

## Yellow Blue Bus



*The phrase “I love you” in Ukrainian can be difficult for westerners to pronounce: Я люблю вас (Ya lyublyu vas) In an attempt to aid the linguistically challenged, a funny but phonetically similar phrase has been proposed: “Yellow blue bus”. And now, maybe for the first time ever, we have a picture to match! 🍷*

Nearly four months ago, our family evacuated from Ukraine. At the time, we took with us only the belongings we could carry in a few suitcases and our old yellow van. And while the time of our return has not yet come — though we believe it will — we find ourselves amazed as we reflect on the goodness and provision of God.

I’m reminded of the patriarch Jacob who, journeying back to his homeland after 20 years serving his uncle Laban, observed the extent to which the Lord had blessed him: *“I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; **for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands.**”* (Genesis 32:10)

Similarly, we left Ukraine with, as it were, the clothes on our backs, and now “we are become two ~~bands~~ vans!”

During our first few days in Slovakia, it was hard to know anything for certain. Having left behind our home and our ministry, we were thrust into a new country where we had no prior relationships, no knowledge of the local language, no place to call our own. And yet God brought people out of the woodwork — both in Slovakia and abroad — who ministered to our needs with breathtaking generosity.

It was around this time that I realized we would need a more reliable vehicle. We still had no idea which country we would land in, and the ability to move our family around was (and still is) critical. Our yellow van, special as it is to our family and our team, is not young. The top half is a 1996 Ford Transit, while the bottom half is a ‘91. The fact that it even made the trip from Ukraine to

Slovakia without a major breakdown is amazing. (As it was, we did have a breakdown near the border. Some of you may remember our issue with the starter and our friend with the “magic screwdriver”).

But vehicles in Europe are expensive. Based on what I could recall from talking with friends in Ukraine, I figured we would need about \$20,000 just for a used one. The actual amount we needed turned out to be more than double that. What’s a missionary family to do? Could it be possible that God has that kind of cash in His budget? 🙄

Then I got an email from our friends at No Greater Joy. These folks have had our backs for years: praying for us, supporting us, and promoting our ministry. Knowing what had happened in Ukraine, and guessing (rightly) that we might need financial help, they now offered to pay for our plane tickets back to America. But actually, going back to the States was the last thing we wanted to do.

We left Ukraine out of concern for the safety of our children, and yet we longed to remain as close as possible. Maybe we could help refugees in Eastern Europe? Maybe we could make trips back to L’viv from time to time? And maybe... maybe one day we could go back home. Not back to America — back home. To L’viv.

I know that sentiment may be hard to understand, given that we are Americans. We do dearly love our homes and friends in the U.S., and we are proud to be Americans! But over the years, God has knit our hearts together with the Ukrainian people, and no matter what happens in this war, our desire is to continue ministering to Ukrainians.



*Road trips are more fun in the new van with passenger seats that face each other and sliding doors on BOTH SIDES!*

BUT AS WE WERE ALLOWED OF GOD TO BE PUT IN TRUST WITH THE GOSPEL, EVEN SO WE SPEAK; NOT AS PLEASING MEN, BUT GOD, WHICH TRIETH OUR HEARTS. 1 THESSALONIANS 2:4

So with these things in our hearts, I approached NGJ with a compromise. Instead of buying us airline tickets, would they be willing to put that same amount towards a van? Tickets for a family of our size would total several thousand dollars, and I calculated that amount would at least get us started towards a van fund.

When Mike and Debi heard we wanted to stay and that we needed a vehicle, they decided to go the extra mile. As many of you know, they sent out an email fund-raiser to all their subscribers. They told our story and our need for a van, offering to accept funds from those who wanted to donate. And donate they did!

Tim Easley, NGJ's general manager, sent me several updates as the fund-raiser got started. Two hours after the initial email went out, they had received over \$15,000 towards the van. Another hour or so passed and they cleared \$20,000, which was the originally stated goal in the email. Tim wrote to say that they would go ahead and wire that amount to our account.

Meanwhile, we were actively looking for a van. We had no experience, so it was slow at first. But we quickly learned two things. Vans — used, new or otherwise — were in high demand and hard to find. Secondly, we realized that \$20K was not going to be enough. The next day, I wrote to Tim about our search and also the discrepancy in cost. I soon realized that my cost concerns were unfounded. Tim replied saying that donations had now exceeded \$40,000. But he got distracted while writing the email and by the time he sat down to finish it a few hours later, donations had exceeded \$55,000. "So, get the car you need," he wrote. "Debi said absolutely whatever comes in is for you. Help those around you and buy the supplies you need."

So that is what we've done. It took time to find a van to purchase, and we had many people helping us to look. But God finally brought us our van: a brand new diesel/hybrid Ford Tourneo Custom manufactured in January of this year. Needless to say, we are thrilled to have reliable transportation, to have extra funds to help those around us, and to be reminded once again about how good God is!

In addition to the NGJ fund-raiser, there were many other people who gave to us directly via PayPal and also through our church, Fairpark. We have a backlog of thank-you notes to write like you can't believe! In time, our goal is to reach out personally to



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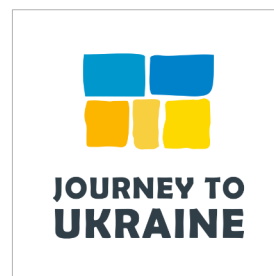
everyone who has donated to bless our family, our ministry, and the Ukrainians whose lives we have the privilege to touch. But for now, let me say it here...

**Thank you. Our family has been overwhelmed by your kindness, and we are grateful!**

*"And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." (Matthew 25:40)*

## Podcast vs. Newsletter

Before we close this report, I want to address some questions we've received about ministry reporting going forward. This newsletter, *Overseas Field Report*, has been our primary communication medium for ministry and family updates for over 20 years. However, during the chaos of evacuation, we found it simpler/faster to record brief audio updates to let people know how we were. These updates were well-received, and we soon turned them into a podcast which we call *Journey to Ukraine*. Hence the question many have asked: now that we have a podcast, will we continue publishing our newsletter? Simple answer: **yes, we absolutely will!**



We love the new podcast, and we plan to continue it for the time being. However, we also recognize that there's no substitute for black-and-white text on a page. This issue of our newsletter is long overdue, but in future we hope to return to our bi-monthly-ish publishing schedule. So fear not: if you're interested in keeping up with the Steele's, you can listen to our podcast, subscribe to our blog, and even get a good, old-fashioned printed issue of *Overseas Field Report* mailed to your home.

The story isn't over yet. God is still working, our family is still on the field, and we're excited about the journey ahead. We are grateful for all those who have prayed for and supported us over the years. God is faithful, and we are blessed beyond measure for the opportunity to share His Gospel in Ukraine. Thanks for standing with us!

## How You Can Pray

- Praise the Lord for the provision of our new van!
- Pray for the upcoming printing of 15,000 copies of *Good and Evil* in Ukrainian.
- Pray that we would receive residency status in Slovakia.
- Pray for health and strength for our family.
- Pray for our existing ministries in Ukraine (like Bible First).
- Pray for new doors to minister to displaced Ukrainians.
- Pray for peace and liberty in Ukraine.

*To God be the Glory*