she embodies the most beautiful and admired attributes of a woman. The story of Mary and the birth of Jesus Christ is the one of the most sacred stories of the entire Bible. The divine message solemnly proclaimed, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" (Luke 1:28, NKJV). Despite the public opinion of her out-of-wedlock pregnancy and the serious problems it was causing to her upcoming marriage, Mary never complained or showed discontent. She entirely surrendered herself into the hands of the Creator.

Joseph, the humble and hardworking husband of Mary, played an exceptionally important role in her life as her guardian, husband, and bread-winner for little Jesus. We can imagine him working in his carpentry shop in Nazareth, polishing cedar wood and teaching his son craftsmanship secrets. Joseph's love for Mary was unquestionable. Mary particularly needed her husband in those days when Emperor Augustus decreed the census. And Joseph had to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem "... to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child" (Luke 2:5, NKJV). Sometime later, after the Savior was born, Joseph took Mary and the Child to Egypt to keep them away from danger. After the death of Herod, the family returned to Nazareth. Joseph also protected his family with loving care on this journey.

The first detail we learn about Joseph in the Gospel of Mathew is the trial he endured. His bride was carrying a baby, but whose baby? Having pity on Mary, Joseph wanted to let her go quietly, without publicity. But an angel who appeared in his dream threw all embarrassment away. Joseph learned from the angel that Mary carried the Savior of the world under her heart. It would seem that their roles should be altered now - Mary was Messiah's mother while Joseph was just a mere mortal whose mission was to serve her. But they did not change. Righteous Joseph was still the head of his family while Mary was his meek and humble wife who did not order her husband around and never demanded anything for herself. Joseph, not Mary, was given the revelations from God in his dreams. Joseph was ultimately responsible for carrying out the Lord's commandments, for the safety of the Child and His mother. Joseph, Mary and Jesus lived together for about fifteen years. We do not know very much about these years. Very few facts mentioned in the Gospel reveal to us how the holy family members treated each other with great kindness, compassion and love.

The way to develop the ideal Christian family is lengthy and difficult. Fortunately, we have a great model - righteous Joseph, Virgin Mary, and our Savior Jesus.

Christmas Eve

*Everything is stained by ages of offense,
And yet, though nothing spotless has remained,
The pain of conscience overcomes all doubts,
What once was lit in the soul will not go out.*

*The glorious was not done in waste,
God did not appear in vain among us,
Not unavailing, heaven kneeled to earth,
Eternal halls were thrown wide open.*

*Deep, unseen, within the memory of the world,
The spring of truth is living, unsuppressed,
And, over the ruins of ancient shame,
Its word resounds like a funeral knell.*

*Into the world light was born, rejected by the darkness,
Still, it shines in the dark where evil borders good.
Not by seeming power; but, by truth itself,
The king of this age will be condemned, and all his works.*

Vladimir Solovyov



Petr Shamshin "Holy Family"

"Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with a promise: that it be well with you, and you may live long on the earth" (Eph. 6:2-3)

"Honoring parents is a very important topic not only for believers, but for all people, especially those who are in prison. Here, in these circumstances, we can see very well who really cares about us. Where are all our friends? It is a very rare case that you have someone, in addition to your mother, who truly cares. It is very sad to watch, when, in spite of this, people treat this one devoted person, who truly and genuinely loves them, with disdain - and even yell at her. Prisoners make huge demands for packages to be sent to them, without even thinking about whether there will be enough money left afterwards for their mothers to buy even one loaf of bread...

"I do not know why, but convicts often have the opinion that you need to have a long visit with your wife, but it is enough to have a short one-day visit with your mother or to just get a package of goodies from her. Why such disrespect? God says, 'Honor your father and your mother... that your days may be long, and that it may be well with you...' (Deut. 5:16). Consequently, honoring your parents is needed, first of all, for yourself. Recall Ruth. She stayed with her mother-in-law and God blessed her. She became part of the genealogy of our Lord Jesus Christ. So let's honor and care for our parents, not only by our words, but by our deeds, showing our relatives and friends mercy and compassion."

Mikhail Denisenko (Russia, Ivanovo region, prison)

"The Word of God says, 'Honor your father and your mother...'; but what does it mean to honor them? Tell me frankly, how often do we pray for our loved ones when they are healthy and when they are doing well? How often do we ask God to be with them every hour of their lives and to keep them healthy, and to protect them from evil ways and to shield them from evil people? I often think of my mother. Yes, I prayed for her sometimes, but why did she need my prayers when she was doing well? How much time do I have here to truly honor my parents, to pray for them, to fast, to give of myself for their sake? I did not pay attention to the value of these things and suddenly I received a letter from my sister, who wrote to tell me that my mom had died. What a shock I experienced! My sister explained that it happened very quickly; my mother suddenly lost consciousness and fell, she was taken to the hospital, she was in a coma, her heart stopped and she died. I no longer have this most precious person with me....

"Every prisoner knows that your mom is the most sacred, dear and beloved person in your life and feelings that you have for your family, and especially for your mother, are ten times stronger in prison. I have asked, and I continue to ask, God for forgiveness for not having prayed for my mother. Dear brothers and sisters, do not repeat my mistakes. If your loved ones are well today, pray and ask the Lord to bless and care for them. God bless you!"

Alexei Smirnov (Russia, Khabarovsk region, prison)

"I was raised in a Christian family. We lived in Moldova. In my family no one thought that I would choose this path because my parents raised me with God's love, but this world became an idol in my life.... Even though you think you know the Living God, who is love, if you live under the influence of an evil spirit, you deceive yourself. As I write this letter to you, tears are running down my cheeks because my dear mother has passed away. She is no longer with us and I, who brought her so much pain and suffering, am still alive. How many nights could she not sleep, praying for her prodigal son? Dear, dear mother, I could not even tell you 'I'm sorry!' I appeal to all: think about your life, so you will not feel the same pain and difficult feelings as me. Save your ruined souls before it is too late, be in a hurry to seek God!"

Igor Babiy (California, USA, prison)



I write to you, children...



M. Khorev with his wife, 1986

Mikhail Ivanovich Khorev

Letter number thirty two

Greetings to you, my dear ones.

Today I would like to share some of my memories of my mom (March 5 was the day of her funeral). At that time I was in prison. I found out about her death from the investigator. Prior to this event I thought that a mother's death was especially tragic for little children. But now I am deeply convinced that children of all ages need their mothers.

I love to write you letters. I have no problem deciding on what to write. However, sharing with you about my mother is especially difficult. Why? First of all, regardless of which words I choose to describe her life, I already know that I will not be able to describe her life in a way that is worthy of her. Secondly, she is no longer alive, and such letters of gratitude should be sent to mothers while they are still living, so that they would be assured they did not waste their lives.

The greatest gift for a mother is the grateful hearts of her children. I know many hymns in which the love of mothers is praised, but more often than not, this praise comes too late; the mothers have already died. The authors of these songs are lamenting the loss of mothers. Yes, this is so often the case with us humans - we don't value what we have until it's lost.

My dear mother was simple, poorly educated, but a God-fearing Christian. She only attended school for a couple of years at a church-based school in Tver province. She lost her parents at a very early age, and in 1906 she was brought as an orphan to Petrograd where she spent the rest of her life. This is the city where she was buried. Her life was filled with many difficulties.

Shortly before my arrest, I stopped to visit my mother. At that time I had no idea that this would be our last meeting. We sat at the table and talked. She loved our conversations. I asked, "Dear Mom, I know you've had a difficult life, but what was the most difficult thing that you lived through?" When I asked this question I braced myself for her answer, but the answer she gave was very unexpected. I thought she would share about being a widow, or the horrors of the blockade through which she lived in Leningrad, or maybe how difficult it was for her to raise four small children alone. But I did not hear any of these!

She said something like, "All the difficulties that I lived through in my life have left me with the most sweet memories, because the Lord was quick to help in all my sorrows. A traveler who finally reaches his final destination is not burdened by difficulties encountered on the way. Now I understand that I have fulfilled God's will for my life. All of my children are grown up, and they are committed believers. My greatest difficulty now is waiting to enter eternity. I strongly yearn, dear son, for the Lord to take me home to heaven." My mother was very ill. 75 days after our conversation my dearest mother went home to heaven. My sisters later told me about her peaceful and brave last journey.

The greatest thing that my mother has given me is prayer. She taught me to pray. Yes, yes, do not be surprised by this. I will try to show you this. I do not remember my very first prayer; I was very little at that time, but some of my childhood prayers I remember very well.

My childhood was marked by poverty - and where there is need, there is God. There were four children in our family. In 1941 there was hunger in Leningrad. We lived in a small shared apartment with three other families - with one room for our entire family. Our building was already damaged by bombing: we had no water, heat or electricity. The windows were shielded with plywood. Every day we thought that our final hour was coming. People died daily of starvation. I was a 10 year old boy and often attended funerals. In those dark

and awful days, coffins were not made, nor were graves dug. Dead bodies were simply wrapped in sheets of fabric and left on the streets to be picked up by a special transport and they were buried in a common grave.

Our family was spared from death by starvation. It was not because we had large amounts of food, not at all. We experienced poverty before the war came. Even if our father were to leave us a large inheritance with a lot of money we would still suffer the common fate.

But God was faithful to His Word. We lived under the special care and providence of God. Our family miraculously was brought out of Leningrad and we were saved. How did it happen? I will briefly tell you the story.

My mom gave shelter to one woman with two small children in our room. They were spared, but their house was burned in the bombing. After 10 days, her husband, a colonel in the military, came from the front lines to bring her out of Leningrad. To show gratitude to my mother for sheltering his wife and children, the colonel brought us out of the city in the same vehicle. In this way, on January 14, 1942, we escaped from Leningrad. We drove 35 kilometers across Ladozhskiy Lake. The lake was frozen, but due to bombing all around, several vehicles dropped through the ice. Yet God preserved us even there.

Prior to our escape, when we still lived in Leningrad, our mother would come home from work and check to see if we were still alive. We all stayed in one bed under one blanket to keep warm. Every day at 7 am we would all get up and kneel by our bed to pray. My mother not only taught us to pray, but she would often very gently and skillfully correct the content of our prayers. In the evenings we also prayed regularly.

As you read the Bible please note that when kings are mentioned, there is also mention of who their mothers were. The influence of mothers on their children is great! For the longest time I could not understand why the image of my dad was so vivid in my memory. I saw him rarely growing up and when I was six, we were forever separated from him. But I always wanted to be like him, to live a life like he lived, from the very beginning to the end. I loved meeting people who knew my dad very well and always had tons of questions for them. Only recently, I realized why my love for him was so deep.

As I recall, my mom would often tell us about our dad. She wanted us to imitate him. From her stories I know more about dad than I know about her. She was like a powerful floodlight shining on this subject, shining the light so brightly on the image of dad in our minds, while she herself remained in the shadows and invisible. This is the kind of woman that my mom, and your grandma Grunya was...

O, wise mothers! The last thing they are concerned about is their own authority. Their entire life is given to their children, but rarely do children love so deeply in return. Often children think that their mothers have too much interest in their lives, intrusive with their advice, questioning and recommendations. To this day, I am amazed how my mother, with so little formal education, could possess such wisdom in dealing with every child's heart uniquely. I wanted to share just one example of her wisdom.

This took place in the fall of 1942, when we were evacuated from Leningrad into very distant Kyrgyzstan. Our family was temporarily staying in the house of a woman who lived alone. One evening our landlady retired for the night into her room. We were also getting ready for bed. Before our regular evening prayer, my mother would always ask us whether any of us was hurt by anyone or offended, and only after this would we pray. But this particular evening she suggested something entirely different. She said, "Children, when saying the Lord's Prayer you will come to the phrase 'hallowed be your name.'" I would ask you to examine yourselves. If your behavior and actions in any way brought hurt to another, then it also brought dishonor to God, so for that reason skip that phrase, but if your heart does not condemn you, then recite the entire Lord's Prayer.

I reflected on my behavior, and skipped that phrase. After everyone went to bed, my mom called me aside and asked, "Dear son, please tell me - what is troubling you?" I told her how earlier that day I went into our landlady's food cellar and ate two pickled tomatoes from her reserve. Of course our landlady knew nothing about it.

My mother clarified some points in my story and after that sent me to ask forgiveness from her. The landlady heard my apology and later went to speak with my mother. Much later I found out that she was so pleased with my apology that she gave permission to my mother to use all of her food supplies without any restrictions as if they were our own.

Your Papa

For give n e s s . . .

"... If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matt. 6:23)

I had been traveling for two days already, to the court in Moscow. The train stopped again at a small railway station. Then I noticed a few drops of summer rain hitting my barred window and I heard muffled commands coming from the guards on the streets and the barking of their dogs. After a short time they brought me a companion who would continue the trip with me, and with two of us, I didn't feel as lonely in the cell.

My companion's name was Mikhail. He seemed to be just a little over twenty. Glancing into his eyes, I thought that something terrible must have happened to him. His eyes were extremely sad.

Over the noise of the wheels we began talking about prison, living in prison and indeed, of life itself. During our conversation, I learned that Mikhail was on his way from a prison colony to a jail because they canceled his sentence and he was going to stay there until the re-trial. I was overjoyed when I found out that Mikhail was my brother in Jesus Christ and that he, like me, had also come to God in prison. It was already dark outside, and it was getting late, but we continued to talk.

"You see, brother," said Mikhail, "I hate them! They ruined my life." Mikhail's eyes flashed, and his gaze was filled with malice, hard and cold.

"They" were his parents. They were alcoholics and according to Mikhail, they turned his life into a huge nightmare. Getting drunk and fighting were everyday things for them. But no one cared about it. "Almost half of our village lived like this, if not more," he explained.

His parents were always dissatisfied with him. Anything he did caused them to be irritated. Constant insults, humiliation, and beatings - with or without a cause - were only a small portion of what his parents did to him. He never had good clothes, nor even normal clothes or food to eat. From the time he was seven years old, he began to steal and run away from home. When he was forced to return home, his dad almost beat him to death.

As I listened to Mikhail's story of what had happened in his childhood, I found it so hard to believe, but I had to believe it was true, because a person with so much sadness in his heart can not lie. No one lies about those things.

To my shame I have to admit that, "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" - I was almost asleep. I wanted to stay awake and listen, but no matter how hard I tried, my eyes closed by themselves. But Mikhail talked and talked like he hadn't had a chance to talk to someone about what was on his heart for a very long time.

"I understand that, as a Christian, I must honor my parents, but tell me," inquired Mikhail, "for what do I honor them? For what? For leaving me without a childhood? For that, because of them, I have become a criminal? For what?"

"I understand you," I said as peacefully as possible. "But as a Christian, you are obligated to forgive them."

Mikhail did not answer right away.

"Yes, obligated," he agreed. "Unforgiveness is a sin before God. I know that. But try to understand, as soon as I think about it, memories from my childhood appear before me. And I can't do anything about it. Everything inside me begins to boil. How can I forgive?" Mikhail stayed quiet for a moment, and then quietly said, "I asked God to help me forgive my parents. It's useless. My heart won't let go of my parent's guilt. Sometimes I think that I will never be able to forgive them. Never." Those last words Mikhail said with inexpressible anguish and pain.

With the feeling that I could no longer resist falling asleep, I still asked him, "But why are you talking about your parents with hatred? Why, if you want to forgive them, are you not doing it? There's something in you that keeps you from forgiving them. What is really holding you back?"

"I don't know... I guess it's the hatred... I guess it doesn't leave me." said Mikhail and stopped.

When I woke up the next morning, Mikhail was gone. They had taken him out in the early morning. For a moment I thought that Mikhail didn't even exist and it was just an ordinary dream, but Mikhail was real. I felt bad. After all, my brother in Christ was seeking for consolation, but I...

There was not much of the trip left till Moscow. I was alone again.

Five months later, I was coming back the same way and was still alone. I was looking outside and there was the same landscape, except that instead of summer, it was late autumn. Otherwise, everything else was normal: the noise of the wheels, rare yelling of prisoners in their cells, frequent stops at large and small stations where the number of passengers would increase and decrease.

The train stopped at the station of a small provincial town. It happened to stop where I could see the station area, where normal free people live, through the window. There was the familiar sound of people coming in and out of our train.

"Hello, brother!" said a person who entered my cell and put his bags of the floor. He gave me his hand, "I believed we would meet again, and so here we are..." He smiled broadly.

My eyes refused to believe what they saw, because such a meeting under such circumstances is almost impossible! But it was a fact - Mikhail stood in front of me! The same Mikhail. But what a contrast! Instead of hurting, sad eyes, holding his great pain inside of himself, I saw a man full of inner warmth and the joyful eyes of a happy man.

After a brief conversation, as if by agreement, we returned to our original discussion, which was abruptly interrupted by me.

"I see you have dealt with your problem," I said gladly. "You have such a happy look."

"You know, my brother," began Mikhail, "I pondered about your question for a long time. For several days in a row I asked God to reveal to me what was holding me back from forgiving my parents."

I listened with a true interest, and thanked the Lord in my heart for this meeting.

"I have always believed that to forgive is to simply forget," continued Mikhail. "But in life, it turns out that we often forget the good, but we remember the evil caused by someone for a long time, sometimes even for a lifetime. Interesting, right?"

I agreed.

"I wanted to forgive my parents and erase everything they had done wrong in my childhood. But the more I wanted it, the more I remembered. Then, after my conversation with you, I pondered. For many days I was seeking for the answer to what it really meant to truly forgive."

"And you found it?" I asked.

Mikhail smiled. "Yes, I found it. To forgive, you must try to understand the cause of someone's action and find a reason or justification for it. And if you can do that, then you can truly forgive. But to forget is to only bury the offense deep inside yourself. It will remain in you and when there is an opportunity, it will come out and be remembered again," he said confidently.

I could not disagree with him because I knew myself that forgiveness works this way: to understand, to justify, and to accept the offender.

Mikhail, meanwhile, continued to talk.

"We Christians know that in this world there is only one single reason why people do evil: our sinfulness. It's our original sin, with which we come into this life and which develops in us from the moment of our birth, inclining us toward evil. Knowing this, you can justify any person."

"But didn't you know that before?"

"I knew. But, you know..." Mikhail paused to think, "the thing is that, when I was thinking of my parents, I looked at them through the eyes of hatred. Hatred made me blind. I only saw evil in them, but I didn't see their souls. They were in slavery to sin. Alcohol had become their idol. They not only sacrificed themselves but me as well. But I, like a blind person, didn't see that until recently. I saw only my own troubles and blamed my parents for my ruined life."

“...Forgive, and you will be forgiven.” (Luke 6:37)

Mikhail looked out the window and continued.

“When, after my thoughts about forgiveness, I read in the Apostle Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians that ‘if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation,’ and that the old has gone and the new has come, only then did I understand. As if someone invisible tore the veil from my inner eyes, I clearly saw that even after believing in Christ, I continued to live in my sinful past. I continued to live with hatred for my parents, considering them guilty because I was a criminal. My hatred kept me from being able to forgive them.”

Mikhail paused. I noticed how his face reflected a barely noticeable shadow of doubt. It seemed to me that he was solving a big question for himself.

“You know, deep in my heart I felt like I was a victim. What can I say?!” He said emotionally. “Not noticing it myself, I reveled in it. Because I felt like a victim, I could not only feel sorry for myself and rely on the pity of others, but could also forgive myself many things.

“I could justify any bad trait in myself and any of my actions. I could forgive myself the fact that I was in jail, because I asked myself, ‘Well, is it my fault that I grew up to be a criminal?’ and answered right back, ‘Of course not! My parents are to blame for that. They made me a criminal; because of them, I am in prison.’ My parents’ fault was a reliable excuse for me. Their guilt was beneficial for me. Well, think about it,” Mikhail spoke to me, “Why did I need to take responsibility for my sins when I could put that responsibility on my parents? I ignored the fact that they did not actually commit those crimes themselves. My crime was a consequence, and the reason was that my parents had made me a criminal. After all, if they hadn’t made me into a monster, I wouldn’t be a criminal either. Logical?”

Mikhail looked at me with an open and sincere gaze and continued.

“But in reality, it was a lie. And with that lie, I was deceiving myself. A person can not pass on something they don’t have themselves. And if my parents raised me like this, it just means that they were like this themselves. And that is their fault. But I was also among other people. I grew up without knowing what was right or wrong. I had the opportunity to educate and change myself in whatever way I wanted. I became a criminal by my own free will. My crimes were my own personal choice. That’s all there is to it.”

Mikhail spoke calmly, as if he was talking about someone else, not himself.

“Instead of honestly admitting to myself,” he continued, “that I became a criminal, and I was in prison because of my own fault, and only my fault, I blamed my parents. I hated them and wrote accusatory and sometimes insulting letters. I expressed my anger at them for my own offenses. They live a hard life and after my crimes it is even harder. I should have told them about Christ instead of being filled with hatred. It turns out that they were not guilty in front of me but I was guilty in front of them. Also, I was guilty in front of our Lord. The Lord forgave me, but I... That’s it, brother...”

The train was taking me farther and farther from the station where Mikhail had been escorted from the train. Over the noise of the wheels, I was thinking about the people who are often carrying resentment in their hearts toward their loved ones, friends and sometimes strangers. They feel offended and hold onto each offense like a check made payable to the bearer. They save them, cherish them, and hope to present them for “reimbursement” when a convenient time comes. And at that time they forget one simple and important truth: there is no place for God in the unforgiving heart. And perhaps this is the largest and main offense - one of their own doing - and unfortunately they will not put any blame on themselves until they realize that... there, in eternity.

Dmitry Abramov (Russia, Perm region, prison)

With Him I’m Not Alone

“Many of us don’t have any close loved ones... so here is my situation: I lost my close loved ones a long time ago, and the other relatives long ago became strangers. When I ended up in this place, my relatives rejected me. I tried to communicate with them to have at least some kind of relationship, but that didn’t work. They didn’t need my troubles. Honestly speaking, you don’t value close friends and relatives until you get into such situations.

“But God doesn’t leave, if you’re seeking Him. And with Him I am not alone: I have a big family of brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ, who do not leave me, nor forsake me, but they support and care about me. Glory to Thee, O Lord, for this miracle, for this family love that you gave me in these people!”

Peter Cherkas (Russia, Sverdlovsk region, prison)

We Are All - Family!

“I am 36 years old now and I have learned a lot. Everyday I analyze myself from different perspectives and discover something about myself. Only here do you start to capture the depth that a human soul bears...”

“In 2011, I lost my family in an accident... and from that moment a new life began for me. I had to learn most of the things from scratch, and my eyes suddenly were opened to other things. Most importantly, I realized that I am very weak, because I couldn’t keep myself on track and I broke down. It’s not easy to carry a loss like this, but for me it turned out to be extremely hard. I realized I only stood firm when I had my family around me, my loved ones. This was a revelation for me. Previously I considered myself an independent adult... but that was a delusion. I learned a lot, but realized I didn’t know how to face the future - how to continue to live. It became apparent that because of my relatives, I had meaning and joy, and the feeling that I was wanted, even necessary... and I knew that I was not alone, but now what?”

“Faith! A thought about faith came to me and for me that was very unusual. I started to pray and thank God secretly, not because I felt forced to, but because I began to have a desire to. It was some kind of impulse, which I had previously ignored or suppressed. But now, I have given myself fully to Him, and that gives my soul a feeling of fullness, richness, and freedom. When you are alone it’s cold and frightening, but God touches your heart so much so, that you feel like a part of the family. We are all really close in our faith in Christ - family! Church of God!”

Alexander Levin (Russia, Yamalo-Nenets AO, prison)

I Was Happy As Ever!

“I am 53 years old right now. For more than 30 years I lived behind barbed wire. I can not blame someone else for my imprisoned life, it’s my own fault. All my life these things have happened in the same order: “I sit in prison, I’m freed, I steal, I’m back in prison, I’m freed, and so on.” My short times of freedom were all filled with wine, women, drugs, and overall, a reckless life. But there was also a time when I talked with Christians...”

“After another spree, and after I squandered all my money, I went to Christians. It was really hard after a hangover, and with insolence I came to Christians and asked them to “treat” me. I don’t remember how exactly, but they put me in a car and drove me out to a summer cottage. It was really good there, among the Christians. I was happy as ever! Some people were coming and some were leaving and they all were happy, with smiles on their faces. I stayed there for three days.

“When I was going to go home, the brothers gave me their phone numbers so I could call them if I needed something and promised me that they would never leave me and that whenever I had a need, they would always be willing to help. I told them that those three days had been the best and happiest days of my life. Nothing prevented me from staying there not only for three days but for the rest of my life, there in happiness... Then, at that moment, I decided for myself - that this is my family! - that I didn’t need anyone else in addition to these brothers and sisters. But...my heart was far away from God...”

“It was God’s last warning for me. Back in the city, I continued my “fun” life. While drinking booze, fighting ensued which ended with a murder... and now I am imprisoned for life. But all of this could have been avoided - God was stopping me! Lord, what a fool I was! How easy it was to reach out and lean on Your help! ...and all my life would have been changed...”

Valery Illyushin (Russia, Orenburg region, prison)

Twelve Years Apart Before Marriage

(*excerpts*)

Lina Antonova



Antonovs in exile, 1985.

...My dear young friends, especially sisters! I want you to be aware that you should concentrate your attention on the salvation of sinners as the number one priority in your Christian life. Bring them to the Lord and, if you partner with the Lord in the work of saving souls, then also make Him your partner when choosing your spouse, your life partner. The Life-Giver certainly will lead you to the one prepared for you....

...On November 20 of 1944, my fiancé, Ivan Yakovlevich Antonov was sentenced by the Military Tribunal to be executed by firing squad for anti-state propaganda (preaching of the Gospel was considered propaganda during the Soviet era). But God has His own plans and life paths prepared for each of us, and Ivan was no exception. The execution was replaced with ten years of prison camps, which he served in the [far north] Republic of Komi.

For a long time there was no correspondence from him. These were the days of trial for me. I prayed much, but the love I had for him in my heart would not go away, while the surrounding circumstances were raising doubts. I humbled myself and was ready to accept any fate, no matter what Lord had planned for me. Finally, in 1945 I received a letter from him, which exuded cheerfulness, joy and humility. He would begin each of his letters with some verses from the Bible. In my prayer, I asked the Lord to show me His will: was the love in my heart towards Ivan from the Lord? If so, then in his next letter, let Ivan include this verse: "So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'Feed My lambs.'" (John 21:15).

The next letter came, which began: "You know that I love you...." I thanked my loving Father from the bottom of my heart; doubts were gone and my spirit was not disturbed by it until the day of my trial in the court of law. I had agreed to be not only the bride of the Lord, but also the bride of Ivan Antonov, and was eager to share the prisoner's fate. We became engaged, bound together by the word "promise."

During the long period we were separated, the Lord tested me - all of my peers got married. Members of the church did not know about my relationship with Ivan, as for many it was incomprehensible - to understand the ways of God, and such sacrifice in my years of youth: the sacrifice of sharing the fate of a prisoner in his sufferings, to encourage him on his path full of hardship, and to comfort and to inspire him for several years.

...The Lord gave me strength and I remained unshakable in my decision. On the contrary, I was pleased with my fate and grateful to the Lord. I loved and I was loved in return, which is a passion of every young heart, because it's the way God designed it. I was the youth leader in our church. I did my best, and with God's help I ministered here and my fiancé there, in the prison camp. Through Ivan's testimony several people in the prison accepted Christ as their personal Savior. Our letters were also testimonies of our faith. Before writing each letter, I prayed and called on the Lord's help. He was the Author of my letters. One day I received a letter from the prison's inspector where Ivan was incarcerated. Ludmila Starniychuk wrote to me: "Lina, I work as the prison censor, checking the contents of the letters. I got very intrigued by the content of your letters and look forward to them, probably no less than Ivan. How happy you are! I am asking you to write me personally! To me, your letters are like fresh air for a suffocating person." At first I had a few doubts, and thought it was a fabrication, but the words, "...your letters are like fresh air for a suf-

focating person" eliminated any doubts. And I began to correspond with her. But the KGB became very interested in me, and soon my life was changed dramatically.

...It was Sunday, November 5 of 1950. After the church service I was on my way home. Like a magnet, my eyes were drawn to the opposite side of the street. Three men were staring at me. Their gaze made me feel ill at ease. Why were they looking at me that way? One of those men came up behind me, touched my shoulder and said quietly:

- "Lina, those people over there would like to talk to you" - and pointed to the corner of the nearest house. Three more men were standing there. I understood everything. I greeted them with a smile. Perfect peace was reigning in my soul. Later the investigator told me:

- "Well done - you were brave and totally calm. In these circumstances, even men get out of balance, and these moments are even unpleasant for us." However, it wasn't about me being brave, but about my Lord, Who gives strength to one who trusts in Him in any situation.

Six men surrounded me and took me down the street. My poor mother ran after them with my older sister Poly. Brothers and sisters stood at the intersection and followed us with their eyes. Mom was shouting in fear with tears in her eyes:

- "Where are you taking her?"

- "Taking her home" - answered one of them.

My mom and sister were strictly forbidden to make any fuss about the situation under the threat of prosecution. And truly, I was taken home.

My sister hurried home to get something out of the apartment, but KGB agents were already there and, not only kept everyone out of the apartment, but would not let anyone into the courtyard until the other agents arrived with me. Truly, as Jesus said to the multitude coming to arrest him, "have you come out as against a robber..." Who am I? An inconspicuous, insignificant young Christian girl, and so many people were brought down to arrest me. They searched our apartment and confiscated Christian books that I cherished, but the Bible was not found, so it stayed safe. I was told to get dressed and follow them. I asked if I could share a Christian duty with my parents before I left. One of them asked:

- "What, pray?"

- "Yes" - I answered.

- "Well, pray."

We knelt down. My mom was beside me; she was suffering tremendously. But the Lord gave me such a great peace in my soul; I felt as if I was preparing for a hike with my friends, instead of going to prison. However, I grieved in my soul, seeing how my mom was suffering, the suffering of a true, loving mother. Oh, how the agony was reflected on her face! No words can describe it! As I was leaving, she grabbed my hand, embraced me, and clasped me to her bosom; and I could still feel the trembling of her body and the beating of her heart throughout all of this long separation from her. She held me so tightly in her arms, that one of the men had a hard time dragging me out of her hands. After I was taken away, my mother and sisters were strictly forbidden to go outside. The Lord put deep faith into my heart that one day I would come back home, to the same place where we prayed together before this farewell. With tears of joy we would give thanks to the One Who reunited us, and guided us safely in our lives, and was always with me, with my mom, and my sisters.

When I was taken down our street, I saw brothers and sisters in Christ standing in each yard. With tears they were trusting me to the Lord, blessing me as I headed to a difficult, unknown future. I was led into a "political" prison, which was located in the basement, under offices of the interrogators. The heavy door closed, separating me from everything: freedom, the sun, the air, the precious faces of my parents, my friends in Christ, who surrounded me with sincere God-given love.

...On February 17th, 1951, behind closed doors, the court sentenced me to 25 years in distant prison camps. My mother wasn't even allowed into the courtroom.

...On the second or third day after the trial, the investigator pulled me into his office.

- Well, Lina, now you will never see your Ivan. Never, never, will you see him again!

- The Lord will have the final say. God will provide. He has plans and a purpose for each person, and He has His plans for our lives.

And truly, while being given such a harsh sentence, God gave me faith in my heart that I would not serve all 25 years in prison camps, and that when my marriage to Ivan took place, it would be a testimony to these people. I was kept in the political prison until May then I was transferred to the criminal prison, where I was the only person in my cell. But here I thanked God for setting me apart from the people affected by sin. Hearing snatches of swearing and vulgar language, I felt like I was at the threshold of hell. Countless times I thanked my Savior, for freeing me in my early years from this horrible pit of perdition. The Lord revealed to me that as His children, we ought not to be afraid of prisons, Satan-designed institutions established by people for the people just like them. Also, we should not be afraid of verdicts given by these people, but should fear the judgment of God Himself, the Righteous Judge, when He will say, "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41). That's the sentence we need to be afraid of, my dear friends! And everything else is temporary, transitory and changeable!

- How long is your prison sentence?
- Twenty-five years.
- How much have you served already?
- Five years.
- Were you engaged before prison?
- I was.
- Fiancé's name?
- Ivan Yakovlevich Antonov.
- He came to see you. You are permitted a two hour visitation.

At that time even family members were not allowed to visit convicts in prison camps. Legally we were not yet husband and wife and were considered of no relation to each other. But Ivan had applied for permission to visit and the Lord gave him favor with the Department Head. We were given approval for three days of visitations, excluding nights. Among the administration of the prison camp as well as the prisoners, news of a miracle was spread: a fiancé came to visit his fiancée, who was sentenced for twenty-five years!

...Coming back from the visitation to my barrack, on my way through the prison yard (it was on Christmas Night, January 7, 1955 [the official holiday date in Russia]), I had so much heaviness and sadness in my heart. I wanted to be free, to be home, to be gathered together with God's people. It was a beautiful evening outside; snow was sparkling in the moonlight. The moon was bright, and all nature was speaking about heaven - where there are no tears, no separations, no evil - while my earthly surroundings were screaming about hell. I was walking and weeping, praying to God, but all I could say was, "My God! Oh, my God! Strengthen me! Comfort me! Twenty more years of separation are still ahead of me, but you can shorten it!"

Some people think that it's possible to get married without having love for each other; and that you will grow to love one another after you get married. I personally do not share such an opinion. After all, even when you purchase something, you need to at least like the item you are buying. All the more so, when you are choosing a life partner. Our God is the God of love. All of His commandments are based on love, and even more so the principles of marriage and family. God made everything love-centered - love he placed in the heart of a man for a woman and in a woman for a man. If there is no love, there is no God. It's a terrible mistake when two people come together because of the flesh, lust, material needs or other similar reasons. Such a family is not of God's will, and it will never be seen as an example of Christ and his Church. Before the birth of the Church (who is the Bride of Christ), God prepared for her a Groom (Christ), Who loves His bride, the Church, with the love given to Him by God the Father. And so it is with the family, if God is its Founder. A Christian man symbolizes Christ: the one who wants to get married turns in prayer to God the Father, asking Him to reveal to him his counterpart - the bride. And God, Who knows the hearts of all, will do it flawlessly. His counterpart - the bride - will become his beloved and intimate soul-mate. Christ had fallen in love with his Bride, the Church, before He saw her. The Bride, the Church, responds with love to the call of her Groom. No sinner will know God until he comes to love his Savior, and is united with God by pure, holy and faithful love. No words can express this blissful state, you just have to experience it. And it can only be experienced by a spiritually born-again soul: "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband" (Eph. 5: 32-33).

Have you ever experienced this spiritual bliss, when you connect to your Life-Giver and Savior? Two connecting hearts, male and female, experience a similar bliss, if they are connected by the will of God, because it is God's established principle. In a born-again soul, Christ has to become greater, while that person's flesh, his "self" or ego, must die daily; "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). In old age the righteous person is fruitful and full of energy. He must live until he becomes "perfect" or complete in Christ. "The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing, to declare that the Lord is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him" (Ps. 92:12-15). This refers to the spiritual growth of each spiritually born-again child of God. The same thing takes place in the family that is established by God, the love of a husband for his wife and of the wife for her husband increases. They will join one another to the point that they become as one. In their old age, their love for each other reaches a peak, and spiritually, men must strive for perfection, and God takes them into a new world - a world of joy, love and happiness.

Before marriage, often young people are guided by feelings or seek human council instead of consulting the Life-Giver in such an important issue. And it results in irreparable failures... Their marriage seems a disaster and some families are shipwrecked. Many husbands and wives give up saying: "That's my cross, that's my destiny." No! And once again I say: No! Did God ever in His plan, when He envisaged the family, have a divorce planned in the life of husband and wife? Did he ever plan for sorrow instead of joy, hatred instead of love, quarrels instead of peace, discouragement instead of cheerful spirits, grumbling and tears instead of pleasure, etc? When people get married by the will of God, peace, joy, love, and understanding reign in that family. Although life will be tested by storms, a family established by God will be an example of the Church with Christ in any circumstances, and will be a refuge of peace and comfort for each family member. It will be a shelter of rest from the fierce waves of the worldly ocean. The husband treats his wife with love, as taught by the Word of God: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her" (Eph. 5:25).

The wife will be obedient to her husband. Instead of dominating, she will respect him as the head of their family, and will always view him as greater than herself. Children will obey their parents in the Lord, and love them; while growing up in such a family of believers, they will always look up to their parents and follow their example. A Christian family like this glorifies the Lord, and will be a model to others around them and a joy to one another.

My visit from Ivan was a great testimony to all of the camp authorities, guards, service staff and almost every prisoner in the camp, a testament to the love and faithfulness of God's children not only to their Savior, but also to each other.

... I was released on the 21st of May, 1956. From the very first day of my arrest, the Lord had comforted me. All of the expectations that God had put into my heart were fulfilled by Him. Soon, I was standing in the same place where I had been praying five and a half years before, getting ready for the unknown path that God had prepared for me. Words can't express all the joy of that home-coming and my thankfulness to God. Ivan met and greeted me at the train station. Twelve years had passed since the date of our vows to get married - twelve years of separation. And now, finally, God joined our ways into a single life path.

December 30, 1956 was our wedding day. The Lord had done great things for us, and we rejoiced. On that day we received the blessing of the Lord and of the Church upon our life together. Ivan prayed, "Oh, satisfy us early with Your mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days! Make us glad according to the days in which You have afflicted us, the years in which we have seen evil." (Ps. 90:14-15). The Lord was truly glorified on the day of our marriage, and it was a great testimony to the persecutors, especially to my investigator that even after the trial wanted to hurt my heart even more, by gladly saying, "Now you will never see your Ivan. Never, never, will you see him again!" But our marriage was God's demonstration that those who put their trust in Him shall not be ashamed. For the sake of His glory, of His name, the Lord did a great thing for us and through us. Glory be to Him forever!

Invitation

"The Christian rehabilitation center 'New Life' invites all believers in Christ who are in need of assistance and brotherly love, guidance and advice after release from prison. God bless you and help you to find a truly new life!

"Write to us! We are waiting for brothers and sisters in Christ!"

Oleg Sibilev (Russia, Krasnoyarsk region, rehab center)

Greetings

"Through the magazine I want to send greetings to the Christian brethren: Dima Gurov, Alexander Kutuyavin, Eugene Kubrin, Valera Maklakov, Vasya Yurchenko and everyone who knows and remembers me. May the Lord give you spiritual strength and bless you!"

Konstantin Raskazov (Russia, City of Omsk, prison)

Gratitude

"In February 2014 I will be getting out of prison. I would like to ask brothers and sisters to pray for me so I would remain faithful to the Lord for the rest of my life. I was invited to Novorossiysk, a rehabilitation center, so that I could get stronger spiritually and let the Lord shine in my life. My sister and I grew up in an orphanage, and now Tatiana is also a Christian; she also received the Lord into her heart, and now she's in God's hands.

"With all my heart I thank the Brethren in Christ of the churches 'Life' and 'Father's House' for their unprejudiced labor that they do in the name of the Lord, coming to these places, comforting, encouraging, and in some cases convicting us. I thank God that believers help us financially, that through them God cares for us and does not leave us in our needs and

sorrow. All of our church, 'Salvation in Jesus,' gives thanks to the brothers and sisters of the churches 'Life' and 'Father's House' for the prayers and support. Thank you for being there for us. All glory be to God!"

Igor Kunavin (Russia, City of Omsk)

Write to us!

"Before, I was serving a sentence in the prison in Mordovia, and now in the prison in Tambov region. Unfortunately, I lost the address of the believers which I knew before and with whom I had socialized. I'd like to restore my communication and spiritual correspondence with them. If anyone remembers me, please write to me. I'm waiting for your letters and I'm in need of spiritual support!"

Alexei Shaikhutdinov (Russia, Tambov region, prison)

"In the colony, where people are serving repeat sentences, the unbelievers watch us Christians, as we learn from our Lord's humility, meekness and wisdom on how to behave so as not to tarnish the name of Christ. We distribute religious literature and magazines. Our small prison church has a strong desire to start spiritual correspondence for our edification and for our prayer time together with the believers. Please write to us!"

Alexander Zyablitsev (Russia, Irkutsk region, prison)

Wishing spiritual communication by correspondence:

Sergei Moskalenko (Russia, Vologodsky region, prison)

Sergei Bedarev (Russia, Kirov region, prison)

Andrei Luytaev (Russia, Altai Krai, prison)

Alexei Repetin (Russia, Yamalo-Nenets AO, prison)

Svetlana Belyakova (Russia, Kursk region, prison)

Mikhail Postovalov (Russia, Saratov region, prison)

Vitaliy Sadkov (Ukraine, Vinnytsia region, prison)

Vasilij Geringer (Kazakhstan, City of Pavlodar, prison)

First steps

"I understand that it is never too late to open up my heart to God, but it is not as easy as it seems to be. I'm not a murderer or an alcoholic. I am a thief. I became a thief just to be able to live and support myself. I understand that I'm lost and that I'm living in ungodly ways. How can I get out of this lifestyle that I'm living? I sincerely believe that there will be people who could support me spiritually as I try to understand God and His truth."

Nikolai Fedotov (Russia, Khabarovsk region, prison)

Need of spiritual literature

"If possible, please help me with spiritual books. I need a Concordance, a Bible Dictionary, and literature in Greek and Hebrew. I would be very grateful for any help."

Andrey Prikhodko (Ukraine, Dnipropetrovsk region, prison)

Need of medication

"I need medicine for the treatment of my liver: Essentiale Forte, Gustal and vitamins. I would be very grateful for the help and I ask for your prayers!"

Dmitry Lebedev (Russia, Murmansk Region, prison)

"I have a need for Complivit vitamins, so please send them to me if anyone has the opportunity. God bless you!"

Dmitry Bolkunov (Russia, Far East, prison)

"I was left all alone - to all of my troubles, which I finally started to realize, and then I got sick and was in bed and couldn't get up. I have spinal tuberculosis and hepatitis-C... Maybe God will forgive me and have mercy on me and send people to help me with the needed medicines..."

Sergey Kozinenko (Russia, Stavropol region, prison)

"My hope is only in you. I was prompted to address you about my serious disease. I am ashamed to ask you for help, but I have no relatives or close friends.... I have varicose veins and need ointments: troksevazin and escin. My disease has been neglected and is getting worse. I hope very much for your help, which will ease my suffering and pain. May the Lord bless you!"

Alexander Dovbish

(Ukraine, Zhytomyr region, prison)

Learning German

"I'm learning German, and I'd like to maintain written communication with brothers and sisters from Germany. I have been corresponding with one brother in German. I will be infinitely grateful to the Lord for new Christian friends!"

Sergey Ukolov (Russia, Yamalo-Nenets AO, prison)

Asking for stationery, spiritual literature and essentials

Tatiana Smirnyagin (Russia, Kursk region, prison);

Alexander Dvoretckiy (Ukraine, City of Vinnytsia, prison);

Maya Sharban (Russia, Khakassia, prison).

To anyone wishing to respond to a request for assistance (help), we inform you that before you send a package to a prisoner, please write a letter to that person to specify the location and permission to receive it. This is especially true for those sentenced to life imprisonments. Do not forget to include an envelope and paper for the response. May God bless all who sacrificially help in His name!

"Ask and it will be given to you." (Matthew 7:7 NIV)

"He has regarded the prayer of the destitute and has not despised their prayer." (Ps 102:17 NASB)

Children Write to God

"They live with us, not knowing that they are the face of our life, a mirror, a tuning fork. They have their own world, a special world. A world away from which we adults are moving all the time, without looking back. And the farther away we get, the less understandable that country becomes to us - the country of childhood. The great humanist and educator, Janusz Korczak, encouraged adults to rise up to the spiritual world of the child, not to condescend to it. After all, perception of the world by children, a child's emotional and moral response to the reality around us, differs by originality, fineness, immediacy."

- *Mikhail Dymov (from the book "Children write to God")*

"Why, in the spring, when You turn on the stars in the sky in the evening, and You blow the warm wind on the earth and it becomes quiet all around, do I sometimes want to cry?" - *Natasha, 8 years old.*

"And now, would You create man the second time around?" - *Oleg, 9 years old.*

"There is so much misery and suffering on the Earth, so much that people would not be sorry to die." - *Igor, 10 years old.*

"Why am I needed on the planet Earth?" - *Oleg, 8 years old.*

"I came into this world, glanced around, and the world was already so evil and cruel." - *Andrei, 10 years old.*

"Make it so that all the weapons on the Earth would break." - *Kostya 10 years old.*

"Lord, I want to die not hurting." - *Tanya, 10 years old.*

"Make it so that my mom and dad would reconcile. Dear God, help me, I will give up smoking." - *Yura, 9 years old.*

"I'd like to have my birthday not just once a year, but five. Not because of the gifts. I'd just get to see my daddy more often." - *Nina, 8 years old.*

"Please, let grandma come to me for the New Year." - *Raya, 8 years old.*

"Please, make it so that after the death of our entire family, we would be together in the other world. As for mom, without us, paradise would be hell for her." - *Sasha, 10 years old.*

"Please, give me a happy family." - *Rodion, 9 years old.*

"I was at the cemetery, and I was shaken by one gravestone. A big black stone, with one word carved on it: 'Mother.' And that's it." - *Ivan, 11 years old.*

"You know, even though I think I have no soul, sometimes it still aches a bit." - *Roman, 8 years old.*

"Divorce - it's a family funeral." - *Olga, 10 years old.*

"Tell me, when will Jesus Christ come the second time? Because people need to get prepared, so it won't happen like it did when He came the first time." - *Alina, 10 years old.*

"Every morning I bury yesterday. After all, it left me forever." - *Arkady, 9 years old.*

"I'll share a secret with you: when I see a lonely woman, I feel ashamed." - *Armen, 10 years old.*

"I'm still a little one, I'm in third grade, I have no sins, but they start to gather" - *Eva, 9 years old.*

"I do not want to be in the adult world - everything is a lie." - *Andrei, 10 years old.*



Dear Friends of "RCR,"

Thank you for taking the time to read the very first English translation of a complete issue of *The Gospel Behind Barbed Wire* prison magazine. When we proposed doing a translation of one issue into English, the staff in Moscow suggested this issue about Family, since they had so much response from it. It is our great pleasure to submit this to you and our prayer is that you saw the same things we see... in every issue... and with every letter we receive in response.

RCR began publishing *The Gospel Behind Barbed Wire (GBBW)* in 1995. Since that time over 100 issues have been printed and distributed to people in prison, to Christians visiting and ministering at prisons, as well as to Russian speakers with hearts for prison ministry - with each published word... in Russian. It has been a great privilege to provide our magazine to those who speak Russian. They have been able to share our joy and amazement at the lives touched by the Gospel. Many of our friends and supporters, however, do not speak Russian and they have not been able to rejoice with us in this way.

Isaiah 55:11 tells us that God says: "So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to me empty, without accomplishing what I desire..." (NASB). And so it has been with *GBBW* magazine. The magazine has gone out with teachings on the Gospel, articles of Christian encouragement, and stories and testimonies submitted by people in prison. Over the years, our faithful staff in Moscow has received countless numbers of letters in response; letters from men and women who have read *GBBW* magazine and discovered the grace of God, many entering a saving relationship with the Lord.

We hope that, as you read the English version of our magazine, you could picture those who wrote the poems and articles. Close your eyes for a moment and thank our Heavenly Father for His redeeming love and for the love He has shown to these broken lives. God's word has gone out to the prisoner... and returned to us with thanksgiving. We thank God for allowing us the honor of publishing this magazine and for the financial support of those who share this burden for the lost.

A special note to our English speaking friends: Would you consider contributing to the cost of publishing *The Gospel Behind Barbed Wire* magazine? There are nearly 1000 prisons in Russia with an average population of 700 inmates. With our present funds we are able to print 6500 copies of each issue - just one magazine for every 107 inmates. As of the end of 2014, RCR is reaching about 75% of the prisons. Information about where to send donations is on the back cover. We hope to one day be able to send magazines to all the Russian prisons, where the Gospel is so greatly needed.

We hope you enjoyed this VERY SPECIAL issue of *The Gospel Behind Barbed Wire!*

Ray Brumbeloe

Ray Brumbeloe
Chairman of the Board
"RCR" - Russian Christian Radio

“RCR” - Russian Christian Radio



RCR offers radio programs of spiritual and moral content (in Russian) in mp3 format for broadcast on the network of your prison or institution.

An application for radio programs must be sent to the RCR editorial office in Moscow, with a note on the envelope specifying “Radio.”

Dear readers, “Thank you!” to all who support us financially. Publishing the magazines and delivering them are associated with the timely receipt of donations. To ensure that each issue of the magazine is published without delay, you can help to support its publication by kindly sending a donation to the address below. We believe that it will bring good fruit to honor the Lord. We also invite all of you to please pray for our ministry. God bless you!

In Russia:

- **Mission of Evangelical Christians “Gospel Call” (aka Russian Christian Radio)**
- **Send donations to: 125047 Russia, Moscow, PO Box 141 Eduard Zavedeev**

In the US and elsewhere:

- **Donations by mail: RCR, PO Box 1667, Estes Park, CO 80517-1667, USA**
- **Electronic donations – Via PayPal on the RCR website: www.rcr-us.org, please click on the “Donate” button and follow the instructions.**
- **If you would like to designate your donation for the prison magazine ministry please note that on your check, or add special instructions where indicated for PayPal donations.**

In Russian: All texts of Scripture are taken from the Russian Synodal Translation, published by “The Russian Bible Society,” Moscow 1995.

In the English translation:

Bible versions used are the New American Standard (NASB, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation), New King James Version (NKJV, Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.) and New International Version (NIV, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®).

The Editorial Board awaits your creative works, drawings, photos, crosswords, poems, articles, short stories, testimonies, and feedback. Manuscripts and letters are reviewed at the discretion of the editors and are not returned.

The editorial staff is not responsible for the published addresses. The opinions of the editorial staff do not necessarily represent the opinions of the authors. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit all sent materials. The publication is copyrighted, and any reproduction requires prior written authorization.

Russia address: 125047 Russia, Moscow, PO Box 141 RCR, The Gospel Behind Barbed Wire
Web site: <http://www.rcr.ru>

Executive Editor – Mikhail Fadin
Editor – Irina Brugger
Director & Graphic Designer – Ernest Brugger
Associate Editors – Eduard Zavedeev, Alexei Nadiion, Ruslan Grigorovichev, Olga Yakimenkov

Assisting with Translation into English: Jesse Irwin (pg 0, 1, 18), John Poysti (pg 2-4), Galina Gerchik (pg 5), Anna Balan (pg 6-7), Tatyana Moroz (pg 6), Tania Sacarat (pg 7), Larisa Tuchin (pg 8-11), Tatyana Razumov (pg 14, 19, 30), Nadia Afanasyeva (pg 15, 18, 20-21), Natasha Matveyuk (pg 16), Ilia Khatunzev (pg 17), Svetlana Garrey (pg 18), Agunia Apelyan (pg 22-24, 25), Venera Demenskaya (pg 26-29), Daniel Saharchuk (pg 31), Victor Saharchuk (pg 3, 12-13, 26-29, 32). Proofreading: Victor Sahachuk, Erin Fonken, C.Ray & Barbara Brumbelee, and overall editors: Natalia Poysti and Susan Shull.