Come Before Winter

a call to missions



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Introduction

It was the worst day of my life. I walked into the dimly lit room between rows of neatly placed chairs. I never dreamed this could happen to me; at least not at this time in my life. Maybe I could have done something different. Maybe I could have prevented this tragedy. Was it my fault? Worse yet, I found myself blaming God. He had done this to me... Why?

I was in England when I received the phone call. It was late at night and I was exhausted from the trip. Within a few hours I was on a plane back to the United States. Back to Tulsa, Oklahoma. I hadn't slept in three days. I told myself it was all a bad dream. I would wake up soon and it would all be over.

Unfortunately, I never woke up.

I found myself standing over the body of my best friend. My companion. The mother of three beautiful children. My wife had been driving down 101st Street in Tulsa when she lost control of her car. The exact cause of the accident remains a mystery, but her fate was determined instantly. For reasons beyond my understanding she went home to be with the Lord that 28th day of September 1982.

Although I knew Jan was with Jesus, the very Hope of our existence, I felt betrayed. For 13 years we had ministered together. Before she accepted my marriage proposal, I had told Jan that she needed to understand the call God had placed on my life. A call that would consume our lives, even placing us in potentially dangerous situations. If she agreed to marry me, her life would not be a normal one.

Now all of that was a memory. How could I possibly continue?

I came to the conclusion that the call God had given me in my youth had now passed. The work was over. Jan was gone, and although I was surrounded with loving friends and our three children, I was alone. I was convinced my life, and ministry, had come to an abrupt end.

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I share this tragic time in my life to help you better understand the

significance of God's call not only on my life, but on yours as well. As followers of Christ, we are called to serve in the building up of His kingdom. We are called to be a witness... an example... to take every opportunity God gives us to stand against the kingdom of Satan and to see his Kingdom come in every nation. We are soldiers enlisted in God's army, we are called to serve.

The reality of this commission became very evident to me when God called me into His kingdom. I still hear the words as clearly as the first time the Holy Spirit uttered them into my heart, "COME, COME BEFORE WINTER!”

These words originated from the Apostle Paul in a prison cell in Rome as he neared the end of his life. He beseeched his beloved companion Timothy to come to him before the harsh winter set in. Beyond their practical application, these words have a spiritual significance to all who call themselves Christians. We have no guarantee of tomorrow. We never know when our winter will come — when we will no longer have the opportunities that now exist.

For my beautiful wife Jan, that day came unexpectedly in the prime of her life. She had faithfully served her Master, taking every opportunity to proclaim His love and to share the saving knowledge of her beloved Savior. When she died, I believed my winter had also come. But God had a different plan. One that would challenge the wisdom of an earthly man, and reveal the awesome power of our heavenly Father. The call continued... "Come, Come Before Winter!"

While part of my life may have departed with Jan in September of 1982, my work in the kingdom did not. Thousands of people die everyday without ever knowing about the love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ. While the fires of hell quietly beckon their eternal souls, we have the message of hope—the keys to life everlasting.

It is not a question of "How" or "When" we can reach those who are perishing, it is a question of "Will". Will we answer the call? "COME... COME BEFORE WINTER."

Chapter 1:
The Letter

My dear Timothy

It's been such a long time since we were together. I've been sitting here thinking of the many things we have shared over the years and wishing you were here now. Every time you come to mind, my heart grows heavy and a tear comes to my eye. They are tears of sadness that you are so far away. They are also tears of overwhelming joy. The Lord has done more in my life than anything I could ever have imagined. Yet what would I have done without you?

Your companionship is something I have praised God for since we first met. I feel like your father. I remember when I was in Lystra and was near death, your care and concern renewed my strength. Your loving and gentle spirit has never changed. As I recovered, you sat so intently at my bedside, listening to all that I could share with you about Christ. My wounds were proof of the cost involved in serving Him, yet I could see that flame growing within you. What a joy it has been to me to nurture you in the ways of God! Your faith encourages me!

No matter in what direction the Holy Spirit was leading, I knew I could always count on you. When the call of ministry took us in different directions, the loss of your companionship was always felt. During those times, I took comfort in knowing that you were more than able to carry out God's purposes. Your life was developing a ministry of its own. I have watched you mature from a shy, young boy into a mighty man of God. Even now, my heart is overwhelmed with the pride of a father. The Lord has given you many gifts, Timothy. You have a heart full of compassion for your fellow man. These days, that is a rare gift indeed. The hardship you and I have suffered together has made you strong. Your commitment to Christ has been proven by the way you have lived your life. Don't ever lose heart, persevere for the sake of Christ.

As I'm writing this, I feel as though you are right here. Timothy my son, I ask only one thing more of you. My days here are drawing to a close. I have fought a good fight, I have kept the faith. I have lived for Christ, working in His service. No matter what obstacles I encountered, my faith remained strong. For me, the race is over. Now the voice of God is calling me home. He is waiting for me at

the gates of heaven, ready to receive me into His Kingdom as He will all of His saints.

How I hope to see you one last time! It is the final prayer of my heart, that we might rejoice together in all that God has done. But you must come quickly, Come Before Winter. Remember how harsh the winter weather can be? The sea is without mercy. You know that winter storms can be deadly. When you come, please bring my coat. I left it behind during my last visit. Most importantly, will you bring all of my writings, especially the parchments? I will be waiting anxiously for you and praying for a safe journey. Be careful in your travels, son, but please, COME BEFORE WINTER.

Your loving father in Christ,

Paul

Chapter 2:
Sitting in the Belly of a Whale

To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever. But you brought my life up from the pit, O Lord my God.—Jonah 2:6

I grew up in a Christian home. My father was an Assemblies of God minister in Saskatchewan, Canada. I was the preacher's kid, and like any good preacher's kid, I was expected to follow in the footsteps of my father. Even if I didn't dedicate myself to the pastorate, expectations were high. The pastor's son is often deemed the "role model", the "likely candidate" to accomplish great things for the Kingdom.

I sympathize with other children whose parents are in the ministry. The social pressure can be overbearing. Although I loved my parents, I had no intention of following in their path. I was very independent and often dreamed of a "fractious existence"—a life free from rules, expectations, and dependence on the financial support of others.

Despite my rebellious attitude, God touched my life at a camp meeting one night on Vancouver Island. I was only 14 at the time. A word of the Lord came forth that God was calling me to preach the Gospel, and that I would travel around the world with His message. I didn't understand the significance of that evening, but I knew I was called. My spirit bore witness to its authenticity and despite my resistance, it would not go away.

Having no desire for the ministry, I later enrolled at The University of Saskatchewan in Regina. From there I would go on to study Law and eventually make my way into politics. Two forces were at work within me. I regarded one as leading to a life of financial hardship and sacrifice, while the other would grant me the power and money I desired. Despite my efforts to thwart the leading of the Holy Spirit, I could not escape His conviction. Like Jonah, I was running from God's call and I thought I could hide from His presence. I was gravely mistaken.

One Sunday evening My friends and I had had a little too much to drink, and we decided to visit the service at my father's church. We were unruly and brash. My rebellion against God was at its peak and I believe I was pushing the limits. The ushers and guest speaker that evening seemed to totally disregard our vain attempts at disrupting the service. No one would have blamed them for throwing us out. Our behavior was inexcusable.

I thank God that I didn't succeed in my rebellion. During the service a conviction came over me. While I longed to escape, I found myself in the arms of a loving Savior, His spirit of love and forgiveness overwhelmed me. My whole being was focused on Jesus Christ as I tearfully rejoiced in His deep call within me. The seas were calm.

I knew this was the night. I could not resist any longer. I wept at the altar of my father's church that Sunday evening as the calling became clear; "Come Before Winter!" Three days later I was attending Bible college.

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When God called His servant Jonah to go to Nineveh and cry against the great city, Jonah fled to Tarshish seeking to escape God's instruction. Jonah recognized the voice of God, a voice he had surely heard in times past. Whether for fear of his own safety or disregard for the people of Nineveh, Jonah quickly made a plan of escape; a voyage by sea that would lead him away from the task God had laid before him.

Perhaps like Moses, Jonah also felt inadequate to serve his God in such an awesome calling. How could he speak to an entire nation of people foreign to his own. Despite Jonah's apprehension, Nineveh was in trouble. Their wicked ways had come before the throne of God and His judgment would pass upon the people of Nineveh in a mere forty days.

A spiritual winter was quickly descending upon Nineveh. Their days were drawing to a close. Hundreds of thousands of people were about to experience the hand of God in judgment. But Jonah had the message that could lead to their salvation. He was needed as an instrument of God's mercy to come to the people of Nineveh; to cry against them; to call them to repentance and testify to the grace of an almighty God. Jonah, however, focused on his own distresses and ran from God's call.

I believe there are many Jonahs in church today. They confess obedience to

Jesus and His words. They may even hear His voice. But when the call comes, they run. They may not depart to another country, like Jonah, but they run spiritually. They focus on other activities, they justify the work they are already involved in and attempt to ignore the leading of God's Holy Spirit. They may be afraid, experience a feeling of inadequacy, or simply not care.

When we hear God's call and choose to run rather than obey, we can expect troubled times ahead. We cannot be indifferent to God's call. We must either respond or run. There is no middle ground.

While Jonah believed he could actually escape from God's call, he simply made matters worse. Imagine the fear he experienced while sitting in the belly of a whale, crying out in repentance. It's amazing how fast we will choose to obey God after our winter has come. Then we are in need of deliverance.

Through more than 30 years of ministry, God has led me to many nations—nations whose winter was upon them; children in and around Chernobyl who were dying of cancer from the high levels of radiation; Communist soldiers, who, believing they were ushering in an earthy "paradise", were actually serving as enemies of the cross; families in China who were literally dying of starvation because of ravaging floods; and many others.

Ninevehs are all around us. Your Nineveh may be opposite your house, across town or even on the other side of the globe. The fields are ripe for harvest but winter will soon set in. We must act now. Are we willing to repent and pray the words of Jonah, "I will pay that that I have vowed."?

If Satan can't get us to run from our calling, he will use more subtle means. He will fill us with fear; fear of failure and of what others will think of us; fear of rejection or even persecution. Satan will also tell us that we are not worthy. Satan knows the power of following God's call to come before winter and he will do everything in his power to stop us. Satan does not want us to reach Nineveh. But God's grace is sufficient. He has chosen the weak to confound the wise. His power is perfected in our own inabilities. He needs only a willing heart. A heart that will cry, "Here am I Lord, send me."

Chapter 3:
Tried By Fire

That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:—I Peter 1:7

In 1968, I began my studies at Oral Roberts University. I was reluctant to return to school. I had been ministering in music and the preaching of God's word throughout Canada and the northern part of the United States. I had even spent a year in Africa and witnessed the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as thousands of souls were saved. Without a mailing list or monthly support, I simply trusted God to provide for my needs and followed His leading.

My travels ended temporarily in 1966, and I took the pastorate of a small congregation in Southern Saskatchewan. It was during this period that I heard Oral Roberts preach for the first time and learned of the university. I knew God was directing me to attend ORU and further my studies, but I was unsettled and anxious to get on with my ministry to the nations. I wrestled with the decision for three months before finally yielding to God's plan.

As we pursue the Lord's call on our lives, it is important to seek his timing. If He knows we are willing to respond to His command, regardless of the direction it will send us, God will lay out the path we must follow in preparation. It was during this time at ORU that I would meet the man who would affect my life more than anyone could have imagined.

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The fire in his eyes was consuming. It told the story of a man who had survived the fiercest of trials and came forth as gold. Jaanus Karner was a leader of the underground church. Although in his early twenties, his story could have been included in the Book of Acts.

I had been touring with The Collegians, a music group from ORU, when our

itinerary had been modified during the last few days of a European tour. After a church in Scandinavia canceled our appearance, the leaders of the group saw it as a good opportunity to travel into the USSR. We were in Finland at the time and it was only a short distance across the Baltic sea into the Soviet Republic of Estonia. I had never been in a Communist country and really did not know what to expect.

We arrived on a Sunday morning and were taken to a Methodist church in the heart of Tallinn, the capital city of Estonia. They must have heard that we were coming because hundreds of people had gathered around the outside of the church unable to fit inside. There were also soldiers with guard dogs and machine guns around the church. I thought it strange that armed guards felt it necessary to position themselves outside a simple church. What did they fear? How dangerous did they view followers of Jesus Christ?

We were ushered around to the back of the building and let in a side entrance which led to the platform where the Pastor would deliver his sermon. A gasp went through the crowd as they saw us. Forty young men and women from North America had come to visit their church. I am sure this was the first time in over fifty years such an event had occurred. The Communists had forbidden us to speak with anyone in the church. We were simply on display. Or had the Communists allowed them to be on display for us to see the "freedom" of worship they apparently enjoyed?

Although we couldn't understand a word that was being spoken, there was a spiritual connection with these fellow Believers. Their faces told a thousand stories of life under Communism—a so-called Utopian system. Their countenances told a different story... one of danger, sacrifice and the determination to follow Christ at any cost.

The invisible wall of silence began to crumble when an elderly Russian woman stood up and began to sing. The words may have been foreign but the message was loud and clear. In a high, quavering voice she began singing "On a hill far away... stood an old rugged cross...” I'll never forget the emotion I felt at that moment. All of us just looked at each other with a sense of awe. We all began to sing the words to this classic hymn out loud. I was caught in the spirit of that moment. The Communists had succeeded in dividing the nations, but we were joined together in the spirit of love and unity. Tears began to roll down my cheeks as I quietly prayed, asking God if there was any way I could ever minister to these people. I said, "I'm here Lord. Send me."

It was the next day at our hotel that I met Jaanus. He had apparently been present the previous day when we visited the Methodist church and wanted to invite a few of us to accompany him to an underground church meeting. He explained the restrictions and dangers of openly preaching the Gospel. The Believers had to meet secretly in their homes or deep in the woods. To this the term "underground" church had been applied.

I quickly volunteered with three other members of our group to go with Jaanus. This young believer had been arrested, interrogated and beaten by the KGB on numerous occasions. He was fully aware of the dangers he was placing himself in by escorting us to the secret meeting. I admired my Estonian brother for his courage.

After we checked our passports with the hotel desk we proceeded to follow Jaanus out of the lobby. He had instructed us to do exactly as he said and not to move until he did. A suspicious looking man dressed in a London Fog trench coat, with his hat pulled close down above his eyes and dark sun glasses began to follow us. A cigarette was hanging from the corner of his mouth—his appearance was obvious. On one hand it was comical, with this agent straight out of a James Bond movie following us; but on the other hand this was real, and the consequences for being caught were left unspoken. I quietly prayed in my spirit as we followed Jaanus out of the hotel.

We crossed the street to a bus stop where a bus had pulled up allowing the passengers to board. Jaanus had us wait until the last minute to enter the bus, literally jumping on board before the agent had an opportunity to follow us. As the dilapidated Russian bus careened down the street, we could see the man who was following us running down the street as the blue smoke from the diesel engine blurred his image. I couldn't help but wonder if he actually believed he might catch us.

Jaanus took us through an obstacle course of buses, taxis and dark alleys before we finally arrived at the designated meeting place. It had taken longer to arrive at the apartment than many services in the United States last. We were anxious for what was in store.

The room was pitch black when we entered. I knew the room was full of people from the stale air caused by the lack of circulation and I found myself tripping over many legs. They sat us in one of the corners of the room and began whispering many questions in our direction. "What is God doing in America?" "How is the revival going?" "Tell us about your freedom of religion!"

I had no idea how to answer their probing questions.

Should I tell them that we have a church on every corner? That the average Christian in America probably has five or six Bibles not to mention all of the study materials available to him. Should I tell them that many Christians seldom take time to witness to others, and that I had seldom heard a prayer in church directed at the suffering of these courageous members of Christ's Body?

I found myself thankful for the darkness not wanting them to see the shame on my face. I had grown up with a silver spoon in my mouth. My faith had never been challenged to the extent that they endure in a single day. Many of those present had friends or family members confined to horrific prison cells in Communist "reeducation" camps. Their crime...serving the same One I called Lord,...daring to share their faith with another or owning their own Bible. All of the freedoms I had taken for granted, freedoms I often didn't have time to exercise, were the same activities these Believers were literally dying for. They were dying to this life that they may live a far better one.

If this was real Christianity, what in the world was I doing?

The call to Come Before Winter had suddenly taken on a new meaning. In one sense, these people lived in winter. The persecutions they endured were harsher than I had ever imagined, and the fire in Jaanus' eyes was burning its way deep into my heart. I wanted that fire. I wanted to know that I was willing to stand for my faith as they did. I vowed that night that if I ever had the opportunity to serve behind the Iron Curtain, I would take advantage of it no matter what it would cost.

Chapter 4:
Forgotten Vows

For thou, O God, hast heard my vows: thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear thy name.— Psalms 61:5

I continued traveling and sharing the Gospel through music and the preaching of the Word. Only now I was leading a group called Living Sound that I had co-founded with Larry Dalton at ORU. The ministry was very active and we were traveling extensively being very well received in many countries. The problem was that I had forgotten the vow I made that night in Estonia. We were so busy with all the requests we were receiving that I forgot my desire to reach those in restricted nations.

Although we may forget our vows, God does not. He takes them very seriously. And one night while we ministered in Southern Africa, God reminded me of mine.

I was praying during the service when I felt the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in the room with me. I did not look up, but I knew He was there in His Glory. His presence was overwhelming. I heard Him say, "I am going to send you to minister among the closed countries. You will do things that most men will believe impossible. If you trust me and are obedient, I will protect you."

The reality of my prayer suddenly frightened me. I wasn't ready to accept the risks I had witnessed others take. Living Sound was less than a year old. How could I tell them what Jesus was revealing to me. I again felt like Jonah. I wanted to run, to escape this assignment. I beseeched the Lord to send someone else. I had been to the Soviet Union. I had witnessed life under Communism. I was afraid and didn't want to go back.

I approached the platform that night intending on delivering the message I had previously prepared. Despite my efforts to read the Scripture I couldn't say a word. I stood awkwardly before hundreds of people. I was in rebellion and God wasn't going to allow me to continue until I acknowledged His Word. For years I had confessed the call on my life—the call to Come Before Winter. I had vowed

to take every opportunity God would give me. I had repeatedly prayed, "Send me, Lord!" Now that Jesus had revealed His plan before me, I was afraid to obey.

While my team members where confused and embarrassed by my inability to begin the message, I finally surrendered myself to the will of my Master. I closed my Bible and began to tell those present what God had spoken to me moments before in the back room. I told them God was going to take us behind the Iron Curtain.

Naturally they were shocked. I'll never forget the look on the faces of our team when I told them what God had planned for us.

In 1970 the world was holding its collective breath at the height of the Cold War, and I wanted to be careful how we proceeded. We agreed to wait until God opened the door for us to go into Eastern Europe. We would not initiate the encounter.

Nearly two years passed before the door opened for us to travel to Poland. A group of university students had heard about our singing group Living Sound and requested our presence at their campus in Krakow the following October. This was the invitation we had been waiting for. We knew God had opened the door, and we began making preparations to travel into Poland. We had no idea what we were getting into.

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Crossing the border into Poland brought back memories of my previous visit to Estonia. The Russian soldiers, machine guns, guard dogs. I had witnessed it all before but you never quite get used to it: The intimidation they pose, the fear they try to create, the way you are made to feel like a criminal even though you haven't done anything wrong. Without the peace and blessing of God, I would have turned around immediately. I had no desire to be in Communist Poland.

We were scheduled to sing the next day at the Jagellonian University. It was a prestigious university well known throughout Eastern Europe, and we felt it a privilege to conduct our first concert there. However, when we stepped off the bus in Krakow, I was informed that we were to perform, not at the university, but at the Communist Youth Club headquarters!

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There were beer bottles everywhere and the room was filled with smoke. It hovered just under the ceiling blurring the lights, and it stung our eyes. These were not university students. They were leaders and active members of Poland's Communist Youth Club, and they had invited us to share our "American rock-n-roll". They had no idea we were a Christian group with an evangelical message.

Had providence brought us together or had our zealousness to minister in a Communist country clouded our vision? If we sang the Christians songs we had prepared, we faced a possible riot. Worse yet, we could all go to prison. As I closed my eyes and prayed, the words appeared before me like they were written on the wall right beside me. Jesus had spoken them to me two years prior. "I am going to send you to minister among the closed countries. You will do things that most men believe impossible. If you trust me and are obedient, I will protect you." I knew what I had to do. Nineveh was before me. I had to give them the message.

After singing several of the songs we had prepared, I stepped up to the microphone. I could hear grumbling throughout the room. Many of these young people had studied English as a second language and they were not impressed. We were not singing American rock-n-roll.

I began to preach. I told them that Karl Marx did not have the answer. Neither did Vladimir Lenin. I shared my testimony and that of other members of our group. We were all sinners and the cross of Jesus Christ was the only way unto salvation. I challenged them to turn away from their sin and consider the cross.

When I finished, I believe even the smoke stood still. I could not tell who was more taken back, the Communist youth in front of me, or the members of Living Sound behind me. One of them later told me that she was fervently praying that God would shut me up before we all found ourselves in prison.

When I turned to walk away from the microphone, two men were waiting behind the curtain. They grabbed me under my arms and led me down a hallway to a narrow staircase leading into the basement. My associate, Joel Vesanen followed us down. The basement was divided into small rooms, one of which I was escorted into. There was a table in the middle of the room and four young men appeared to be expecting me. Their anger was obvious.

In broken English they began to express their anger. They demanded to know who had sent us. We were accused of collaborating with the Central Intelligence

Agency. They continued speaking to me, switching from English to Polish and back to English again. They had advertised a rock concert to be performed by an American group and sold hundreds of tickets for two concerts that evening. They didn't want us to continue, and certainly did not want to refund the money they had collected. Now it appeared that the Communist Youth Club was covertly pushing a religious program. God could not have done it better.

I explained to them that we were not members of the CIA and had no political agenda. I simply wanted to share our faith in Jesus Christ. They reluctantly instructed us to remain for the second concert, only I was not to preach. I thanked them for allowing us to stay. I was certainly not in a position to argue.

By the time we returned upstairs, it was time for Living Sound to begin its' second concert. They were relieved to see Joel and me but remained very uneasy. Actually I believe they were terrified.

During the second concert something clicked. The group was no longer inhibited by their surroundings. They sang and worshiped like never before. The singers raised their hands, and tears ran down their cheeks. I could feel the anointing of the Holy Spirit descend upon them. The Communist youth would never forget this evening. Neither would we.

When we concluded there was a cold silence in the room. Everyone appeared to be frozen in time. Who would have believed what had just happened. By official invitation we had just ministered the Gospel in word and music to Communist leaders, within their private club. I savored the moment. I thanked God He had allowed me to obey, to Come Before Winter.

We remained in the club until 3:30 a.m. the next morning. The Communist youth had given us a standing ovation and begun chanting for an encore. We sang three more songs before finally disbanding and mingling among the people. Each member of Living Sound made their way through the smoked-filled room greeting the youth and sharing their testimonies. I saw members of our band praying with Communist youth, leading them into salvation. Nineveh had heard and repented. I left Poland overwhelmed at what God had done through a small group of naive Christians. I didn't believe it could get any better than this. I was wrong.

Chapter 5:
The Stirring of the Waters

For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.—John 5:4

One of the most unusual miracles found in the Bible, recorded only in the Gospel of John, is the story of the angel of the Lord who would come down to stir the water in the pool of Bethesda. Whoever would enter the water first would be healed. Imagine the multitudes of people who must have gathered in Jerusalem to witness the bizarre event—a mysterious pond that could make the most deformed man whole, the blind to see, or the paralyzed to walk. Only the water had to be stirred. Without the angel's touch, this pond was no different than any other body of water. The miracle only took place during the season when the water was stirred. And only the first one to enter the water would be healed.

The needs of those who had traveled to Jerusalem were great. There were no doctors who could heal them. They were probably considered outcasts, and others must have wondered what grave sin their family had committed that such a judgment had come upon them. Those who had come to the pool of Bethesda —Hebrew for the "house of mercy"—had lost all hope. Only the water could deliver them now. But they had to be the first to enter.

Only one would be healed, after which the opportunity was lost—lost until the season returned when the angel appeared again to stir the water.

We are surrounded today with hopelessness. There is no cure for sin outside of Jesus Christ. He is our pool of Bethesda—the only One who can deliver us from the disease inflicted upon these earthly bodies. Having been immersed in the pool of Living Water, we now carry its power. Every person who has committed his or her life to Jesus Christ carries the waters of Bethesda. These are living waters by which others may come to drink and to receive life everlasting.

However, this water must be stirred by the Spirit of the Lord. Without anointing, the waters are stagnant. It is only when they are stirred up, that the Lord can use us as instruments of deliverance to set the captives free. Containing the water is not enough. We must commit ourselves to the Master's plan. We are simply vessels to be broken, to spill over and allow the Living Water to touch the lives of others who seek its truth.

The Holy Spirit knows when the season is ripe. He knows when winter is coming. When the water is ready to be stirred we must hear His call and make ourselves available. Otherwise the opportunity will be lost.

What would have happened to Nineveh if Jonah hadn't finally conceded to God's call? Would the opportunity for repentance have been lost? Would thousands have perished?

I have heard the grief of many who have confessed lost opportunities. God was leading them, stirring the waters to go and minister the Word to a friend or relative in need. They thought there was plenty of time. They had other things that had to be accomplished so they would go tomorrow or the day after. They continued procrastinating until it was too late —until winter had come. The opportunity was lost. That is a terrible moment.

We do not know the magnitude of lost opportunity. We need to pray daily that we will be sensitive to God's leading and be prepared to obey. He will lead us where others dare not tread. He will accomplish things, through us, that are seemingly impossible. If you trust Him and obey his command, He will protect you. Even in the worst of trials He will be with you—His love never fails.

I have never experienced this stirring in greater measure than when the Holy Spirit put it on my heart to minister in a Catholic church. I was not Catholic. I was Protestant; I believed God was Protestant, and I knew He would never allow me to minister in a Catholic church. I am now ashamed of my attitude at the time, but that was the way I was raised to believe. I resisted God as He quietly stirred the waters.

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A Priest in Tampa, Florida wanted us to minister in his church. He had been present when Living Sound performed in a Jesuit high school and was evidently moved by our presentation. I had no intention of accepting his offer. But God wouldn't let me refuse. I was restless all of that evening and couldn't get a

moment's sleep. The waters were moving. I again had to make a choice either to run or obey. When we submit ourselves to God's service you can expect He will employ us.

The next morning I called the Priest and told him we would be happy to minister at St. Paul's Catholic Church, his local parish.

The service was tremendous. Living Sound ministered in praise and worship while I concluded with a simple Gospel message. Many came forward that evening to commit their lives to Christ. I will never forget the willingness in their hearts to be used of God. I forgot I was in a Catholic church. I forgot I wasn't Catholic. We were blessed to be vessels, used by God for His purpose. I thanked God that he had allowed us to take this unique opportunity. Although I was about to learn that God didn't see it as "unique".

It was at the altar that the words came to me. It was difficult to believe what I was hearing. God spoke to me very clearly and told me, "I'm going to send you to minister in the Roman Catholic Church."

I had already concluded the service and assumed that was the end. God wanted us to minister at St. Paul's Catholic Church and we had obeyed. I wasn't looking for a ministry among Catholics. Why was God calling me to do this? I found myself questioning God again. I still felt a religious prejudice and didn't really want to minister to Catholics. What would my Protestant friends think? What would my co-workers say? Would they really believe I had heard God this time? What strange Come Before Winter was this?

It seemed like we were being sidetracked. We had committed ourselves to minister in the closed countries. Why would the Lord send us in a new direction?

In my own mind none of this made sense. I went home that night and again couldn't sleep. I was wrestling with what God had told me. I believed I had my calling figured out and I was second guessing the Master. It is so natural for us to apply human wisdom even in our ministry. But it has no place with God. It has no place in those who claim to live by faith.

I almost missed this opportunity. I came extremely close to refusing to obey —to allowing the waters to grow stagnant. But I had learned to trust God in His leading regardless of what others thought. Regardless even of my own doubts.

The following evening I was ministering in a Methodist church and decided to announce my newly discovered call to the congregation and the other

members of our team. I told them that God was calling us to minister in the Catholic Church. You can imagine the reaction. I think they were more stunned then those who were present when I first announced my intentions to travel to Communist countries!

Several Christians came to me that night warning me not to associate my ministry with the Catholic church. They drilled me with their "convictions" and of falling prey to "false doctrines". My friends' advice was well intended, but they didn't understand. God had said He would do it. I was simply called to obey. Winter was coming and God wanted to stir the waters. Who was I to question.

When God calls us to serve, we will often be tested by the "concern" of others. We have to be on guard. If we really believe God is leading us, if we know we have heard His voice, we have to be prepared to face opposition. Satan will use even our friends to cause us to doubt God's leading.

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It was three months later when God opened the door for us to minister in our second Catholic church. We had just finished ministering in several churches throughout Western Europe including Sweden and decided to take the ferry into Poland. We didn't have any bookings there, but during our prayer time we felt that the Holy Spirit was leading us to do it.

Crossing the Baltic Sea, we landed along the northern shores of Poland. The border crossing wasn't much different then I remembered during our last trip into Krakow—the machine guns, the guard dogs and the tank emplacements. It was quite overwhelming for those in our group who hadn't traveled in a Communist country before.

Once we finished with the border officials, we headed southeast to the capital, Warsaw. As we drove throughout the countryside, once again we saw the evidence of a country ravaged by countless invasions and wars. Years of Communist control had placed Poland in a time warp. The progress of the modern world had passed this nation by. Farmers still tilled the land with horses. Milk was delivered by wagon. Dirty storefront windows displayed empty shelves with employees sitting idly inside. Gasoline was rationed, for the few who were fortunate enough to have cars.

I couldn't help but notice the statues of the Virgin Mary proudly displayed in the fields along the roads. Poland is predominately Roman Catholic and each

village had at least one Catholic church. Their faith was something the people desperately held onto during the war. It was rooted deep within their culture and traditions.

I began to feel inadequate. Who was I to bring my ministry into this country. What did I understand about their faith, their values or the incredible struggles they had been through. Poland had been invaded so many times, it must have been difficult to hold onto any sense of security. And for many, the Catholic church was all they had.

Warsaw was full of activity. Old buses and trains, covered with a layer of dirt, grime and occasional graffiti, moved droves of people. They seemed oblivious to the gray landscape surrounding them. I will always remember the eyes. They were without hope.

We drove by a beautiful building, St. Ann's Cathedral. It is one of the most beautiful Catholic churches in Poland and well known throughout the country. The building was a 14th century cathedral with gold statuary. Even though it displayed years of neglect, it was one of the most beautiful churches I had ever seen. However, there was more than just the architecture that caught my eye about St. Ann's. As we drove by, I had a strong feeling that St. Ann's had something to do with why we were in Poland. I could feel the stirring in my spirit.

I couldn't get our call to the Catholic Church out of my mind. We settled into our hotel rooms and had a time of prayer to seek the Lord as to what we should do next. We met a young Christian in Warsaw called Richard. He was a member of a Protestant Church. When I told him about our call and asked him to phone St. Ann's Cathedral, he did so with great reluctance.

We phoned Father George, the head priest at St. Ann's, from the hotel. One of the members from Living Sound asked me, "How can you call Father George?" "We don't know him." "What will you say? We can't just invite ourselves to sing in his church, can we?" Having ministered in the Communist Youth Club, boldness didn't seem to be a problem.

Father George was very pleasant on the phone. We didn't have a strategic plan or eloquent words, we simply told him, "You don't know us but we're a group of Christian musicians from America. We would like an opportunity to come and sing in your church."

I suddenly realized what I had just said. I didn't know anything more about

this church than any tourist or history buff would. I was a total stranger. Expecting a polite refusal, I was caught off guard when Father George replied, "That would be nice. We celebrate mass on Thursday evening. You are welcome to come and sing after that." He seemed very trusting. After confirming the details, I rejoined the group to give them the news. Now what?

Thursday night, we went into the church through the back door. We wanted to have a few last minutes of prayer. I couldn't believe my eyes when we walked into the sanctuary. There was a crowd from wall to wall. No one was sitting, everyone stood. That was the only way they could pack them in. Thousands more stretched out across the building and into the street. I gasped and said, "Lord, what are we doing here?" I never expected this!

As we started to sing, my heart filled with an incredible joy. All of my questions fell away as the Lord's presence filled the entire church. These people came with thirsty hearts! They were looking for the pool of Bethesda! We sang songs in English that clearly the Lord was translating into the hearts of people. Everyone was singing, including Father George!

I preached a simple Gospel message and gave an altar call. Hundreds began to work their way toward the sacristy to accept Christ. I didn't think they understood what I meant so I again explained the salvation message and told them if they weren't serious they should leave. Everyone remained. As each person surrendered to Jesus, a miracle took place within their hearts.

My eyes scanned the people, and I saw a priest standing six feet from me at the altar, tears were in his eyes as he prayed the sinners prayer with us. I had a lump in my throat so big that I could hardly speak.

Three days later I received a call at our hotel. It was from the office of Stefan Cardinal Wyszynski, the head of the entire Catholic church in Poland! My first thought was, "How would I explain why an American music group felt the need to minister in a Catholic church in the capitol of Poland. Had I created a problem for Father George?"

When we were introduced to him, he told us that he had heard about our group singing at St. Ann's and was polite and to the point. He said, "Young man, I have been contacted by a great many people who were at your meeting last night. Poland is a country where the Communists continually proclaim that God is dead. Even in school the children are indoctrinated in Communist ideology and discouraged from believing in 'religious superstitions'. But you have a

message that our people are thirsty for—a message that our young people will understand."

I couldn't believe my ears. Stefan Cardinal Wyszynski had agreed to commend our work at St. Ann's Cathedral. My spirit was leaping with joy. I couldn't wait to tell the other members of the team. I thanked the Cardinal for his encouragement. It had meant a lot to the ministry. "But you don't understand," the Cardinal continued, "I will open every basilica, every cathedral, every church in this country to you if you will come back and bring the Gospel to our people."

Stunned, I could barely comprehend what the Cardinal was saying. By responding to the call of God, He had opened a door I never dreamed possible! I was sure I had heard wrong. "Yes sir, we would love to come back," was all I could say. My heart was beating wildly with excitement.

For a moment I remembered when God had first told me he was going to have us minister in the Roman Catholic church. We had no idea why. Reluctantly we had simply obeyed. Now I was beginning to understand. There was no other way we could ever effectively minister throughout Poland. The Communist Youth Organization surely wasn't going to ask us to return. There were no missionary visas for Poland. If we spoke publicly we would probably be arrested. But God wanted to bless the Catholic church. He knew it was the only way, the only structure left after the Communists had invaded Poland. How close had I come to missing God's call! The waters were stirring; the call was evident. In a mixed feeling of joy and wonder I began to praise the Lord. Who could know the mind of God? What blessing comes when we Come Before Winter.

Through the 70's we continued traveling into Poland. We ministered in church after church after church. All Catholic. All by invitation. Thousands of people came to each presentation and hung on every word we sang, every word I preached. The altars were always full.

During one of the services ambulances were waiting outside. The heat was unbearable and some of those who had come to hear our message had passed out from heat exhaustion. They wouldn't go home. The pool was being stirred, and they were waiting to enter, to be delivered from the sin and hopelessness that consumed them. In one six-week period we saw more than 13,000 people come to the altar and surrender their lives to Jesus Christ. Revival had broken out in Poland!

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After one of our meetings in the city of Krakow, we were contacted by a man who had heard a lot about our concerts. His name was Karol Cardinal Wojtyla and he was the leader of the church in the southern region of Poland. He invited us to his home and extended the hospitality of his table. We taught him some lively choruses and gave him copies of our "Living Sound" albums. He loved to play the guitar. A real bond of love formed that evening as our team shared some of the experiences we had witnessed during our travels. His love for Poland was obvious and he was so thankful that God was using us to reach many people, especially the youth, throughout the country.

You can imagine our surprise when we learned that this same man was nominated in 1978 to become Pope John Paul II. In 1980, the Pope invited us to his new home, in Rome. He invited us to sing at another meeting. There we were in St. Peter's Basilica, standing before nearly 60,000 people singing There is Power in the Blood. The crowd was exuberant.

The Pope sat there tapping his toe to the music. When we finished, he came down and wrapped his arms around my neck and hugged me. It was at that moment that I realized the awesomeness of what had transpired since our group had felt the first nudge to go to Poland. The call... that little voice saying, "Go and trust in Me." And now here we were, reaching out to thousands with the Gospel message, to souls hungry for Jesus, singing and rejoicing before the Lord.

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We did nothing special to facilitate this great move of the Holy Spirit throughout Poland. It was God's timing, His anointing, and we simply had to hear His call and obey. Jesus said in John 14:12 that we would do greater works than He did. I believe many Christians in the church today could be experiencing great things for the Kingdom if they would really seek God's face, if they were willing to obey his plan and hear the call... "Come Before Winter."

To date, we have witnessed the conversion of more than 200,000 souls throughout Poland. Each and every one came through the Catholic church, the church which I had no desire to serve in and had stated a religious prejudice against. How small we must appear in God's majestic plan. A huge chasm divides our reasoning from God's reality.

Chapter 6:
The Hunted

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.—John 21:18

The Apostle Peter's life was one of contrasts. He made a bold profession of Christ when, not fearing for his own safety, he drew his sword and cut off the ear of one of the servants of the high priest who had come to arrest Jesus. However, he adamantly denied Him later that same day. Peter had also received much instruction from his Master. His confession of faith was considered the "rock" upon which Jesus would build the Church, yet he had to be rebuked by the Apostle Paul for placing Gentile believers back under the law.

Peter's life demonstrates the weakness and frailty of man. But he was called, and despite his shortcomings, God had a plan for his life. As long as Peter submitted himself to that plan, he was a worthy vessel fit for service.

Before Jesus ascended into Heaven, He spoke prophetically of what Peter would suffer—that he would be bound by chains and led to a place where he did not want to go. We know that place to be prison, and eventually, death by crucifixion. Tradition also states that Peter's wife was crucified with him and that Peter, considered himself unworthy to die as Jesus had. He requested to be crucified upside down.

When we hear the call to Come Before Winter, we do not know where it will lead us. For many in the Church, especially during the last century, it has led to martyrdom. An estimated 150,000 to 200,000 Christians are martyred every year for their faith and testimony of Jesus Christ. Today, in Communist, Muslim and other restricted nations, Christians suffer inhuman tortures and imprisonment for their faith. In many instances they could escape such sufferings by denying Christ or by simply agreeing not to evangelize.

Peter faced similar situations. He probably could have eluded the persecution before him, had he not publicly continued his ministry. Peter had the same choice many believers now face—to run or respond—to save his life or lose it

for the sake of Christ.

Fortunately, most of us have never had to face such trials. No Christian should wish such trials upon themselves. We must, however, be prepared. Jesus said that if they hate the Master they will hate the servant also. We have no guarantee of safe passage through this life.

When we commit ourselves to the cross and a life of service, we must be willing to face whatever may unfold before us. We may become the hunted.

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I first met Victor in 1979, during a trip to the Soviet Republic of Georgia. He was a young man in his early twenties, and had a haunted look about him. His behavior was that of someone whose life was being orchestrated by Another, and he was simply following orders.

Victor had come to the hotel to escort us to the worship service where we were scheduled to minister. I knew Victor's life was in danger, but I had no way of informing him. I had had a run-in with the KGB, the Russian secret police, earlier that morning; and they were on every corner watching us. Four police cars had pulled in behind our bus. The last thing I wanted to do was get this young man in trouble. I had heard of the brutality committed against Christians arrested for their faith, and I felt a sense of responsibility for his safety. Unfortunately, my efforts would prove futile.

We had been traveling throughout the Soviet Union for nearly five weeks driving south from Moscow to Armenia on the Turkish border, making our way into Georgia. We were staying in the capital, Tbilisi.

En route to Tbilisi we passed through the village of Gori, where the Soviet dictator, Joseph Stalin, was born. I had studied some of Stalin's history when we first began traveling behind the Iron Curtain and was trying to imagine what Stalin's boyhood had been like growing up in this quaint village.

Stalin's father was abusive and reportedly subjected his young son to severe beatings on a daily basis. He was only 11 when his father passed away. The years of abuse came to an end, but not without leaving their mark.

Stalin's mother was a devout Christian and encouraged him to attend theological seminary, hoping it would bring stability to her son's fractured life. Although her intentions may have been well-meant, his time in seminary proved

to be disastrous.

It was not long before Stalin's abhorrence of religion began to surface, and he was asked to leave the seminary. His hatred against Christianity grew, and it was during this time that he embraced the teachings of Karl Marx. As he moved deeper into Marxist philosophy, Stalin's character was being molded into that of one of the most vicious and brutal dictators in history.

Joseph's Stalin's reign of terror and his anti-Christ propaganda was evident as we drove through the countryside. It reminded me of an old film documentary from my childhood school days. The landscape was like a drawing in black and white. Shades of gray distinguished one building from another. They looked like they had been painted with a bucket of fog. The air was thick with the smell of coal burning. The snow was covered with black soot from the antiquated oil refineries where many of the villagers labored. Even the children's faces where permanently stained from the pollution. Life as God intended seemed to be stripped away under Communist rule, robbed of all color and it seemed only death ruled in the hearts of the people.

When we arrived at the hotel in Tbilisi, the clerk requested our passports, stating that he would need to keep them at the hotel desk. This was a common practice throughout the Communist bloc but one I had never gotten used to. Somehow, it made you feel like a captive.

As we turned over the passports, I held out my hand, requesting our room keys. Ignoring my gesture, the clerk pointed to the staircase, instructing us to proceed to the third floor where a woman would unlock the doors for us. We wouldn't even be entrusted with our own room keys...another loss of freedom, another intimidation tactic, another way of reminding us who was in control.

Two elderly women were sitting at a small wooden desk in the hallway. Their faces were empty. It seemed they had forgotten how to smile. They seemed uninterested in us and yet a bit nervous at the sight of foreigners. Before I could even mention the room number, one of them stood up and moved towards a door unlocking our little space of privacy. I wondered how she knew we were coming. They didn't have any telephones in the hall and there were other people coming and going. I had an uneasy feeling, like somebody knew we were there. But we hadn't told anyone. Ministering in the USSR during the Cold War was very dangerous and you had to take every precaution.

As we headed down to breakfast the next morning, I was summoned by the

desk clerk. Without saying a word, he handed me a piece of paper. It was a note from the head of the KGB in Tbilisi requesting my presence in his office first thing that morning! Immediately my mind raced with questions. Surely there was an explanation. What was going on? How did the KGB know who I was? How did they know where to find the group? Had they been following us? For how long?

As I joined the others, in "Living Sound”, I tried to remain calm and not let my thoughts get ahead of me. After all, what could the KGB want with me? This was crazy! I assured them that it was some kind of misunderstanding and that I would straighten it out and then meet them back at the hotel.

The desk clerk called a driver who put me in a special car. I knew it was KGB by the license plate number. Immediately the driver lit up a cigarette and the car bumped along the street. I was oblivious to everything as we drove through the city, praying for the Lord's wisdom. There must be some mistake. I couldn't imagine what the KGB would want with me. We had been in the city less than 24 hours.

Although I could feel my nerves tensing throughout my body, I was not afraid. The words of the Lord came back to me, "I am going to send you to minister among the closed countries. You will do things that most men believe impossible. If you trust me and be obedient, I will protect you."

The taxi pulled up alongside the curb at the KGB headquarters. The driver came around and opened the door and pointed toward a nondescript building. I can't describe the feeling I had as I stood alone, outside of KGB headquarters, staring at the building. What deeds of darkness had originated in this place? What tortures were devised to "encourage" the "guests" to speak? How many of my brothers and sisters in the faith had been summoned here?

One thing I knew, however—I was not alone. My dilemma was no different than what many others lived with on a daily basis. They knew the fear and intimidation brought on by decades of Communist oppression. I decided in my heart that there was nothing to fear. I was an ambassador of Jesus Christ and He had ordered my steps. He would instruct me on how to answer any questions the KGB may pose.

There was nothing to indicate that I was entering KGB headquarters. Had I not been given the street address, I would never had known how to identify the building. Even those who entered and exited the building where dressed in

everyday attire.

The Secret Police, later called the KGB, was formed in 1917, when Vladimir Lenin was leader of the Soviet revolution. The purpose of this organization was to remove the "enemies of the government" and to instill total fear in the people. Anyone could be arrested, for any reason, at any time and then be imprisoned or executed without explanation. It was a simple strategy and the secret police were efficient and ruthless at carrying it out.

Countless thousands, even hundreds of thousands, had died or simply disappeared. By the time Joseph Stalin came to power, use of this terrorist group had been perfected. His hatred of Christianity had increased over the years, and he turned against the church with a vengeance.

Thus began one of the most gruesome eras in history regarding the persecution of Christians. With the goal of eliminating religion, the Communist regime confiscated church property, harassed believers and taught atheism in the schools. Christian schools and seminaries were closed. Bibles, hymnals and religious books were burned. Many in the Christian community simply vanished without a trace. Minor children were even removed from Christian homes and placed in Communist boarding schools. There they would be taught to fight for the "Motherland". Anyone not conforming to the Communist philosophy fell under the jurisdiction of the KGB.

One thing could be said of the Soviet secret police. They took great pride in their work. They wanted to be sure that they had the attention of the masses. They implemented some of the most brutal methods of terror known to man, ranging from psychological torture to physical destruction. Ministers as well as believers from their congregations were arrested. Within the walls of the KGB headquarters they were systematically tortured. Men were beaten beyond recognition for refusing to "confess". Others were forced to amuse the police by standing for hours on one leg; then after giving in to exhaustion, they were beaten. Hours of intense interrogation were used to brainwash prisoners, leaving them completely terrorized and paranoid.

The KGB played the parts of both judge and jury, condemning God's children to prisons or labor camps. Many were told that if they believed in God, they must be insane, so they were sent to psychiatric hospitals, where they underwent "medical tests” that left them in a zombie-like state or worse. The message of the KGB was clear, and "dying to self" took on a whole new meaning for believers.

As I walked into KGB headquarters in Tbilisi, the chief inspector was waiting for me. He rose from his desk, smiled and greeted me by name. He was very polite and spoke English surprisingly well. Had I not known who I was dealing with, I might have actually believed he could be my friend. He was a professional and had obviously had good training. For a moment I felt intimidated.

He asked me to sit down and showed me a letter he had received from the pastor whose church we were scheduled to sing at that evening. His smile faded and he got straight to the point. "I understand you came to Tbilisi expecting to sing at a church. I have here a letter from the pastor of that church. He has changed his mind. Your group is no longer welcome."

I tried to appear calm, but inside I was stunned. Our visit was supposed to be a complete secret. How was it possible that he not only knew we were in Tbilisi, but was fully aware of what we would be doing? I could feel my heart racing as I tried to retrace the events leading up to our arrival, searching my mind for some kind of explanation. The commander became annoyed at my lack of attention. He held up the letter and said, "The pastor is requesting that you not come to his church."

I thought that seemed like an unusual request for a pastor to send to the KGB, so I asked to see the letter. My sudden boldness surprised the officer. He readily handed it to me, knowing it was written in the Georgian alphabet and that I wouldn't be able to read any of it. I said, "How do I know that's what it says?"

"Believe me, that's what it says," he replied. I could sense the irritation growing in his voice.

As this man stood over me, basking in the atmosphere of intimidation he had created, I felt a strong presence of the Lord. Scriptures went through my mind, reminding me of the mighty God I serve. How many times in the New Testament had the followers of Christ been instructed not to preach? How far would my faith in Jesus Christ carry me?

I knew that there was a freedom of religion clause in the new Soviet constitution, so I said, "Sir, we are here to exercise our freedom of religion as granted under your constitution. We are going to that church tonight. If they don't want us to participate, that's fine. We'll just sit there and observe them. But we are going to go and be a part of the meeting tonight." Then I asked to be excused from his office.

He stood up with an expression of total disbelief. His face flushed red with anger. With all the authority he could muster he pointed his finger at me and said, "Mr. Law, if you go to that service tonight and let those young people who have traveled here with you sing, you are going to prison." I said, "Goodbye sir," and walked out of the room.

Back at the hotel, I called everyone together. I knew it was one thing to put my own life in danger, but it's another thing when fourteen young people are depending on your decisions. I went over my recent experience, trying not to sway their decision. We took a vote on whether or not to attend the service. I warned them, "The police are going to hound us tonight. I don't know how many will be there or what they will do." We prayed, committing the situation completely to the Lord. The vote was unanimous, "Let's go."

At six o'clock p.m., we walked out of the hotel and headed for our bus. It was a difficult situation. Victor was about to join us and he knew nothing of what had transpired at KGB headquarters. I had no way of letting him know that the police were going to follow us. Victor arrived and gave a nod and then got into his taxi. We followed him, while the four unmarked KGB cars followed us.

We traveled across the city and out into a suburb, driving up and down one street after another, trying to find the address. About a half a block from the church, Victor's taxi pulled over. He got out of the cab and jumped onto our bus. He still hadn't seen the police cars behind us. I quickly said to Victor, "Get out of here, the police are behind us!" I pushed him off the bus and he walked hurriedly to the sidewalk.

One of the police cars had already pulled ahead of us, and an officer headed down the sidewalk to apprehend Victor. I shouted to the guys in our group, "Get out and stop that man." Six of the young men in our group jumped off the bus and gathered together, blocking the sidewalk. As the agent was running toward them, one of our guys shouted the question, "Do you know what time it is?" The KGB agent was distracted just long enough for Victor to disappear around a corner into the church courtyard. We all breathed a sigh of relief. Victor was safe, at least for the time being.

I rejoined Victor in the church courtyard and he led me in to speak with the pastor. I explained to Victor and the pastor that the KGB had contacted me and informed me of the letter that the Pastor had written. "What are you talking about?" The pastor replied, "I didn't write any letter like that. It is a tactic of the KGB. Now you know what we must deal with every day. For those of us living

under Communist control, this is part of the Christian walk."

I still didn't fully understand the situation or what the pastor was saying. I said, "Sir, there are four carloads of police out there watching us. They have said they will disrupt the service. The commander told me this morning that I, along with my group, would be arrested. I don't know exactly what they will do. We aren't here to cause trouble for you. We will be happy just to sit at the back of the church and watch."

The minister obviously didn't share my fears. His response was one that I will never forget. "We have never seen young people from America," he began, "and we have never heard you play your instruments. We have never heard your testimonies. If you have come to sing and share with us, knowing now what you will face, then we want to listen. I don't care what they will do to me if you don't care what they will do to you."

With a clear sense of the Lord's purpose, I turned to the group and said, "Bring in the equipment." An incredible joy filled the church. There was a special anointing as we sang and I preached from God's Word. Victor, the man who had risked his life to get us to the church, was my interpreter.

From the podium I could see the police sitting in the back. In the middle of my message, they got up and headed for the pulpit. Looking out at all of those hungry souls wanting to know more about Jesus, I continued preaching. What could man do to me when the presence of Jesus Christ was filling every heart in this church? With a slow yet determined walk, the officers came towards the pulpit. It seemed to me as if my time had come.

Then, for reasons I still don't understand, they turned down a side aisle and left the church. We had defied their orders. We had openly shared the Gospel in their presence. We had no desire to get ourselves or anyone else in trouble, but we had answered the call. We were walking in the instructions of our Master and were prepared for whatever these people wanted to do to us. We can't always assume legal protection in exercising our faith. For many in the Church, the very law that was written to protect them, will be their enemy. We live by a higher law than what man would place upon us to restrict the preaching of the Gospel.

After the meeting, I took Victor aside and said, "Look, you're only one step ahead of the police. Why don't you go home. I can find another interpreter. I don't want to endanger your life." Then he said something I have never forgotten. He answered, "Terry, eight years ago my best friend became a

Christian. He told me all about Jesus and what He had done in his life. I realized that if I ever accepted Jesus as my Savior, I would have to be willing to die for what I believed. I am not worried about what the police can do to me. I died eight years ago when I accepted Christ. My life is now His.” I have never forgotten Victor's words. This man was on fire for the Lord. He was prepared to pay any price to serve Him!

As our bus left the city of Leningrad a week later, the police moved in behind us. They grabbed Victor and threw him up against the building. They searched him and he was pushed into one of the police vehicles and taken to KGB headquarters. Three weeks later, we realized he had disappeared. It took us three months to locate him. He was in a Soviet prison. The sentence was for one year. There he was beaten repeatedly. He spent over two months in solitary confinement.

Later, when I heard he had been released, I sent a message to him telling him not to worry, that we would get him to the West. "No" he replied, "I am the one who can bring the Gospel to my people." Victor had heard the voice of God. He saw the opportunity, and he was determined to establish his footsteps as the Lord would lead. Prison hadn't broken him. He was responding to the call God had placed upon his life. He wanted to Come Before Winter.

Victor had been out of prison for only five months when his picture appeared as a "wanted" notice on the front page of the Russian Communist newspaper. The caption read, "If you know where this man is, contact the police.” He was on the run for almost two weeks before the police found him. Once again, he was sentenced to prison. Back to the repeated beatings and isolation.

After twelve months of struggling to stay alive, Victor was released for the second time. His appearance was horrifying. This young man had endured months on the edge of death. He was like a skeleton. His skin had a deathly pallor. Months of starvation had left him so weak that he could barely walk. But in his eyes the fire remained, fueled by the voice of God and the vision that wasn't yet complete. While Victor's body struggled, his spirit was strong and determined. Victor wanted to bring the Gospel to his people. He knew the time was ripe, the angel was stirring the water and he had heard the call...” Come Before Winter.”

Chapter 7:
Little Red

And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. —I Corinthians 13:3

God has allowed me to participate in many unique experiences. From the first time I submitted my life to God's call that evening in my father's church, to ministry throughout the former Soviet bloc countries, the call to come before winter has been constantly with me. It is now, after 30 years of ministry, that I am increasingly aware of why God has chosen such experiences for me.

As Christians, we are stewards of all that God entrusts to us. For many leaders in the Church today, this principle of stewardship has focused primarily on finances. How unfortunate! For we have been bought with a price. If we confess the Lordship of Jesus Christ, we are no longer our own. Not only our treasure, but our time and talents belong to God. And we have the awesome responsibility, and joy, of seeking His good pleasure for our lives.

Through the years I have learned many aspects of God's call. I have learned to trust in the Master and to seize the day, grasping opportunities before me. I have learned to count the costs and risks that may arise in following God's call. But the greatest aspect of obeying the call to Come Before Winter was illustrated by a young believer in China. She taught me a greater lesson than all others combined. She taught me the reality of God's love.

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Little Red had only been a Christian for one week when she was arrested by the CPSB—the Chinese Public Security Bureau.

A Chinese brother who represented our ministry had come to a small village in China seeking rest from his difficult travels throughout the country. The evangelist knew of a family in the area where he could remain for awhile. There were very few Christians in this village. It was virtually unreached by the

Gospel. The villagers lived an unpretentious life. They grew their own food along the mountainside, raised their own farm animals. Families remained together, pooling their resources in order that everyone's needs might be met.

There were no televisions or radios. Electricity was only available a few hours each day, and even then was unreliable. Most of the families cooked outdoors, beside their huts, over open fires fueled with coal. They were a simple people, conservative in nature, and they opened their village and hearts to the traveling evangelist.

The evangelist had no intention of preaching in this village. It was simply a stopover, a sabbatical of sorts to help him regain his strength. He anticipated at least 30 days of rest before he would continue on in his ministry. But his pool was being stirred.

One afternoon a group of teenagers struck up a conversation with the evangelist. Without any means of modern communication, the youth knew little of what was happening outside their village, let alone outside China. They were very inquisitive. They asked many questions about life in the free world. What was the West like? Was America as lawless and wicked as they had been told?

As the evangelist answered their questions, more youth began to gather. How could any servant of God continue to converse with such a captive audience without sharing the Gospel? The evangelist knew the opportunity was right. He was sensitive to God's leading and began to tell the curious villagers about God and the sacrifice of His son upon a cross.

The youth had never heard anyone speak like this before. They knew little of their Creator. The questions came at the evangelist faster than he could compose his answers. "Where does God come from?" "Where does He live?" "How come the Chinese Communists don't believe in Him?" "What is heaven like?" "Is there a hell?" "What is a Christian?" "How do we become Christians?"

Within a few hours a church had been born. In this simple country village, a revival was taking place. They were hungry. They were ripe for harvest. With little effort, the evangelist led three young Chinese people in prayer to an unknown God.

The youth didn't want to waste another moment. They began to share with their friends. More youth came. They began prayer meetings. The message was clear; salvation was a free gift to anyone who would repent of their sins and accept Jesus Christ into their hearts.

No one had ever given a gift to these people. They worked hard for every meal. There was no free ride. Intrigued by the evangelist, more villagers came to the meetings. Word quickly spread and before long others were traveling many miles through the countryside to attend the meetings. Young and old alike witnessed the revival. Many who came to the meetings committed their lives to Jesus. The crowds grew to 2,000 people and 350 new converts were baptized in the river.

The meetings had been going for less than three weeks when Little Red showed up. She came from a very conservative family and rarely left her village. At nineteen years old she had developed into a beautiful young woman. She was taller than most Chinese women, and her appearance caused a murmur among the crowd. In the western world, she could have passed for a movie star or model. Her enchanting personality only complimented her beauty.

Little Red was not your typical young woman. Although she had only attended school through the elementary grades, she had received a lot of private instruction. She was an only child, and her parents took much pride in raising her. Everyone liked Little Red. She had a way of lighting up the room.

The evangelist, viewing the vast number of attendees at his services, realized the danger he was placing the village in. Caught up in the excitement of the moment, he had nearly forgotten that he was in Communist China and these meetings were completely illegal. If the police caught wind of what was going on, they would surely be arrested.

Within the week, that which he feared most came upon him.

On Sunday morning, April 23rd, more than twenty police officers armed with rifles and clubs stormed the meeting. They could have come peacefully, inquiring as to the nature of the services, but their agenda was clear.

Regardless of guilt or innocence, they immediately rushed in on those in attendance. Rifle butts smashed into faces and heads. The believers were kicked, spit upon and dragged from the meeting place. There was blood everywhere. What had begun merely four weeks ago as a small gathering of curious youth had erupted into a real riot.

Sixty-four newly converted Chinese Christians and our ministry representative, were arrested that morning. They were all herded into police vans, hauled away and confined to three small isolation cells measuring barely 12 feet square. This was not an American prison. There was little ventilation and

the prisoners could barely breathe in the stagnant air. Toilet facilities existed outside the cells, but no one was allowed to leave. The corner of the room became their toilet.

When the iron door was shut, virtually no light entered the room. The believers were surrounded in darkness, forced to stand for lack of space. Only a few could lay down at a time. A faucet decorated the corner of each room, but they weren't working. The prisoners couldn't wash, and within a few days the smell was unbearable.

Despite the situation, the believers remained faithful. The evangelist continued to preach. They prayed and sang to their newfound Savior. Some of those incarcerated had only become followers of Christ a few days or even hours before the arrest. And now they were criminals. Being treated worse than animals, they were quickly being tried by fire.

The guards frequently came to the cells and selected prisoners to be interrogated and beaten. For some reason, one girl in particular endured the most. Why they selected her no one knew. Perhaps it was because of her beauty.

Little Red was pulled from her cell almost every evening. She was stripped of all clothing and made to kneel on small pellets which drove their way into her hands and knees. Blood dripped from the small holes left by the pellets. The guards laughed at her and taunted her, ridiculing her for praying to her God.

Everyone thought Little Red would break under the torture, but she remained firm in her convictions. The others would attempt to comfort her during the day and allow her to rest, but the assistance seemed futile, compared to the constant persecution at the hands of the brutal officers.

One officer in particular, who was referred to as "Devil," was especially cruel. Little Red was sexually abused on several occasions. She was hung upside down and shocked with a cattle prod on her private parts. No one would have blamed her for breaking. At nineteen years of age and a Christian for only one week, she had endured unimaginable torment, inflicted by a man seemingly possessed by Satan himself.

After 30 days in this Communist hell, the believers were to be released. By this time Little Red no longer spoke. When not subjected to the beatings, she would sit in a corner and stare into the darkness. The other believers prayed fervently for her, wondering if any hope remained in her.

The officers had gone too far. How could anyone do this to such a beautiful young woman? In four weeks she had aged a lifetime. Her face no longer resembled that of a movie star. Her eyes were sunken like deep pools within her face. Bloodstained bruises covered most of her visible flesh.

By a miracle of circumstances that I cannot describe in this book, we were able to raise money for the release of the prisoners. On the day of their release, the prisoners were lined up in the courtyard. The daylight stung their eyes as they squinted, attempting to focus on their surroundings. Little Red could barely stand and had to be supported by our friend.

The officers stood in front of the believers. Ironically, the one referred to as "Devil" stood directly in front of Little Red. All of the believers knew what he had subjected the young woman to. They had heard the screams and felt her anguish. Even some of his fellow officers thought he had gone too far. A shared hatred for this man emanated from those gathered.

What no one knew was that Little Red had spoken with her tormentor. She had told him that Jesus loved him. Those three simple words infuriated him and caused him to lash out even harder. Those three words ate their way into his soul and denied him rest night upon end.

As he stood before the girl he had so savagely abused, he broke. His knees buckled and he fell under the weight of his own heart. It was like a ton of bricks bearing down on his soul. He tried to compose himself, but the effort was useless. The man who seemingly held Little Red's very life within his grasp was crumbling before her. Tears of repentance and sorrow sprang from his eyes. He begged her forgiveness.

But how could she? How could Little Red forgive such a man? He deserved the flames of hell and the torment he had inflicted on others. He was the criminal. The evangelist longed to kick the officer. The echoes of Little Red's screams continued to ring within him. Maybe the others would turn a blind eye if he assaulted the "Devil" who had subjected his young convert to such horrors.

As the evangelist turned Little Red's head from the sight of this monster, she slipped from his arms and knelt down beside her persecutor. The officers looked on in disbelief. A stillness fell over the courtyard. No one moved or made the slightest noise as Little Red reached out her hand and wiped a tear from his face.

Her response sounded across the courtyard as she spoke words of love and forgiveness to the broken officer. The words resembled those of Jesus, hanging

on a cross, pleading for forgiveness for the souls of those who crucified him. Unbeknownst to her, Little Red was experiencing the highest call. The ability to love. To love even the worst of mankind.

The other believers broke out in praise to God. Other officers knelt down and prayed for forgiveness, inviting Jesus into their hearts. The gates of hell were shattered before a young Chinese Christian who, beaten nearly to death, demonstrated the love of Christ. No higher calling exists.

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Wherever God's call would lead us, no matter how we serve Him, our motivation must be love. It was love for every soul who ever lived, is alive, or will live, that put our Lord on the cross. It is love that calls each of us to labor in His kingdom. It is with love that I challenge you to hear the call... "Come, Come Before Winter."

Epilogue (World Compassion)

And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down...—John 6:11

In a Russian village called Maloyaroslavets, 120 miles south of Moscow, God planted the seed for a ministry called World Compassion in the heart of Terry Law. Terry had taken a small film crew to the village to record the reality of the grinding poverty that the people were facing. In the fall of 1992, a little more than a year after Boris Yeltsin came to power in Moscow, Russia was struggling to distribute enough food to keep its people alive. To the shock of the rest of the world, the former superpower had expended so much economic energy building weapons that food was in dangerously short supply.

In the early morning hours of that cold November morning, a long line began to form at the bread store. Some had waited hours in below freezing temperatures to get a good place in line. By the time the bread truck came down the street, nearly 120 people were waiting in front of the store. The truck unloaded its entire cargo, 25 loaves of bread. Terry and the crew watched in disbelief as 95 people left to go home empty-handed and hungry. There would be no more bread until the next truck arrived perhaps tomorrow.

During this pathetic scene, the crew had been rolling the tape, recording the desperate situation. One older woman, a grandmother with her babushka, or scarf, tied over her head, had been watching the crew closely. Obviously angry, she approached the Russian interpreter with some pointed questions. "Who are these people? What are they doing here?"

The interpreter was a devoted Christian who had spent 18 years in Communist prisons for his activities as a leader in the underground church. His heart went out to the woman, and he answered, "These are people from America. They are bringing us Bibles and telling us about God." This answer seemed to irritate the woman further, and she snapped an answer back in Russian that clearly shook the interpreter. Terry was anxious to know what she had said. The interpreter responded, "She said, Tell them we can't eat Bibles!"

The message was clear; these people needed physical help before the love of Christ would mean anything. Yet this was a new area for Terry, and he struggled with the thought. Would food distribution pull precious energy away from preaching the Gospel? Would meeting the physical needs sidetrack evangelization? Three days later, Terry would have his answer.

When the nuclear reactor at Chernobyl exploded in April of 1986, a cloud of radioactive debris was spewed into the sky. The winds on that day were blowing from the south, and the cloud moved north, over the Ukrainian border with Belarus, depositing deadly radioactive material over huge areas of what was then the White Russian Soviet Socialist Republic. Hundreds of thousands of people were poisoned with radioactive debris, and an estimated 600,000 children are now in various stages of cancer and pre-cancer. The greatest challenge came when Terry held one of those dying children in his arms.

While in Minsk, the capital of Belarus, Terry and his group were invited to visit one of the cancer hospitals for children. In one of the wards, he was able to stop and hold a five-year-old boy named Pavel. Pavel was dying of cancer, and his mother stood nearby, despair etched into her face. The economic disaster created by the Soviet Union meant that families in Belarus could not afford the most basic necessities of life, including food, if it was even available. This meant a choice between growing food in the radioactively contaminated soil or having no food at all: starvation. Radioactive food leads to cancer, yet starvation was knocking on the door. This is the situation that faced Pavel's family, and explained the deep lines of hopelessness on his mother's face.

Speaking with the head doctor of the hospital, Terry discovered that many of the children were suffering from leukemia. With blood transfusion equipment, the doctor said, he could give transfusions to the children from a parent with the matching blood type, and that half of those who were dying could be saved. A voice was whispering, "Come Before Winter.”

The Spirit of God was speaking to Terry, and he returned home filled with a new resolve. Terry says, "When we finally acknowledge God's call, there is anticipation and enthusiasm to see how He will bring things together." There was a new dimension awaiting those who shared Terry's burden for Russia, and he was anxious to share it with them. It would be impossible to minister the whole Gospel without caring about the physical needs of the people. A Christian cannot say, "Be warmed and be filled," without providing warmth and food. The call came through the lips of a Russian grandmother and the eyes of a cancer stricken

child, "Meet our desperate need. Come Before Winter."

One of the most famous miracles of Jesus' ministry is the feeding of the 5,000 hungry people who came to hear His words of life. If Christ saw food distribution as a necessary part of his ministry, is there any reason not to follow in His footsteps? It was not yet obvious how important this new aspect of ministry would be in preaching the Gospel to thousands, but World Compassion had been born. World Compassion is a ministry that can be "given away." Many people have the desire to travel overseas to minister life to those in need, yet they are unable to do so. For those unable to meet the needs of the people face to face. World Compassion is a ministry that belongs not to Terry Law, but to the people who desire to feed hungry families and hold dying children, sharing the love of Jesus with them.

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Through World Compassion and the people who shared Terry's burden, more than 60 tons of food were soon purchased to help feed the children affected by the Chernobyl accident. When the food was ready to be loaded on a ship in Elizabeth, New Jersey, Terry was there to oversee the loading of the food. The Ambassador to the UN from Belarus had come to meet Terry and to thank him for the aid to the children. As the food was being loaded on the ship, the ambassador was clearly moved. He asked, "Why would you people here in America care about Russian children?"

Terry answered, "Sir, in the Bible, in Matthew 25, Jesus said, 'I was hungry and you fed me. Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these, you have done it unto me.'"

The ambassador asked, "Is that in the Christian Bible?" When Terry told him that it was indeed in the Christian Bible, the man nodded his head, as a small tear formed in the corner of his eye. He realized the motivation of the people who were sending this food. They were doing it because Jesus had told them to do it. Yet this powerful witness of the love of Christ was only the beginning.

After the food arrived in Belarus, Terry went to Minsk to be sure that the food had actually been delivered to the hospitals. At the cancer hospital for children, the head doctor was overjoyed to see Terry, and greeted him warmly with a bear hug, before giving him a tour of the hospital. The children were no longer hungry or eating contaminated food, but were enjoying the clean food that had been sent. We also delivered several IV pumps. This practical help

opened the door to the most important part of the visit.

In coming to the hospital, Terry and his team had brought copies of the book called The Story of Jesus, an illustrated storybook written in Russian that clearly tells about Christ and the gift of eternal life. As the storybooks were handed to the children, their parents began to read to them. Children in various stages of cancer, some on the very brink of death, were seeing pictures of Christ, as He healed people, fed the multitudes, and most of all, as He held the little children in His loving embrace. Children who were slipping away from this life were hearing of the One who was inviting them to eternal life. The food and medical supplies had opened a door for sharing the love of Christ with precious, dying children.

Yet that was not the last of the fruit to be harvested in that season. A few weeks later Terry received an invitation to meet with Boris Yeltsin in Moscow. After traveling all night, Terry and his companions traveled from their hotel to the Russian White House to meet with the President. They were disappointed to find out that Yeltsin was unable to meet with them due to a last-minute schedule change. The President's press secretary was there to meet them instead. After the introductions, he asked them a familiar question, "Why would people from America care enough about Russian children to send food and medical supplies to them?"

It was obvious to the man that many people in America cared about these children—that it was more than the effort of just one person. To answer, Terry read from Matthew 25, "Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me.'" The man's next question also had a familiar ring, "Is that in the Christian Bible?" It was the next question however that caught him off guard. "Would you be willing to tell that to the Russian people, on national television?," he asked.

That evening the lobby of the hotel where we were staying was transformed into a television studio for the program "Good Evening Moscow." The host of the program treated Terry's Bible like it was a rare jewel, holding it carefully and asking many questions about what it said. At one point Terry took the opportunity to lead the discussion deeper. He said, "The Bible says you must be born again."

The interviewer responded, "What does that mean, to be born again?" Immediately, the door for sharing the plan of salvation was open again, and Terry was able to look directly into the cameras, and directly into the homes of

millions of Russian families, and encourage them to believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Because Terry had listened to the call to "Come Before Winter," and because people responded with food and medical equipment for the children of Belarus, God had accomplished what seemed impossible. He had delivered the story of Jesus' life to dying children, and He used an official Russian television program to broadcast the plan of salvation to a land emerging from 70 years of atheistic darkness.

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World Compassion continues to open doors for the Gospel around the world, ministering to the physical and spiritual needs of hurting and hungry people. Through the involvement of people who have a heart to reach into other lands with the love of Christ, thousands have been touched.

In a refugee camp in Armenia, starving families have been given not only physical food, but more importantly, the Bread of Life. In China and North Korea, humanitarian aid delivered to those in need is opening doors for the Gospel which once seemed impenetrable.

Working together with other ministries, World Compassion has distributed more than 16 million copies of the illustrated storybook of the life of Christ, The Story of Jesus. Translated into 20 languages, the book gives a presentation of the Gospel, which can be understood by persons with even limited literacy. Children and adults have received this message of the love of Christ in dozens of countries including the former Soviet Union, China, Cuba, Thailand, the Philippines, India, Tibet, Nepal, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, Hungary, and Armenia. A newly completed translation in Arabic will allow distribution throughout the Middle East.

The incredible growth rate of the church in China has left millions of new believers with an acute need for accurate Bible teaching. Bibles are scarce even among leaders, leaving believers open to false teachings and heresies. To meet this critical need, World Compassion has developed an Audio Bible Curriculum, containing 300 hours of important teaching on the issues of discipleship, basic doctrine, the Bible, and Christian leadership. Through duplication inside China, World Compassion hopes that 25,000 copies of this incredible resource will be distributed. Translations will allow the curriculum to be distributed in other restricted countries such as Cuba, Vietnam and North Korea.

In Kaliningrad, Russia, food, clothing and the love of Christ is provided to abandoned children who live in the sewers of the city. The World Compassion office in St. Petersburg, Russia has distributed a topical Bible study on videotape to hundreds of pastors, while the requests continue to pour in. Since 1990, five million New Testaments have been given to hungry souls in the former Soviet Union.

Believers who want to touch the world with the reality of Christ can continue changing lives through World Compassion. For further information you are invited to call World Compassion at 918-492-2858 or write to the address below:

World Compassion, P.O. Box 92, Tulsa, OK 74101

Will you Come Before Winter?