

Missions Update Summer 2023

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[0:00] We were in Poland for a week, many of you know, and we then left Poland and just kind of hopped over to Vienna, Austria for about five days or so, then back to Warsaw to catch our flight back to the States.

And it's crazy. It takes a full 24 hours to go one way with the changing planes and the layovers and all that.

24 hours. Matt, I'm getting old, bro. I got to Poland and I'm like, y'all, I need some rest before I can do what I can do.

But we wanted to share a little bit about our trip with you, introduce you to some of the people that we met and ministered to, tell you a little bit about their lives and why this was such an important thing for us to do.

So this is our statement, our mission statement that we adopted. We may tweak it just a little bit more. Grace Church Williamsburg exists to exalt Christ and glorify God by our commission to go into our community, culture and world to make disciples by the gospel and to gather together those disciples to equip and build up the body of Christ in the gospel.

[1:17] That's what we're all about locally and abroad. It's really amazing that a church just four and a half years old is able to do what we've already been able to do by the grace of God reaching across the ocean.

When Greg and I first sat down and thought through this together, we thought that it would be many more years before something like this would begin to gel. And God's just brought it together largely because of your generosity, your prayers, your commitment, your investment in this ministry.

And we're very grateful to you for that. So let us share a little bit about where we were, what we did. We were teaching in Poland and we were introducing biblical soul care in the local church.

The emphasis of all nine sessions, there were nine one hour sessions. All of that was geared toward helping these folks understand what does it look like for us to take care of each other's souls in the local church?

What does it look like for you to do that with the people sitting around you and across the aisle that are part of this body of believers? How do we help care for each other and take care of the souls that we worship God with?

[2:31] How do we minister to each other? Now, that wasn't completely foreign to these people because it's a good church. We'll show you in just a minute the people who are involved. But the idea that they could minister to each other through biblical counseling was new to them.

Because they, like many, many other people, think of biblical counseling as a crisis ministry. They also think of it very heavily in terms of psychology, clinical psychology.

The only people who are qualified to minister in soul care to each other are people who are certified or degreed in secular psychology.

Because you're messing with people's lives and souls when you talk about the trials and sufferings of life. The only thing wrong with that mentality is you can't find that in scripture. It is not there.

It's quite the opposite. So as we moved through that with these folks and just showed them what the Bible says, they became more and more intrigued. When I first started, the first night that I taught was a Monday night.

[3:37] I had one session on a Monday night. We traveled to the camp that day. I taught that night. Then the next day, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, it was two sessions back to back every morning with a translator.

That Monday night, I finished up. And the next morning at breakfast, because I told Suzanne Monday night when we went back to our room what I'm about to tell you now. I got one of the guys,

one of the elders from the church, and I said, Hey, Kyle, listen, man.

So what do you think about judging the response of the people? He kind of looked at me, and I said, Look, man, when I was teaching last night, they looked like they were going to stone me at any minute.

And he said, What do they look like? And I showed him. He said, Well, let me show you what it looks like when Polish people are engaged. And he did this. I said, Okay, I'm good, because every one of them looked like that.

I'm good. I'm good. And he was serious. He said, No, man, they were tracking. And many of them were challenged, because the first night that I taught, I went head on with what I'd been told about what they believed in this.

[4 : 45] And they believed in a secular psychology brought into the church, and that only experts can pull off soul care for people. And I went after that tooth and nail right at the very front and debunked every bit of it and told them, No, no, no, not even Christian psychology.

And I explained all of that to them, and we went on from there. So let's see what we have. This couple up here at the top, that's Kyle and Christine and their family.

And you can see who I have here. That's little Amelia. She was my buddy. That family, Kyle, is a fairly recent graduate from the Master's Seminary, and he is the person that I hooked up with online to find out about all of this.

Four years ago, Suzanne? About four years ago that this trip was being planned for that long. It finally came to fruition. And so Kyle is one of the elders.

This is Tomek and his family. Tomek is also a Master's Seminary graduate. He is the teaching pastor, preaching pastor at the church.

[5 : 56] This is Yannick and his wife. Yannick is one of the first graduates of the Master's Seminary. He went that far back. And then over here in the bottom corner is Yorick.

So we have Yorick, Yannick, Tomek, and Kyle. And he does stand out. They've been there about four and a half years.

They're getting ready to come home on furlough. They've learned the language. It's amazing to see them ministering as they do. They are a... We stayed with Kyle and Christine for three days before we went to the camp.

And it was a lovely time that we had with them. These are quality, quality people. They love the Lord. It was wonderful to hear them singing in their language the same songs that we sing.

So that was the church. I can't say the name, but, you know, Polish. Man, I'm telling you. I can't do Polish. I can do some German. But I can't do Polish.

[6 : 54] I tried. The best I can do is... Zin Dobre. I did that with you last Sunday. Zin Dobre. There you go.

Good morning. Good afternoon. Good evening. Whatever the context is, you got it. That's it. Yannick told me, Polish. Easy.

Easy. And Suzanne and I are looking at him. What? He said, 500 words. You got it. I said, Yannick, you're a salesman. I know better than that. I've already tried.

So let me get to my notes because I can't remember what all of this is. This is Kyle showing us around old downtown Warsaw. Now, what's interesting about this is this has a huge impact on the culture of Poland because of World War II.

World War II has left a scar on Europe that we are still trying to get our minds around. The way they raise their children, the way they think about their lives, Hitler, and what happened from Russia to Poland, from the Germans to Poland, that whole thing is burned into these people's minds.

[8 : 09] Even the current generation. It is crazy weird how this thing affects these people. They have actually rebuilt old Warsaw from rubble.

The Germans raised it to the ground. They didn't leave a stone on top of a stone. And these people have rebuilt this city. And in the old town, they've tried to rebuild it in the likeness of pre-World War II buildings.

They wanted to capture that old feel again. This is actually one of the few structures left from the original time.

And so that is a, you just kind of walk down the street and all of a sudden that appears. And we stopped and looked at it. And we thought, man, what is this? Because all around it is new.

And they preserve that little bit of the remnant to remind them. And that's us standing in the square. There's all kinds of bands and ice cream places and people doing their thing all around that square. [9 : 15] It was pretty neat. A pretty special time for us. And then we had Sunday worship there at the church. So that middle deal is the pulpit, obviously.

Actually, Suzanne took a picture of all of these headsets because they have several languages they translate during the service. Because it's such an international community. So we were able to put the headsets on and get it in English.

But there were other people that were sitting in there getting it in, gosh, two other languages. I can't remember at the time. Ukrainian, because it's not, it's the most similar to Polish of the Slavic languages, but it's different.

And then one other. And then this book over here in the corner is by J.I. Packer. And so they do have a few resources translated into Polish from the English.

A few, just a few. That book there is Concise Theology. Then Monday we traveled to the camp. So this is a picture actually of our room that we stayed in.

[10 : 20] There are little suitcases that eventually got lost for days. They went away for a while. But over here on the right top is where the dining area was.

And man, these people put on a feed now. They can do some food. We were shocked at that. This is, what is this, Suzanne? Breakfast. Yeah.

They're doing all these veggies for breakfast. I'm like, where's the bacon? Bacon. I can eat bacon now. Come on. Help me out. And then the second day, they got that bad boy hooked up.

And Suzanne wore it out. The espresso machine. That was my first duty of the day is to go to the espresso machine, get in line, and get Suzanne's coffee. It was really good, though.

The food was excellent. They eat their big meal in the middle of the day. I don't know if that's a Polish thing all over or Europe. Is that what it is? Oh, man.

[11 : 18] I don't know how they function after that. I mean, they pull it in. Big old meats and everything. It was pretty weird. All right. So this is the pavilion that we all met in for the sessions.

So Monday night, and then I did two every morning, and that's Tomek translating. This is toward the end.

In fact, that diagram up there was what I used on the last day of the teaching on Friday. And by this time, Tomek and I were so worn out from the translation thing, I was not anticipating how exhausting that is.

Because as I'm working through my notes, and you guys know I walk around and ad lib and all. And as I'm doing that, and he's translating, I'm waiting for him to translate what I just said.

And I've moved on, and I'm trying to hold on to my next thought because it's wanting to come out, and I can't let it out yet. And so if he does what he did, he'll say, at the end, he said, I'm sorry, brother.

[12 : 25] What was that second part? And I'm like, I don't know. I'm at the next thing. So we had a good time with that. Everybody was very gracious to us.

There were times when I said things, and most of them got the English, and it went away, and they didn't know. But that was very real. That was a very real and weird kind of experience for us.

But folks, they ate this up. They ate this up. It was humbling to see their responses to what we were telling them and the kinds of things they asked us and wanted to talk to us about afterward.

There was no downtime. We didn't have any time to decompress. That's another thing, a lesson that we learned. We're going to have to build in a time for us to pull back and kind of shut off.

Because when you're dealing with this subject matter with people, and they're sitting down with you and asking you about these things, you're in a counseling moment. So you're looking into their eyes, and you're listening intently, and you're trying to engage with these people.

[13 : 33] That is an intense time. And there was time and time and time between the sessions of teaching at night. Did we have that in here, Suzanne? Suzanne? Yes.

Let's see. Yes, here it is. Suzanne put in my notes on Thursday night now. Thursday night, the elders asked me to do an after hours Q&A; following the evening teaching.

Suzanne, was that the same night I did the fill-in for the English pastor who was sick, and I did an impromptu Q&A;? They pulled that on me several times.

And Greg knows how much I love Q&As.; I don't. I don't like being flat-footed. I like to know what's coming, right? So anyway, they asked us to do this after hours teaching, and about 18 people

came.

And here's the kind of stuff that they wanted to know. Here's the question they led off with. Yannick, one of the elders, asked me. He said, I want to go first. Okay. You're an elder.

[14:43] Elder privilege. Go ahead. He said, I'd like for you to explain to us the concept of false guilt. Is that a biblical concept? Thanks, Yannick.

Let's just ease into this thing. Another question they asked. How can we give hope to a family whose unbelieving loved one has died? These are real.

All these people were experiencing these things. What are some day-to-day examples of Paul Tripp's five stages of the war for the heart? I just taught them on that. So now they wanted practical day-to-day examples.

How does that look in life? And then one of them was, I've identified my sin, the idol of my heart.

Now, how do I practically put off and put on?

How do I put that off and put on what is right? Yes. That's how you know, right, Greg? They're getting it. They're grabbing it. They're wanting to see how it works in life.

[15:44] It was very encouraging. But I'll tell you, I finally had to tell them because they were going on and on and on. And I finally said, guys, I'm fried.

I can't do another question. Can we pause it till tomorrow? Sure, sure. They were very gracious. But the next day, Friday, man, they knew that was the last day.

I'm going to wring it out. But it was good. Then we had some afternoons to be free. The first three afternoons, I couldn't do anything. My back was so bad after the flight and all, I just stayed up in the room with that shock thing doing me.

But one of the days, one of the afternoons, we broke away for a couple of hours with Jurek, one of the elders. And this is Gregory in the yellow shirt. We met him while we were there.

He's a Polish guy, spoke great English. He took these pictures. Man, this castle, is that something? We drove up to that bad boy, and I thought, wow, that is amazing.

[16:46] It's, yeah, I can't say it. It is Polish, brother. It's very Polish. Anyway, whatever castle this is, it was built in the mid-1600s.

And right after they finished building it, the Swedes invaded and took it over. Yeah. Yeah. So that was, it was just a cool time.

We have lots of pictures of the inside of this place. When you get inside of it, it goes deep into the ground. And they had underground stables. It was really something for that time.

And then this is a picture of the forests around the camp. They're deep fir forests. So it's very, looks very different from around here. It's just a whole different feel.

But it was very pretty. And then we were surprised at the international nature of the church. So right away, this guy, Ian, and his wife, Paris.

[17:51] Right away, we took to them. They would sit with us at breakfast, and they would clown around with us. They were just a delightful couple. That's their baby, Jude. And it was probably just the second day we had met this couple, talking to them.

And Paris, the wife, said to me the next morning after one of the teachings, she said, I told my husband. They're from Kenya.

I told my husband, does this man have a camera in our room? Is he listening to us?

How does he know these things? You know, like I laughed. I said, no, no, it's just the Lord, Paris.

It's just the Lord. And Ian, Ian came up to me, and he said, Jeff, it was so sweet.

And we wanted to share this with you. We saw you and Suzanne walking last night, and you were holding hands. And we thought, wow, a couple of 90-year-olds, and they're still. Wow! I kept my eye on that guy the whole time.

[19:03] And then this is Federico. Federico. He's Italian, and he is Italian. He was a delightful young man, single, and we know his pastor.

Suzanne, was I at seminary with his pastor? Yeah. So it was really cool just to know that we knew different people.

We were really good friends with some people his age that we know from another family in Georgia. They're connected. It was just weird how that all worked out.

So building relationships, getting to know these people, hearing the stories of their life, it was, folks, it was really something. When we got ready to leave Poland on that final day, Jurek was taking us back to Warsaw to get to the airport to catch the flight to Vienna.

It was really interesting. Time, as we were walking across the parking lot at the camp, person after person who saw us would run up and give us a hug and stand there with tears, telling us how thankful they were that we came.

[20 : 13] And here's what every single one of them, including all four elders separately, said to us as we left. Please tell your church, thank you for making it possible for you to come and be with us.

Thank them for us. So I'm doing that. Thank you for sending Suzanne and I to do what we did with these people. It really did mean the world to them.

And then real quickly, we jetted over to Austria for a relationship building trip with a career missionary there in Vienna. We, of course, have never been to Vienna. And Suzanne, what is this? Yeah. So this is all Catholic. This is all Catholic. Here is the church family or the picture of Stan right here in the circle.

He's the missionary. This is actually a photo of the trip that we took back in the spring to Germany. And so Stan was at that teaching in Germany and we didn't know it.

[21 : 25] We didn't meet him. I met him later online and said, Hey, man, you were at the teaching in Germany and you're in Austria? Yeah. How did that? We didn't. I don't know. We were so busy with other things, but that's what this is about.

So free Bible Gemeinde Donnerstadt. Free Bible Community is the name of Stan's church. That's a picture of us when I was preaching in the church that Sunday.

Free Bible Gemeinde Donnerstadt. Free Bible Community. It's very interesting. They don't use the German word for church. And there's a reason for that.

They don't call themselves free Bible church. It's deliberate. They say community. The reason is because church, the word for church in German is used by the institutional church, the Catholic church.

And it has a terrible negative connotation. They didn't want anything to do with it. So they call themselves a community. That's just where they are in their culture.

[22 : 25] This was a little bit of what we saw in Austria in the way of our hotel. This is where we ate every morning.

Why are we showing you this? That room is huge. And every morning that we went for breakfast before we did our thing, that place was just full of all these people and all their native dress from Africa, all over the place, all talking in their languages.

It was just buzzing everywhere. And over the few days we were there, this gentleman was one of the wait staff. There were about three of them circulating in this area.

And he was so kind. And once I realized he spoke English, I stopped him and I said, what is your name? And where are you from?

And he said, I am from Iran. And my name is Mohammed. Don't call me Mohammed. It's too Islamic. Call me Momo.

[23 : 31] I laughed. I said, you got it, Momo. So we got to talking to Momo and he stood there with us forever and we caught up on his life. He toured the United States years and years ago.

He loves the U.S. Oh, such a beautiful people. Such a wonderful country. Oh, I said, were people nice to you? Yes, they were nice. Let me tell you stories.

So he did. He told us all about how people were nice to him. It shocked me, really. I said, I said, Momo, because, you know, come on. I said, Momo, he didn't go to New York.

Did he go to New York? It was pre 9-11. Yeah, it was pre 9-11. But as we were talking to him, I asked him, I said, Momo, what is your impression now after all these years looking back on people in the United States?

How would you sum us up? And he didn't even hesitate. He said, you work too much. You work too much. He said, yeah. People don't enjoy life in the U.S. like they should.

[24 : 38] You work too much. He said, over here, we live. They do. But how they live is a problem. This is a picture of the river.

Is it the Danube? The Danube River. And all along the ceiling. You see it up here? All along the ceiling of that whole thing. It traces the Danube into Germany.

And that's a picture of Ingolstadt, where we went in the spring. And it was really neat to see that in relation to where Vienna is. That's why Suzanne took that. She was impressed with that. And then this is just, we spent about, I don't know, three quarters of a day with Stan and Grace taking us into Old Town Vienna.

And that was remarkable. Those two columns that you see right here, Napoleon built those when he conquered Vienna. And they left them.

And the Austrians left them. They thought they were pretty. They're nice. They get over it. I said, Stan, why are you telling me that? He said, because I want you to have some insight into our culture. We're not like the Germans.

[25 : 46] We're laid back. Austrians are laid back people. The Germans are stiff. He said, we're not like that. I said, so you guys are not like, you don't like being called Germans?

He said, no. No. We speak the language, but that's it. That's where it stops. Very interesting to me. So this was the summer residence for the king, I guess.

Is that what it was? I don't remember all this stuff. Yeah. Yes. There you go. I was trying to figure out the name.

Yes. It's Schoenbrunn Palace, built in the mid-1700s as a summer residence for the Habsburg rulers. There you go. And then this is a plague column.

This big monument here sits right in the dead center of Old Town Vienna with all the beautiful architecture all around. You can see it in the background. It's like that everywhere.

[26 : 44] You're just enclosed by this ancient architecture. It's beautiful. That's a monument to all the plague victims. They estimated that up to 75,000 people lost their lives to the bubonic plague during that era.

This is a place that's in the gardens. So this view is behind that. You walk around behind that building and see this. Up here, right in the middle, we walked all the way up there.

Right there is an awesome coffee cafe. It was worth it. We got up there and went inside and had some awesome Vienna coffee, and it was wonderful.

These were delightful people. And here's for my brother Brian. I promise Brian. All right. Here you go, brother. Yes. So look at these beautiful. You can't see them very well.

Those are beautiful doors. That's where all the trucks are. Those are ancient, man. And this beautiful building, that's the headquarters for the fire department. For you there.

[27 : 44] So I asked Stan. I said, do a little translation for that. He said, fire defenders. And Brian and I talked about that. He kind of explained to me why that would be so.

Fire defenders. That building was built in the 12th. And no, that was St. Stephen's.

This was built in the 16th century. So that goes back to the Reformation. Isn't that something? See, we knocked down buildings to build bigger ones to house bigger fire trucks.

They built their fire trucks to fit the building. That's exactly right, man. That's exactly right. Bigger trucks. Yeah. It was really cool. That was right in a big old square.

It was beautiful. All right. And then where's St. Stephen's? Did I miss it? Oh, shoot. It might have not got in here.

[28 : 40] It didn't get in here, baby. We'll do St. Stephen's for you another time. That's a cool picture. It's this huge, huge place built for Catholics. All right.

Two more things and then we'll move on. Yes. Here's the problem. It's hard to put into words because Greg has experienced this when they did a mission trip to Egypt. Being in Europe where we were was terrible.

As beautiful as this is because it is so dark. It is so oppressive. It is so godless that you feel it.

And that's the best I can do. I have thought and thought and thought how in the world I could communicate to you guys what it was like to walk around thousands and thousands and thousands of people where God is absolutely, completely irrelevant.

Not even on the radar. They have so moved on from anything God that there is not a hint in their culture, in their language, in the way that they interact with each other that would be forgotten.

[29 : 48] None. They don't even think like that. They're way past that. And you see it. We have never seen such displays of homosexuality, lesbianism, and immorality publicly displayed and proud of it.

No matter where we went. No matter what the setting was. It's not a place you want to take your kids and walk around. I can tell you that.

I'm glad I didn't have my little ones with me there. It would have been walking around like this half the time. It was, yes, that bad. As beautiful as some of the other things were.

It was heartbreaking to feel that. So for prayer, as you saw us put up here, we're praying for the people in Poland. One of the ladies shared with me one evening with tears.

A beautiful lady in her spirit. Married. Met her husband there. Great guy. And she said, we are in a church two hours from here, and I can't go to my pastor and ask him for help.

[30 : 52] My husband and I need help, and I can't ask my pastor. We went to him and asked him, and he didn't know what to tell us. He stands up and he preaches about Jesus, but that's as far as it goes.

And there's no one around us. The elders told me there is no one in Poland doing this. No one. 38 million people. In Austria, Stan told me the same thing.

He said, Jeff, if anybody in our country who's a Christian wants to get help in any way for their marriage or an issue going on in their life or something they're suffering with, there is no one here we can go to.

It's secular or it's nothing. And that's why we're trying to help these people do something about that. We're trying to help them understand how to help each other use the scripture to minister to souls. Amen. So thank you for allowing us to go, for making it possible for us to share with these people. I could stand up here for the rest of the time and just do this and talk to you about what's going on in their lives and all the stories they shared with us.

[31 : 57] But thank you for allowing us to go and be away from you for a while, for my best friend and my dear brother Greg for coming and ministering to you and shepherding you as he does, and for the guys who filled the pulpit when Greg and I couldn't be here.

We're grateful to them as well. Look forward in the future to some of our own men filling the pulpit when we can't be here.

It's coming. We're working on it. You be in prayer about that. Well, how about we stand together?