Bob: And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us on the Monday edition—Monday, November 30th. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey. I'm Bob Lepine. So are you starting to feel like Christmas is now just right around the corner?

Barbara: I think we've been feeling that. [Laughter]

Dennis: —since July, Bob. [Laughter]

Bob: It's bombarding us everywhere; isn't it? I should mention as we start today, your wife Barbara is joining us in the studio. Welcome to *FamilyLife Today*.

Barbara: Thank you Bob.

Bob: This is your second favorite time of year—

Barbara: Second favorite—

Bob: —or maybe third favorite. I'm trying to figure—

Barbara: You know—[Laughter]

Dennis: You're right Bob; you're right. [Laughter]

Bob: —because we've got Thanksgiving—you love Thanksgiving.

Barbara: Yes.

Dennis: You've got Easter—you love Easter.

Barbara: I love Easter

Bob: So Christmas—you love Christmas.

Barbara: I love Christmas.
Bob: You just like the holidays.

Barbara: Yes. I think there’s something about the holidays that are just very easy—or easier—to pull family together, to create meaningful memories, to have the kinds of interactions that we long for, as human beings, and at home. But the real reason for loving the holidays is for the message—for what God did.

Dennis: That’s really what Barbara’s been doing through her Ever Thine Home® resources she’s created—helping families know how to love on each other / appreciate one another—starting at Thanksgiving and then later on, at Christmas, around decorating the tree.

Bob: Well; and when you started thinking about Christmas this year— and this was months ago—in fact, almost back to last Christmas—

Barbara: That’s about right.

Bob: — you had a dream / a desire to see families recognize that Christmas is not just an American celebration of an American Jesus.

Barbara: That’s correct. I think we tend to be very narrow in our thinking. It’s natural, I think, for all of us— we all think that our country is the center of the world, and our country isn’t the center of the world. John 3:16 says that Jesus came for the world—God sent Him to the world.

I thought it would be interesting for families, this year, to focus on the international aspect of the gospel. Jesus came and gave His life for every person in every country—as Revelation says “every tribe and every tongue and every nation.” So the ornaments we’ve created for this year are international. They are the names of Jesus in five different languages to help us, as families, to have an ornament on our tree to remind us that Jesus is for all the nations / for all the people in the entire world.

Dennis: You know, she created the first year around the Christmas names of Christ.

Bob: Right.

Dennis: These were the names from Luke and from Isaiah. Then followed those up with the royal names of Christ— each one in the shape of a different crown. Then last year you did different crosses and the Savior names of Christ.

Barbara: Yes, we did. Those were a hint of the international flavor of the gospel because each of those crosses represented a different country or a different culture of people. My vision is that our trees would really proclaim the message of who Jesus is. A part of the message of who Jesus is—is that He came for all people all over the world.
So this year, we wanted to focus on a few of the languages and the name of Jesus in those languages.

**Bob:** So around the edges of the ornament— John 3:16: “God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes would not perish but have eternal life.” And then in the middle of the ornament— in Arabic, or in Hebrew, or in Spanish, or in Chinese Mandarin, and in Russian— you have Jesus’ name in the script / in the alphabet of those countries.

**Dennis:** I’m wondering, Bob—how’s your Russian right now? Are you feeling real confident in your Russian right now as we call a friend?

**Bob:** I have a very limited vocabulary when it comes to Russian.

**Dennis:** But you are very mellifluous in Russian. [Laughter]

**Bob:** I’m up for giving it a stab. While we’re on the subject of Russia / the former Soviet Union, we have got somebody joining us today who is actually, at this moment, in Moscow.

**Dennis:** He is. Andy Leininger joins us on FamilyLife Today. Andy and his wife have been married for 25 years. They have three daughters. Tell us a little bit, Andy, of how you, as a southwest Missouri guy, ends up in Russia.

**Andy:** Yes. Well, I’ll make it real short. When I was 13 years old— and just hit with the fact that the average Russian couldn’t hate the average American because they didn’t know them well enough to hate them—you can’t hate someone that’s unknown. If I could miraculously live in Russia and talk to Russians—you know, speak Russian so they wouldn’t put me in jail—we’d find out that our heart, our worries, our problems are the same. Shared that thought with my parents. We prayed about it and kind of set it aside because we thought, “It’s completely impossible.”

Fast forward 15 years, my wife and I are expecting our first child. We’re at seminary in Texas. We look and we see the wall in Berlin fall down. Liz and I look at each other and say, “Maybe we’ll end up there.”

**Dennis:** Oh, really?

**Barbara:** Oh that’s cool.

**Andy:** And a few years later, we’re in the former Soviet Union.

**Bob:** Wow.

**Dennis:** You work for the International Mission Board of a Southern Baptist Convention.
Andy: Yes. I’ve been here for 19 years.

Bob: Tell us a little bit about the spiritual climate where you live because I have this picture in my mind of a dark, oppressive place—where a lot of people are alcoholics / where there’s just a lot of despair and not much hope. Is that accurate?

Andy: Yes, in some ways I think you could say that it’s true, but I think that it’s really an oversimplification. Communism came and left in the past 100 years. Russian Orthodoxy—a branch of Greek Orthodoxy—has been with Russians since they called themselves Russians, way back to 800/900 A.D. The roots of orthodoxy / the roots of seeing themselves as a Christian country is as old as the Russian culture itself. To be Russian is to be Russian Orthodox. However, that doesn’t mean it’s a phase. I think it is much more of a cultural tradition.

You fast forward to today—most people believe that God exists / I very rarely find a true atheist—but that it doesn’t matter—God kind of created us and then stepped off the scene. So you have the same kind of darkness you have in any materialistic society. By materialistic, I don’t mean just accomplishing or getting more things—but a materialistic society that doesn’t really think about the spiritual—but only material that you can touch, hold, and feel.

Dennis: Tell us about families in Russia.

Andy: Families have multiple generations much more than we do. There’s almost always a grandmother around helping raise the kids. Divorce is pretty high. Common law marriages are the norm. If you talk to young men—I spend a lot of time working with men in the 20-35-year-old range—almost all of them get real quiet and real sensitive whenever you talk about fatherhood and what it would mean to have a father that loves you, guided you, and nurtured you. That’s a hole—in fact, that’s one of the widest open doors for talking about faith because you talk about God, as a loving Father, which is a concept that most long for but have yet to experience.

Bob: At Christmastime, is the Russian culture at all like the U.S. culture? Are there lights, and songs, and decorations up around the city?

Andy: No. No. No. Christmas is always celebrated a little bit later in January. So most people celebrate New Years really big, and then Christmas is a truly religious holiday—it’s not a commercial holiday.

Bob: Interesting!

Andy: So it’s a great time for churches—we invite all kinds of people to celebrate Christmas—for that, it is purely a religious holiday.
**Dennis:** So what are some of the family traditions around Christmas?

**Andy:** They’ll have a tree. They have Father Christmas—*Ded Moroz*—and *Snegurochka* [Snow Maiden], which is always a kind of blonde girl that celebrates the seasons of ice and all that. They’ll go out ice-skating. They’ll go out and enjoy the Christmas lights and stuff; but there are not the kinds of traditions that you see in the States. They’ll celebrate Christmas at mass or at an evangelical church, but that’s about it. It’s not as big of a deal.

**Bob:** Tell us about receptivity for the gospel in Russia. You’re involved in church planting and in evangelism. Do people see this as some American import, or do they understand that Jesus truly is universal?

**Andy:** They see Protestantism as Western—I would say Western more than American. They tend to think Europe first / the U.S. second, when it comes to these things.

Most Europeans, and most Russians, aren’t just non-believers; but they’ve rejected the traditional orthodox view of Christianity that’s around them. So, when you start talking about faith, you have to realize that first they see it as religion that they rejected as opposed to a personal relationship with God.

Russian Orthodoxy is a little more mystical so God can’t be known. The idea that Jesus came down, as a real man, to be known—because He sweated, and was tired, and ate just like we do—those concepts are kind of foreign to them. You have to break through several barriers to get to the point of “God wants to be involved in your life for good and not to just be a punishing God, looking for the mistakes you make in life." You have to overcome those things—which means we focus much more on relational evangelism than we do on just one-time proclamation evangelism. If we just go out and witness on the streets, we are not after someone to repent that moment as much as we are to get them to study the Bible so they can know Jesus and see a God that can be known.

**Dennis:** Yes. Speaking of the Bible, what’s the opinion of the Bible over there? In America, obviously, it’s the number-one bestselling book of all time in our country. How’s it viewed in Russia?

**Andy:** It’s respected in the sense that they won’t desecrate it—they won’t put it on the floor—but a lot of people will say the old kind of Soviet things of “Сказка (*Skazka)*,” / “It’s a story, / It’s a fairytale.” Russian Orthodoxy doesn’t push reading the Bible, being people of the Word. They are more people of the service or ritual. So some people are spooked to read the Bible or think they can’t understand it. You have to kind of introduce it to them and let them get a feel for it. We always start with Gospels or narrative stories that are easier to understand.
**Bob:** When somebody makes a profession of faith in Russia / when they’re converted, are they going to face ostracism / any social pressure—are they doing to be persecuted at all?

**Andy:** They’ll face some social pressure. I don’t know if I’d call it persecution, but it comes at a real cost. I don’t think there’s political persecution to *individuals*—there are sometimes to organizations—but not individuals. A typical high school is going to be one believer for every thousand high school students. The pressure you face is simply isolation and loneliness—you are the only believer around. There’s no one to connect with unless you meet with your small group or your church. So you don’t have to persecute a lot when you are the only person because you’re the only voice saying, “This way,” when everybody else is saying, “That way.”

**Bob:** I’m trying to think of a young woman, who would convert to Christianity, and then she’s looking for a godly husband—slim pickings for that; right?

**Andy:** *Huge* problem. One of my biggest burdens is raising up godly men for the amazing godly women that are in our churches. I have put a lot of effort into helping men be men—which is a *huge* issue here. It’s amazing how an hour a month, over a year—if you do that with 20 guys—and you have 20 men, who will look at you and say, “That has made more difference in my life than anything else.”

**Bob:** Wow.

**Andy:** Which isn’t a comment on me being special—it’s a comment on the void—

**Dennis:** Right.

**Barbara:** Yes.

**Andy:** —and the need men have to have older men bless them / guide them and say, “Yes, you work better when you take responsibility and shoulder the burden, and guard, lead, and protect.”

**Bob:** Do you see the area where you’re ministering—or the broader ministry of Eastern Europe and Russia—is it hard soil to be working, or is it fertile soil for the gospel today?

**Andy:** You know, when you say, “If we share with—how many people do we have to share with to find a believer?”—you know—it looks *hard*. But when people believe, you don’t get people that are just believers—you get fully-committed obedient disciples.

**Bob:** Tell us what a church service at your church would feel like if we came.
Andy: It’d be two hours long or longer. If it’s a traditional church, there could be two or three sermons. Since Sunday school and discipling like that wasn’t allowed, they made up for it by having more sermons.

Bob: And the singing?

Andy: There’ll be singing in a traditional church—it’s going be hymns. In a younger new-church start, it’s going to be many of the same praise choruses we sing in the States—

Bob: Okay.

Andy: —but still longer.

Dennis: Comment on the state of orphans in the country of Russia.

Andy: Okay. It all goes back to the whole thing you were talking about of alcoholism, addictions, and the like. The majority of orphans in Russia—pretty much in most Western countries—it isn’t because there aren’t any parents, but because the parents have either chosen or deemed incapable of parenting that child. Most of that is because of addictions.

So there are many orphanages around. Adoption is much more difficult now. It wouldn’t surprise me if one out of every three evangelical churches has some kind of ministry to orphans, trying to fill that void, because there are just so many kids that—for whatever addiction their parents are going through / or cycle their parents are in with their imprisonment—in and out or whatever—their kids are now wards of the state. Their future is not real bright. There are a number of ministries but nowhere near enough.

Bob: We want to encourage our listeners, as they gather together for dinner tonight or as they’re with their extended family, to just take a few minutes and pray for what God is doing in Russia and throughout Eastern Europe. What would be the things you would encourage folks—if there were two or three prayer requests that you’d put at the top of the list—what would they be?

Andy: Well the first prayer request would be for spiritual awakening. The way we try to articulate that is: “Healthy churches developing mature leaders to start new churches for the glory of God and the awakening of Russia.” It’s an intentional vision statement.

The next thing I’d pray is for them to just ask God if they can come help us—come on a volunteer trip—help us evangelize, help us run an English camp, help us run a sports camp, help us work in some orphanages and share faith there, help us do conferences on fatherhood. There’s a variety of ways we can use special events and then follow them up with local committed believers—so that you take an event and make it a process—but come help us.
Pray for this. We find, time and again, our greatest work is our work of prayer—and we covet that. If you go to the IMB.org website, you’ll see European affinity [under “Explore the world’]. You’ll see consistent prayer requests for Russia that are shared there.

**Dennis:** That’s cool.

**Bob:** I have no idea how many people listening just sensed maybe God was tapping them on the shoulder and saying, “Should we go to Russia?”—but Dennis there could be some folks who are getting a call, even right now.

**Dennis:** Yes. I’m thinking there may be a young man or a young woman, who’s 13 years old—like a boy in Bolivar, Missouri, was / growing up, as a young lad, hearing something about God’s work in a foreign country—maybe it’s not Russia / maybe it’s another country.

Andy, I’m going to give you the soapbox here for a second. Speak to a young man / a young lady—or maybe it’s a mom and dad—who they just kind of, ultimately, felt like you did, at the age of 28/29, where you guys: “It’s time for us to go. It’s time for us to roll up our sleeves and be a part of it.” Go ahead and throw the gauntlet down—give them a challenge here.

**Andy:** Simplest thing I’d say is: “Never be afraid of the call of God upon your life because God’s call is your life; and wherever it takes you, He will be there. Wherever it takes you, it will be good. It will be hard, and yet it will be worth it.” That could very well mean Russia—it doesn’t need to be that—but I’ve found, time and again, that the joys set before us are far greater than the challenges and the crises we face. We are so blessed and honored to be doing what we’re doing. My desire for everyone is that they embrace the call God puts on their lives because God calls all of us to be fully-mature obedient disciples of Jesus Christ.

**Dennis:** Well-said.

**Barbara:** Amen.

**Bob:** Now, I will say it at the appropriate time: “До свидания.” [Translation: “Goodbye.”][Laughter]

**Andy:** До свидания. [Laughter]

**Dennis:** Hey, thanks for joining with us.

Bob, I just have to say, “You were flawless—

**Bob:** Thank you.
Dennis: —“in your Russian, there at the end.” [Laughter] You were perfect.

Bob: I was watching your face, as we were talking to Andy. I could just sense, maybe from both of you, just a little bit of the “Man, if things had been different, that could have been us.”

Dennis: Oh sure.

Barbara: Yes. I think so.

Dennis: We sent a son over there—our son, Ben, spent his senior year in college over there. I'll tell you—it is pioneering work, Bob / it is hard work. I so admire these kinds of warriors.

Barbara: Yes, I do too. It always amazing to me to see their heart for the people that they weren't born into. Andy is American—he was born in the United States—and yet he has a heart for the Russian people that God has given him as a part of his call. It really is a thrill to hear what he's doing—I admire it. There’s something about it that is just exceptional.

Dennis: I have a passion—it's part of why we do FamilyLife Today. I have a passion that moms and dads be thinking about: “What mission, what cause, what call are they challenging their kids with as they help them grow up?” He did a magnificent job of summarizing it. You know, whatever you’re about, you ought to be about the call of God upon your life—whether you’re an astronaut, a school teacher, you work as an engineer or a writer—it doesn’t matter—it all ought to be done for the glory of God.

The family unit—those of you who listen to this broadcast, who are raising your families right now, need to be praying for your sons and daughters—that they catch it / that they get it—that they understand the Great Commission and that they define success in life, not around how much stuff you accumulate, but around your mission in life and obeying Jesus Christ.

Bob: I’m looking at this Russian name of Jesus on the ornament that you have created—one of five for this year—the name of Jesus in five different scripts / five different languages. But I could see a mom or a dad taking this ornament and holding it up with the kids and saying, “Do you know what this says?”

Dennis: Right.

Bob: And they say, “No.”

Dennis: Right.
Bob: You say, “This says, ‘Jesus,’ in Russian.” On the back, you’ve written out a little bit about God’s work in that country. There’s a prayer challenge on each ornament; but you could go to the internet and you could type in “Russian churches.” You could show your kids pictures.

Barbara: Maps.

Bob: Yes. You could use this—you’d take a different one of these ornaments each night and give your kids a little history/geography tour. Help them be thinking, at Christmas, about people all over the world rather than, “What toy am I going to get under the tree?”

Barbara: Exactly. I think that these ornaments can be that—at least, that’s our hope / that’s our prayer—is that these ornaments would be that spark to a conversation that you might have with your kids / as you might have, as a family, about the people that God is trying to reach around the world and: “What part does He want you to play in that? What part does He want your family to play in reaching people around the world with the gospel?” It may be giving financially / it may be going on a mission trip—as our guest talked about—Andy.

There are ways that we can be involved. I think it’s too easy to sit back and go: “Oh, that’s the other side of the globe. It’s too far away. There’s nothing I can do.” That’s wrong because there are things that we can do to help further the proclamation of Christ around the world.

Bob: I remember, last year, with the Savior names of Christ—the crosses that you created—I remember thinking, “These are going to be my favorites,”—but then you started talking about the names of Jesus in these different scripts because they’re beautiful!

Barbara: They’re beautiful—they really are.

Bob: The lettering is beautiful. I started getting excited about that being on the tree and somebody saying, “That’s an unusual ornament.” These are evangelistic—people will see this on your tree and say, “What is that design?” And you can say, “That’s the name of Jesus in Arabic,” and share with them, on the other side, a little bit about God’s work among people in the 10/40 Window.

I really am excited about what you’ve done. I hope our listeners will go to our website, FamilyLifeToday.com, and look at the ornaments and decide whether this is something they’d like to have on their tree this year at Christmas. Again, the website is: FamilyLifeToday.com. Find out more about the Adornaments® that Barbara Rainey has created—not only this year’s set—but the sets from past years as well. You can also call if you have any questions; or if you’d like to order Adornaments over the phone, our toll-free number is 1-800-FL-TODAY—1-800-358-6329—that is 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY.”
I might just mention that, in addition to the Adorenaments, you’ve got other items that can be used in the home during the holidays. So, again, if folks want to see all that you’ve created, go to FamilyLifeToday.com and click the link for Ever Thine Home.

Now, quickly, let me just add a word of thanks to those of you who make *FamilyLife Today* possible—those of you who are in touch with us, from time to time, to let us know that you support this ministry and that you believe in what we’re doing. Our goal, at FamilyLife, is to provide you each day with practical biblical help and hope for your marriage and for your family. We’re grateful to those of you who help make all of this possible with your regular donations in support of this ministry—a special word of thanks to those of you who are Legacy Partners, giving each month. We’re grateful for your financial support.

If you’d like to help us with a donation today, go online at FamilyLifeToday.com; and you can make an online donation. You can call us to donate—our toll-free number is 1-800-FL-TODAY. And you can mail your donation to *FamilyLife Today* at PO Box 7111, Little Rock, AR; our zip code is 72223.

We hope you can be back with us again tomorrow when we’re going to continue talking about keeping Jesus at the center of your Christmas celebration. We’re going to talk to somebody who lives in Asia and hear about how God is at work throughout the countries of Asia and how the gospel is being shared with people in those regions as well. Hope you can tune in for that.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I'm Bob Lepine. We'll see you back next time for another edition of *FamilyLife Today*.

*FamilyLife Today* is a production of FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

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