



January 1, 2020

Dear Ministry Partner,

Sometimes, as I've discovered —especially in the last few days—**God Himself jumps into your life and shouts, “SURPRISE!”**

We shouldn't be surprised by God's surprises! God has been surprising people for a long, long time! Psalm 77:10 actually says it's *psychosis* (that's the original Hebrew) to think that the Lord could change. But even when God does the unexpected, the psalmist urges us to remember that all the great deeds of the Lord are in your favor—that *that* will be true *always*. He never changes!

I saw it again in Spain and Ukraine—I've just returned from an intensive, whirlwind ministry expedition to both countries. I often return to the U.S. with the feeling of “I wish you'd been there”—but this time, you'll be able to experience it yourself . . . because we shot video. (As soon as it's edited, I'll let you know it's available.)

SURPRISE! You can prove God exists!

First stop: training young people in Madrid for an evangelistic Christmas campaign. They were delighted to learn that we can know that God exists! Professors from two other seminaries attended too, and they were as captivated as the young people by this teaching—they had never heard it themselves!

The campaign was wonderful. We were equipping students to reach out all around the city—and they were ecstatic to have answers for a secular society . . . powerful assurance of their faith in God and in Jesus Christ, His Son.

It was a “POWER weekend”! Against the beautiful backdrop of Christmas ornaments throughout the city, students were asking their community, “Do you know what you're celebrating?” It was the modern-day version of Phillip in Acts 8 asking the eunuch, “Do you understand what you are reading?”

I also taught “homiletics”—basically *how to preach*—through the Bible's narrative literature. In other words, how to share the Gospel through storytelling. Most of the Bible is narrative in nature, so preaching through narrative is crucial to evangelism. These third- and fourth-year students gobbled up the teaching and immediately began producing wonderful messages which will connect powerfully with the lost for years to come!

Then it was on to Ukraine by way of Germany, where I picked up our video-ministry friends Paul and Bob from **Media 7**. Together we flew into Borispol airport in Kyiv. And . . .

SURPRISE! The schedule has been revised!

Our partner, Ruslan, met us at the airport. We scarcely had time to drop off our bags at the seminary before our work began. At a church-planting site, church-planters were ready with a flood of questions. (One hot topic: “Why did God create gender difference?” Since God contains masculinity and femininity within Himself, why not acknowledge both genders within us and choose our preference? It was a joy to bring biblical truth to the table for these eager learners!)

The “schedule” was fluid. I preached in three different church-plants on Sunday alone. Then the church-planters wanted me to do another Bible study on Monday! Then I found myself preaching at the seminary chapel service for students, professors, and staff. When I thought all we were doing in Ukraine was shooting a video!

For the cameras, I interviewed a number of church-planters. And I was thrilled to connect with my good friend Anatoly Prokopchuk, founder of the seminary. We reminisced about our alma matter, Dallas Theological Seminary. (We were both amazed at how old we are! *Surprise!*)

We also fondly recalled that day, almost 20 years ago, when we first connected in Ukraine—and decided to begin planting churches. *What a beautiful shock to look back and realize that hundreds of churches have been born through this sweet partnership in the Lord!*

But this was not simply a stroll down memory lane for two old pals . . . because you were there with us. Anatoly and I both recognized that we were not the only ones who should be celebrating what has happened and what is continuing to happen in Ukraine. **Everything that God has done in Ukraine through our ministry has been achieved through caring, committed friends like YOU.** And it is beautiful.

In a way, you can even see it in the clean bathrooms. There’s a dignity, a child-of-the-King mentality, in our seminary and our churches there that didn’t exist in the old USSR. Our friend Ruslan noted it, with a certain wistfulness. As he explained it to me, he is a child of the old Soviet mentality. He said it with feeling of loss. *I wish I could overcome it in my lifetime*, he said; but he honestly wonders if it will be possible.

Yet given his own background, Ruslan is all the more grateful for the fresh, new God-given mentality that reigns in the seminary. (He calls it the “American church mentality,” and he is grateful to be part of it.)

But then came the greatest surprise of the entire trip. . . .

SURPRISE! God has an unexpected plan for you!

I didn’t expect this—but I found myself before the video cameras interviewing a young church-planter I’ll call Pavel. I recognized him from our past church-planting seminars. He was overjoyed and gave me a huge bear hug. And then he told me a heartbreaking story. . . .

Inspired and equipped through our ministry, he set out to plant a church in his remote home region of Luhansk, in his own hometown of Brianka. Pavel and a man in his congregation realized that they could plant another church in a nearby town, if they only had the funding—and they would have the funding if they didn’t have to pay their water bill. Could they actually dig a well on the church property—stop paying for water—and launch a second church?

Pavel and his friend began talking to anyone and everyone about their dream. But no one would help them. *The town supplies plenty of water*, people said. *Why dig a well?* Finally the pastor and his buddy realized that they would already have the money they needed if they had simply dug a well themselves. So that's what they did! They set to work digging a hole in the courtyard of their church!

And *surprise!* They hit water! Soon they had a functioning well.

But before long—another surprise—INVASION. Russia began shelling the Luhansk region. *The first bombs to fall on Brianka blew up the town's water system.* Suddenly, the only water to be found was at a **well of the church!**

Pavel and his people quickly set up the church as a coffee house—and a water supply depot—for the town. Day after day they ministered to their fellow residents, providing life-giving water and other support in Christ's name.

But the war intensified—the situation grew more and more dangerous—until it was impossible to stay. Finally, at the last possible moment, with Russian troops advancing fast to occupy their town, Pavel and his family had no choice but to flee. They had nothing but the clothes on their backs. They raced to the big city of Kyiv. They were shell-shocked, exhausted—and devastated to leave their ministry behind.

It felt like failure. They were lost . . . despairing . . . unfamiliar with the city. They literally didn't know what to do. But . . .

SURPRISE! God had already written the next chapter!

To keep his wife and two children alive, Pavel took work emptying grocery trucks on a loading dock. Then one day, a man came by—"навмання," Pavel says. "Navmannya"—*at random*. Pavel was shocked that the man recognized him from all the way back in Luhansk. "Pastor! What are you doing here?" the man cried. "You're working here, at the docks? You're a pastor! There is so much need! *You* can't waste your life and talents here!"

In that moment, Pavel sensed the Lord speaking to him. He determined that he would find whatever the Lord had for him to do.

Today, Pavel and his team are planting not one but several churches . . . among fellow refugees from the war-torn east of Ukraine.

Was it a "random" encounter? What are the chances? (I have another pastor friend who teaches his church about "random moments." He asks his congregation, "What are the chances of that?" and they've been taught to reply in unison, "A HUNDRED PERCENT!")

SURPRISE! God has planned ahead for you and me, too!

Friends, we live in an Ephesians 2:10 world! "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them!"

Pavel thought his ministry was over because of the cataclysm of war in his homeland. But it's not over as long as God keeps us on this side of eternity! God, who went to find Pavel at the docks, was ready to introduce him to a new chapter of service.

And what about you and me? What surprises does God have in store for us in this new decade?

I believe God is ready for us. I believe God has planned ahead. I believe God has prepared the good works that we will do in 2020!

As you read these words, World Link is ready to go into new countries. We are prepared to minister on every continent. Are we ready to go? I pray our answer is YES.

Isn't it exciting to be part of the team that God is using to get to the entire world with the message of the Gospel that He first brought us at Christmas? He will supply the empowerment. Not by might nor by power but by His Spirit! He gives us the supply month to month, and year after year, that we might do what He has prepared for us to do. *He has already prepared the way by entrusting resources to you to invest in His work.*

He won't change. We can trust Him. We may be surprised—but He is placing His work in our hands in the year ahead.

We can be confident and grateful that He is committed to lead us even into eternity itself: “For such is God, our God forever and ever; He will guide us even into eternity”—so says Psalm 48:14, in early manuscripts.

I invite you to pray and to give. I hope to hear from you soon. Happy New Year!

Gratefully in Christ,



Dr. Manny Fernandez

P.S. Give generously. Give joyously. Let God use you. Share Him with a world in need! Join Him in His work today by giving once again . . . and get ready for victories in 2020!