

A BI-MONTHLY REPORT FROM LEE AND MARCIE TOSTI
GREATER PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND
FEBRUARY 15, 2022

Well I don't know if anyone else is having fun, but I am. I continue studying most every week with our sister Masha in Russia—we finished Daniel and are now in the Gospel of John. Joe G. from Ithaca and I study each Wednesday—we're in James. I meet with Joe H. from Woonsocket RI every Friday—we're in...the Bible. A few of us meet every Tuesday at Panera Bread—we completed Galatians last week and begin Colossians tonight. There are the congregation's Old Testament classes on Thursdays and New Testament classes on Sundays. And I preach three out of every four Sundays. Then there are occasional, private, one-time studies with saints from here and there, and frequent phone calls and text messages and emails offering encouragement or asking for slides or "What do you think this means?" Then there's opening our home sometimes on Sunday evenings for groups and socializing and encouraging each other. It's good to be used!

Oh, and there was the day the neighbor's goats ended up in our yard. While the owner was picking them up, when he learned that I am a preacher, he immediately replied, "I may be coming to you before long." It turns out that he has a bad case of life right now. So many doors have been opened because of the events of 2020-2022.

And Friday, the receptionist at the doctor's office told me that she is going to visit our church: "I love the Word," she proclaimed. I hope she does!

Then there was the insurance inspector. He told me that, before COVID, he was very active in several Bible studies. When I followed up with him about studying together, he responded that he would keep me in mind for future studies, but that "I'm starting an online live series this weekend on how scholars study the Bible." I'll remember to wear my glasses the next time I see him. I jest. And this is not to disregard the great efforts that scholars have made in their studies; rather, it is to point out the unhealthy attraction to something other than the pure milk of the Word. And regarding how scholars study the Bible: As you already know, because all valid Bible study is done exactly the same way using exactly the same principles by exactly everyone, if the scholar's method abandons these God-given principles that tether us all to the intended meaning of the Word, then the scholar's way is simply not worth knowing—besides being on the lookout for it; and I intend to circle back, in love, to check in with our inspector-friend....

There have been other mini-conversations with many people along the way. But I can always count on something spectacular happening on Fridays, when I study with Joe Harris.

Here are two fantastic quotes from Joe these past two months:

- "A lot of these questions I can't answer. And a lot of these questions are not questions that serve a useful purpose." Joe said this while speaking about his own "criticisms" (his word) of the Bible; for example, "There is a lot I don't know or understand about what happened with the snake in the Garden of Eden." Seeing and accepting this principle was a BIG step for Joe.
- "I took a look through some of the other books that were written about the time of the Bible. It's no wonder they were not included." Here Joe referred to what skeptics think of as the lost books of the Bible—books they think should be included in the canon but unfairly were not allowed in. And here we get a glimpse of how much Joe is willing to be reasonable and honest.

And, after three months of visiting and talking and contemplating, finally Joe and I are bringing definite focus to our discussions, along with a more conventional method of study.

First, up until the end of January, Joe's conversation continuously was full of doubt, continuously full of confusion and continuously full of vacillating between knowing that we have a spirit or not and knowing that our actions in this life have reward or penalty in the next life or not. For months we discussed all of this very frequently. For months he would agree with truth in one sentence and then disagree with himself three sentences later. Back and forth. And then, the last week in January, we gave ourselves the assignment of seriously and honestly considering reasonable evidences that we comprise more than just the physical. And the next week, February 4, Joe confidently and consistently asserted that he believes we comprise more than physical, and that he believes our actions now affect our outcome later. And he has not backed down from this.

Actually, Joe has always believed and lived this; rather, it was satan continuously sowing doubt and confusion. And this being a very big step in the right direction, I encouraged Joe about this.

Second, in one of our recent studies, Joe went on and on excessively (for thirty minutes straight), jumping from one relevant point to another relevant point to another and another, all of them relevant to each other but ever more distantly so. And then he suddenly stopped and said, "Sometimes I allow myself to get distracted." Having waited for months, I pounced, asking him if he would permit me to help him, and us, to not get "distracted" but to stay on topic. The next study, which was last week, we actually dove right into the text as soon as I arrived. Wonders never cease! :-)

And finally, having heard Joe refer to his bad past hundreds of times over the months, and then again on Friday, I pounced again and asked him if he has been forgiven. "Sometimes I feel like I'm forgiven. Sometimes I don't feel like I'm forgiven." "Joe, I didn't ask if you *feel* like you're forgiven. I asked if you *are* forgiven. And I'm guessing that you don't know." "You're right: I don't know if I am forgiven." Amen! Baby steps. Pray for Joe and me.

The brethren here continue to encourage us. Soft hearts are everywhere. Pleasant surprises occur frequently. Blessings abound. And we're all gearing up for a gospel meeting this spring. It's good to have work and to be focused. With God's blessing, unity will grow stronger and stronger.

To those of you who support us financially, we are grateful. To those of us who support us with prayer, we are grateful. To those who support us with encouraging messages and visits, we are grateful. And to those who are lurking behind the scenes, we are grateful for you too!

Lee and Marcie Tosti
4A Boswell Trail
Foster, RI 02825
Lee: (607) 280-0800; xntoc@usa.net
Marcie: (315) 608-1118; marcie-tosti@usa.net



Ice ice everywhere



A visiting little cutie

Our two youngest helping me replace the deck on our trailer