

REFLECTIONS OCTOBER 2016—DECEMBER 2016

Dear friends and family,

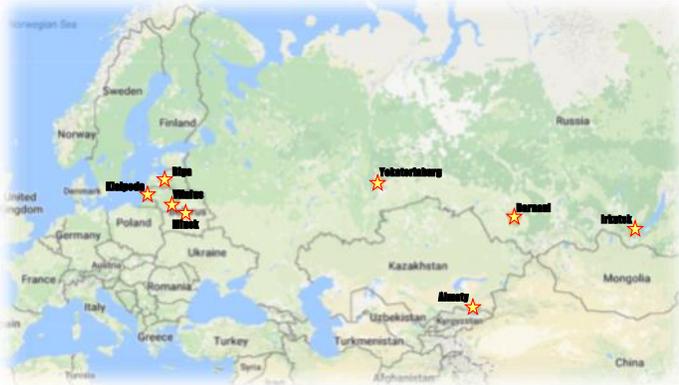
Do you hear that? (Clickety-clack, clickety-clack...) And, do you feel the rolling rumble? You guessed it—I'm writing while traveling by train. It is still a very common mode of transportation here in Russia, and Sonia's preferred method rather than flying. So, as I type, beautiful scenes of winter whiteness are passing by outside my window. I am enthralled by the frozen rivers, the endless fields of undisturbed snow, the ongoing forests of birch trees, and the early morning beauty of snow resting on all the branches of those birch trees. Every branch was outlined with snow and shadow, all stretched outward and upward like hands lifted in praise of our Heavenly Father. (Ne 8:6)

Sonia and I are returning to Barnaul from Minsk, Belarus. Church members there invited us to present a ScreamFree Parenting seminar and preach last weekend. They were excited by the great turnout (including at least 4 expectant mothers), challenged by the principles we shared, and grateful for the blessing. Sonia and I were blessed, too, having met new brothers and sisters and having seen an active church with so many children and involved brothers and sisters. It's always wonderful to meet new family.



This seminar is just one of many such events on our schedule. The requests for presenting ScreamFree Parenting actually took us by surprise (especially since we've never advertised!):

- On Saturdays in October and November, we presented the full ScreamFree Parenting video course to a group of parents at a local kindergarten where one of our church members, Ivan Zheltyakov, works. We now have contact with 5 new families in the area (and I also now have a fully developed presentation "package" that will allow us to repeat this seminar with less effort).
- Next week, I will travel by plane, bus, and car to Klaipeda and Vilnius, Lithuania, to present ScreamFree Parenting to capacity crowds. I'm told there is even a waiting list for the event in Klaipeda, and they are borrowing chairs to maximize seating. Joel Petty (missionary in St.



Petersburg) has regular contact with the churches and missionaries in these eastern European countries and has coordinated these opportunities. After Vilnius, we will travel together to Riga, Latvia, to discuss plans for doing more seminars next spring.

- A brother from the church in Yekaterinburg, Russia, has invited us for a parenting seminar in February.
- We also planned with Stas Sushkov, a brother in the church in Irkutsk, Russia, for a double event (Leadership and Parenting) in early November. The secular leadership event was key to the plan for promoting the church's parenting event. Stas works for one of the largest national banks in Russia and he had proposed to his supervisors that ScreamFree Leadership would be a useful topic at the bank's nation-wide birthday celebration event. He knew it would give him opportunity to locally advertise the follow-up Parenting event that would introduce attendees to the church. Ultimately, however, the chairman of the bank disapproved the proposal primarily because our young program doesn't yet have a track record among Russia's businesses. Stas and I have decided to develop a new outreach plan that will use the ScreamFree Parenting seminar and reschedule for a later date.



Another big trip we are working on right now will be a mission trip with our teens. As I mentioned in my previous report, the parents of the kids from Almaty, Kazakhstan, who attended our camp in 2014 and 2015 asked if we could do a joint winter camp since their kids could not attend this year. Seeing this as an opportunity for our teens to grow through service, we are planning to travel by train as a group of 9 to do four days of camp during the winter break—the first week of January. Throughout December, our teens will be meeting and practicing skits which I will use as a part of my lessons.

And, another big event we are working on is the “Jubilee Seminar” our church will host at the end of March, 2017. In October, we started the process of getting official invitations and visas for our main speakers. We further developed the theme, prepared a logo for the event, and distributed the first announcement/invitation to many Americans and Russians who have been a part of the LORD's ministry in Barnaul. When we get back to Barnaul tomorrow, we'll start searching for a suitable facility to rent.

As good as all these seminars and plans are turning out to be, I've saved the most exciting news for last. All of the above are good works that, along with our regular activities of mentoring (4 individuals), teaching, preaching, hosting, and serving as a leader, God has used for the benefit of His church. This last news is just ... plain ... *exciting*.



At the insistence of one camp team member—and with the significant help of several others—we've done some follow-up work related to our summer camp ministry. In October, at the church's rented facility, we celebrated the 10th anniversary of those who were campers in 2006. Campers from other years were invited, too, of course. A group of 21 gathered for getting reacquainted, enjoying good food, and looking at (laughing at, actually) pictures from our 2nd year of camping as “Footprints in the Sand”. Those original campers are, of course, now university age. It was so

good to reconnect. We announced that we would assemble again (in our home) in November.

Amazingly, 18 who attended in October also attended in November ... plus 5 more! Before dismissing, I shared a short devotional speech to prompt each one to consider the LORD's teaching about seeking His kingdom first. We announced that we wanted to start meeting every 3rd Sunday for the purpose of fellowship and discussing how to live God's way with today's problems. Many indicated their interest and unanimously agreed that they would like to meet in our home.



And more pictures of the camp/teens events are available

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and [here](https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1355990694414184&set=t.100000097983786&type=3&size=1331%2C798) https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1355990694414184&set=t.100000097983786&type=3&size=1331%2C798

Dear brothers and sisters, I hope you see the significance of this chain of events. Since 2005, we've been "camping" to share God's love and message of truth with children. Some have been from church families. Many have not. When they were young, they were not sufficiently independent to attend worship assemblies. But the relationships that God allowed us to make a decade ago have now blossomed into opportunities for God to really make a difference. These young adults already know and trust us. Meaningful dialogue is already possible. THIS is what Christian summer camps can accomplish. This is what is so exciting. Please pray for God to guide and bless us in this effort. We "must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth." (2Ti 2:25)

It has been a fast paced year with a number of significant challenges as well as significant events. Through it all, though, God has shown Himself to be reliable, faithful, willing, and able — no surprise there! I'm grateful for the opportunities to serve with Sonia and the rest of the church here in Barnaul. We're thankful for all of you, for your partnership which enables us.

It's now dark outside. The sun sets early during winter in Siberia. And, we've traveled many kilometers (yes, miles, too!) since I started typing this letter. I'm enjoying the journey. With God in the lead and the rest of His family as partners, things are good and there is a bright future ahead — a warm welcome home.

Your fellow servants,

Joseph, Sonia, and Mason Rhodes