



June 5, 2008

Estonia Recap

Thank you so much for praying for Team Estonia during our trip. Your prayers were felt. Your prayers were answered. Here are some of my thoughts from the trip.

1. Tom and Jennifer Thompson are good at what they do. Estonians are VERY suspicious of outsiders. They have been invaded by so many countries over the centuries, including twice in the 20th century, that they see any foreigner spreading foreign beliefs as a threat—including an American spreading the Gospel message in the midst of their atheistic worldview. Tom and Jennifer are certainly making inroads; however, they will have to be there many more years until Estonians on a large scale accept the Thompsons as one of their own and listen to what they have to say on a broad scale. Our fellow church members are doing a phenomenal job living out their call in Estonia.
2. We had a fantastic team. We were comprised of five churches. The youngest on the team was 25 and the oldest 71. We had marrieds and singles. We had a father – daughter combination. We had a mother – son combination. We had Type A's and we had those who are laid back. We had a high school drop out, someone with two doctorates and everything in between. We had big city people and small town people. We had someone who had left the country well over 30 times, several who were outside the USA for the very first time and everything in between. We had someone who has known the Lord for over 50 years and someone who has known the Lord for less than five years. God's sovereignty overwhelmed the entire team and provided unity, excitement and effectiveness. The team far surpassed my expectations.
3. Satan hates evangelism. Sunday morning, May 25, was the first day of work as an entire team. Only four of us had distributed tracts in Estonia—which is no easy feat. So, the four of us spent the first two hours taking out all the newcomers to train them on how to get tracts passed out. The first group I took out was made up of three people. We went to a section of Tallinn where lots of Soviet style apartment buildings stood. I showed them how to wait by the locked doors and then follow a resident into the building—not unlike the way college guys get into female college dorms. (Just another example of how Texas A&M prepared me for ministry. ☺) I showed them where to find the apartment mailboxes inside. I showed them how to greet an Estonian to get them to take the tract. Then the three nervous newbie's just started distributing the tracts. Only 30 minutes into the distribution, I was putting tracts on car windshields, when a black SUV with

tinted windows came roaring up next to me. The passenger window was rolled down and a Russian man in his 40s started giving me the what's what and the how's how. I have no idea what he was saying in Russian, but his non-verbals spoke volumes. Then he tossed a tract at me, backed up and took off. I turned around and there were the three newbies watching. Now, I don't know how many hundreds of tracts I passed out or how many people I witnessed to in person during the week, but that was the only time I got berated. And Satan made sure it was within the first 30 minutes of ministry to unnerve the newbies in an effort to derail them before the work even began. Satan hates evangelism and we must not be intimidated by his tactics.

4. Street Evangelism can be gut-wrenching. Each night, from 11pm until 3am, any one on the team was allowed to voluntarily go to the nightclub section of Tallinn to do street evangelism. Of the 30 on the team, about 6-8 of us took on this ministry. You can imagine the scene: late at night, nightclubs, bars, gay clubs, prostitutes, and all who engage in the night life. On the second evening, Jaime Douglas and I were standing along a sidewalk when a prostitute slowly crossed the street and made her way over to us. My heart was beating so loudly, I think Jaime must have heard it. She walked right by us, in very close proximity, then turned around and began another attempt to seduce us. This time we engaged her in conversation. When we handed her the Estonian tract, she read it and then looked at us and said, "oh, I know what this is about." But her look had changed. We could tell she wanted to talk. She was speaking in broken English as she slowly took a few steps away from us. We called out after her but she kept walking. Then, when she was about 20 yards from us, she turned around and looked at us again and then looked back at the tract. Then she walked another 10-20 yards and looked back at us and then at the tract. About 50 yards down the street she stopped again and read the tract. So, Jaime and I decided to walk toward her to see if she would talk to us. We got within about 5 yards of her and we thought she was going to come to us when at the last minute she turned and crossed the street. Then she put the tract in the inside pocket of her jacket. Within two minutes, a man came out of a bar wearing a fine looking suit, talked to her for about 30 seconds, she put her hand in the crook and off they went. Gut wrenching. Literally, one minute she is under the conviction of the Holy Spirit and the next minute she is selling her body for money.

On another note, it just goes to show, close is never good enough when it comes to salvation. She had a Gospel tract in the inside pocket of her jacket that was covering her heart when she went in to have sex with that John. I pray she gives her life to the Lord before it is too late.

5. Nocturnal street evangelism is where it is at for me. I like telling people about Jesus anytime. But late at night on the streets with prostitutes, pimps, 20s and 30s club hoppers, drug dealers, security guards, police, and cab drivers is my favorite. I get excited just thinking about it. Some of my favorites off the top of my head have been New Orleans, the red light district of Amsterdam, Berlin, Old Town—Tallinn, and Las Vegas. If you want adrenaline rushing ministry, you ought to do late night street evangelism. It's hard to beat.
6. It is hard to worship during a service inside a maximum security prison when one is seated between a convicted murderer and a serial rapist. I went with the men on our team to Tartu Vangla, the prison in the city of Tartu. We were to get a tour of the prison and then participate in a worship service for prisoners. We were all seated on one side of the aisle in the service. Then the guards arrived with the prisoners. Several of us decided to go and sit with them on their side of the aisle. I plopped down right in the middle of the second to last row which held about six prisoners. I shook all their hands and introduced myself and then the Russian prisoner next to me commenced telling me why he and the other five on our row were in prison. He himself had "killed somebody" while the man on the other side of me had "raped women". I'll be honest, at

that moment I was calculating the distance between me and the door and what my first move would be should the worst case scenario take place. Sadly, I was surprised when the murderer next to me got up in the middle of the service, grabbed the guitar and led the congregational praise and worship. Turns out that while in prison, he had met the Lord Jesus. I wish my faith was stronger. The rapist is still unsaved. As soon as the service ended I tried to share the Gospel with him as quickly as I could. I'm not sure how much he understood of what I shared with him.

7. It truly takes the sovereignty of God for someone to be saved. Exhibit A of the sovereignty of God saving someone: A group of four people on our team found in Tallinn, a Texas bar and grill. The food was so good they kept telling the rest of our team about it. Exhibit B: Each of the small groups on our team voluntarily ended up eating there. Exhibit C: Amazingly, we started figuring out that all of us had been seated in the section being managed by a waitress named, Amy. Exhibit D: My small team had lunch there one day and all afternoon and evening two of us couldn't shake Amy from our minds. It was like we had a burden to go back and talk to her. Exhibit E: We were able to get back to the place at midnight and Amy was still there working. Exhibit F: My friend, Scott Berry, took the plunge and asked her when she got off work and if when she got off work she would be willing to talk to us. (On a humorous aside, at that very moment, Scott and I suddenly realized how this looked and sounded and what ensued was quite a thorough explanation that we are happily married and not hitting on her.) She agreed so we told her we would meet her at the front door when she got off work. At about 1am, Amy stood at the door to the bar and grill and gave her life to Christ. Her salvation was truly a team effort.

I have high hopes for Amy. She is beautiful, unusually kind, and looking for answers. Jennifer Thompson is going to go visit her and hopefully a relationship will form that will enable Jennifer to teach Amy things about the Lord.

8. My heart breaks for Estonians whom I've grown to love so much. Each time I go, I leave a piece of my heart there. I've been to many countries around the world, but none have gripped me like Estonia. 700,000 Estonians. A majority Atheistic worldview. There is hardly anyone to spread the Gospel, pass out tracts, and distribute Bibles. Thousands of children run around playing with no clue who Jesus is, no clue there is a heaven and a hell, and there is nobody to tell them about any of it. There are the Thompsons and a handful of believers living in the country. NEHBC and other Southern Baptist churches have a phenomenal opportunity to be agents of life change. This year, several churches banded together to go to Estonia. I'm praying the same thing happens next year. I'm praying you go to Estonia with me next year.
9. We are getting beaten badly by the Mormons. One day in town we ran into eight Mormon missionaries fresh off the plane. They had just landed. They were in their black pants, white shirts, dark ties and had their big, black plastic name tags. They were locked and cocked, trained and ready to lead as many Estonians as possible to Hell. They know what they believe, they are well versed in their unbiblical views, and they are winning people by the millions into their cult. Southern Baptists must step up. What we are doing is simply not enough.

Now the mission trip baton is being handed off to our teenagers. They and several adults leave June 14 for Arkansas where they will work on behalf of First Baptist Church of Camden. Tract and Bible distribution is in order. Please begin praying now.