

PASTOR CHUCK IN RUSSIA

story by Esther DeWitt
photos by Matt and Esther DeWitt



Pastor Chuck Smith and Pastor George Bryson fellowship with Pastor Vlad and his wife Sveta before the start of the conference.

A dramatic outpouring of affection overwhelmed Pastor Chuck Smith, CC Costa Mesa, as he made his first trip to Russia this past June. He ministered to CC pastors as well as radio listeners who gathered in Moscow to hear the man who had helped them understand the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

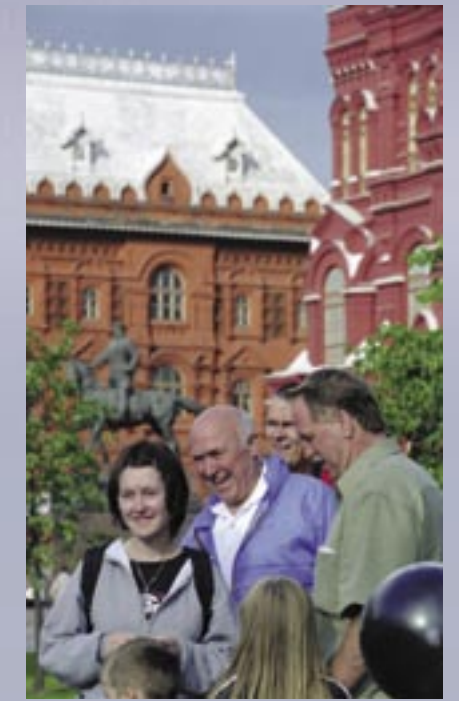
For twelve years, the young believers of the new Calvary Chapels of Russia had been praying that Pastor Chuck would be able to visit them. They treasured his translated messages and books. Every year at important events they had heard from him through video greetings. Now, the time was right, the door of opportunity had been opened, and Pastor Chuck was finally able to visit Moscow.

“He is real!” whispered one of the Russian students to Matt DeWitt when Pastor Chuck visited the Calvary dorm to pray and send off the team for another day of outreach. A hundred people crowded into the dorm for the prayer and greeting.

Tears flowed freely that evening at the graduation service for Calvary Chapel Bible College Moscow. The emotional event marked the end of the term of service for campus director, Ilya Gromov, his wife, Ira, the secretary, and Christina Dixon, the



Pastor George Bryson, and his granddaughter Hannah, give Pastor Chuck a tour through Red Square on his first day in Moscow.



Olga Andronova poses with Pastor Chuck in Red Square.

dean of women. Pastor Chuck challenged and encouraged the graduates in a commencement message, which applied not only to them, but also to the audience of current students, former graduates, families, and friends.

“He is a simple man like us, but look how much the Lord has done in his life,” explained Pastor Vlad Oplev, from CC Nizhni Novgorod.

Pastor Max Gorbunov, CC Omsk, said, “Our church was blessed with an opportunity for fourteen people to attend this event. Though it takes forty-two hours to get to Moscow on the train, it was a great blessing for all of us to be there. It was a gathering of a big family that we have in Russia in our Lord Jesus. When I was leaving, I was sad and happy at the same time as the Lord opened to my heart how it will be in heaven. This was only a glimpse of what awaits us in the future where we’ll all be together.”



George Bryson, of Calvary Chapel Church Planting Mission, walks with Pastor Chuck, along with Phil and Peggy Twente, in Red Square.

“Being here reminds me of what was happening in Calvary in the early ’70s”

Pastor Chuck Smith

For those impacted by the teaching and ministry of Pastor Chuck, the gathering was more like a family reunion than meeting someone they had never seen in person before. George Bryson, the director of the ministry in Russia, introduced the stream of people to Pastor Chuck. Pastor Bart DeCrane from St. Petersburg said of his meeting with Pastor Chuck, “When Anya and I were introduced to Chuck as ‘newlyweds,’ he smiled and told us that he had

been married for 55 years, and he is still in love with his wife!”

On Pastor Chuck’s last day in Russia, six Calvary Chapel fellowships from the Moscow area packed into a rented theatre in a hotel in the center of Moscow for an all-church service. The service left a lasting impact on everyone present.

Pastor Chuck told pastors and their wives who had gathered together for dinner that

night, “Being here reminds me of what was happening in Calvary in the early ’70s.” As pastors in Russia shared prayer requests, praise reports, and updates on their fellowships, pastors from the U.S., including Ken Ortize, George Bryson, Roger Stahlhut, Bruce Kozcman, and Matt DeWitt were able to join Pastor Chuck in praying for each fellowship.

With paparazzi-like frequency, camera flashes went off as believers gathered around Pastor Chuck to meet him during his four days in Russia. The thousands of photos will serve as a reminder to those that were there of the amazing fellowship of so many people gathered together from so many different places, all to glorify the Lord and to learn of God. After Pastor Chuck left Russia, the team members took on the challenge of sharing the Gospel with renewed energy, while the churches went to work following up on the new believers.



Praying together for their churches and families, the last evening of Pastor Chuck’s visit to Russia ended with a dinner with pastors and their wives.

“To see the beginnings of these ministries is a very exciting thing.”

Pastor Chuck Smith



Classical instruments set the tone. Pastor Sergey Grigorev played violin while Pastor Misha Andronov led the worship.



Many were moved to tears during the radio rally.

“What really moved my heart was the people’s appreciation for the teaching of the Word of God.”

Pastor Chuck Smith



Radio listeners, many of them older believers from the Orthodox Church, filled the hall to hear Pastor Chuck teach the Word.



When the older believers arrived for the radio rally, those from Calvary Chapels gave up their seats and moved to the balcony.

The Radio Rally

The outburst of gratitude took nearly everyone by surprise. The main floor of the theatre was packed. The faces were, for the most part, older than those that normally fill the conferences and concerts at CC outreaches in Russia. The women, many with heads covered in scarves, and men, dressed in suits with military medals displayed, arrived early and in large numbers to hear Pastor Chuck Smith.

These were the radio listeners who listen to Pastor Chuck teach through the Bible in the Moscow area. Though his radio messages are translated into Russian and read by a Russian, the listeners feel a strong connection to Pastor Chuck. Some even expressed surprise that he did not speak Russian.

The radio program receives the highest rating of any of the programs on the Christian station. The reaction to the broadcast had surprised everyone, and the office sometimes receives upwards of 300 calls and let-

ters a month. The radio ministry is reaching a wide audience—many from the Eastern Orthodox faith and other new believers.

Most CC ministries here are geared to the younger generation, with rock concerts drawing large crowds. Churches meet in rented halls and disciple young people in a casual atmosphere. Older folks attending are usually there because they have seen a genuine change in their children after receiving Christ.

The CC congregations from across Russia packed the balcony, ranging in age mostly from 15 to 30. They were amazed to see so many older believers, from all church backgrounds, gathered together to hear the message of grace. Hundreds of “Babushkas and Dedushkas” (Russian grandparents) had arrived early to hear Pastor Chuck and filled the main floor. Even George Bryson, who heads up the ministry in Russia under Calvary Chapel Church Planting Mission (CCCPM), was astounded. The radio station played a live broadcast of the event,

dubbed a ‘radio rally’ for the listeners who couldn’t attend. A time of worship kicked off the event.

Pastor Chuck approached the podium. He was visibly touched by the response of the crowd. His teaching focused on the fleeting nature of this world and the importance of keeping an eternal perspective.

In the closing prayer, even before they were invited to do so, hands went up all over the hall, asking for prayer and to receive Christ.

The emotional response left many people, including some of the men serving as security, in tears. An elderly woman approached the front with a single rose to give to Pastor Chuck. People asking for prayer, autographs, and a chance to shake hands immediately surrounded him. They thanked him for teaching them about grace, for leading them in the study of the Bible, and for loving them enough to come to Russia.

George Bryson tried to keep the crowd controlled while Pastor Chuck enjoyed



As Pastor Chuck taught, Dima Tribelsky, pastor of CC South St. Petersburg, translated.



Pastor Chuck was surrounded as he stepped off the stage.



There are five Calvary Chapels in Moscow and three in St. Petersburg.



Many responded to the message with deep emotion.

Russia

“Having received the ministry of God’s Spirit and God’s Word, they embraced us with open arms and it was to us a very exciting and wonderful experience.”

Pastor Chuck Smith



Pastors Ken Ortize and George Bryson marveled at the crowd. In more than a decade of ministry in Russia, neither had ever seen such a gathering of older believers.

speaking to each person that pushed his or her way forward. Ministry staff members and people from the outreach team passed out New Testaments to those who asked for them—700 total, while leaders from the Moscow churches prayed with people. There was a common bond of love as many people shared the stories of their lives with the ministry team.

One listener who attended the rally, Olga Skotneekova, commented, “I love how Chuck Smith presents the Gospel. He doesn’t complicate it ... the sermon itself and the worship time were awesome ... Honestly, I just couldn’t wait for this meeting with Chuck Smith. I learned much through the radio broadcasts with his teachings, and now I could hear him live.” Another listener who attended the rally, Novikova Galena, shared, “I was looking forward to the event since they started making an announcement about it on the radio! ... It was such a blessing to hear him [Pastor Chuck] share with us some things from his own life and his experience. I was very blessed! His teaching of the Word is very simple, and in that way so beautiful.”



With an outpouring of affection, radio listeners gathered around Pastor Chuck, asking for prayer or a word of encouragement.



Sharing their personal stories of thankfulness for the radio ministry, listeners gathered around Pastor Chuck to greet him after the message concluded.

For more than an hour, Pastor Chuck prayed for people, signed their Bibles, and took pictures with them. "What really moved my heart was the people's appreciation for the teaching of the Word of God," said Pastor Chuck. "They wanted to show their love and thankfulness for someone who would minister to them God's truth." ✝

Calvary Chapel Church Planting Mission is a ministry designed to get laborers into the the mission field of Russia. All who have a burden to share the love of Jesus Christ are welcome. There are outreaches going nearly every month. If you are interested in being used by the Lord to spread the Gospel in Russia call **(800) 33-CCCPM**.

CCCPM 2004 Schedule

Many dates are pending confirmation and/or airfare reservations; please call (800) 33-CCCPM for current information.

Winter Internship	Moscow	January 15 to March 11, 2004
Men's Leadership Conference	Moscow/ St. Petersburg	January 26 to February 3, 2004
Women's Ministry Mission	Moscow/ Omsk	February 12 to 23, 2004
CC Vista, CA CC Pomona, CA CC Brandon, FL	Kaluga	March 15 to 25, 2004
CC Skagit Valley, WA	Cheboksary	April 1 to 12, 2004
CC Spokane, WA	Novorossiysk	April 12 to 22, 2004
Regeneration - Berkeley, CA	Elista	May 10 to 20, 2004
Family Discipleship Ministry	Moscow	May 24 to June 3, 2004
CC High Desert, CA Youth	Moscow	June 14 to June 3, 2004
CC Pasadena, CA CC Houston, TX	TBA	July 19 to 24, 2004



At the end of the radio rally evening, many prayed together.

"I never thought that I would ever see the day where the doors would be open such as they are now and the opportunities to go in and to minister."

Pastor Chuck Smith



Pastor Chuck signs Natasha Frovola's Bible at the Moscow church service.