

## Transcript of a Conversation with Dale Ledbetter, Former Missionary to Ukraine

**Question:** “What’s going to be the best approach to engaging with Ukrainian’s in our community and what’s going to be some of the best ideas in terms of reaching out?”

**Answer:** “In a nutshell, basically the same stuff that you would offer other people because they have moved here. However, almost every subject you will talk about there will be two groups of people, the older generation and the younger generation; there will be the more conservatives and the more open-minded; there will be the saved and the lost. Every subject has a dichotomy, so that’s what I will be talking about.

If you are after lost people really read the Russian/Orthodox mind set. We in America, we have the mind-set of here’s the Roman Road, here’s Faith, here’s the four points of whatever method we are using, wouldn’t you like to accept this?” “Why! Sure.” “Pray this prayer.” To them that is like rubbing a genie’s bottle. I call it rabbit’s foot religion. It is a very ritualistic mind-set. Religion and appeasing God is a ritual that’s magic, lighting candles, smells, sounds – it is not a relationship. Somehow you’ve got to get beyond this. They know about Jesus. They know the facts, but you’ve got to get across the relationship. It’s worse than Catholic. The way I have described them is to picture a cross between Catholicism and Gypsy fortune telling. It is very superstitious, very superstitious.

It’s almost like, if you have ever been to the rural, rural areas southern south of the border, very poor people who have syncretized on Catholicism. There’s not as much syncretism as it is just superstition, just very, very superstitious – things like urinating on your socks, if a child has you make them wear them. There’s a lot of old stuff and a lot of new things. They can also hack your computer better than anybody in the world, so there’s a lot of that kind of thing.

If you are talking the young generation, computers, speaking English, English as a second language, classes would be the primary thing I would start with. If you’re talking a Christian environment, unfortunately we have created a dependant society. They want almost everything given to them. I’m not sure where these people come from and what their background is – so I’ll be talking about that.

I was a pastor in Dickson, TN, after graduating seminary. Before I ever went through the “Experiencing God” course, I experienced God. I watched the Communist wall fall. One of the things you need to realize is if you look at somebody and their 15, 20, 25 years old, they don’t have the mind set of Communism, but you look at somebody 40 or over and they do. So there’s another group and you have two different groups of people there. You’re looking

at somebody my age and they probably don’t speak English very well, they are probably hard workers and probably drink Vodka a lot; or they beat their wives, treat their property ? . It is almost a maternal society. A lot of that has to do with almost all the men lost their lives in World War II. We lost 600,000 or 400, 000 in World War II, they lost 20 million. They don’t understand. Also they don’t understand the persecution they went through. As a result they have cocooned themselves, if their Christian. If they are lost, they are secular, materialistic people; me-myself-and-I, and sex and drugs, just like anybody here in an urban setting.

When the wall fell, I went on a short-term mission trip in ‘93. It was my very first one (shows map) You can see where I went – to the west of the capital city - Zhy is where I went. When I came back, I started the paper work process to become a full time IMB Southern Baptist missionary. We served from ‘94 to 2001 in the city of Odessa, if you look down South to the Black Sea. (Famous ice skater – beat Nancy Carrington – is from Odessa). This is the size of Texas – Texas has 15-17 million people. At the time I moved there, there were 52 million people. It’s a lot of high rises and compact urban centers and then miles of agriculture between them, then another big urban city then miles of agriculture. It isn’t like America where there are villages and towns all over the place. It’s just huge urban centers and then miles of agriculture. There are seven cities over a million, and there are probably another 20-25 that’s 400 thousand. If you draw a line almost right down the middle, Odessa and to the East is primarily Russian speaking and to the West are Ukrainian speaking. They pretty much know both, but these will get mad at you if you speak Russian. So that is why I ask, ‘Where are they from?’ I say why don’t you speak our language and they say ‘Russian was hard enough.’

Ukraine has been fought over for centuries by everybody, whoever went through there. It reminds me of Ohio, Iowa. I was in Iowa and they bragged about having top soil three feet deep; it is 32 foot deep herein some places, not every where. It looks like coffee grounds, just black. It is wonderfully rich dirt so people have fought over it for centuries. It has four distinct seasons. These two things are pretty much on spot, if you read them, don’t waste your time on all that. I love the four seasons. You can almost draw a line between spring and summer. ? is more like going to New York’s weather and Odessa would be like Ohio’s weather, it is far North.

My wife and myself, we moved there and served seven years as church planter and then I became the Strategic Coordinator for all of Southern Ukraine, which is the size of Arkansas, 8 million people. They were primarily Russian speaking, I know 50 words in Ukraine, mine is Russian.”

Introduces himself to Darryl Grady and explains he was giving a Readers' Digest of the whole thing to those that need to leave...

*"Ukraine when I moved there, had 52 million people and was just coming off of being in the Soviet Union. At that time it was the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest nuclear power in the world. They had a lot of bargain chips with those rockets. Probably of all the soviet cities in those countries, they had been the very friendly to the West more than any other. You had mentioned Slavic, the word Slavic covers pretty much Russian, Ukrainian. It also covers Polish and, Czechoslovakian. It covers two completely different worlds. When you get past the Soviet Union, it is Catholic influence and modern. Russia, part of what we used to call Russian the Soviet Union, is 15 republics, 11 time zones, excuse me, it is now 9 times Russia alone, 11 time zones counting Czechoslovakia. Those were puppet states. They were a border between an invasion down from the American's – that's what they thought. Stalin even made the railroad tracks to have a different gauge from the West so they couldn't invade. So when you come from the Soviet Union into Poland you have to spend 3 hours while they pick the train track up-put these wheels on it. Stalin killed 40 million of his own people. We hear about Hitler and we hear about the Jews, but we don't hear about this. He's probably the worst mad man that ever lived on the face of the earth, we just don't hear about it, because you don't hear about peasants. Back in the day of World War II Ukraine was just primarily small towns, and villages and farms and they did something called 'Russify' everybody, made everybody speak Russian and become one nation, one Soviet Union and that bread basket as you were talking about in Ukraine, became the feeding trough of the rest of the Soviet Union and they force labored them and starved them and that's how they killed a bunch of them. The Western Ukraine is still very country, but most of those towns are small and they are very, very independent minded, very nationalistic. The further East you get they are more sympathetic to the Soviet ones. Just raise your hand if you have questions. I have a thousand things I could talk about but I am just trying to give you a background and we will go from there."*

**Frances:** Talked about a lady she knows in her late 40's or early 50's. She is very nice lady but is very, very submissive. She was a manager of a plant back home and has a lot of education to be anything she wanted. She came to the states and found out her degree wouldn't transfer so she went back to school and got her degree in Accounting. She volunteered with an organization we have but we could not get her to decide on anything or lead anything because she was waiting on us to tell her what to do. She is a Christian. She would not look at us and kept her head down, being very submissive. Is that because of the Russian and she was forced to do that or what?

*"Whatever subject we talk about today, whatever that subject may be, there is going to be a two part answer; the lost and the saved. If she is saved she thinks God is from a different perspective. If she is saved, the man is very conservative in theology, the man is the pastor and very, very, very conservative. She would never, ever try to lead."*

**Frances** stated that the group was all women. *"She perceives you as being the leader. When we get into are they old or are they young, that's two different world views. On and on we are going two different almost with every subject."*

**Pastor 1:** *"The biggest thing that I have seen just from the interaction at our church and even the lady I met at IHOP, she is very young and very beautiful but very rebellious. She is nothing like the Christian group that meets at our church. She is young and unchurched where they are older, several are young, she's 20 something and going to school to be a nurse. She is very strong minded and you can tell she is very independent. I thought that just was a huge . . ."*

**Answer:** *"The average lost lady has 9 divorces in her life. The bottom line is there is no hope. I am talking about them over there. When they get here it is a different world, that's why they came here. They came here because there is no hope, for Christians there is no hope. Here is what happens. A Christian wants to earn some money, so let's start a business. Let's sell ice cream on the street corner. The government comes by and asks how much you made last week. He replies he made a thousand dollars. They charge them \$1150 tax. The government assumes everybody lies. The government assumes everybody lied because everybody does lie. If a Christian can't lie or doesn't feel like he can, so he doesn't and so he can't make ends meet. I literally know a church that tried to have a garden and sell vegetables. They ended up giving them away because they were taxing them so much it was going to cost them money. Everybody says just sell out of your trunk and don't tell the government. Christians are helpless and hopeless. They still have a form of persecution there. They're not thrown in prison but they can't get a job because they are not buddy, buddy with some form of communist. In their old days, if you did not sign the communist card you could not get a job. So all the Christians moved to the villages and lived on farms, with chickens and eggs. That's why they have large families."*

**Pastor 1:** *"These folks down there believe in having a quiver full of kids."*

**Answer:** *"What's happened back in the 80's, some freedoms came and some of them got out. Some of them were able to immigrate. If grandma got out, she has the right to get all of her blood relatives out. The state department will allow her to go get her other relatives. All*

40, ever how many they say now, 46 million, probably 40 million would love to immigrate. I'm exaggerating, but half the population would love to immigrate but they can't because the state department limits quotas and all that. It's the same thing with our southern borders. If grandma got in legally she can put all those people in. When so and so get's in they can put all their cousins in. That's probably what you have here – the core group. Like you said, she came from New York, a friend to friend type thing, someone to know here and be around. Lost people, Christians – two different worlds.

Let me talk about the lost people for a minute and their world view.

**Question:** “In the context, are you talking about secular versus religious or literally lost person saved.

**Answer:** “Almost the whole population considers themselves to be Russian Orthodox. If they are way far west and far west Ukraine, they may be Catholic. Polish is almost all Catholic. Most of them are Orthodox of some sort. There's the Russian Orthodox and a small group of Ukrainian Orthodox, it's the same. There are more Russian Orthodox members than there are all other Orthodox put together in the entire world. On any given Sunday you can't find them anywhere. It's a tradition. This is why. ???? Before he left, in a nutshell, this is how you understand their whole world view about religion. The lost person thinks of religion as a ritual of magic and mysterious – I call it the three M's. It is magical, mysterious and mythical. It is Catholicism and Gypsy fortune telling. When we ask them if they would like to pray this prayer, they perceive a sinner's prayer as a ritual. It is not asking Christ into your heart, it is a ritual. When we went over there in great numbers and volunteers in the late 90's, we came back saying we saw several hundred people praying the sinner's prayer, made a great video but on Sunday we couldn't find them. They would pray and you would see women doing this when we gave them Bibles. Not because they loved the Word of God, but because they perceived it as an icon – magic. So we got there on the ground running, we had to rethink our methods and strategies. We still have people going over there today who want people to raise their hands to be crusades. It's a good tool but it's not the end. Now that's the lost people. They think of magic and when you speak to them you have to talk to them about a true relationship. I think that's true in the states, about American's too. It's a deep seated – I literally saw a mafia guy with his brand new Mercedes and the priest was blessing his car. (Frances said in American, the Catholic Church does the same thing). They have been since the beginning of time. Go into Russia and Moscow the weather is just horrible. The winters are long. It is not so much the cold, it's the dark. All the mission books were written from perspective Africa, Equator, South America,

China but when the Soviet Union fell, there was nothing talking to us missionaries about the depression, the darkness and the long winters and nothing worked. I went four years and there was not a day where everything worked, either the elevator was out, the telephone was out, or the electricity went out, or the water went out. Something went out everyday. Their society fell apart, their socialistic government fell, their education system failed them, and their monetary system failed them, their atheistic religion failed them, everything failed them, and then they found out they had been lied to all these years. They're skeptical of everything. You have to prove yourself to them. Even the lost and Christians – this is where everything is the same on both sides. If they want a pound of meat, they may say you have your thumb on the scales. They have been taken advantage of. Everything failed them. So how would you feel if you found out tomorrow that baseball, apple pie and grandma's Thanksgiving dinner are all false. Their entire world has fallen apart. They are influenced by mystical religion.

Let's talk about the saved for a minute. There was a group, two main line groups, two groups of people. There was the official Union church that the Soviet's allowed as legal churches, basically one per big town and then there was the underground church. Soviet's lumped everybody into one thing called the Union - The Union of Evangelical Christians – EXB. The Evangelical Christian Baptist is what we call them – they added the Baptist. It had the Jehovah Witnesses, the Mormons, the Pentecostal's and the Baptist were by far the biggest group. There is a note here on one of these about the Pentecostal's having 3000 churches. I don't know about that. I question those numbers. That is the same numbers we have for the Union of Evangelical Christian Baptist and of the 3000 churches maybe 50 - 100 of them were Church of God. There were 4/5 that were Baptist and the other 5<sup>th</sup> was other. Anyway, here is what the Soviet's did. The Soviet's made the legal churches have a director for each state. Phil would have been the director for Bradley County. He has authority. That's where the authority comes in. He can fire a pastor or hire a pastor. Most of the time they allowed the church a lot of freedom, but when the director of missions came, they called him the elder pastor, it was me! The guy I worked with was very nice, very humble and he had great success. Anyway, the Soviet's established that system so they could control the churches through the central point. They said if you are under 18 you cannot go to church period. You cannot publically evangelize anyone. You have to be an adult. You cannot publically do anything. You cannot go to the lake to baptize because that is public. So what they did was sneak through corn fields and they baptized with a flash light and they taught their kids at home. The underground church says we will obey God rather than men and we will bring our kids to church. There was some animosity between the two groups although they have the same theology. Over the years they

have kind of healed those things and come back together. They are very, very conservative. I have often said, as a description, this is something you can only talk about in a Baptist circle, but they make Church of Christ look like Pentecostal Baptist. They are very serene. They will stand up and they stand up every time they pray. They are very formal. They are low educated, maybe two books, one suit. They are very poor. Long services because you spend a lot of energy and time getting to church you may as well stay for a while - three sermons, poems.

We had to overcome a misunderstanding our first year when asked to have a drink. I would reply I can't I'm a Christian. I had to figure out Christian doesn't mean anything. Everybody that is Russian Orthodox are Christians. "Have a drink." "I can't, I'm a believer." Most of the world outside of America thinks that. The Muslims categorize all people from here as Christians - Western people are Christians. I got a Visa to United Air vendors once and it had religion as Christian. They didn't ask me they just did. They saw I was American.

What kind of questions do you have?

**Frances:** "You mentioned that they are very male oriented in the church. So would it not be proper for me to deal with the leadership?"

**Answer:** "It would just be better. It's not against the rules, it's just better. Again, once you got to know them, they may have softened a little bit, being here. If they have been here ten years, they have softened or they have become cult like - not a cult but cult like in that they have become very protective. You have to judge, find out what that is. Are they very, very inward, protective and secretive, or are they just a bunch of loosely organized Christians that get together from time to time?"

**Question:** "If I am hearing right, I'm not sure you would have so much trouble ??????????"  
I can't see you ever taking that voluntary role

**Answer:** "It's the same, the man is the head of the home, but the woman is the neck that turns the head. There is a lady there that is influential."

**Audience:** "I can just about tell you who she is. She never took her eyes off me. She listened to everything I said. I'm not sure how much English she understands. When I first got there, the Praise Team was warming up. They all saw me and they came back .....my English is just about as bad as theirs. She would look and smile but not say a word. Everybody started praying and this one person gets very loud. I could hear a dominating voice from her proximity.

**Several talking at once - could not catch all of this!**

"It is very traditional to have one to three - I call it the Season of prayer. Everybody is praying and usually it's the pastor's wife that is a very influential lady - that's her chance to preach and she will take off and pray really loud for about 30 seconds or a minute, and then maybe another person or two, male or female, and then the pastor will bring it to a close. Then there's usually a guy that preaches, and he is a young whipper-snapper. Usually he is limited to ten or fifteen minutes, then they have music. And if they have a visitor, you're the Oreo cookie because you're the white between the sandwich and the pastor is going to fix what the other two screwed up. He has not planned anything but is looking at his watch as to how much time was taken and he will take time accordingly."

**Several talking at once - could not catch all of this!**

**Audience:** "Leo took 10 or maybe 15, I took 10 or 15 and the pastor took 20. What I thought was really amazing was the message that I felt God prepared my heart with kind of picked up where Leo left off. Pastor began, I don't know if he intentionally did it, I don't feel like he intentionally did it (cause I have a guy in very short, choppy sentences telling me what he was saying) he referred back to a lot of things God had spoken through both of us. He is a very dynamic preacher, very passionate, and I was blessed. I couldn't catch a single word he said other than ?."

**Speaker:** "You mentioned music. Praise band? Lively? Spirited? That is where the Baptist and Pentecostal differ most. They do this from theology. The major difference is the style. The Baptist are growing out of it but when we first went there in the mid 90's, they were minor key, poor, pitiful 'Jesus is coming back again, amen, poor, pitiful me.'

If you are persecuted like that, you feel that way. They are coming from a world view of persecutions, and very traditional and they are coming into a culture that's never been persecuted and very open about things. They had never thought of seeing television shows and stuff that we show on television. They have them there now but back then, it was a major catastrophe to would show Dallas, but if you go there now, it is like any big city in America. It is a rat race, people trying to make money and that's the way it is in the lost world there. The Christians have not seen they are still caught in the twilight and if they are immigrated they may still be in the twilight zone. The group that I know in Franklin, TN, is a loosely organized group. There are a few poor people. They are primarily from , in the center of the map.

**Question:** "How much of a presence does IMB have?"

**Speaker:** "A good presence, mainly one missionary in each big city. There's probably 15 families there. I don't really know today, I am out of touch."

**Question:** “Were we restricted of the ?.”

**Speaker:** “Our very first missionary was a transfer from Venezuela and he went in 1989, right when there was some major ? major rebuilding freedom and knowledge and in 1991, officially

*In many ways it was worse because they had this philosophy of freedom but they had all these laws of control. We’ve got freedom to share the gospel on the courthouse square but the law says you can’t. We had to fight with the police. It is according to what guy you got. In the Northern part of my town there was 28 signatures, a year and a half and \$40,000, and they got the right to use the land to build a church on. The Southern part of the town, the government gave them the land, and said to make something good out of it and reach people for Christ. The Christian doctors wanted to start a Christian clinic, a free clinic. The city said they loved the idea and when you get your licenses, we will give you this building, it is a former hospital, all you have to do is remodel it and it is yours. So he went down to get a building permit for the building, and they said they loved what he was doing, so when you get your license we will give you the building permit.”*

**Question:** “How can we make them feel part of our family, those who are Christians, and work in our churches, too?”

**Speaker:** “If they are a handyman, hire them. Have your church people hire them.”

**Question:** “We have been doing some remodeling and I hope I didn’t offend them. They have offered to do some of the work and I didn’t let them. Should I have?”

**Speaker:** “I don’t know how Americanized they are. No, that’s not a big deal. Business is business. If there is a plumber and you need a plumber, hire them as a plumber. Do anything you can to get in their presence and get to know them, but you need a translator. It’s not going to do any good to have him speak all Russian and you speak all English.

**Question:** “A couple of times a year we have a kids event with blow-up toys and we always encourage them and ask them to bring their children and be part of it. They haven’t yet and it seems like either it’s not getting passed along to their senior pastor or they are still maybe not ?. I don’t think they are convinced completely at that point that that’s a good idea for them. I don’t want them to think we are trying to integrate them into our church and I’m glad you brought that up and we are not. We want to have a relationship with them. I understand that they want to keep their worship service for their church. I’ve got that. I am all for that and I think that is great. But I would love to see us have more than just a landlord-tenant relationship. I

*don’t like that. I want it to be more of a mission, more ministry related, more relations.”*

**Speaker:** “Have you invited him to speak at your services?”

**Question:** “I have. It was kind of an open invitation on both ends. Al(?) says ‘When you going to come preach?’ I answer ‘when I am invited.’ He replies that I am always invited. I said ‘I don’t want to impose, just tell me when you want me there and I will be glad to come and I would love to.’ He says ‘This Sunday’.

**Speaker:** “He’s your go-between. That’s where your two world views are colliding and not understanding one another. Their church is used to spontaneous. They look around right before service and there’s five guys that can preach and they only need three today. ‘You’re going to preach first. Are you ready, brother?’ Why don’t you preach second! And then right before service starts, the American walks in. ‘Would you mind letting the American speak?’ They are going to roll out the red carpet for the dignitary. You need to invite him. If he has lived here long enough he understands how structured Americans are. He thinks it would be offensive to push his way. You understand your culture but you’re not understanding his. You could go every week to his.”

**Question:** “What I am asking is to have two of their pastors to speak for their anniversary. Would it be right or wrong for me to take the second spot? Let them have an opening guy, me, and them a closing guy.” Is that going to be received well?

**Speaker:** “I would give a special invitation to the main guy and let him do his thing. I would not ask a secondary pastor. There is an authority chain. Ask the main pastor. Let him make the decision. However you do it, just make sure you go through the top dog. It’s not the end of the world if you screw up.”

**Discussion:** “Just to clarify, we never wanted to integrate. That’s not going to happen with any culture. It doesn’t work. Second, third generation, yes – but not older generation.”

**Speaker:** “I have a very good black pastor friend. He is not a part of the association. I invited him to speak at our annual meeting and he wants to know what the protocol is? Is there an itch I haven’t scratched?”

**Question:** “I have a question about our involvement over there. Are the IMB missionaries over there now pretty open to allowing groups or they having to work underground.

**Speaker:** “Oh no, it is absolutely wide open. The only thing I would challenge you to do if you go over there on a short term trip or a long term trip, is to work through the missionary and ask them how you can help them rather than telling them what you want to do. We American’s are so self centered and think we have it all figured out. Our basic knowledge is based on the two weeks we spent there last year. They live there constantly. We need to ask what they need and what they want us to do and what would help them best. They will tell you what works and don’t work.”

**Question:** “The Orthodox leaders, are they called priest? Are they somewhat threatened?”

**Speaker:** “Very threatened. The Baptist are considered cancer. They put out propaganda that we will steal and eat their children. That is literally what they do in the year 2000.”

**Comment:** “That is what they do in Mexico. I have heard people say they think we eat babies.”

**Speaker:** “It actually hurts their reputation. We were in on a short term trip and I had half of my team in a little village all week long. They worked all week. What happens is the priest puts pressure on the mayor and the mayor gives you the permanency. One town they rang the bells that the Baptist are in town. In the big cities it doesn’t happen, just the little villages of ten thousand is where it happens. They are very powerful in those little places. It’s like going to New York – very cosmopolitan – very international – very used to hearing other languages. We had one guy that got invited to the Orthodox mass to speak and tell them what he was doing there. A very nice guy, totally against what we were doing but a very nice guy. A poor 72 year old volunteer stood there with his translator for 3 ½ hours, standing up-no seats. He did that because it opened the door for the Baptist living there. It accomplished nothing, but it opened the door. We didn’t fall down on the floor with a demon in us, we are normal people.

To sum it up, if it is a lost person I would talk very seriously about their relationship with Christ, not the fact.

Briefly talk about the facts of the gospel message, but really, really talk about relationship – the walk with Christ rather than a peculiar action.

Group, I would try to earn their respect anyway I can. If their child is sick, do whatever you can do. It may mean hiring a translator. That’s your biggest obstacle. There are 24 ways to say the number 1; 24 ways to say 2; and, 24 ways to say the color green or the word warm. It is the language like Greek. If it is the subject it has a form. If it is a preposition, it has a different form. If it is a direct object, it has a different form. If it is an indirect object, it has a

different form. If it is a clause, like with something, it has a different form. All those six different forms have male, female . Six forms for genders, so every word you have to say is it masculine? We say we are going to go to Walmart. They say we are going to walk, ride, fly, bicycle. ? . (discussion on the word “go”)

Ukrainian is a little easier, they say, I don’t have a clue. In Russian it took me 2 ½ years to be able to preach my first sermon and then it sound like a five year old. People in Spanish preach in nine months, not very good, but Americans can preach in 9 months. In any language, unless you are immersed in it, you don’t learn it. She said she learned it in school but she didn’t practice it. Unless you are immersed in it, you don’t speak it. You are not going to get anywhere with communication. You are not going to communicate unless they know you care.”

### **Discussion on preaching in Spanish**

“I hope I helped. You can call me if you need to ask something more. By the way, this is a portion of my dissertation and that’s why it starts on page 17 and ends on page 32. I didn’t give you the other stuff because it was 114 pages long. What I did was, my dissertation project was to take a volunteer group and go into an urban setting and use those volunteers to help us start churches in urban settings. Ukrainians started hundreds, even thousands of churches but they were ignoring urbans, because this is what they thought, ‘we can get a sponsor to buy us a farm house for \$5000 and we can fix that thing up and we can get some people who are already going to the big churches 20 minutes away and we can start another one in another village and another one in another village and so they started hundreds of churches. They led a lot of people to Christ. They were travelling 3 to 4 hours to preach to 1500 people, but not across town 15 minutes to preach to 200 people. It overwhelmed them.”

### **Shows visuals from their country**