The cost of reconciliation  by David Brickner, executive director

In April I shared some thoughts I originally addressed to our Jews for Jesus leadership council. Those thoughts included loving God, loving people and loving God’s gospel mission. We are continuing to process these simple but crucial mandates.

Our love for God compels us to love others and to want them to be reconciled, first to God and then to one another. Yet reconciliation with God is a thoroughly supernatural event. It can only occur through the transformation of the new birth by the power of the Holy Spirit. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Praise God for the new birth! Short of experiencing it yourself, seeing others come alive to God is absolutely the most thrilling event one can witness. Once you see it, you are never the same.

In a sense, evangelists get to be spiritual obstetricians. Sometimes we see new birth after much “labor” (many visits and prayers), but other times we “happen” to be in the right place at the right time!

For example, we were elated by the following missionary report by Amy Moore as she was wrapping up this year’s Passover tour: “Sandy* and Rick* are a Jewish couple who came to a Christ in the Passover presentation I did two years ago in South Dakota. Tonight they came to my meeting with their son, and I found out that since I last saw them, they both prayed to receive Jesus as their Messiah! And that night I got to pray with their son, Seth,* to do the same! Seth is in a doctoral program at University of Chicago and knows some of my friends, so I’m going to try to get him connected. Pray for Seth as he learns what it means to follow Yeshua!”

Isn’t it amazing that God wants to use ordinary people like you and me to help people find peace with God? Paul says, “Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18–19).

We know the miracle of being reconciled to God cost Jesus His very life. And here’s the thing—it’s bound to be costly for us to be committed to this “word of reconciliation.”

The Scriptures encourage us to wrestle with an interesting paradox. We are commanded to have our feet shod “with the preparation of

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(Continued from page 1) the Gospel of peace” (Ephesians 6:15), all the while remembering our Messiah’s words, “I did not come to bring peace but a sword” (Matthew 10:34).

It is hard but true that reconciliation with God sometimes leaves us estranged from others, even those we love dearly. As you read “Bits from the Branches,” you see that this cost weighs heavily on the minds of people we meet with.

Our founder Moishe Rosen spoke about when he first came to Christ. He felt that if he could only show his father from the Hebrew Scriptures that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, he would believe. After hearing Scripture upon Scripture, Mr. Rosen finally reached out and closed the Bible, telling his son, “This book has come between you and me.”

When Moishe asked if there was anything he could do to show his father that he loved and respected him, the answer was, “If you should see me walking down the street, do me the favor of crossing to the other side so I don’t have to.”

Are we willing to count the cost, to experience the disapprobation of others in order to offer them the opportunity to hear and believe and be reconciled to God? To really love someone is to risk their displeasure, if there is even a chance they might hear and believe.

But what about the reconciliation that’s needed between followers of Jesus? Few seem willing to pay the price to be reconciled with their own brothers and sisters in Christ, despite the price that Jesus was willing to pay for us to be reconciled to God. For all the squabbles that occur among us, those who don’t know the Lord might find it hard to understand what Christians mean when we say that we are saved by grace. Of some, it might well be asked, “Where did grace disappear to after it saved you?” Naturally we are more comfortable expending energy on people who agree with us than we are seeking reconciliation with those we’ve offended or who have offended us. But what kind of reconciliation includes only those who share our views on one thing or another? We might find cheap ways to gain an uneasy appearance of peace rather than experience genuine reconciliation with others. In this, we become imitators, not of Jesus, but of the world.

Consider the toxic climate of this current election cycle. The discourse is so often simply the drawing of battle lines and casting of aspersions, rather than presenting a real way forward. People say whatever they feel they need to say to win/keep their opponent from winning, giving little hope of creating or perpetuating anything other than the dysfunctional status quo.

This is where Jesus is so radically different. Instead of seeking the support of those who are (at least outwardly) God-fearing, He actually suffers and dies for the very people who spit on Him and treat Him like nothing. In so doing, He doesn’t become less, but makes it possible for them to become more. The true power of reconciliation shines brightest when people who are so obviously lost turn to Him and receive His grace.

Even so, it is between those who have disagreed most strongly that the power of reconciliation becomes most evident.

It’s good to hang out with other believers who encourage and affirm our faith . . . but it’s also important to care for those who do not share our love for God. Do we find ourselves repelled by those whose sin identifies them as the very people Jesus would have chosen to share a meal with—much to the Pharisees’ chagrin?

Do you know that even today, some scorn Christianity because we are required to forgive our enemies? They just don’t realize that apart from Jesus, we are all enemies of God! The forgiveness we offer is no greater than the forgiveness we have received. That is the secret of forgiveness—remembering how the debt of our own sin was nailed to the cross. That

We exist to make the messiahship of Jesus an unavoidable issue to our Jewish people worldwide.

Jews for Jesus international headquarters: 60 Haight Street, San Francisco, CA 94102-5895; phone: (415) 864-2600; email: jfj@jewsforjesus.org; web: jewsforjesus.org; also working in: Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Russia, South Africa, Switzerland, Ukraine and the United Kingdom; editor: Ruth Rosen; art director: Paige Saunders; design and illustration: David Yapp; ISSN 0740-5901 Volume 10:5776, June 2016; ©2016 JEWS FOR JESUS.
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IT REALLY HAPPENED!

FIVE YEARS AGO, SUSAN PERLMAN RETURNED FROM A "CHRIST IN THE PASSOVER" TOUR IN WASHINGTON STATE, DISMAYED THAT SHE HAD LOST A SHOE ALONG THE WAY.

LYN TEXTED A PHOTO, AND SUCK ENOUGH IT WAS SUSAN’S SHOE. THE LADY HAD KEPT THE SHOE ALL THIS TIME, AND SUSAN HAD KEPT THE OTHER—WHAT ARE THE ODDS?!

THIS YEAR MISSIONARY LYN BOND TEXTED SUSAN: "ALAN AND I ARE STAYING WITH SOME NICE PEOPLE IN WASHINGTON, AND THE LADY HAS A SHOE SHE THINKS BELONGS TO YOU."

AND NOW SUSAN CAN CELEBRATE THE RELINION OF TWO "SHOES FOR JESUS!"

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Christ-like sacrifice that leads to real transformation. It won’t be easy, but it will always be worth it.

Find out more about David Brickner, his writings, speaking schedule and possible availability to speak at your church at jewsforjesus.org/david-brickner.

*not their real names

This month’s banner photo shows missionary Aaron Abramson engaged in conversation with a seeker on a midtown Manhattan street corner. Photo by Rachel Friedlander.
From Daniel Balogh in Budapest: “I was your Bible teacher for years and this is where you end up? Why did you leave Judaism?” The question came from Zhava,* who had taught me in a well-known Jewish high school in Budapest. I replied that nothing could be more Jewish than to believe in the Jewish Messiah. I showed her Isaiah 53 and asked who the prophet described. She looked at me and said, ‘Well, the Messiah.’ I showed her the New Covenant prophesied by Jeremiah many years ago before Yeshua came. She said, ‘Biblically, you are right. But you are living in the past, because today we don’t need to take the Hebrew Scriptures as our final authority, but rather the Talmud (the oral law and traditional rabbinic interpretations).’ Zhava is from a strong Orthodox background; it will be costly for her to trust the plain teaching of Scripture over the interpretations of the rabbis. Pray that God gives her the grace to take this hard step!”

From Aaron Lewin (at the time, reporting from Budapest): “Dan,* an American Jew, left his high-paying job in the United States to travel from Budapest: Photo ©Jews for Jesus/Leonid Dolganovsky to church with her—which is where we were introduced. ‘I met with Dan for weeks, and watched as he devoured the Bible! At one meeting, I explained the gospel to him with a simple illustration. ‘Imagine,’ I said, ‘that I had an expensive parking ticket that I couldn’t pay, and I was brought before the judge. The judge was about to throw me in prison when you walk in and say, ‘Judge, I’ll pay this man’s parking ticket.’ ”

“Dan looked at me intently and said, ‘So, you mean that Jesus paid all the parking tickets.’ Well, I wanted to see if Dan had really understood the gospel, so I asked a few more questions. Finally he said, ‘In your illustration, the judge is the father of the one who paid the parking ticket. But why would the judge do that to himself?’ I looked at him and simply said, ‘The only possible motivation is love.’ Please pray that Dan would understand more and more the great love that the Father has for him, and the price that Jesus paid to set him free.”

From Aden Friedman in Johannesburg: “I was presenting Christ in the Passover and a young Jewish woman was sitting in the front row, brought by her Christian friend. Shelly* had never attended a church before. She enjoyed the Passover presentation and was astonished by how Jewish Jesus is. She even admitted that ‘He could definitely be the Messiah.’ Her great concern was that if she believed and told her parents or friends, they would ostracize her. She gave us her contact details so my wife, Cara, and I will definitely follow up with her as she has made known her desire to learn more. Please ask God to reveal the truth of Messiah to Shelly, and to give her the grace to receive His salvation regardless of how others might react.”

Also from Aden: “I was in the office when a middle-aged lady charged through our front door asking to speak to someone. I ushered her into the boardroom and she began to tell me that I couldn’t be Jewish and believe in Jesus! We ended up chatting for 45 minutes about Him and she gave her contact details so we could get together again! Praise the Lord for His faithfulness in reaching His people. Pray for Judy* to come to faith in Jesus.”

From Israel, Tatiana Bolotov reports: “It was a regular sortie (tract-passing expedition)—some would pass by, some would take tracts and others would stop to talk. I noticed a woman looking at me attentively, so I gave her a tract. She was pale and did not look at all well, so I offered to pray for her health. She agreed, after the prayer, she wanted to give me her address to get our free literature, but could not even remember it. I calmed her down and suggested she call me later at the phone number on the tract I gave her. And she did! Ira* said that soon after I prayed for her, she felt herself return to normal, and realized that God had touched her. She asked to meet with me and when we did she was very open to the gospel. At the end of the visit she received Yeshua as her Savior and Lord. God is wonderful! Hallelujah! Now we meet together and Ira absorbs God’s Word with such joy. Please pray for her spiritual growth.”

Lisa Smolowitz reports from South Florida: “Anybody who has been to South Florida knows that many communities are gated. The gates come in all different sizes and shapes: some elaborate, with cascading waterfalls, others with just a plain bar.

“Three years ago I moved to South Florida. As I was wondering how I was ever going to meet Jewish people behind all these gates, the Lord laid this Scripture on my heart from Psalm 24: ‘Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of Glory shall come in’ (verse 7). As I drove around Jewish communities, encountering fellow Jews wherever I went, I prayed this Scripture. I’d go on various evangelistic outreaches, and have many one-time conversations that I’m sure God will use. But I knew there would be something more.

“Recently I’ve begun to see answers to my prayer. One way I’m seeing it is through playing tennis. Years ago, that was ‘my sport’ and I loved it. Then my knee was injured and for years I was unable to play. After having knee surgery, I discovered I could play again! I joined a tennis group in my community. Fourteen of the sixteen women on the team are Jewish and one is married to a Jewish man. I have shared about my ‘job’ with most of them and have also shared my testimony with many of them. Every week we go to a different ‘gated’ community to compete. Each time I play, I meet another eight to ten Jewish women. When I rush off to go to work, they all say, ‘Work, where do you work?’ as most of them are retired. As I explain what I do, I often get to share my testimony. Sometimes I see them again outside the community and have opportunities to share more of my faith and answer their questions.

“Please pray that God will continue to lift up the gates in South Florida, and that He will open doors to ongoing ministry to many of the women I am meeting, that they will come to know and love the King of Glory.”

*Not their real names.
Jews for Jesus and Berlin: a brief history

1978: Susan Perlman of Jews for Jesus visited Berlin at the suggestion of a ministry friend who hoped to finance an outreach there. Local believers advised that we wait. New friends Susan met, including Dr. Irmild Bärend (quoted below), later helped pave the way for our work.

2005: Our first official outreach in Berlin was a Behold Your God campaign. Thirty people handed out 300,000 tracts in three weeks. Avi Snyder’s photo was featured on the front page of a leading Jewish newspaper!

2006–2016: We’ve had annual outreaches in Berlin, with teams coming for follow-up every three months. Over the years we’ve built partnerships with local Messianic congregations and churches.

Summer of 2016: Aaron Lewin is leading our new Berlin branch! He says, “We plan to open another branch. When Avi replied that Berlin was next on his list, Aaron let him know that he and his wife, Becky, would seriously consider moving with him if he chose to go there. Aaron said, “A year later, while I was on holiday in Israel, Dan also told me that he should lead the Berlin branch since I speak German. I thought he was out of his mind! But the seed was planted and as Becky and I thought and prayed about it, a desire started to grow. Finally I mentioned the idea to Avi, who told me that this had been his hope all along—he was just waiting for God to show us!”

Meet the Lewins

Aaron Lewin grew up in England, though he was born in Israel and lived for a time in Greece. Both his parents (father Jewish) knew Jesus before Aaron was born. Aaron says, “I never doubted that God existed, but when I was eleven, I drifted away from Him. Over the next few years I got into the punk rock scene, but when I was sixteen, an experience with the Holy Spirit showed me that I was wasting my life. I asked Yeshua (Jesus) to forgive me and help me live for Him. The change was radical and obvious to all who knew me.”

Aaron met Jews for Jesus through family friends during a gap year between high school and college. He asked if we had an internship in Germany since he wanted to improve his language skills before his university studies in German and French. Avi Snyder, our European director, took Aaron under his wing and mentored him during a one-month stay in Essen—and the two continued to meet regularly via Skype throughout Aaron’s university years. Meanwhile, Aaron participated with us on evangelistic campaigns in England, Berlin and Poland.

Following graduation, Aaron moved to Budapest where he’d accepted a position as Avi’s assistant. Over the course of three and a half years, he not only assisted with administration, but very naturally began moving into front-line missionary work as well. In 2014, Aaron asked Avi if he had plans to open another branch. When Avi replied that Berlin was next on his list, Aaron let him know that he and his wife, Becky, would seriously consider moving with him if he chose to go there. Aaron said, “A year later, while I was on holiday in Israel, Dan also told me that he should lead the Berlin branch since I speak German. I thought he was out of his mind! But the seed was planted and as Becky and I thought and prayed about it, a desire started to grow. Finally I mentioned the idea to Avi, who told me that this had been his hope all along—he was just waiting for God to show us!”

About Becky: She was born and raised in Austria as a “missionary kid” of a Swiss father and French mother. At age seven she surrendered her life to Yeshua at a big evangelical event, but it wasn’t until she was fifteen that she truly and deeply understood the gospel message and was baptized. Becky trained as a nurse and worked in a retirement home for several years. She and her four sisters also went on a worldwide evangelistic singing tour which included the U.S., Thailand, Australia and North Korea. Becky also participated in many outreaches in Israel and has always had a love for Jewish people. In fact, she and Aaron met in Israel during an outreach, thanks to mutual friends in Mali, Africa, where Aaron had spent four months of his gap year and Becky had worked for eight months as a nurse.

Becky is a full-time mom to the Lewins’ three little girls. “However,” Aaron says, “she is no stranger to ministry and has been on a JFJ campaign in Poland, helped out on campaigns in Budapest and has done DOME (church relations) calling for Switzerland. When our children are older, we’ll see what ministry opportunities the Lord opens for her. We do hope to have a hospitality ministry to wandering Jews/Israelis.”

Aaron’s heart for the work in Berlin

“Our vision is to make Yeshua known to our Jewish people in Berlin, especially to the 22,000 Israelis who live there. We would love to have a Hebrew-speaking Bible study/ discussion group. And since many are accustomed to exploring ideas via the Internet, we hope to connect with people through Facebook, live chat and other platforms.”

“We also know that God will use our presence in Berlin as a testimony to thousands of Muslims who live in the city, and we pray that we might have a unique gospel ministry to them.”

“Finally, we hope to encourage German Christians to share their faith with Jewish people. The German church as a whole rejects Jewish evangelism because of the Holocaust. We want to inspire German Christians to share the gospel with all people, including us Jews!”

JEWISH PEOPLE AND BERLIN

Before World War II, 525,000 Jews lived in Germany. After the war, only 37,000 Jews remained. As recently as 1970, there were only 30,000 Jews in Germany. Today, the Jewish population in Germany is an estimated 200,000–230,000. Approximately 50,000 reside in Berlin, including 22,000 Israelis, 15,000 Russian-speaking Jews and 10,000 German Jews.

Please note: Statistics for Jewish population in Germany and especially Berlin are difficult to find. Figures quoted invoke guesswork and estimation, though we do have some sources: j.mp/ij stats2, j.mp/ij pop 1933 and j.mp/ij pop 1945

*Concerning Muslims in Germany, Avi Snyder adds: “Over a million refugees are settling in Germany, the majority of whom are Syrian Muslims. This might increase the anti-Jewish “heat” on the streets, but will also give us a unique opportunity to demonstrate the power of the gospel for reconciliation. If we reach Israelis with the gospel and they catch the vision for evangelism, just imagine: European and Israeli Jews for Jesus, sharing the gospel of peace with other Jews as well as Germans and Muslims on the streets of Berlin!”
WHAT WE WANT GOD TO GIVE US:
• wisdom, humility, boldness, grace, peace, unity, energy and good health for all participants
• divine appointments and Spirit-led decisions that put us in the right place at the right time to offer salvation to those who are ready to receive it
• grace and compassion for those who try to thwart us
• favor with authorities
• an outcome that blesses and glorifies God!

WHERE AND WHEN:
St. Petersburg
(May 29–June 11) led by Maxim Ammosov and Igor Barbanel

Massah
(June–August) college-aged Jewish believers go to Israel, then on to India to share their faith with Israeli backpackers

Budapest
(July 6–23) led by Ildiko Hajdu and Kata Tar

Berlin
(July 13–31) led by Leonid Dolganovsky and Aaron Lewin

New York City
(September 14–24)

Moscow
(September 19–October 1)

London/Paris joint campaign
(September 27–October 13)