

THE JOURNEY

Summer Two-Thousand and Seven



The Team in front of a monument in Vieko Turnovo, where we were supposed to stay for two weeks until the Lord changed our plans :)

Bulgaria Summer Project 2007

"For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain."

[1 Thessalonians 2:1]

We're in the airport in Sofia, Bulgaria. Our students are relaxing, killing some time before we board the plane back to the states. We all seem a bit restless, a twinge of sadness leaving our Bulgarian adventures behind and embracing a longing for family and places familiar and loved. What an interesting perspective Jimmy and I have as we write you this letter of deepest thanks. As you know, we started out our trip with some time in Italy for training and travel.

we had some real hands-on, and very unexpected practice living this out on this trip. We closed our time in Italy only to find out two days before our arrival in Bulgaria that at the last minute the Bulgarian government denied us access into the Bulgarian Air Force Academy in Vielko Turnovo, Bulgaria. This was to be our location for the duration of our two weeks in Bulgaria for housing and ministry. We planned on teaching Bulgarian cadets English and sharing Christ through those relationships built. Without access to the base, our plans were largely altered.

One of our points of training was having a vision from the Lord for ministry. This is perhaps one of the most difficult things to articulate and also to wait for the Lord to carry out in our lives. We had the opportunity to study what true vision from the Lord looks like as

The Lord gave us a new vision and allowed it to unfold before us, even as it still is unfolding. With some seasoned wisdom found in Shawn Maze and our national connections, Mladen and Grosdan, we set out on a journey of a different sort. With the two weeks behind us





Jimmy and I can see more clearly how the Lord used this trip to give us a broader spectrum and vision for the people and needs in Bulgaria. We had no real understanding as to the effects of communism that still are in action today. While the vice-like grip of communism as a governing body is no longer in effect, the mentality of the people has been molded to distrust religion beyond the ritualistic practices of the Orthodox Church. Our team took the grand tour of the country of Bulgaria, taking a first hand look at the people in over six cities, encouraging the body of Christ and praying for God's continual work to be done in this beautiful country. We met with the Military Ministry home-groups in multiple cities and were welcomed into the homes of generous and gracious believers along the way. We had the unexpected blessing of ministering to those that already believe, strengthening our brothers and sisters in the Lord. Jimmy mentioned on a few occasions that he wondered if



we shared similar feelings of Paul when he describes the mutual encouragement to and from the saints that was the product of his various missionary journeys. We certainly were encouraged to continue on in our faith as we witnessed countless believers press on in the love of the Lord despite the continual "un-official" persecution by the government, peers and often even their own families.

As a ministry we are evaluating how we can best serve the people of Bulgaria in future trips.

Jimmy and I, as well as the rest of our team, were so thankful for the chance to have our eyes and hearts open to a new culture. Please be praying for the political situation and leaders in Bulgaria, as well as for the new and fledgling Chaplaincy program that is underway. Pray for favor for



the believers and for a continued strength to press on despite the persecution they incessantly face.

Perhaps one of our most unexpected lessons while on our trip was found within the confines of our own team. For many of us, it was the first time that we had spent so much time traveling and living in close quarters with people that were not our natural families. What a stretching experience to always be under the watchful eye of not only Bulgarian nationals, but in constant view of seven pairs of eyes (including



Mladen, our national correspondent). Early in on our trip, my sister Shelly posted a comment on our blog encouraging us to love one another. It had not previously occurred to me how much of a challenge this would be. The Lord had plans of his own to guide Jimmy and I into a season of testing and growth as we daily battled student issues, stemming from both joy and frustration. As leaders we were tested to love our students with the love of Christ, bearing with them their burdens and requesting the same grace from them on our behalf. Together we saw the importance of showing the world the love of Jesus by first showing it to one another. Together we saw the intensified attacks of Satan on our team, the beauty of confession and forgiveness and the putting aside of self.

Thank you for paving the road to this journey with your prayers and support. We are excited about what God is doing in Bulgaria and in the hearts of seven young Americans that were opened up the challenge of loving first, our brother and then, the world. You have been a greater part of this journey than you may realize, and we want to genuinely thank you for joining with us to take the love of Jesus to people around the globe. It is the cry of God's heart to draw people unto Himself, and what a blessing that he has allowed you and me to be a part of that! If you haven't visited our blog and would like to read the updates and see some pictures that we sent out while in Bulgaria, please visit us at <http://jr2journey.blogspot.com/>.