

BOOK 3

PRISON WORK CAMP

CHAPTER 1 – PRISON WORK CAMP IN ODESSA

I'm in the cell in Odessa's central prison ("Centralka"). First of all there's a prayer beside the plank-bed; for some a meditation, and for some malice. Others count everything as what is supposed to be. For us Christians it is: "Acquaintance, or becoming established." A lot depends on this for the future time spent in the cell. There are six men in the cell, but now it's not like it was in Kharkov, even though here it's easier to listen or explain something peacefully.

Here I inquire and ask for permission to inform my relatives. After all, my unknown whereabouts has tormented them for a long time; it has been a time of tiresome waiting for some bit of news from me, whether it be pleasant or unpleasant, far or near. I understand them in my consciousness, what my father and mother are going through, the depths of their pains and sufferings concerning me. It's hard for me to understand all this, for I can't help them in any way.

I am absolutely convinced, that around the breakfast or dinner table, or during the time of Sunday's lunch, there is a blessed and very

delicious cooked meal – and yet for the parents, especially the mothers, it's not so easy, knowing that their son doesn't have such a privilege, and that many times he lays down to sleep in his plank-bed in a hungry or semi-hungry condition.

You can't fool a mother's intuition! Therefore, my desire was to knock without stopping until I notified my parents as soon as possible. Again I receive the same answer as I received in Brest: I'm in quarantine and in transit, and I will be able to write only when I arrive at the final destination – the prison work camp.

I started to implore the authorities, saying that one of my parents may suffer a heart attack if I don't disperse their anxiety and notify them of my whereabouts. I only ask to be able to write two or three sentences and nothing more.

Thank God! Our God is a God of answers! It is written: "Ask, and it will be given to you; knock, and it will be opened to you." (Matthew 7:7) Truly, it was the main goal for me to bring my parents peace and reassurance of where I was located.

I was given a page from a newspaper, and I was permitted to tear off a clear piece of the newspaper. I was given a simple pencil, and I wrote:

"Papa – Mama! I'm in the prison here in Odessa." This is the entire content of my letter. I am not allowed to write anything more.

Later at our meeting in the work camp, my father and mother would tell me: "None of us know anything about your routes, and where you were taken or where your place would be, whether it would be the north or Siberia, Russia or Ukraine. We fasted and prayed a lot, realizing that if there was no news for such a long time it probably means that they were taking you somewhere far away. In our Church, and in other churches of our region, many intercessory prayers were carried to the Lord for you. This increased our strength, knowing that with these prayers you were under the grace of God."

And so one day my mother sees that the postal carrier went by. She hurries to the mailbox and takes the envelope in her hands. She immediately froze on the spot. At this same moment, our pastor was riding on his bicycle past our house, and he stopped when he saw my mother. She's completely agitated and can't say a word. The pastor came up to her, looked at the envelope, and tells my mother:

"Yes, this letter is from your son." He quickly opens the envelope and reads the letter in one line:

"Papa – Mama! I'm in the prison here in Odessa."

They thanked God. The pastor offers his help, inasmuch as he sat two times in prison and has good experience in such matters. He also

knows many laws and how to act correctly in these situations.

"I simply want to help you and share in your pains and your sufferings for your son," said the pastor. "Right now we must hurry and do the following in an organized manner – gather up some non-perishable foods. Tomorrow I won't go to work. Instead, I'll go with your son's father at five in the morning on the trolley bus to the prison. We can deliver up to five kilograms (eleven pounds) of food products. Your son, I know, has been traveling by stages through transit prisons, and he has been half-starved, and maybe even sick. While he's in prison, they may allow the package to be delivered to him. However, when they send him off to the camp (zone), there he will not be able to receive anything. We need to do this very quickly, since they will not hold him too long in the prison. They'll send him to the zone the minute a place opens up. If Odessa doesn't have a place in the camp, they can once again transfer him somewhere far away. We must hurry. We'll depart in the morning. We'll meet at the bus stop." The pastor rode away from our house on his bicycle.

On this very night there was an unusual manifestation of nature's elements. There was rain, then frost, which produced a strong covering of ice. This icy element was a huge catastrophe for the Odessa region. Transportation was

paralyzed, and everything stopped moving, except for the railway train. The city was without electricity and without water. This was an extraordinary circumstance in Odessa – a state of emergency in the entire province.

To travel by bus is impossible – it's now only wishful thinking. The pastor arrived in the morning to my father's house. They tied towels to their boots and went by foot to the railway. They overcame the forty kilometers (25 miles) through rain and frost, even though the road was transformed into a continuous glacier. Having arrived by the electric train to Odessa, they again went by foot from the railway station to the prison/ There was no other choice since the transportation throughout the city was at a standstill due to the heavy elements of nature.

They arrived at the entrance to the checkpoint of the prison and explained the entire situation – to whom they came, and the package of five kilograms that they brought. My father showed his documents/ The military guard stands up, opens the side door of the checkpoint towards the area where the transportation passes, and says:

"You see there, those two cars? Your son is in one of those cars, and they're already taking him to the zone, to the workers' camp."

No matter how much they begged, my father and the pastor weren't able to deliver the package of food products. Nobody listened to

them, and for a long time they stood on the road in a stupor – they could not come to their senses. They came on the road through such hardships – all for nothing. The prison gates open up before them, and the two cars depart. They could only follow the cars with their eyes, and they could send me off with only a prayer to God. We can't always have it the way we desire; God often answers through sufferings and pains.

The pastor later related that it was difficult to look at my father; there was a strong bitterness in the throat. There was nothing to be done, except to pray. What a cruelty! Yes, this world can sometimes be cruel, especially the people in this world.

The camp (zone) where they took me was 500 meters from the prison. As it turned out, it was already evening time as we left one gate and entered another gate. By the time all the reception and drawing up of documents was completed – it was time for sleep.

On the second day, there were the assignments according to groups and brigades. There were several thousand convicts in the work camp. The camp (zone) was a residential zone and a working zone. There were two huge factories, which had the kind of conditions that no one in the world at liberty would work in. The inferior working conditions were physically unbearable. For those types of work, the worker at liberty would need to be paid a large salary;

however, the convicts worked for nothing. That's why the work camps were overcrowded, especially with young people. At trials, the young people were usually given long terms to serve. This was the politics of the Communist ideology – the existence of free labor. Not one large construction site, not one grand project, was managed to be built without the participation of the convict and his work. This was legalized slavery.

But for us, God willed it that even here we should be within God's peace and accept everything as from God's grace, and be content with everything that we encounter on our path. The story of Apostle Paul comes to mind, a man of faith, who was in a deep relationship with God; he experienced so much bitterness and lived personally through so much pain and suffering. Contemplating his life, it seems as if something doesn't connect – that all these burdens were attributed to a great man of God, a man who was in God's plan.

"In journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fasting often, in cold and nakedness."

(2 Corinthians 11:26-27)

God, through the stories of great heroes of the faith, supports us with strength and establishes us in the faith. In all situations he teaches us to submit ourselves only to him. And in the next step of our spiritual growth – in his will – he gives us wisdom and makes us experienced people in the Kingdom of God.

But the main idea of God is – through our sufferings and pains in our spirit – to develop, grind, and then to polish two great qualities that were inherent in Paul: godliness and contentment. These qualities will serve as a great acquisition – a source of help – in times of pains and burdens:

"Now godliness with contentment is great gain. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content."

(1 Timothy 6:6, 8)

God treats us in such a manner because he understands our inner human character and the entire human structure, the strong and the weak sides. It is essential for him to place us in his godly order, and godliness and contentment exist as the channels of God's action in us and above us. In his will exists an aspect of becoming the director of our lives, so that godliness and contentment would manifest in our activities.

God's orderliness of our qualities, our character, gives an opportunity for a practical application of godliness and contentment. A theoretical understanding of these qualities is

only an unsubstantiated action. A practical application of godliness and contentment, however, leads us into a condition of full obedience and submission to his voice, his words, and his will. Afterwards, the doors open wide to God's storeroom and God's reserve supply of his grace. This is a great acquisition!

The properties of these qualities are crystallized by God in those conditions of a person, where God comes off as absolutely essential, and his work is carried out through his methods and by his designs.

Do not be amazed now, that people in God's plan very often find themselves in dangers similar to what Apostle Paul went through, and also what other brothers and sisters experienced, often in pains and sufferings, in captivity and in exile, in hunger and freezing cold – for there God crystallizes his precious stones. This is God's plan for their future acquisition. We are his material, and he is our God!

CHAPTER 2 – ASSIGNMENT IN THE CAMP

I stand up as my family name is one of the first to be called for the assignment by groups, brigades, and work. The chief of the colony told me:

"We knew that you were coming to us, and we prepared a workplace for you."

I don't answer anything out loud, but in my mind I'm thankful that I have good benefactors. I hadn't even arrived, and they already had prepared a workplace for me! Not bad! Thank you for such a high honor. I can only guess at how it will all turn out.

They assigned me to the ninth group, the ninety-first brigade, a brigade of ninety-five people. Every one of us, who went into this group, was taken by the officer of the group to the barracks where we would live. The barracks have two floors, and our group is accommodated on the second story. The brigade is arranged into two cells, with fifty people in each cell, with bunkbeds.

Finally, the moving was finished. Behind my shoulders now were the long half-hungry and hungry days of the etapes (stages of the journey), the transit cells, the carriages "Stolypin" (for prisoners) – all this was like a dream that passed into the history of a personal life. Now there was a new coil of life, and events, which would untwist in the life of the camp.

"O, God! Give strength to step into this unfamiliar life with the smallest of mistakes, to go forward only with you – only with you! Give me a wise heart so that I can have discretion in all things amongst the crowd of thousands of convicts." These words were my constant prayer, just as in childhood I used to repeat the multiplication table, in order to remember it. Otherwise, it would be difficult to survive here.

Life in the cell greeted me very harshly, and from the first days I was shown its nature and character.

At this time, the city of Odessa was in an extraordinary position – a natural, elemental disaster that was bound up with the thick coating of ice. There was no electric power in the camp, which means there's no light. The factories are at a standstill and nobody is working. The light from the generators is sent only to localized places for the protection of the camp. The kitchen is inoperable; there's no energy. No one can prepare the food.

During this period of natural disaster, we were given half-baked black bread to eat. The convicts sculptured chess pieces out of the doughy bread. There was also sour cabbage, three times a day. The camp lived in this way for ten days. This was a terrifying picture. It's hard to conceive of a thousand people without any employment; they're hungry, and it's wet and cold in the cells; they're angry, and the sour cabbage

three times a day is simply destroying many convicts with intestinal illnesses. A clash of gang leaders and their sorting out, then fights between them after drinking chefir (a concentrated tea brew), and once again I appeared to find myself in hell. All this reminded me of the transit journey through Kharkov. A certain percentage of the people were infected with tuberculosis. One was compelled to watch how people would go out of their mind. How to survive? It was necessary to survive.

There was a time when our circle of young people sang a song that had words of great comfort:

"Don't let your soul despair,
Don't malign your destiny,
For there's always faith, hope, and love."

[Songs of Rebirth, No. 553]

Here in the camp it was important to live every day by faith, depending completely on God's supernatural protection. Faith, and only faith. Here in the cell of emotional expressions, faith does not work. Here it's essential to proclaim it with the confession of the mouth, and to believe with the heart. (Romans 10:10)

I remember the farewell meeting while at liberty, when one of the youth presented me with verses from Psalms as a heart-felt wish:

"The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them.
O, taste and see that the Lord is good;

Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!"
(Psalm 34:7-8)

These words were an encouragement on the unknown path, and today they serve as a support, renewing my strength, leading me towards complete dependence on God, and afterwards being sustained by God's grace. Otherwise – it's impossible to survive here!

It's difficult in that there's nobody in the zone from our Christian denomination, nor anything close to our belief. It's understandable, that it will be necessary to go on a solitary path with only God's help, even though at this time I prayed to God and believed that he would arrange something; and in some manner my solitary path would be examined by a heavenly council, by God himself.

The days of extreme weather pass, and it gets a little better. The idleness of a thousand people vanishes. The entire camp moves into a full workers' regime, with three shifts of eight hours each. The schedule was changed on a weekly basis.

On the first day we stood in columns and walked to the factory in the workers zone. For some reason, a chief officer accompanies us. He approached me and announced that he is authorized to personally show me my place of work. There's a question in my mind: who authorized him? Oho-ho! The brigade buzzed, and someone behind me uttered:

"If he has picked on you, there's little that he will not show you now."

I go for the first time to work, and I pray to God in silence. In principle there's no fear, for I never feared work. However, here I sense there's something threatening. Once again I recall the words from the Bible that I once memorized:

"The Lord is on my side; I will not fear.
What can man do to me?
The Lord is my helper:
I will look over my enemies.
It is better to trust in the Lord."
(Psalm 118:6-8)

The consciousness reveals its own information: It's interesting that the chief officer showed me such concern, which is not shown to anyone else; it's obvious that something is hidden here, and within a little time the secret will be revealed in the shop.

And here is my work, and my personal work place. Our shop: there are two thermal ovens for baking metal parts under oil, which our section of the shop receives from the forging machines. Welding semi-automatics form an entire line; there is not a single exhaust ventilation above them. There's also an entire line of handheld electric welders; and an x-ray laboratory clearing up the welding works; and at the end of the shop there's a testing of the product. Our job was to manufacture gas cylinders that use propane-

butane. There was no technology available here to extract the smoke in the shop; only one box at a great height accommodated the entire shop, and no one knew whether or not it worked.

The entire smoke accumulated so densely in the shop that practically the entire time only half of the shop was visible. And when they changed the metal in the thermal ovens, then the entire shop was one smoky nightmare. About fifteen meters from my work place, there were exit doors, and here the pressure of the smoke to exit created an area that was like being in a smoker. There was nothing to breathe with – everyone walked around coughing, with terrible headaches. There was no medicine, either!

My work: here is a metal platform, where we lifted the cylinders after the x-ray procedure. It was important to pour hot water within the range of 50 to 60 degrees Celsius in order to immediately dry the walls of the cylinder. Then a device was twisted into the neck of the cylinder; and then the full-of-water cylinder was rolled down and connected up to a stand. Here a man from the Department of Technical Control worked, pumping the cylinder up to an atmospheric pressure of 16. And if there are no drips, then he makes a notation with a number in his book and places his brand (stamp).

Now more specifically my job: I take the cylinder from the stand, untwist the device and give it away. Then I pull away the cylinder, turn it

upside down, and lift it with the bottom up. It was necessary to grab it by the boot of the cylinder, which is sharp as a razor after being pressed; then without any visibility, I was supposed to put a plug on the neck of the small triangular device so that the cylinder could release any water under the air pressure. To lift each cylinder means to lift 75 kilograms (165 pounds). The plan for each shift required 650 cylinders. And the sum total of lifting for one shift of work was $75 \text{ kg (165 lbs)} \times 650 = ?$

What a load! Not just kilograms, but tons during an eight hour work shift. It was constant work with hot water and in hot water, wearing rubber boots throughout the shift. I received work gloves, one pair for the entire week; the gloves lasted only two days. Then it was necessary to twist together the torn gloves (rags) and continue working. The hands were constantly cut by the sharp boot of the cylinders. The lacerations hurt. The wounds on the hands would steam up during the process of work, thanks to the hot water. When we arrived at the residential zone, we quickly ran to the cold water to place our feet under it. The feet had steamed up so much during the eight hours in the hot water, that for several minutes I couldn't feel the stream of cold water – and we extracted our feet out of the cold water only after sensitivity had returned to all the extremities of the toes.

I finished my first work shift. We're now in the residential zone. We all wait for the formation and the evening inspection. During the time of inspection, the chief officer, who assigned me my work, comes to our brigade. He comes up to me and craftily smiles and asks:

"How's work?"

I didn't want to talk to him, so I kept my mouth shut. However, he persistently asks the same question again:

"How's work?"

The convicts made a circle around us; everyone watches this scenario intently. It was obvious the chief officer was creating a psychological game for the public. I gathered my strength, and having finished a difficult work day, I answered:

"I never feared any kind of work. And my Bible says that a great gain is to be had by being godly and content. Gain never comes without persistent work. Furthermore, godliness and contentment is the character of Christ, and in my faith – this is the entire condition (of wealth)."

"Oo-oo-oo!" howled the circle of workers that had surrounded us. The officer's face was flushed with blood, his adrenaline rose, and the eyes widened. He definitely was ready to grab me and choke me; however, he contained himself. He realized that he had just received a powerful slap in the face. As he leaves the brigade, the convicts laugh.

He turned around and said only two words: "We'll see." He goes a little farther, and the convicts yell after him:

"Why are you scaring him with – we'll see – we already have seen!"

Again the officer turns around and – with anger – fires out a barrage of swear words. This scenario was my registration and entry into the group and the brigade.

The first work day was finished. I was so tired that I felt sick – the body was buzzing with an achy feeling. I didn't want to talk nor walk nor socialize. After all, more than forty tons had passed through me.

After dinner, which was completely repulsive – wheat porridge with grease and salty herring-like fish – I fell on the plank-bed and reflected for a long time on the events of the day. This was the hardest work, but it was necessary to go through it. After all, God himself promised in his word through the Prophet Isaiah:

"He gives strength to the weary,
And for the exhausted he grants power."
(Isaiah 40:28-29)

If the chief officer is concerned about my work place and my work, then now it's understandable that the fate of my life is on the KGB's game board. There's nothing to doubt here. The only question remains: Will I survive? Will I manage to get out of this hell?

And yet God speaks through the inner voice: "Do I value all his help and his strength through the entire period of my affliction?" Of course, yes! I agree. It would be unthinkable for the time lived in the past to be without God. Again I hear the voice: "Do I value his victories in many of my circumstances?" Of course, yes! If that is so, it means we will pass over this together! I must be calm, for Jesus Christ himself confirmed my experiences during the days of his ministry on earth:

"If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you." (John 5:20)

"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake."

(Matthew 5:11)

The workdays in the camp passed. Someone encouraged me for the courageous outcome with the chief officer; someone mocked me for my confession of faith; someone reproached me – after all, the public is a coat of different colors. Another thing: all the convicts who at liberty were members of the Communist Party, at their arrest they are excommunicated from the party, but nobody excludes them from atheism. For years they were brainwashed with an ideology against God, and they remained with that ideology; nothing changed in their relationship to a confession of faith, for in their mind and their spirit the Christians were still

"Shtundy" (sectarians). The suspicious people regarded me as a spy for the Americans.

The hard work, and the terribly poor food, caused my physical strength to diminish. Sometimes circles pass through my eyes, and severe stomach pains torment me. The muscles along the bones of the hands are torn. I can't sleep at nights. I don't know where to place my hands. I pray to God at night, and with his help once again I rise and walk forward. I saw only one thing: the invisible hand of the Lord was holding me. I didn't have any choice in my work. Everything was done specifically to completely break me in such a manner. Nevertheless, in all cases God raised and led me out by providing me with physical and spiritual strength. I only must go forward.

The convicts were fed with bad food. The country spent only thirteen rubles a month for the sustenance of each convict; and only a teaspoon of sugar was handed out for a twenty-four hour period of time. Calculate – you can eat for a whole month on just thirteen rubles. However, the smell from the dining room sometimes made the worker wish he didn't have to go there. However, it was necessary to go there because work demanded it; the flesh was like in a state of paralysis, and it was essential to eat something.

CHAPTER 3 – INCIDENT IN THE DINING HALL (THE CLOUDS BEGIN TO THICKEN)

Ten men sit at the table, and one bucket of food is handed out for the entire table of ten convicts. One person takes a long-handled spoon and ladles out a serving to each person.

Something beyond belief occurs: the man who serves the food pours out my fair share last, giving my portion as a joke in the measure of a few spoons of porridge, or not a full ladle of gruel. A day passes, and then a second day, and I begin to see that this is done on purpose; except I can't understand who is initiating the action. I can see on the face of the server that he is doing everything intentionally. I had to keep silent. I came out of the dining hall and stood in the column of my brigade. I said a prayer and fervently thanked God for the test that I encountered, and then I went to work.

In the evening everything was repeated. At breakfast – again the same game. Another day goes by. The hard work exhausts all of my strength. What can I do? Simply pray to God! I pray to God in my thoughts, I pray at every place. I ask God for clarification: Why is this happening? Who is the initiator of all this, or the criminals? I think that I'm on good terms with everybody – unless it could be the mischievous idea of the chief officer? I can't understand any of this, and my physical strength is leaving me.

After work it becomes difficult to drag myself to bed on the second floor. My entire organism is going through feebleness – emaciation.

One night I wake up and find that my body has an abscess, especially my lacerated hands and the muscles around the bones of my hand. I prayed for a long time to God in my thoughts – amidst the various tonalities of the convicts' snoring. After the prayer I threw my arms behind my head and looked at the ceiling of the barracks – and plunged deep into thought. The heart of the matter revolves around me. Everything is unknown and it's all like in a fog, but I am assured that God is not only above me – he is precisely within me. And the circumstances should not have power over me. I must manage everything correctly in these circumstances. I thanked God for the solace in him. And for myself I simply expressed the command: "It's not important how long the ordeal will take; it's only important how I will pass through it!" I regained my composure with the consolation of Christ – and I fell asleep.

Morning – inspection. I look at the sky – the wonderful weather bestows life to many people and promises much good for this day. But what about me? And again the word of the Lord appears in my soul:

"...for not a hair will fall from the head of any of you." (Acts 27:34)

And again I look at the sky, contemplating – today in our time zone it's morning, and on the other

side of the world it's evening, and somewhere it is night and people are resting. The earth is created by God, along with everything on the earth: people, with their pains and sufferings, all revolve around the sun, in the solar system. The sun bestows heat and life. O God! What gratitude we owe you! All of my various difficulties, the mockery thrown by people, the diverse experiences – everything revolves around you! It is in his power and possibility to give me stillness – to calm the stormy sea; it is in his possibilities to send hail on the earth or to give warm blessed rain! My life is in God's possibilities! Praise God!

"For His mercy has no limit,
It is renewed every morning;
Great is your faithfulness!
The Lord is a part (portion) of me,
says my soul,
Therefore I have hope in Him."

(Lamentations of Jeremiah 3:22-24)

The soul feels a glowing warmth, and I experience showers of blessing from God's grace! This night has been full of contemplation and prayer. And the morning is beautiful – they have become the source of my support this day.

After the inspection, the entire brigade goes in a column to breakfast. At the table everything is the same according to the scenario of the game. And you can't say this is food, but without it a person could simply topple over. No one is

indispensable here. Here is a place with its own life and its own unwritten laws.

We head off to work. As I walk in the column to work, I pray and think: 'How can I work? Where can I get strength? To win this battle by myself is too much of a burden for my shoulders. I understand that this is a world of spirits clashing between each other; the spirit of evil never calms down – on the other hand it rushes at its prey like a hungry lioness. To resist this evil can be done only through the Spirit of God. How I behave in this situation will determine whether I individually open the door for the Holy Spirit to enter through my heart – then God himself will battle with the spirits of evil in the spiritual world. That's how he will grant me the victory. May God give me strength to patiently wait and remain standing during this battle!'

Several more days pass by. I started to completely lose all physical strength, and I started to drag my feet. After work, I swayed as I tried to walk. The convicts started to make fun:

"Put some rocks in your pockets for balance, so you won't fall down."

At night my entire body felt like it was completely cramped up. O God! I can't believe it – can it really be true that my end is approaching? This can't be! During the process of reasoning You (o Lord) give clarity to the mind and to my soul! If it weren't for You (o Lord) – I would have collapsed the past few days; I would

already be grinded into powder. No! It's not the end! I must simply move forward.

Today at breakfast it was the same old game. However, at lunch time, I gather strength and take the ladle first, and I say:

"Hey, fellows! That's enough! Today I will hand out the portions of food."

Just as I stretched the long-handed spoon out to the bucket of food, somebody's hand taps me on my shoulder. I turn around and I can't believe my eyes – the same chief officer who showed me my work place stands over me. It was the same officer who at the evening inspection was interested to know how my work was; and how I felt after my first working day; and afterwards he left in shame after he was laughed at by the convicts. "We'll see!" were his departing words.

Yes, there was the instantaneous thought: He has the chance to take vengeance on me for that occurrence during inspection. He could, like people said:

"Roll up his sleeves and go on the attack in hand-to-hand combat."

I glanced at him and saw a lot of anger on his face; his eyes became enormous like in a monster. Bending over me, he said in a taunting voice:

"Condemned person! You cannot serve the food. You have a very heavy job and your hands shake. I am concerned that you will serve

yourself so much that these other people won't have enough!"

'Wow, what a devil,' I thought to myself. 'Even the voice and the mannerism of actions reveal your nature and your character – who you are!'

I returned the ladle. Everything was clear! This was not a practical joke. He strikes at the most vulnerable place.

I ate the few scraps of food – several spoons – that were left for me, and then I left for work. I thought intensely about everything that transpired in the dining hall. It's a powerful scheme of the KGB: they give hard labor, and now with strange hands they take away food – that means everything is going according to their refined, deceitful plan towards a complete breakdown.

I can't write to my parents to ask for their prayerful support. The letters are handed over to a special department for censorship, and when they read it they won't allow it to go through. I'm squeezed into a corner. What can I do? Is there a way out? No! There's no way out of this. For this purpose are created such places so you won't have a way out. Only God! He's the only one strong enough to change everything. When there is no way out, then believe in these words:

"For all things are from Him,
through Him, and to Him."

(Romans 11:36)

These words of Apostle Paul consoled me, and I got down to work.

As usual, the nights go by with little sleep and enormous head aches. The entire body aches. I look again at the ceiling, and the 121st Psalm comes to my memory:

"I lift up my eyes to the hills,
from where my help comes.
My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.
He who preserves you will not fall asleep.
He who keeps Israel will
neither slumber nor sleep.
The Lord is your guardian."
(Psalm 121:1-5)

I don't see the hills just yet; I only see the ceiling of the barracks. I don't make my confession of faith out loud because forty-five people are resting. My entire conversation with God is in my thoughts and in the whispers of my lips. However, I believe very much in God and I wait for help from him, who is the foundation of my faith:

"He alone is my rock and my salvation;
He is my defense . . .
Upon God alone,
O my soul, rest peacefully!
For my hope is in Him!" (Psalm 62:2, 5)

I strongly believed, that something extraordinary was about to be accomplished, that the Lord was leading up to something. Something had to

happen. The only cruel struggle is that I simply can't see a little further – what lies behind all this. Man does not know the decisions of the Lord (Jeremiah 8:7). I strongly believed that God does not allow what is above one's strength; and even if physical strength is exhausted, God continues to prolong the phase of testing, which means that he is still counting on some powers. Somewhere he sees a reserve, and how often it turns out to be so: "For me everything is coming to an ending, but for God it's just the beginning."

I truly believed that this ordeal was temporary. I believed in our mutual relationship through prayer and contemplation. Other variations and opportunities I simply did not have.

To please him in actions – I was feeble. To advise him in something? I couldn't even hurry him to do something. He's God, and he doesn't need my advice or my corrections. Yes, I have burning pains and sufferings, but I thank God that at such a crucial moment he gives understanding to the mind: "God gives everything according to his decision, and everything is just and impartial." For me so far the entire situation is like being in a fog, but for him everything appears transparent – everything is comprehensible. Everything that happens is in his will and in his nature. And I must gather all my forces and power and move forward. I must be namely here, in these barracks, at this place where he wants and in the

conditions of life and work that he wants – because he is God!

With these kinds of thoughtful introspective arguments, I entered the new day. After such an encounter with God, all the thoughts of pains and sufferings were eclipsed by the rising tide of the freshness of the Holy Spirit. The soul feels light. I feel troubled, like the calm before a big storm; but this calm did not bring with it a storm or some other kind of natural element. On this day victory arrived! It was only necessary to wait patiently for it to come. What people have always lacked is patience and strength. 'A waiting period – this is also a piece of the ordeal,' I thought.

We sit at the table in the dining hall. In the recurrent situation, I am content with the way things are. I don't take my bowl into my hands, nor do I hand it to the server. I know that my ration comes last. This time the chief officer stands behind my back as if at his post, like a soldier standing beside the banner at the main post of the detachment.

'He deserves this kind of attention,' was the immediate thought that went through my head. What an insolent, inhuman game! As soon as the food is handed out, he momentarily vanishes. I submit to all of this, for I know my portion – it's only the miserable scraps that remain. What they'll give – that's mine.

I don't have a storm within my spirit. I don't ask anybody about anything. I don't ask any

questions. God gave me strength to rise above these circumstances. I look at the man who hands out the food – he is under the chief officer's control, and he's dependent on them for something. Now he is executing their will. They must have promised him something in the KGB. Most likely, by the characteristic operation of the devil, they could have deceived him cheaply, and used him without giving him anything. This is the nature and character of the devil – to exploit, then smear, mock, and discard.

And then a culminating incident occurred at the table. This time, the man who fetched the ladle and hurried to hand out the food, he takes the bucket of food and begins to bawl out loud like a possessed person. The sensation was such that it felt like someone was cutting his skin with a sharp knife. The server lifted the kettle of food, turned towards the officer behind my back, and yelled:

"Leave! I can't do this any more! Get out of my sight! Or I will crown your head with this bucket of food! Leave – now!" He spewed out, furthermore, quite a few swear words.

There was an outburst in the dining hall. It felt like a bomb had exploded. The convicts rose from the benches, and many of them ran up to our table. The overseers force their way through the crowd, shoving everything and everyone aside. Many of the convicts stood on the benches and tables to have a better view of the

spectacle. The server still held the bucket of food and continued to howl:

"Get out of my sight! I can't do this any more!"

The overseers arrived at the scene of the spectacle and grabbed the bucket of food out of the server's hands. They placed the bucket on the table. Then they restrained the server's arms and dragged him away. The chief officer disappeared instantaneously. The server (convict) never returned to the residential zone again, and no one knows of his fate; obviously he was sent on a long journey (etape) to another work camp.

Silence. It turns out that the silence follows the storm more often than it comes before the storm. Many of the convicts lost their appetite, but the time for eating continues. The next server dishes out the food for me first, and then jokingly adds:

"For you and for that other fellow!" Then he adds a jargon term used among prisoners: "Don't be afraid of me! I don't work as a *kuma* (friend offering protection) for the chief officer."

Everything was settled. As they say among the people: "Operation Ё" failed shamefully (before the very eyes of the convicts). ["Operation Y" was a popular Soviet film – a comedy embodying the 1960's.]

I paid for all this with days of semi-hunger and hunger, but for all that – what a victory! What

an acknowledgement of God through this circumstance! How much has changed all around me! God manifested himself in this situation in his character and his nature! Praise God!

Sometimes we wish to do what Jesus Christ said in his parable – to stretch out our hands and tear out the weeds. But God does not give us the right, even in our pains and sufferings, to uproot everything around us. The Lord himself will sift the chaff from the grain in his own time, and according to his purpose. And here in our sufferings he changes us again and again: our inner being, our soul, the center of our hardships, failures, and victories.

During the process of transformation it is required from us that we leave behind something human – and that is our pain. And God, during this time of pain, says with the inner voice: "Keep believing that I, and only I, will cure you! Believe and wait! Don't hurry! Continue to believe me!"

It turned out to be a shameful failure for the KGB. Now there's only a state of victory. In the brigade, and afterwards in the detachment – after all the events – a tradition was born: the person who was serving the food would first turn towards all those seated at the table and say:

"Fellows! I don't work as a *kuma* for the chief officer." Then he serves everyone equally.

Thank God for giving faith and purpose. Then you look at these people and see poverty –

without a faith in God, without any hope, without purpose; they simply throw their life away; their only abilities are cruelty, criminality, and violence.

CHAPTER 4 – A SURPRISE MEETING

About this time came the period when by the regimen of the camp a short-term meeting of two hours was due me; after a month I would be entitled to a meeting for a duration of two full days (forty-eight hours). Waiting for the meeting gives a pleasurable anticipation of some kind of consolation, for there will be a chance to see familiar faces, have fellowship with them, and be diverted at least for a short period of time from life in isolation. Today they call me out for a short-term meeting, and I go – rush – with gladness in my heart to the building where the meetings take place.

The short-term meeting takes place in the hall of a small building where regular telephone booths are installed – one opposite the other, at a distance of two meters one from the other. People sit in the booths and look at each other, and talk to each other by telephone. This communication and fellowship takes two hours.

When I entered the telephone booth, I had a big surprise: in the booth sat and waited for me, not my parents, but my friends from my native church, and my pastor. This was indeed a shock. There was so much happiness. Even though the authorities eavesdropped on the conversations, nevertheless, there was the opportunity to talk about something for two hours. The pastor conveyed to me the news that my

parents already knew that I would have a two-day meeting coming up, and so the pastor asked to be given the two-hour meeting. The pastor brought many greetings from many friends and from many churches.

He beseeched me: "Don't be very agitated in extreme situations, because our Church and the churches of the region pray a lot for you every day. You simply should know about this, as it will be easier for you to go forward!"

O, God! How pleasant it was to hear this! This was that precious oil, which once flowed down Aaron's beard (Psalm 133:2). This meeting served as an immense support for the spirit. When I held the telephone receiver in my hands, the pastor asked:

"What happened to your hands?" They looked awful, with large cuts and small cuts. My friends are troubled by what they see.

"I've never seen such crippled hands in all the prisons and work camps that I went through," said the pastor.

Before parting, the pastor bowed his head and quietly prayed and blessed me – even though this was not permitted here. Separation was hard – they stood the last few minutes silently and in tears. It was difficult to talk about anything the last few minutes. The bell sounded – and only the wave of the hands remained in the eyes. We parted. Streams of warm spring rains flowed within the soul. Ah! All the same, it is

pleasant to have such moments of brotherly fellowship and communication, and to have a church family that stands beside you with interceding prayers on your behalf. What an invaluable treasure – to have brothers and sisters who serve and stand up for your destiny in the breach! This encounter inspired me very much, and the visit became a strong raising of my powers, a big sustenance, like a drink of cold water in the hot desert sun.

"Brotherly fellowship is the sociability of the spirit." This is an expression of the love of God in happiness, in thoughts, in love, in unanimity and like-mindedness. This was a rising tide of new blessings from God.

I remembered an interesting example, a historical occurrence that our grandfathers talked about. At the time there were no water-pipes. They didn't exist. Usually they got their water from dug out wells. In order for the water to be suitable for drinking, and so there would be a lot of water, the well needed to be renovated and cleaned. This was an entire process. First, it was necessary to draw out the water from the well – several times in a row. The water, which flowed back into the well, widened the canals that had access to your well. In addition, the water itself would open up several new canals. Afterwards, drawing out the water again can bring the possibility of going deeper for better drinking water from the well – in other words, you have to

work with your well. This is a guarantee of high-quality water, and a guarantee of a high volume of water in the well.

The visit of my friends brought a renewal and a cleansing of my inner well. New streams poured through with clean cold water – through my consciousness, through my spirit and soul, and through my mind. The movement of the source of living water is guided by the Holy Spirit. He guides the water to the well. Renewal – this is an entire process, and God is the one who takes care of this process by using people at the appropriate time. Praise God!

CHAPTER 5 – LETTERS

Once again the clouds advance. Again, next in turn, they make an attempt to break me completely. Within a short period of time my address, where I served my time, was distributed practically throughout the entire Soviet Union. According to the regimen of the work camp, I had the right to receive an unlimited quantity of letters. I started to receive very many letters. Many convicts in the unit were hurling jokes:

"Did your believers make a Jesus Christ out of you? A lot of people are writing you letters."

Many Christians wrote reassuring letters to me. Many of them were unknown to me. Who are they? Many of them remain unknown to me to this day, and it is unlikely I will ever know who they were here on this earth. I absolutely believe that I will know who they are in heaven; they will definitely receive a reward from the Lord. They served me by the written word and they prayed a lot for me. I am very grateful to them. The most letters I received in one day was thirty-six, and the least was six or seven a day, or even one in a month.

One time God spoke to me, saying that I could have a gospel here! But how? In which way? Praise God! He sends a blessing in wisdom, showing me how to resolve it by myself at this place. Now, I take Bible verses (quotes) from each letter and rewrite them. Within a short

period of time – taking into account the multitude of letters – a small handwritten gospel came out. Every day the little book was quickly enriched with new Bible verses from the letters.

A new life began for me, a life of reading and thinking about his Word. This little Bible started to go from one hand to the other among the convicts. I understood that this was a big risk, and I might have to pay dearly for this. But I couldn't do anything about it. I couldn't say: "I can't give this to you!" Especially if a person asked for it. Everything that I did was in plain sight, and I couldn't think of any safety measure.

We left for the third shift at half-past midnight. In the morning we return from work to the residence zone – everything is overturned, torn up, and tossed about. Near my bed, as if near some office, there was a pile of papers. And, of course, my handwritten Bible was gone. We quickly start to straighten up our places before breakfast. At this time several overseers burst into the cell, bend my arms like a criminal, and drag me away to the operations unit. There is an interrogation.

After this I end up at the ShIZO (Penalty area of isolation), where the conditions are completely different, and even the food is not of a regular convict. They didn't keep me for a long time in this restricted area; obviously, they let it be known that my situation was familiar to them, and things in the future would only end this way.

There was no sense in keeping me for a long time in the ShIZO (isolation) because my work place was harder than anything in the penalty isolation area. In four days I was returned to work.

In my mind, the question again comes up for consideration: 'Why would God multiply the force of suffering in the midst of pains and sufferings?' It was as if it had a place in human unreality. To be more specific: there are additional sufferings during the period of suffering. And the Lord gives me an answer during my analytical thinking in an example: the patient gets to the doctor, who establishes a diagnosis and temporarily prescribes some medicine. Notice – it's only temporary. And if the medicine doesn't do its job within the prescribed time, the doctor chooses another group of drugs in order to bring the patient back to health. Only the doctor can do the diagnosis. Only the doctor can prescribe the medicine, and only the doctor can change the kind of drugs given to the patient. Only the doctor supervises the recovery of the patient. The doctor makes all the decisions, and the last word is his. We are under his care and direction.

Our pains and sufferings are completely under the authority of God. He knows about us in greater depth than we even have a notion about ourselves. We only see as far as the horizon. But he sees tomorrow. We see all the events

around us and everything that affects us – positively and negatively. But the Creator of all worlds knows perfectly well the influence of the spiritual world on us, “the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” (Ephesians 6:12) Then, when we are furthest from seeing and being conscious of the influence of the designs of the evil spirits, he already builds a defensive plan for us in the circumstances of our life, and proposes practical knowledge as a means of protection. He is God! And when the devil announces war against us with all his forces, desiring to crush and grind us to powder, and send the best sons and daughters into exile – God gives us the audacity and courage to tell the devil what David said to Goliath:

“I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts (Sabaoth), the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have insulted;
This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will slay you and remove your head from you . . .
That all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.”

(1 Samuel 17:45-46)

Deep relationships with God are born during periods of suffering; interesting meetings with God occur during these times. During these encounters he teaches us like a good teacher to have peace and tranquility, love, and contentment in everything. During this period God teaches us

to evaluate all our values and orientate ourselves in the choice of our priorities. In times of prosperity, these lessons are very hard, and for many people it is not interesting or not fashionable. In conditions of suffering, out of necessity, we turn only towards God, and at this time our heart is broken as never before in our life. We learn to live every day only by faith and to be in a trusting relationship with him. God utilizes these opportunities – these moments of a broken heart:

“He heals the brokenhearted,
and he binds up their grief.” (Psalm 147:3)

“The Lord is near to those who have a
broken heart,
and saves such as have a contrite spirit.”
(Psalm 34:18)

“And unto this one I look attentively:
unto the humble and contrite in spirit,
and who trembles at my word.”
(Isaiah 66:2)

CHAPTER 6 – A MEETING WITH MY PARENTS

The two-story building had the telephone booths on the first floor for short-term two-hour meetings. Personal meetings from one to three full days were held on the second floor, where there were meeting rooms to live in and a common kitchen. One of these meeting rooms was to be our possession for two full days.

The long-awaited day for the meeting with my parents, my father and mother, finally arrived. If you look at the map of the entire camp – the residential zone and the workers zone – then the small house where the two full day meetings took place was like a small island of a life of freedom.

Embraces and tears of the parents – not tears of grief, but tears that evoked deep feelings – accompanied both the initial encounter and the departure. How much time was spent by my parents worrying about my whereabouts? How much suffering they went through during this time? It was painful for me to look at them. But the tears went away as fast as the storm clouds pass by. I couldn't hold back my feelings when I heard how they named my friends with such love and affection, the same friends who drove up to the very gates of the camp today. These were the names of my most faithful friends. This moved us to tears. This is why it's impossible to avoid the tears in such an environment. I am

extremely grateful to all my friends for the love they showed me.

Our prayer, of course, could not be displayed in a loud voice in these conditions. However, in feelings and in our words that we expressed simultaneously towards God, our prayer – according to the circumstances – was nevertheless very powerful. It was powerful in that God heard it. Afterwards, there was a home cooked meal. My mother's hands try to spread out all the food and to hand me everything so that I could have a good meal. However, my emaciated stomach could no longer accept too much food, especially the high quality, solid home cooked food.

At night, we couldn't sleep. They listened with such desire to my stories, how I went through the trial and my etape (stages of the journey). I listened with such satisfaction to their stories, the feelings of anxiety during those days of the trial and the etape (stages). They also told me about their remarkably intelligible dreams about the occurring events. It was interesting for me to hear how my friends and our youth were serving God, and about who was at freedom and who was being persecuted and put on trial. The greatest encouragement for me was the news that many friends of many churches were praying continuously for the Lord to give me strength in all my circumstances. Everybody prayed and believed that these days of severe oppression

and suppression would pass, and there would be better days, of which the Prophet Malachi wrote:

“But to you who give worship to my name,
the sun of righteousness will come up with
healing in his wings,
and you will go forth, playing like calves full
of food.” (Malachi 4:2)

The sun of righteousness – the victorious sun – these are days when we are again at liberty, and under the rays of the sun we are preserved by the unified praise of our Lord. Meanwhile, we're content with the time, which the Preacher (Ecclesiast) wrote about:

“To every thing there is a season,
and a time for every purpose under
heaven.” (Ecclesiastes 3:1)

Now the time came for the last half-day of our meeting. Everything changes abruptly. The food does not go down, and my thoughts already accompany me back to the camp. I'm already there in my mind – at that bottom of spiritual and physical stench; on the mainland of violence, oppression, and godlessness; and on the continent of a cruel world with its own laws. Mother is restless, and she tries to talk me into eating some more. No way! Tears started to appear in my mother's eyes as the meeting came closer to an end. Her heart has a presentiment of the pain of parting – namely the intuition that God gave her.

And here is the signal that brings our meeting to an end. Everything is finished. It is obligatory for us to leave this small – but warm inside – island of freedom. Our prayer: my parents with their words commit me into the hands of the Lord and ask God expressively, at this time in my severe loneliness, to be my protector and defender. We said good-bye (“God be with you”) to each other.

Mother comes up to the officer and asks for permission to give me the remainder of the food to take back to the residential zone. Ordinarily this was a piece of bacon fat. However, the officer, with a frown upon his forehead, and with a cold voice, answered: “You can't!” Mother started to cry; she felt a great injustice here. Other people were allowed to carry back to the camp up to five kilograms of food. I went back with nothing. Even here the authorities were not ashamed of placing a stamp of degradation on me so that the parents could see my situation.

From the island of freedom – after a thorough search – I return to the mainland of captivity, where all the evil is gathered into one pile. Once again it's my weekdays, my “favorite place of work” for the chief officer, and my semi-hungry life in the midst of a world of criminals. To have faith in God is to profess: I must go forward.

CHAPTER 7 – STORM WAVE

Again the stormy winds, clouds, and waves – like at sea – toss my life about like a boat. Thanks to God for the rays of the sun that break through these clouds and warm my soul and spirit, granting me divine heat. In our suffering God gives us the opportunity to learn how to value the crumbs we receive, just like we learn in the dark prison to value the beams of light from the sun. These lessons formulate our spiritual maturity. Theoretically, we can learn and grow very tall, like a eucalyptus tree, but God, in our suffering, gives us the opportunity to ripen our fruit for God's purpose and for one's own people. The greatness and the height of a tree are insignificant to the ripened fruit.

I continue to receive many letters, and again I put together a small gospel with biblical verses that my friends send in the letters. Again there is a search, again an investigation in the unit office, and again: "Place your hands behind your back!" – and in front of me is the SHIZO (isolation area). There was an intense squabble: they didn't have the right to forbid me to receive letters and write letters, according to the laws of the regime; they also didn't have the right to forbid my friends to write to me. The chief officer had a dilemma, which he realistically was not able to resolve. Again there is an investigation. To apply pressure on me is their favorite activity;

it is an attempt to simply break me by using their best techniques.

At the next investigation they say: "Write to all your people and tell them to stop writing such a large quantity of letters."

I answer: "According to the law, I don't have the right to do this. I'm entitled to receive an unlimited quantity of letters. However, you can do this yourself by writing to them. Needless, to say, if you write to them about this announcement, then they will come to the camp in one day and become living letters in front of the gates of the camp."

"Get out of here!" was the roaring response. I left. This was my day of liberation from the SHIZO.

And here again is a victory from the heavens. Yes! Heaven never loses, and it does not know defeat! And if many people figure it was a defeat for God in the Garden of Eden, that God lost there – there is nothing further from the truth. If you agree with this theory, then there would never have been a tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden. And man would never have the right to choose. He would never have been a freedom-loving personality. God arranged it so man would have a choice.

My entire situation appeared to be in reliable hands, and the Lord was not about to let go. Thank God! I was absolutely certain of this victory. Judging by the words of my pastor and

the words of my father and mother, a multitude of prayers ascended to the throne of heaven.

Once again a "miniature gospel" was compiled and written with Bible verses from the letters I received. Now I made three of them that went from hand to hand among the convicts. Everything becomes clear – why am I here? I know why I am attracted completely to this movement, even though there was a price to pay with days of hunger and semi-hunger. This occupation was very risky, but it was a great blessing. This became my life. In captivity – it became my purpose.

To write out all the verses from the letters, answer the letters, to spare the time for someone – all this took a lot of time. All of a sudden it appeared that I had a time deficit. If you ever experience a time deficit in your activities, or in the fulfillment of your goals, then you are applying yourself in life. Applying yourself in life – is a life of purpose. This is a life of real value, no matter what kind of conditions it goes through, and no matter what kind of circumstances it finds itself in. A life of real value – conditions don't characterize it, and circumstances don't dictate its conditions.

CHAPTER 8 – A SOWN SEED HAS LIFE

Eight months pass, and a young man arrives at the work camp after his etape (stages of a journey). Upon meeting him, I look and find something very familiar about the personality of the man. His family name is very familiar to me. He also looked attentively at me, which caused me to take a second look at him. Naturally, our paths must have crossed somewhere. I started to search through all the files in my mind – who could this be? He keeps constantly observing me everywhere; it's obvious that I am more familiar to him than he is for me.

Finally I dug deeply in my mind and discovered who this man was. The reason it was difficult to remember him was because he was older than me by several years, and he was in the circle of young people from an older generation in the northern part of Odessa province.

Now, when I recognized him and who he was, I came up to him and said his name affirmatively, mentioning the place where we met. He flatly denied everything. The next time, I come up to him again and affirm:

"It is you. I know you and your family name."

He smiled and said: "That person that you know, that is for me my second cousin." And further, evidently, so that I wouldn't attach myself to him, he added: "Don't you see that I smoke,

drink chefir (strong tea), and hang around with a circle of thieves?"

'Fine,' I thought. 'I won't bother you.'

We were in the same detachment, but in different work brigades. We remained on friendly terms since we had a common acquaintance, as he affirmed. He knew his second cousin very well by his first name and his family name.

For several months he worked in the adjoining shop. A wall with a huge door separated us. Transportation flowed through that doorway. He worked on the press machine. And then a factory-related accident happened. The mould of the press broke and hit him in the head, completely breaking the bone in his forehead. He was without consciousness, without any hope for life. They drove him away to the civil provincial hospital.

He returned to the work camp in about three months with a plate on his forehead. When he walked on the grounds of the camp, he walked only beside the fence, which it was necessary for him to hold onto. A very young man becomes completely disabled.

I chose a time when nobody was around him, and I approached him and greeted him. I asked him about the operation, about his health, and whether or not his second cousin – the one I knew – came to visit him in the hospital. For some reason he started to tear up. He asked me to stay by him. He wanted to tell me something.

It turns out that it's not only difficult for him to walk, but it's even hard for him to talk. How sad! He's only twenty-six years old and already an invalid.

I stopped next to him, according to his request. I had to hear him out. He says:

"Please forgive me for lying to you all that time. I am that man that you said you knew. You were right all along. And that second cousin – that was a lie."

I asked: "What was the sense in lying to me in these conditions?"

"I was ashamed," he answered. Then he added: "I knew that you were in prison, and why you were imprisoned. We prayed for you in the Church. I got here through my own foolishness, and it seems I was meant to meet you here. I'm very ashamed, and it's very hard on my soul. Please forgive me, my brother! I don't know if I will survive this and get better or not. As you see, for now I walk alongside the fence and hold onto it."

What an outcome! It had to be this way! Now I knew him for certain. He was the son of Christian parents. The entire family was very active: they played musical instruments, sang together as a family, and recited verses. Now the devil was laughing: he smeared the young man, disgraced him and his family, subjected him to such foolish sufferings, and incited him to

become a thief and to steal cognac and vodka from a store.

We arranged for a rendezvous on a specific day. He asked for this meeting as soon as possible so that he could repent and confess his sins. He also wanted to accept Christ into his heart and straighten out his life. He desired to be in better health.

The appointed day arrived. The young man repented, bringing his sins before the sacrificial Lamb of God, whose blood cleanses from all sin. (1 John 1: 7, 9) We prayed together to God. I was absolutely certain that God forgave him, and sanctified him, and accepted him into the family of God and his paternal house – he received the seal of adoption. The Holy Spirit regenerated him and placed inside him the beginning of an absolutely new life in Christ:

"For the law of spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death." (Romans 8:2)

This evening was a happy evening! Christ came to save the lost, to find the missing, to lift the fallen from the mud, and give:

"... deliverance to the prisoners,
recovery of sight to the blind,
and set at liberty them that are tormented."
(Luke 4:18)

God's love in victory! God wins here! Praise God!

It's a pity that many people complicate their life, and through difficult trials God nevertheless turns them on his way. God never leaves in peace those individuals who have been predestined for Christ and for heaven:

"For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son . . .

And those whom he predestined, he also called; and those whom he called, he also justified." (Romans 8:29-30)

When we parted to our separate cells, I was completely inspired by this event. For a long time I prayed with gratitude to God in my thoughts. It had to happen at the crossroads of all events that God used me, namely in the work camp. This evening my mood was like a rock climber who ascended a mountain, and having reached the summit, he simply flopped to the ground and with supreme joy repeated to himself over and over again:

"Finally it is accomplished!"

I remembered the moments in the ShIZO (isolation). I remembered those fervent hours of hardship, when God spoke within my inner spirit:

"You must be here, where in this hour God wants you to be. You must go forward."

This evening – for the salvation of the young man by God – it was possible to tolerate and put up with anything. There is so much

strength that appears within the inner spirit, that I was ready for the next feat – this is a biblical principle.

Now the two of us got together regularly, and – taking precautionary measures – we would even pray together and read the miniature gospel, which was written with Bible verses. Now we could reminisce and reason together, for we had many friends and ideas in common. Now life went differently.

My new-found friend's health was extremely precarious. He needed a completely different kind of diet, and vitamins, so that his organism could fight for its rehabilitation. We prayed intensely for this need, for him and his family. God is a God of answers. Who can be compared to him? There was a time when the biblical Job testified:

"I know that you can do all things,
and that no purpose of yours can be
restrained." (Job 42:1-2)

". . . so that whatever you ask the Father in
my name, he will give it to you."
(John 15:16)

What can be more right than to depend on God in the difficult days of life's hardships? To continue to believe God and affirm the confession of his living word, and to be steadfast – that shows our dependence on him.

"I will not leave you nor forsake you."
(Joshua 1:5)

"I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you."
(John 14:18)

The Prophet Jeremiah affirms the faith by depending on the Lord and having hope in the Lord:

"Blessed is the person who trusts in the
Lord, and whose hope the Lord is."
(Jeremiah 17:7)

One day the young man – now my brother in the Lord – is called out to the special unit, and when he returned I find out that they have a trial date set for him. They need to have a pre-trial first because the industrial trauma made an invalid out of him. In these conditions he will perish. He needs to regain his health. There were no fines, and he didn't have any reprimands for his work.

The trial day came, and also his release. My brigade was going to work the second shift. It was a good time to pray with my friend and say farewell in a brotherly way. I accompanied him to the checkpoint. My eyes followed him as we parted, and I prayed in my mind, asking God to help him withstand temptations when he was at liberty.

Once again my work days in the camp were spent in solitude. From one perspective it was sorrowful – that was according to human feelings. From the other perspective I rejoiced that God gave this young man repentance here in the

camp, and that God gave him a big present – his freedom. It is a great blessing to be under the rays of the sun at liberty. To be an invalid in the camp was impossible.

CHAPTER 9 – MY FAITH IS CHALLENGED

In my childhood I loved to go fishing with my contemporary friends and neighbors. At the location where my childhood took place there was a big reservoir (artificial lake) with a long dam. Personally, I was not very good at catching fish. However, I loved to catch fish when there was stillness in the air, and the surface of the water was smooth. The movement underwater was very visible. Unfortunately, the stillness was short-lived, for as soon as the sun rose above the horizon, gusts of wind would arrive and the smooth reflective surface of the water would disappear from view. The wind intensifies and waves form on the surface, leaving me with nothing interesting to look at.

It turns out that in nature, stillness lasts only for a short time. God teaches us that in the Christian life, stillness is a short instant, given only to take a breather – for our entire life is a battle. (Ephesians 6:10-17) There are many winds that disturb our stillness: constant misunderstanding from unbelievers, abuse, slander, partaking in Christ's sufferings, saying spiteful things in Christ's name. Apostle Peter wrote:

"Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you . . ."

(1 Peter 4:12)

In principle, an impartial Russian proverb states:

"The pike is located in the lake so that the carp won't sleep."

An example: There are storm clouds that move very fast, and sometimes they can be disastrous, with sharp gusts of wind, thunder and lightning bringing fire. Then there are lingering clouds, sometimes lasting several days or even several weeks. During this time many people suffer from various illnesses, pains in the bones, heart diseases, and suffering from respiratory problems in the lungs; and there are even people who cannot endure it any longer and die.

Once again gloomy dark clouds came for a time and clouded over my life. By the KGB's design, I would say, a foul operation was in the works again. Except this time, it would be carried out by strange hands – a convict's hands. One of the days was our regular search in the residential camp. During this search day, one of the leaders – an influential criminal authority – had a wooden board torn from under his bed, and a sword about eighty centimeters (30.5 inches) long was found there. Two versions were proposed:

- (1) While the search was going on, the overseers themselves placed the sword under the bed according to someone's command in order to take advantage of this moment for their own profitable purposes.

- (2) The sword could have been there, and someone in the cell knew about it and led someone precisely to it.

This incident took place not even in our cell. According to the process of the search, it was clear that for the overseers performing the search, it was their main maneuver to simply run through a surface check in our cell. During the time of the search, I suffered mostly on account of the letters; however, this time everything passed by without any problems. It's hard to say what passed by, because the biggest hit came from another side.

The strangest thing on this day was that they called out my first and last name – for me to appear immediately to the chief officer in the operations unit. It was the same officer who constantly harassed and oppressed me. Usually, when he called for an investigation – as a preventative measure – he always said it out loud. He would find me in any location, and he loved to give me out publicly. Very often he would call me out when the brigade went to work, and he did it in order to cause a discussion about the Christians in the minds of the convicts. In simple words, he loved to pour out poison around me.

On this day he calls me out on the intercom system. This is very strange, but it was necessary to go.

When I entered the consulting-room, we had the same burning question of the day: the letters of my friends and the miniature gospel, which I copied from the letters verse by verse. The threats began: I would pay for these actions; they could take me away from this zone; they could add a charge against me and send me off to another routine and another camp, because I manufacture anti-Soviet literature in the camp. He gives me a severe warning about everything that could happen. On this day I did not proceed to the isolation area. Everything seemed strange, and my soul felt an unaccustomed uneasiness.

Everyone returns to the residential zone, where there are many serious life problems. They arrested the leader (criminal authority), who allegedly had a sword under his bed, for fifteen days. Someone distributes the news to the criminals that on this day I was called to the operations unit – which meant the treachery was the work of my hands? In masterly fashion, they reasoned the KGB set it up like a jeweler sets a stone in a ring. A heated skirmish began. The crowd that was the circle of friends around the leader – these hotheaded persons pulled me out on the street for a dismantling. About forty to fifty people gathered. I stood alone. They yelled at me like madmen and made a loud racket, but nobody laid a finger on me. For now it was only a psychological attack. During the time of this skirmish, I stood silently and prayed to God,

calling on the protective blood of Christ Jesus. In this situation there was nothing else that I could do.

I tried to ask for words of explanation, even though this was very difficult to achieve. Nevertheless, I made a feeble attempt to give an explanation:

"I am a Christian. That's the reason I'm here amongst you. During the time that I've already been here, you all know that I have nothing to do with all these matters. I myself suffer constantly from harassment by the chief officer more than any of you. You are all a witness to this."

Nobody wanted to pay much attention to the sound of my voice. Hundreds of people watched the unfolding drama from the windows of the second story. The storm played itself out for now. But how and when would it end? O, God! Give me strength to endure this ordeal. This kind of help King David once asked for:

"I am poor and needy; make haste to me, O God! You are my help and my deliverer; O Lord, do not delay." (Psalm 70:5)

I couldn't sleep all night. I spent the entire night in prayer, weeping and thinking. Through extensive analysis, I evaluated the entire situation that occurred during the past day. There was much here that was incomprehensible – why was it like this, and what would happen in the future?

To possess such a large sword for a convict was senseless – it's not practical in a fight. Furthermore, nobody fights with swords here. There are more useful weapons that can be sharpened, like personally-made knives and other kinds of material. Therefore, according to this version, there is only one explanation: this sword was definitely planted. And I was not even able to find out about its presence in the prison. The leader was locked up for fifteen days. The possibility of an outcome for the time being was hidden, but the war was carried on by his brother-soldiers.

There was some misunderstanding, but most of the arguments favored the side that I was being set up by the KGB; to put it more bluntly, the KGB laid out the scheme of this battle on their map, and somewhere on the sidelines they were grinning and waiting for blood to flow. Without exception, they were observing the situation and were making up a plan to increase the assault in order to simply destroy or crush me with a stranger's hands.

For me the chance for life or for victory in this situation depended completely on prayer and on the Lord. Prayers from my lips and thoughts never ceased. I needed to continue to wait for an outcome and to have faith in the Lord – and to move forward. In no case could I allow fear or doubt into my mind now. I could not complain about my fate. Otherwise, I would be crushed

instantly, like being caught in a press machine. Presently, it was necessary to stand firm and wait – to wait and stand firm. In this time of the Lord, he sends us into troubles and he delivers us out of them:

"You let us be put in a net (prison),
chains were put on our legs.
You have set men over our heads;
we entered into fire and into water,
and you led us into freedom."

(Psalm 66:11-12)

In the morning I was supposed to go to work. After a sleepless night, I didn't even go to breakfast. I decided in my spirit that I would spend this day in prayer and fasting, even though it would be difficult to do this until evening, especially because of the hard work. When our work brigade stopped in our column for the usual search at the checkpoint between the residential and the workers zones, I glanced at the platform where the officers usually stood and conducted the appropriate searches. The chief officer stood on the platform. At this moment a pain struck my heart. I looked at him, and he saw that I was observing him. He had a satisfied, wide grin on his face. In my inner spirit, something made me exclaim "Oi" as in an instant I had a revelation – this matter is the work of the chief officer! Now I stopped posing questions in my mind and straining it, and wasting my strength.

As I stood in the column, I remembered the word of the Lord spoken through the Prophet Nahum:

"The destroyer has come up against you:
keep a good look-out, watch the way,
make yourself strong,
let your power be greatly increased."
(Nahum 2:1)

This was the time to summon all my strength and pray to God! Once again I needed to knock on heaven's door, and at every instant to bring to God's throne all the elements of this battle. Prayer to God!

The psychological attacks continued all day, one right after another, by the group of convicts that belonged to the leader's circle. They came by my working place and stopped, and then yelled something, trying to intimidate me. At times they called me out to the side to give some explanation, and in the meantime my work load would accumulate. I was overloaded in the process, and the other workers started swearing at me for holding up the work. It was a nightmare! It was like an actual hell in this pit. O, God! How many more days will there be like this? How many more tiring and unresolved days?

The work shift is finished, and we head back in a column to the residential zone. I hear catcalls and outcries directed at me from the convicts. While waiting for dinner, I was called

out to the courtyard. About thirty to forty men came to watch another dramatic dismantling, and hundreds of observers watched from all sides. Once again I requested the opportunity to explain:

"I am a Christian person, and we never occupy ourselves with evil acts against anyone. I won't talk much, for only guilty people try to justify themselves."

Before me stands a roaring crowd. Practically nobody wants to pay attention to what I have to say. It is the law of the mob now, and the mob has always been a bad thing. There were even death threats against me! Countless vulgarities and malice were hurled at me. The entire camp was under intense tension. What will happen between the gang and the Christian?

I didn't go to dinner, even though there was nothing much to eat there; nevertheless, the organism was somehow upheld by the meager provisions. A second night, and the raging elements became even more complex. The body aches from the slave labor. I didn't eat anything, and my insides are churning. To stand alone against such a mob – it's entirely not in my power. I seemed to be pressed in on all sides like in a vise.

I already survived two whole days. And yet there is no outcome, even though I expected one. On the contrary, everything intensified. I waited

for an outcome more so than the guards waited for dawn – but it did not arrive.

On the third day, something started to shine through, and I saw how God started to do something, even though there was much that was unclear to me.

In the shop we had several civilian people at the supervising industrial posts. One of them came up to me and started to ask me:

“What is happening to you? It is terrible to look at you. You’re physically emaciated, and your face looks like it doesn’t have any life. You appear to be lifeless.”

By the way, this person respected me a lot for my diligence, and I in turn did a lot of work for them when he asked. The point is that I was skillful and experienced at doing work with the electric welder. And whenever a lot of defective products were accumulated, they asked me – when I was not on my work shift – to come and help them repair the products. I did the electric welding work with pleasure. For a long time now, they wanted to transfer me to this work, but the operations unit did not give permission, and thus I was forced to drag out the process of my drudgery.

And so, when he asked me the question about what was happening to me, I explained my entire situation. It was understood that he couldn’t help me in any way in this situation. He stood next to me, and I saw his pain for me on his

face. We talked a little longer and then he left to his own cabinet (private room). After a while, he again passes by and calls me to his side. I came up to him and saw by the look on his face that something was really bothering him. He started to tell me:

“I can’t look at you with peace in my heart. Work is not going well for me. I feel in my conscience that I must help you somehow. Maybe you can tell me how I can help you. I’m risking everything on this.”

After these words I look at him and I see tears forming in his eyes. For a certain amount of time we just stood there silently. It was difficult to say anything.

Then I said to him: “All I ask of you as far as your help is concerned, is for you to mail my letter to my parents. I need to inform them of the entire situation around me. They will be able to pray to God with many other believers for a solution to my problems of pain and suffering that I’m going through.”

He agreed and answered that it would not be difficult to do this for me. Then he added: “I’m giving you my address. If your father finds it necessary to convey a letter back to you, let him bring it to me at this address.” I wrote everything down and sent it off with him. I did all this in his cabinet (private room).

Thank God! This was exactly what I was wishing for – to find a contact! And here it is! I

wanted to yell out at the top of my voice for the services that were offered to me. Finally I have a messenger. At last heaven has opened up! And God has started his work! This strengthened my faith in that, if God had started to operate to help me, then he had started everything. In him were all the decisions. He had led in this path of deep pain, and this means that there would be a powerful result.

"Our steadfastness in hard tests, in pains and sufferings – this is the path of victory. This means that God brings us to the next initial position of a more responsible and more complex battle."

For me the most important thing was that now my parents and my many friends would know about my calamity. Now they, along with the brothers and sisters in the Church, will throw themselves into the storm of intercessory, petitioning prayer to God! The Christian mail system works just as good – if not better – as the civil postal system. That's why if our Church will know, then the entire region will know in a day. Then experienced people will step in and serve with intercessory prayers on behalf of someone's suffering. In our Church, we had many such believers who were ready to throw themselves in the fire and into the water for their friends. Only God could do this in the hearts and lives of these people. We were taught this method of intercession from early childhood, when our elder

brethren sat in prisons. We all went through this practical probationary period, and we acquired skills on being there where it was painful for someone, and to help those in difficulties.

All these days pass by like in a nightmare. My prayer acquired a distinct characteristic – it was full of moans and groans. Sometimes I couldn't find the words for prayers. There's no gloom or depression, just a heavy burden on the heart. There's no sleep, except it's not from anxiety; it's from an overloaded nervous system. It seems that everything had to be tolerated. The organism had grown thin and ill. I was aware that God had started his work, and I thanked him for that. But the daily superhuman burden on the psyche wears down everything: the physical, emotional, and the nervous system.

I receive a letter from my father through my contact. My father was able to now write about everything, knowing that I would be the only person reading the letter. I gave my contact a nickname: "a ministering angel from the Lord." In the future he would fulfill a mission from the Lord more than once! Yes, the world does have its good people. May God bless him and count it in the number of good deeds that he fulfilled for the children of God. God used him in a wondrous way in helping me in my crisis. I always prayed for him with tears in my eyes so that the Lord would take into account his labor, for this was

truly a service to a person in need. As Christ once said:

"The one who receives you receives me, and the one who receives me receives the One who sent me . . . and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones, in the name of a disciple, truly I say to you he will never lose his reward." (Matthew 10:40, 42)

"O Lord, save the ministering person that you sent to help me, and reveal yourself to him as the personal savior of the souls of men!" These words did not depart from my lips.

When I opened the letter, my father informed me that on an appointed date there would be a day of fasting and prayer. This would be in our Church and in other churches. It would occur this coming Sunday, and on subsequent days. Praise God! Now I'm not the only one standing in the gap. The tall walls and the barbed-wire may separate us physically, but spiritually we are united before our God as one chain with chain links uniting us one with the other now and forever. We can't see each other's faces, and we miss each other when we meet, but we are very deep in each other's hearts. We are separated physically, but in a spiritual battle – we are united. It's not important where the incense from the censer goes, or where the sacrifice takes place; it's only important that the smoke of the incense, which is the prayers of the

saints, rise in unison like a united cloud upwards to the presence of God, bringing praise to God!

All these days I lived under such intense pressure. Everyone waited for the decisive day when their leader would be freed. He would have the last word. But for now there are threats and accusations against me in front of the mob of convicts, and every day their work continues towards psychological destruction.

The designated day for the fast and prayer was Sunday. We were sent off to work under orders. The criminals, from morning onwards, warned me that today their leader is being set free. Everyone is waiting for a thunderstorm.

I didn't go to breakfast. I determined in my soul to have a specific fast and prayer this day. I remember the words of Christ:

"This kind is not cast out except by prayer and fasting." (Matthew 17:21)

It must be understood that fasting itself does not cast out this kind, but our relationship with God. There were continuous prayers these days, especially on this day. I know there is a powerful group of praying brothers and sisters covering my back.

We go to work in our usual column formation. Mentally, I started to paint a picture of today's events like an artist would. So what happens? The designated fast and prayer of the Church coincides on the same day with the freeing of the leader (criminal authority), who

would have the last word on this day. That's how it will happen! I almost wanted to shout out in the column – Praise God! It turns out that this is a day where two forces collide: the force of cruelty and evil standing face to face with God's power, the force of goodness and mercy. At this moment my spirit was touched and I expressed a single word out loud: "Ah!"

A convict next to me asks: "What happened? Are you having a heart seizure?"

"Oh, no," I answered. There was nothing further to explain. This would remain a mystery for him.

It was time for lunch. All the convicts leave the shop and rapidly line up in the column. They go to the dining hall to eat the gruel. I remain by myself in the shop, leaning my elbows on a large tub of water, where the cylinders were turned and tested under a high air pressure. I pray.

I look and see a man in civilian clothes entering through the door. He was decently dressed in a suit. Something inside me started to pound, as if I was caught in a frost. I start to pray harder with deep contrition.

The man in the suit stood over me and asks me: "How long a term do you still have to serve?"

"Three years," I answered, not wanting to get into a conversation with him. My thoughts say, 'Why have you come? I have a very important day ahead of me, and I have a chance

here to pray to God, to have a private moment. Your visit is interrupting everything for me.'

He corrects me with the exact time of my term: three years, and the exact amount of months and days. Throughout this encounter, my emotions feel like they are tearing me apart. I started to pray as if I didn't care where I was. He comes closer to me, places his hand on my shoulder, and says:

"Be comforted with hope,
In mourning be patient.
Soon help will arrive!"

I felt as if I were chained to the metal that I was leaning on. I couldn't lift my head. I couldn't move. I simply collapsed as I prayed to God until he left. As soon as he slipped away behind the door, instantly the condition releases me, and I quickly hurry after him to see him. Who was this? But my attempts to find him were useless. I didn't find him anywhere. Now it became obvious to me who this was. This was a messenger sent by heaven! I experienced a personal touch of his hand and felt warmth and his power through my entire natural being.

My work day was finished, and again we return to the residential zone in columns. Now I bravely return from work. In my soul there's a completely different condition – I have my answer from God. I am absolutely certain that the leader will have the last word. Today he is set free and is waiting for me in the residential zone.

However, the word he speaks will now be from the Lord, and it won't be the kind of word the mob wants to hear. I absolutely believe that the outcome of all these created problems will be produced by God himself! I can't imagine it yet – standing in the formation of the column – how it will all be resolved. But there is no doubt that it will be a positive outcome, because all power was in the hands of God. God prepared something in the supernatural order, and I am sure that those who conceived of the evil plan will be shamefully brought to ruin, just like the biblical Haman who schemed against Mordecai (in the Book of Esther).

While waiting for dinner, I am called outside with the freed leader. I come out of the cell of my barracks, and behind the wall I hear the conversation of two fellows:

"They'll destroy the young man."

"No doubt, they'll beat him up."

I'm on the street. Today all the evil from the entire camp has surrounded me. Suddenly, I find myself in the center of a ring. I lift my head and see a mass of convicts watching from the windows. They're all looking at this event with anticipation: "What will happen?"

The leader (criminal authority) approaches me. He does something that the camp never saw nor heard of until this day. As they say: "They won't see or hear anything like this after today." When he came close to me, he apologized for his

friends, who terrorized me all these days. He extended his hand to me and said:

"For me, you will always be a man I will respect as a Christian person. Here in this place, nobody will at any time harm you anymore!"

Then he turned to the crowd of convicts and announces: "Everything has been investigated, and this Christian man is innocent. The authorities know who did this and why it was done."

Several days afterwards the events became public. It was the dirty work of the operations unit. Two people suffered from this set-up by the KGB – the leader and I. To create this kind of dirt – this was communistic professionalism to oppress and destroy its own nation. They had their own specialists for these actions.

Nevertheless, the final victory belonged to God's side! On this day God blew away all the overhanging long-drawn-out clouds that had brought such terrible pains. How much physical, moral, and spiritual strength was wasted on this ordeal in order to withstand the fire and not get burned!

At the height of the resolution of all the cases and situations, God raises us up through the path of tears, pain, and suffering.

"One of the strange ways of Providence is that many people have to suffer in the very way in which they would rather not have to suffer, have to go through life denied the one thing that most

of all they would rather not be denied. Such people many very properly comfort themselves in the assurance that when God is bearing down extra hard in His grinding it is that the finished diamond may be extra bright and beautiful." (Halley's Bible Handbook, by Henry H. Halley, p. 665)

The Bible says: "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another." (1 Peter 4:8)

On this occasion, the theologian Henry Halley writes: "Brothers in a common Glorious Hope, be real Brothers to one another in time of Suffering."

Thank God for all the friends and people whom God used in the outcome of this complex sequence of events.

CHAPTER 10 – A PRECIOUS FAITH WORTH MORE THAN GOLD

After a lengthy analysis and reflection on the preceding events, and about the terrible storm, God again opened the door into his storeroom, where it was possible to penetrate into the revelations of God's promises. I was firm in my belief that all the trials of life served for the purpose of obtaining "the precious faith from our God, and our Savior Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 1:1) This is why Apostle Peter says:

"Dear friends, do not be surprised by the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you."

(1 Peter 4:12)

The results of the events opened the door of opportunity for people to express their interest in the reality of such a strong faith. Previously, their knowledge of the faith and their relationship to it was dictated to them by the ideologies of atheism and communism.

For example: One of the convicts waited for a moment when I was walking by myself in the courtyard of the camp. Then he approached me and said:

"I have been observing you from the side, and I have formulated my personal opinion about your faith. People have been seeking God from the very distant antiquity, and for their mind God had to be the protector in all their activities:

during natural disasters, during wars, and during epidemics of disease. Their other gods were supposed to bring them rain, and settled weather during harvest time. Why is it that in your faith, your God doesn't serve you as a protector? What sense is it to have a faith and undergo such suffering, as you have experienced here in the camp? All right, there – at liberty – they tie you to your activities and events. But here, when you are found suffering for your faith, it seems you are suffering for the heroism you displayed at liberty. According to my logical reasoning, your God should be a protector and defender from trouble, as if he were rewarding you for everything – for your faithfulness and courage – in all your activities that you performed at liberty. Here you are becoming sour like the cabbage or tomatoes in the pickling barrel. Here the chief officer doesn't give you any peace, and he's breaking you into pieces. He'll continue to break you and oppress you. After all, that's the kind of system we have, and you know it very well. If you don't agree with something or you have your own opinion, which you express in society – they'll oppress you through prisons, etapes (stages of a journey through transit cells), and camps. We have enough of those in our country. And the KGB has enough power to implement the destruction of these kinds of individuals. Is it possible that your God gets some satisfaction out of your suffering? If so, then it turns out to be

one-sided. He's looking out only for himself, and you are here to be destroyed!"

This conversation turned out to be very long, and I asked him to find a better place, for it would be better not to be seen in plain view. Someone could be watching us. It was forbidden to talk about God in the camp – it was a criminal offense. For this one could receive punishment in isolation, or maybe even another term with another regimen.

So we took precautionary measures, and we had a very inspiring discussion. This was not a crafty or deceitfully refined conversation; it was a sincere discussion that displayed a strong interest in spiritual matters. This man was very educated, and we disagreed with each other in a pleasant way. He loved to prove things to me, and he had his own strong opinions. Nevertheless, he did not repent, and after many such meetings, I always felt a nice feeling in my soul. It was the mood of one who had fulfilled a purpose. I believe that the time of my ordeal was a door through which it was necessary to pass in order to enter a new condition, which God was preparing at this time. These individual discussions became too numerous to relate. Sometimes I had to pay a heavy price for these discussions – but there was no choice.

For us the time of our ordeal is difficult because the zone of silence does not shine through the prism of winds and storms. We do

not experience satisfaction, peace, and enjoyment through the prism of elemental natural events. During the time of suffering, we are not given the right to contemplate fame and glory – for glory is given to God. Our glory is given to us later – in the heavens! Apostle Paul wrote:

“From now on, the crown of righteousness is made ready for me, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that day.”

(2 Timothy 4:8)

One only knows: after spring, God gives us summer, and after summer comes winter. After the elements and the forces of nature, there comes silence and peace. The time of the elements, none the less, have always been times of loss and suffering. The Christian must always be ready for suffering because no one promised us a calm sea. We were only promised a peaceful haven of rest.

Thanks to this test and ordeal, I now was faced with an enormous occupation. I wasn't able to take a peaceful leisurely walk during my free time, for somebody would always come up and ask me something. The conversations did not always have positive conclusions, but I was thankful for even that. The past situation provided many convicts an opportunity to make a contact and discuss spiritual themes.

With the aforementioned person, and with others, I loved to share the first epistle of Apostle

Peter in answer to their questions. This epistle was one of the closest to my heart because, during the 1960's, when most of the brethren from our Church sat in the prisons, the mothers would constantly read and encourage each other with the words of this epistle. Apostle Peter writes:

“So that your genuine faith, which is more valuable than gold that perishes when tested by fire, may result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 1:7)

It's not worth talking about the value of gold, for gold in all ages has been precious and greatly valued. If you compare gold with “the precious faith” (2 Peter 1:1) – then the following should be remembered: gold is a companion of humans to man's dying breath, and then it has no more value or meaning for the dead person. The heir obviously becomes the possessor of the value of gold. And the heir lives according to the same scenario as the predecessor, who waits for his end, which will come near to him at a time not of his own choosing or his own will. But the precious faith – this is God's gift:

“For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.” (Ephesians 2:8)

Faith serves as heaven's significance, and it exists for the realization of that which is expected

– the eternal, immeasurable, and incorruptible. Faith operates from the side of eternity.

Precious faith is worth more than gold. The interesting fact is: wood for fuel in the fireplace is very simple to get, as people say, "It doesn't take a lot of brains" – but gold procures a valuable life, and many people give their lives for the mining of gold.

History tells us: from 1848 to 1855 there was the California Gold Rush. Many people rushed to this part of the world to become fortunate, but not many were successful. Many wanted to become happy, and they sent their families looking for gold. Many of them didn't return to their homes – they sacrificed their lives in various conditions and circumstances.

The gold miners washed entire hillsides of sand and rock in order to wash out a few gold nuggets. And if they were lucky enough to find some gold, well, it was only a material thing. Pure gold comes from fire.

Jesus Christ came to this earth under a similar scenario as the gold miners. But it was not the shining gold of earth that was in his will, for you can't amaze Christ with earthly gold. The heavenly gold was more abundant and more beautiful. (Rev. 4:4, 9:7, 21:18) For Christ it was more valuable to bring the gospel of salvation to people. Christ's mission was to find a person and open his consciousness so he would see his own sinfulness and unworthiness, and then illuminate

it with his cleansing blood, "washing it by the laver of water in the word of life." (Ephesians 5:26) The person becomes divine material. And so, Christ gives his life for the person:

"So that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

Further in time God fuses and blends this material, for it is necessary to obtain the precious faith – pure as gold – without human adulterations. That's how he makes a perfected person. (Ephesians 4:13) God does everything according to the principles of his nature and his character.

And so, don't be amazed now as to why God leads through the way of tears and sorrow. Sometimes there's no explanation for them, but it's because the precious faith is obtained through trial by fire. The furnace of melting is located in God's hands and in his will!

In track and field athletics there is a relay race with the passing of the baton. At each leg of the race, a member of a team races up to the exchange point, where the baton is handed off to the next athlete, who carries on the race for an assigned distance.

The relay race for the precious faith is not handed off like a baton to someone else. Don't hurry with the analysis and comparison! Read carefully: Our parents contributed to us their many prayers so that we would follow the way of Christ when we stood on the platform of decision.

They desired with all their hearts that we make the decision of accepting Christ as our personal Savior. This is the process of rebirth – this is faith in action. But the precious faith is the individual path of the Christian life. It is a wide range of actions that God performs in the life of a believer. God, according to his plan, makes interventions and intrusions on the territory of a Christian's life in his will. He sometimes brings tears, pains, and sufferings – but it is known as the precious faith. Many Christians, like gold miners, gave their lives for the precious faith. The precious faith – its value is worth a life!

It must be remembered: there will be days in the valley of terrestrial trials, burdens, and deprivations; there will be days without a ray of hope, and a person feels loneliness and helplessness – but you are not alone! Thank God! When everything seems to turn against you, remember that God is for you! You just need to continue to believe, not with your feelings or emotions, but well-grounded in the gospel of the word of God. Continue to pray and trust in God – he is the real answer! Through your trials you will become stronger and more firm in the faith. This is the province of God's work. He will come and help you – immediately!

On the first day of April, 1977, the high council of the USSR changed the criminal legislation, and a decree changed the articles concerning the military tribunals. Those convicts

that were sentenced by the military court, and who had served at least two-thirds of their term, they were sent to designated places where there were large construction projects or chemical complexes of factories. This was called deportation. At these places the convicts lived in dislocation under the command of the Special Commandant's Office with its regimen. He was not permitted to leave the confines of the town or city. He was permitted to go to the city only with a pass, from six in the morning to seven in the evening. If the convict had several violations, he would be returned to the work camp and the time served would not be counted; when he returned to the camp he continued his term from the time of his deportation. Not a single day was accrued.

The committee constantly worked at this deportation. More than one thousand convicts were deported to various places. One day, my name was called, along with a group of more than forty-six people, for the formulation of all the needed documents.

The dispatching of convicts begins. Once again the etapes (stages of a journey) await them. There's a small group leaving every day by various geographical routes of the USSR.

CHAPTER 11 – ETAPE TO A PRISON IN KHERSON

On the sixth of May, in the morning, the family names of forty-six men were read out. We were told to get ready for the etape (stages of a journey). This was the hardest moment for any convict in the former Soviet Union. Customarily, they called the names out a lot earlier because it was necessary to go through the searches and procedures, then the loading into special cars, and finally the sending off to the train at the station.

Three hours before the departure of the train from the station, they loaded us into the Stolypin – the special carriage (railcar) for convicts. This was an unforgettable time in my life – a time of wild horror. I recall this etape frequently, and I always say: "When a person gets old and his mind gets impoverished and he loses his memory, then this etape that I experienced will still remain in my memory – I will never forget it." This kind of experience is not erased from memory and is not forgotten.

The month of May was unusual. That year an extreme heat stood on the street. All forty-six of us were loaded into the carriage and left in an impossible situation. We weren't allowed to open the windows; the convoy leader answered that he didn't have permission to open the windows while the train was standing at the station. However, a

soldier at the end of the carriage was allowed to open a window and stand beside it, breathing in fresh air. The interior heated up from the sun, and they didn't give water to the convicts. Furthermore, it is forbidden to use the toilet while the train is standing. It seemed to us that our life would end at this place. It turned out we were in an artificial gas-chamber. The lips were instantly wounded. The scorching stench caused severe headaches. Whoever had a defective heart condition started to howl like an animal.

O Lord! What's ahead? Can it be that my entire life will end here in this stinking carriage? There have been worse situations, and you delivered me from those difficulties! Can this truly be the final situation?

The convicts, who weren't able to hold it physically, started to adapt to the situation by using their shoes or boots as a toilet, as was usual in these circumstances during the etape. The stench of a toilet accumulated in the stinky carriage. It was obviously an unsanitary environment, even though there was no scientific analysis. We were totally helpless here in these atrocious animalistic conditions. These were the methods the Communistic party and its regime used to create "excursions" for many Christians.

Late at night we arrived in the city of Kherson. Again we encounter the howls of the frightful dogs and the soldiers with automatic weapons, who surround us in a circle. The yells

of the commanding military convoy, the cages in the railcars, and the loading into these cages preceded the journey to the prison in Kherson.

Several years ago, I worked for eight months in a mission in this city. I was familiar with all the Christian brothers and sisters. Once or twice a day I would ride past the outside of this jail. Now I'm here on the inside. If only these friends of mine could know that I'm here! But alas! Here it is the middle of the night and they're resting while we're going through these torments of the soul. Even if this happened during the day, nobody would know or be able to help in any way.

The prison in Kherson also left its mark, just like the etape to Kherson, which took away a significant part of one's health – and for some a health that would never be repaired.

By morning we all landed in the cells, which were empty before our arrival. Being experienced in these etapes (in the transit cells), I chose a place furthest from the entrance. And in order not to have to fight for a plank-bed with anyone, I climbed up to the upper level of a bunk-bed. The plank-beds were the familiar metal plates with intervals between them. A padded jacket served little comfort against the metal plates, which cut into the skin. It was necessary to turn to another side of the body every five to seven minutes; otherwise the body would be covered in bruises. A horrible phenomenon greeted us – bedbugs like we encountered in the

Bryansk prison – it was a horror that attacked us without any pity and without a conscience.

In the morning, as it turned out, our common barrel for drinking water was found to be rusty halfway. This was an outrage. All day there was an uprising by the convicts, but by evening they weren't able to accomplish anything, for they weren't valued for anything here. The situation became more complicated at night. The leaders of our etape (stage) announced that our cell was declaring a fast as a sign of protest. A hunger-strike in the prison was a serious violation of government rules.

In the morning, nobody approached the food. Nobody took any food, and nobody drank the water from the rusty barrel. At lunch time, nobody approached the small door where the food was distributed; and at night nobody takes any food, either. The hunger-strike continues for two full days. The following morning, again nobody takes any food. However, right before lunch about ten officers with big stars came into our cell. This was already connected to the state enterprise. Negotiations were carried on several times, and finally the rusty barrel was exchanged.

The punishment began at night. In the dark of night, hardly anyone slept. It was already three days without food, including the day without food on the etape (stage). The convicts are hungry and angry like wild animals, and nobody can sleep. The doors to the cell open, and in fly

several officers, who were with us for the negotiations during the day. They shine the light from their flashlights into our faces, and they led away those who presented their grievances at the negotiations.

This was disturbing for the soul. What was behind all this? Within a short period of time, everything became the property of public knowledge. Those who were carried off were taken to a cell. They were forcefully held by their hands and legs and then were thrown to the floor, like lifeless objects.

Several of them were left unconscious. Then the officers started to drag out those convicts closest to the entrance. There were innocent people who were silent during the negotiations. A general slaughter began with the threat: "We will show you Soviet authority." They brought back the beaten ones, throwing them like sacks of sand into the cell, and then they dragged the next in turn out of the plank-beds and took them away. I did not appeal to God for a pardon. At this moment I called out for the Blood of Jesus Christ, for God to forbid these demons from further madness.

"The Blood of Christ, the Blood of Jesus Christ," I repeated with my lips without interruption.

Several revived convicts told me: "Say this prayer louder! Maybe it will help us in some way.

They're going to cripple all of us. We're going to be slaughtered."

I told them: "I'm saying the prayer, the Blood of Jesus Christ. Say these words with me."

They started to voice these words out loud: "The Blood of Christ, the Blood of Christ!"

The slaughter stopped after about twenty-five to thirty men were severely beaten. O, God! The convicts received a practical lesson and understanding about what the Soviet authority represented, and what constituted Communism, which was raised up by the Communists for the whole world. This was genocide and a crime against its own people.

After analyzing these events, I prayed to God for these convicts who called out for the Blood of Jesus Christ during a difficult time of paranoia and confessed it with their own mouth. I think that after our separation, the Blood of Christ will not give them peace and will cry out in their hearts like the blood of Abel. May God give them salvation.

CHAPTER 12 – DEPORTATION TO PYATIZYORNAYA

On the eighteenth of May, we prepared again for an etape (journey through transit cells). Again we're in a concrete box, like being trapped in a pair of iron pincers. The stench, the unsanitary conditions; can't sit, can't eat; just walk back and forth, and wait. The train will come at night. They torment us with hunger the entire day, since we don't count for anything here. There are massive searches. As I leave the cell, I thank God in my thoughts for the mercy he manifested towards me during all this time of prison torments. I especially was thankful that God gave me strength in the camp to perform the extremely difficult work. Everything passed like in a dream. Everything would pass into history. There was still a lot of time to serve, and deportations to endure, before my entire term would be finished. Ahead lay a road of more time and more unknown probabilities – what would I meet during the deportations? O God, give me a blessing! No matter how many trials still lie ahead – give me strength to only move forward!

The command comes to move out on the etape. Again we receive inhuman treatment. This time the convicts are more subdued and quiet, for they have already experienced "Soviet authority." We were crowded into the railcar like a bunch of fish – then into the convict carriage

Stolypin. We waited in the cars for the train – a passer-by. The oppressive heat – everyone understood it would be the final trial, and tomorrow would be a new day, in new conditions. Even that would be a small token of freedom.

And here is the reality of it all: on the nineteenth of May, the forty-six men arrived at the place of dislocation – Station Pyatizyornaya. This place of exile for convicts was from the reign of Catherine II (the Great).

After several days, the brothers Misha and Vasily Yerusalemtsi found me. Here, after several days, I met with other brothers in the Lord who were also deported here: Nikolay Gavrilyuk and Peter Bondarenko. Then I was introduced to the churches in the vicinity, even though this was very risky. The three of us were serving out our terms there.

CHAPTER 13 – THE TESTIMONY OF BROTHER VICTOR

This is a letter I received from a brother in the Lord:

Dear Vasily Sergeyevich!

Through the words of your large and benevolent heart, Jesus took me out of the bosom of refuse and placed me on the rock of a new life. Please find a small place for the gratitude of my heart, dear pastor, the part of my heart that you're taking as you leave.

Thank you for that mutually memorable, cold March evening, and thank you for not closing the door in my face. This will remain in my heart, along with you, for the rest of my life.

May our eternal living God bless you and your entire wonderful family.

God is with you, and that means everything will be good.

Victor and Tamara Troshin

Pay attention to the underlined words in this letter: "Thank you for not closing the door in my face." I have a powerful testimony in relationship to those words.

Another time arrived. The empire of the Soviet Union collapsed, just like other ancient empires. Sin and violence were never the

foundation of man's development; on the other hand, they were at all times the cause of ruin and destruction. Sin and violence was the sword of the nation against its own people. That's why all the empires fall.

At least the time of freedom came to Ukraine. It was now possible to freely believe and preach the Gospel.

However, during all this time the people's brains were sustained by the atheistic ideology, and even though Communism collapsed, atheism remained in the minds of the people to this day. To our time, many people still believe and express the opinion that Christian people are sectarians or dissenters; in short, they're considered to be people of a lower order. Even though there are Christian people now in Parliament, the mentality of certain people is hard to change. Obviously, it will take some time – if life continues on earth.

The Story of Victor Troshin at the Church Emmanuel in Odessa, Ukraine

It was a cold day in March. The weather in Odessa on the shore of the Black Sea was damp. Our church Emmanuel was evangelizing the city. During the day we evangelized in the squares and parks, and in the evening we evangelized in the church building. This evangelization went for an entire week on the second story of a rented

building named "Youth Center." To enter the hall it was necessary to climb a ladder on the exterior of the building to an iron platform, through a door, and into the hall.

Many new people actively flowed into our church. Among them were two women who were related. On the first day of evangelization, a man appeared at the door in the evening. He was a middle-aged man who dressed well, and it turned out that he was the husband of one of the aforementioned women, and the brother of the other woman. During the service I received several notes:

"Pastor, could you please ask the man in the doorway to close the door and come into the hall. It's awfully cold in the hall."

After reading the note, I approached the man and appealed: "Wouldn't you like to come into the hall? There are still some available places."

"No," he answered in refusal.

Inside my heart I felt that to close the door was something I could do in the form of an order – but I knew I shouldn't do that. Other notes come in my direction with the same request, but I don't make a decision to close the door. Instead I pray to God, and I am thankful that the man has an opportunity to hear the word, even if it's in the doorway.

On the second night, the people again enter the hall, and we greet them. The ushers seat

them where there are vacant places. Many of them appeal to me, before the service, to please close the door if the same man appears again, because many of them would get sick.

I appeared to be in a position between two fires. I comforted the people with the thought that we would pray to God for him so that he would accept Jesus Christ as his personal Savior. This way everything would be resolved and he would be in the hall. Another proposition arose – to pray to God for each other so that nobody in the hall would get sick.

The church service began, and the man appears again in the doorway. I approached the man again several times, and I delicately tried to invite him into the hall:

"It's much more comfortable sitting in the hall than standing in the doorway on the iron platform." But he remained firmly rooted to his spot in the doorway.

On the third night, everything was repeated. Again I individually invite him into the hall. Today he answers that his car is parked in the street, but the locks in the doors don't work.

"All right," I answered. Again the door remains open, and the notes arrive. However, we agreed to pray for the man.

By the end of the week, the man, whose name was Victor, entered the hall and sat in the last row of seats in the hall.

After the completion of the week of evangelization, he continued to attend the church. Sometimes he posed tricky questions. Within time he sat several rows closer to the front; and later on he sat even closer. Soon a turning-point occurs in Victor's life: he accepts Jesus Christ as his personal Savior. In his character, this man was hardworking, well educated, and a person with lots of practical knowledge in life. According to his effort and his fervor, God quickly molded him into an individual for work in the Church where we served together. There was a powerful revelation of God's word in the life of Victor.

Some time passes, and on a Saturday, Victor accepts the sacred water baptism. On Sunday, we had Communion and the breaking of bread, as taught by our Savior Jesus Christ through the word. In our Church there existed a tradition to have people come to the front after the Communion service and give a testimony about their personal path to God, or about something that God had done in their lives. We saw the movement of God in these testimonies. Praise God!

On this day, Victor comes to the front – to the microphone. This was already after his water baptism and after the first communion in his life. Everybody knew that he had something worth testifying about. He took the microphone. It was difficult for him to talk, but he made the attempt.

Here are his own words spoken with tears in his eyes:

"Praise God! I want to thank God for his salvation that was revealed through Jesus Christ. I want to thank all of you for the organization of the evangelism in the month of March. And I want to personally thank the pastor for not closing the door in my face when I stood in the doorway. I did not allow him to close the door, and for that I apologize in front of you, brothers and sisters. You were cold and maybe someone even came down with an illness. The fact is that if the pastor had closed the door, then we would have had to kill him and his assistant. Everything in my car was ready for a murder to take place. The door that I did not allow to be closed served as a password. The dirty deed simply waited for a signal. I referred to the fact that I was watching my car – this was a lie. All the locks in my car worked and the doors closed. What I told you was an utter lie.

"I was pushed into this criminal action because of the following circumstances: my beloved wife and her sister came to church, and we couldn't come to an agreement and show humility.

"I pray to God for his forgiveness, and I ask for your forgiveness. Please forgive me! Everything turned out the way God wanted. Instead of murder, I accepted Jesus Christ. Now

I'm part of the family of saved people. Thank God!"

This was a shock for everybody, like thunder on a clear day. Everything that took place was a significant work of Jesus Christ. This was a manifestation of God's power through the redeeming sacrifice of the lamb, through the operation of the word of God, which brought changes in the mind, spirit, and soul.

This kind of testimony strengthened the Church, proving that the Lord is with us – "He hears us." We received an inspiration to continue "serving people" – and this became our motto.

We returned to this testimony many times. It often ran through our minds, discussions, and analysis.

Brother Victor brought the letter and handed it to me near the train at the station, when we were leaving for America. In his letter of gratitude, he arranged two sentences of his testimony as a daily reminder. This was done out of love, which descended in his life by the Holy Spirit from God.

Brother Victor's First Trial by Fire

At this time, as I'm writing about this history, Brother Victor and Sister Tamara are already located in eternity, and they await us. With their service, they left a wonderful imprint of their service in the Church Emmanuel. It's a pity that

they left so early, for even though they weren't very young, they weren't very old either. They could have lived longer. Heaven determined their time on earth – it was the decision of a supernatural court. So here's the point: in preparation for water baptism, we conducted lessons, stressing the fact that they would encounter various trials and temptations after entering into a covenant with God. This is the tempering of faith. It's not important what the temptation is – it's important to pass through it correctly.

After water baptism, on the following Saturday, according to the schedule of a lighthouse, there was a big evangelization service to which almost our entire Church traveled to. The service proceeds, and there are about two-and-a-half thousand people present. I'm on the platform, and I receive a note:

"Please announce to the owner of a car with the following license number to come immediately to their car." The number was familiar. This was the car of Brother Victor.

'Interesting. I wonder what happened?' I ask myself the question. I make the announcement through the loud speaker.

When the service ended, I come down from the platform, and Brother Victor heads in my direction and says:

"Pastor, we were taught correctly, that after we entered into a covenant with God, we would

encounter trials and temptations. You know, I just encountered one of them. I'm very thankful to God that he sent me a trial, because it shows he loves me more than anybody else. After all, I was supposed to be a murderer, but God gave me the gift of salvation!"

"What happened?" I asked.

"Keep in mind," Victor answered, "just yesterday I finished a major repair on my car, and I painted it. On my first ride I drove to the evangelization here. I parked my car and went to the service. When you announced my number, I hurried to the car. It turns out that someone rammed in an iron rod between the cars and tied up his goat. This goat saw her reflection in my shiny car and smashed the entire left side with her horns. Pastor! You understand – this is iron! We can fix it, but the main thing is that God visited me with this trial. And now by all rights we can count ourselves baptized by water and by fire. This is the sign of God's presence in our lives. Praise God! How he loves us!"

I stood quietly and listened. There was nothing I could say in response. I went out on the street to see the car. The left side was definitely smashed in by the horns of this goat. I stood and didn't say a word. The situation was actually humorous, but it was not something to laugh at in this situation. Inside my heart I was extremely agitated; I was concerned that the devil might find a place in the hearts of Victor and Tamara.

Sometimes people draw conclusions in the heat of the moment, and then after some time an arrangement of importance occurs.

I shook his hand and blessed them. But the image of Victor's car stayed in my mind's eye for a long time.

On Sunday, Brother Victor again ascends to the platform and tells his testimony. Now he talks about the baptism of fire by means of the car and the goat. Now, after a full day of reflection, and after the accidental incident, I was convinced that this trial could be joyfully accepted.

In the future, this incident served as a powerful molding of his personality and the personality of his wife. This was truly the manifestation of God's work! This is how God acts in his nature and in his character. Brother Victor came to kill, but instead he became a servant of God!