

Biography of Cheston Furrow



Missionary to Russia
Since 1993



I am Cheston Furrow and I would like to tell you about my 10 year experience as a missionary to Russia from 1993 to 2003.

Early Years

I grew up in Amarillo, Texas and attended a Christian school. The school was a ministry of Caprock Baptist Church, an independent, fundamental Baptist church. During my childhood and teenage years, I received much teaching about the responsibility of every Christian to be a part of the missionary outreach of a local church.

In 1991, I had my high school diploma in hand but had little direction about where my life should go. I took a job at a dude ranch in Colorado for a year, then returned home determined to do more in my life than just fill a pew. In this frame of mind, I rededicated my life to God and told Him I would do whatever He wanted me to do.

There was a man named Bill Byers who came to our church occasionally, representing a Bearing Precious Seed Bible printing ministry. He was a man of many projects and enormous vision who loved to get people involved in things that they would never have otherwise dreamed of doing. One of his interests was in Russian missions, so he would organize trips into Russia to carry in Scripture. He would also invite people from various churches to go with him on these trips and to help do something beneficial for the Russian people. In this spirit, I joined his team for the 1993 trip. We went to Russia and worked with a missionary. By the end of that trip God had called me into full time missions. I had been working in my own church's youth ministries after my rededication but this was a greater call, pulling me to Russia with a certain hand.

Moving On

I again returned to Russia with Bro. Byers in August of 1994. On this trip I met missionary Mark Rose. During this trip he invited me to return sometime. I went home, counted my money and decided I would go to Russia until my money was gone. I sold my worldly goods and prepared to go, but unbeknownst to me, my pastor appealed to my church to support me through designated offerings.

One month later I was on my way back to this ancient nation that had been deprived of the Gospel and enslaved by Marxism for over 100 years. I would not see Texas for two and one-half years.

I arrived in Ratomka, Belarus, where Mark Rose was working. This was a suburb of Minsk, which is a city of some ten million. He had started a new work there in hospitals. I began helping him as we went to preach to people in clinics. Later we moved our efforts out of the hospitals, when we acquired a building to meet in. This enabled us to establish Bible Baptist Church of Ratomka. I became Youth Minister of this church. Much of our work was of a humanitarian nature which gave us validation in the eyes of Russian officials. We would provide funds for remodeling hospitals as well as distribute desperately needed medical supplies that we were able to obtain from US sources.

Our methods utilized street evangelism, literature distribution on trains, and tent meetings. We would make a push to get folks to the meetings and there were many professions of faith. Those efforts were ministries of Bible Baptist in Ratomka. We also held regular meetings in other towns as further outreach. I would often travel with Russian pastoral trainees as we worked together for these meetings in fringe areas.

Yet another outreach was through the avenue of soccer. We would play soccer with young people on Saturdays and then invite them to Sunday School which resulted in a good youth group numbering up to twenty.

During this time, I was learning the Russian language. I met with a private teacher two evenings each week and was fluent in two years.

Occasionally we were visited by groups from the U.S. who were taking trips just like the ones that had brought me to Russia. Out of these visiting groups, God called at least seven more men who are presently serving as Russian missionaries.

The work with Bro. Rose was extremely demanding, as we were constantly pushing forward with various projects. By July of 1997, after two and one-half years in Russia, I was physically and mentally spent. Many questions were active in my mind resulting from the realities that I had been confronted with in Russia in contrast to what I had been taught about missions. It was time to go home and try to put it all in order. During this period, I had been supported only by my home church and two other churches.

First Furlough

I arrived home in July of 1997 with the desire to learn more from my pastor in order to sort out some of the questions about missions that were

on my mind. During the next two years, I traveled to numerous helpful missionary training seminars and did deputation work to raise additional support. Additionally, I worked in the youth ministries and various other ministries of my home church.

Back to Russia

By 1999, I was ready to return to Russia. Once again I planned to work with missionary Mark Rose. He was planning a major evangelistic campaign to ten cities along the Volga River and I was to serve as a team leader for three of these cities. This project was dealt a major blow when family emergencies forced Bro. Rose back to the States during the 30 day planning period, leading up to the campaign. However, we were determined to proceed and Bro. Rose was able to rejoin us just before the campaign started. Our plan was to enter each city with mass evangelism using street preaching and literature distribution and make a push for a final big preaching meeting. The results were successful, resulting in the eventual formation of three churches now pastored by native Russians.

The conclusion of this campaign left me alone in the city of Saratov. I stayed out of my concern over the lack of follow-up in most of the outreaches that I have been involved in. This had been the source of some of my questions that I had gone home to resolve in my first furlough and now I wanted to do something about it. In many of the campaigns that I've been involved in, we counted on the national pastors to provide the needed follow up on prospects. This usually did not happen and even when it did, we American missionaries were disturbed by the Russian position on certain doctrinal issues such as eternal security and communion. So I stayed there alone in Saratov to try and work one-on-one with some of the prospects.

This brought me into a most difficult period in which I battled many things, especially loneliness. Initially, I started Bible studies in my apartment with about 30 people, but soon learned that most of those were just curiosity seekers of one sort or another, rather than true seekers. The numbers in my Bible study dwindled to just one man named Feoder. He was a professional hockey player who had been saved but was untaught. Each day I would meet with him and start with a question: "*What are you reading today?*" Then I would share what I had read. We had many joyful times and I was encouraged in my spirit to see him grow in knowledge and conviction. Today, he is an associate pastor of a national church.

Later, I met a man named Genadi. He was a businessman who had practiced the usual corrupt Russian way of business. This meant two sets

of books. As a result of our Bible studies, Genadi also began to grow and eventually he abandoned the corrupt bookkeeping practices. He was told by his peers, "*You'll never make it if you just have one set of books,*" but he persisted in his new found convictions. Today Genadi is leading Bible studies to evangelize fellow businessmen and is also serving in a Baptist church in Moscow.

Moving On

During this time, God was calling other men as missionaries to Russia. One promising prospect felt called to a city named Cheboksary. In October of 2001, I led a campaign to this city to prepare the way for this missionary's arrival. It was a very successful campaign notable because we had adequate numbers of translators for the American volunteers who had come to help. The concluding service had over 400 in attendance! Out of these, I was able to bring together a group of ten for Bible study. My plan was to work with these and have them prepared as a core group for when the prospective missionary arrived. We even managed to acquire a building to meet in, which was a major success in itself. We continued for the next one and one-half years, waiting for the missionary. Then suddenly I had to return to the U.S. for medical reasons. By the time I returned one month later, we had lost our building. The missionary never arrived.

Now another problem has arisen that will be devastating to the funding of Russian missionaries today. The government has begun requiring us to leave the country four times each year to renew our visas. This will be time consuming and very expensive. For me, each trip will cost approximately \$800 for travel, lodging and fees for the visa. My present support cannot sustain an additional \$2,400 per year above what I was budgeting for visa renewals.

Second Furlough

By the fall of 2003, I was again in need of furlough. The visa issue was the straw that broke the camel's back. Also being now 30 years of age, it was time for me to return home to see whether the Lord might have a future wife for me somewhere. These are things needing resolution as I contemplate my next return to Russia.

Future Missionary Work in Russia

I arrived home in December of 2003. Arriving almost simultaneously was a new pastor for our church, Bro. Gene Foster. I was already acquainted with him and his wife as they had been members of Caprock Baptist in

the past, and he had been ordained in the church. He had in fact been the Principal of the Christian school for a time when I was young.

Pastor Foster and I are engaging in serious discussions about my future ministry in Russia and this paper is written to bring perspective from the past to my future work.

I expect this furlough to be one to two years in length. I will be searching for the Lord's will in regards to a wife. I will, during this time, be offering my help, based on knowledge gained by my 9 years in Russian missions, to others who are contemplating going to Russia. I believe that I can save people from much heartbreak and wasted time/money by the things that I and others have learned in the school of experience. We shouldn't have to reinvent the wheel continuously but should benefit by what others have learned. This is something I can do even while on furlough. I will also need to raise additional support for a return trip because of the high costs associated with the visa issues and other things.

When I return to Russia, it will probably be back to Cheboksary. Once there, I can re-contact people that I have already worked with to gather a small group. I need to go with sufficient finances to buy or rent a good building to meet in there. This lack was often an overwhelming problem with my former efforts. With a group and a place, I will then go out to win the lost. The best place to meet people is at bus stops because everyone uses mass transit and they stand and wait for the bus. There is great opportunity to meet hundreds of people, speak briefly to them, give them literature, and then invite them to services. Of course, there are many ways to make contact with people, and I will use every successful one. I will follow the tried and true path used by missionaries around the world: build a church, train a pastor, and then move on to build new churches. I must be especially patient in training Russian pastors. These pastors must be carefully trained before turning the work over to them to counter the many false doctrinal views that seem almost intrinsic to the Russian mind, due to the religious cultures that they have been raised in.

Missionary Cheston Furrow