

## Stories from Siberia

Mary C., Siberia

The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians: *I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God make it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. 1 Corinthians 3:6-7*

After moving to Siberia from Moscow I decided to start an English club as that seemed to be an effective way to reach out to the Jewish community. My team mate, Erin and I invited people from my ulpan and others that we knew to join our group. One of the first participants in our group was Leonora, who I had met in my Hebrew class. As we got to know each other better Erin found out that Leonora was very involved in studying Irish Step Dance. Erin asked her if she would be willing to give her a lesson and Leonora quickly agreed. It turned out that Leonora was a much more enthusiastic teacher than Erin was a student so after a few lessons Erin suggested that they forget the dance lessons but instead meet weekly to practice English. In spite of the fact that Erin suggested that they read New Testament stories in English Leonora agreed. As they met weekly Erin found out that while Leonora was Jewish on her father's side she was very drawn to Buddhist, Hindu and other New Age teachings. She even attended a Mormon church for a time. She said that every time she tried to read the New Testament she felt like something was preventing her from doing so. Every week Erin and Leonora met and had long discussions about religion. Their relationship grew and many Gospel seeds were planted in Leonora's life.

In June a very unexpected turn of events happened. Erin returned back to the States for medical reasons and found out that she had a very aggressive form of cancer. Any plans to return to Siberia in the near future went out the window when that diagnosis was made. I felt like God was working in Leonora's heart so I suggested that we continue to meet and study the Bible together. Leonora quickly agreed. After we had been meeting for a few months she asked if we could study the Book of Revelation together. In my opinion, this is not an easy book for believers to understand, much less unbelievers, but since it was something that she was interested in I agreed. As we began our study of Revelation I noticed that our discussions started to become deeper and more personal. She started to attend church with me from time to time and said that the sermons really helped her to understand the Bible better. Clearly God was working in her life.

One day she came to our weekly meeting and was completely stressed out. I asked her what happened and she said that she felt like she was two people-one who was trying to draw close to God and another who was pushing away from Him. I explained that she was experiencing spiritual warfare and that Satan was doing all that he could to keep her from giving her life over to the Lord. Shortly after that meeting she and I met with the pastor of my church and another one of my colleagues. As we shared together at that meeting I felt like God was doing a significant work in her life. My colleague encouraged her to read the Book of John and then discuss it with me at our next meeting. Much to my surprise she read the whole Gospel in the course of a few days. When we had our next meeting I tried my best to answer the many questions that she had about what she read. Then I asked her a question. What is the main message of John's Gospel? She answered 'to believe in Jesus'. I asked her if she was willing to do that and she said that she was. So I had the great blessing of leading her

in a prayer of repentance and salvation. Although we continued to meet weekly and I tried to answer her many questions I felt like there was still something blocking her relationship with God. Just two months after she prayed to receive the Lord she wrote me a note and told me that she had decided that Christianity is not for her. Needless to say I was so sad to hear her say that. I let her know that I still considered her a friend and wanted to get together with her from time to time. She assured me that she felt the same. Since then she seems to be avoiding me and I am trying to give her some space as I prayerfully consider how to proceed. I believe that she did indeed have a true encounter with the Living God and that He is continuing to lovingly pursue her. I look forward to the day when she will completely give herself over to the God who loves her so very much.