



News from Ukraine

. . . concerning Natalie (October, 2011)

So many of you – churches, old friends, new friends, family members – have been so very sensitive, encouraging, prayerful and otherwise generous and helpful to us that you deserve further information about Natalie’s condition. And, as in our last newsletter, I’ll opt to include that news this way

God graciously sustained Natalie through about 3 months of incessant difficulties interspersed with many days of sheer misery. If you follow her notes on Facebook you are aware that she had 2 surgeries within one month (spanning the months of August and September). The second surgery was necessitated by an emergency in which she was in excruciating pain, with scans suggesting that her colon was gangrenous. Again, it was by the grace and mercy of God that the outcome of the surgery wasn’t as expected, but neither was the surgery able to accomplish anything more than to relieve her severe pain. There were surely times when I wondered whether she would be able to survive and recover from such trauma. She has had portions of intestine removed twice, and that which remains shares the abdominal cavity with scar tissue and many tumors. Her surgeon termed that area of her body a “hostile environment”, and suggested we might do well to never operate there again.

Natalie is not on a lot of medicine – no pain killers except an occasional ibuprofen, no antibiotics – but still receives a monthly injection which slows tumor growth and suppresses negative effects of the hormones secreted by the tumors. Since returning home from the last surgery, however, her food intake has been supplemented by a bag of nutritious liquid she receives intravenously for 12 hours each night. It has been a big help, allowing her to actually regain a little weight.

Natalie’s team of doctors (who have experience with this type of carcinoid cancer) lament that we are running out of medical options. There is one option, however, about which Natalie had already done a lot of reading and research on her own. The gastroenterologist who heads the team is now suggesting we pursue it. It is a radiation treatment administered intravenously. This treatment is not yet approved in the U.S., but is apparently in the trial stage here. We would need to travel to either Germany or Switzerland – 2 one-week trips. Our doctors have communicated with a team in Basel, Switzerland, who have also looked at Natalie’s records and have agreed that they would accept her as a patient. The results of this treatment have been promising; tumor growth has been halted for an average of 40 months. It is expensive – about \$20,000 for each of 2 trips – and it is doubtful that our insurance will help (though we are pursuing that possibility). As to the cost, we judge that there’s not much point in saving for a time of old-age if we never arrive. We’re still asking questions and gathering information, and we’re praying earnestly that the Lord pushes us in the right direction and further opens doors or closes them.

Have we experienced tears . . . fears . . . frustrations? Surely we have . . . and plenty of them; many nights I’ve laid my head on a pillow wet with tears. But I suppose these emotional strains are helpful inducements to lean harder upon the One who is every believers invisible means of support. And what sweet comfort to know that “underneath are the everlasting arms”! There are good days in which we feel that we are skipping exuberantly in the brilliant sunlight. There are many days in which we feel that we are stumbling through dark and foreboding shadows. There is always, however, one constant – the presence, the love, the compassions and help of the God who is El-Shaddai – the God who is sufficient, the One who is ENOUGH! This God is our God!

Thanks so very much for your love and prayers!! We’re not discouraged. The joy of the Lord is our strength.

Your servants for Jesus' sake,

Bruce & Natalie