

Orphans Reaching Orphans: a new hope

Introduction: A Tale of Two Nastyas

The one I met was right after we moved to Russia in 2007. She was already a few years out of the Harbor at that time, and she had come back to take an English class that I had been asked to teach. Nastya stood out to me, and we got to know each other on the way home on the metro. She struck me as extraordinarily thoughtful, hungry for growth, perceptive about people, and personally engaging.

Little did I know at that time that the other Nastya - the one whom the Harbor had inherited in 2004 - looked nothing like this person. She came to them from a “correctional” orphanage, which meant that she was considered mentally delayed. Once you get a diagnosis of any sort in a system like this, it's all over. You're stuck there for life, and no one tries to treat you any way except what your papers say you are. As such, she was well below average intelligence – not because she was actually delayed, but because her education and treatment had been so inferior. When she applied to the Harbor, she met *none* of the benchmarks that were needed to accept her into the Harbor (cognitively or otherwise), so the psychologist rejected her outright.



In the nearly four years I have known Nastya, she has always struck me as a person who is serious about her relationship with Christ, and the depth of that relationship has only grown. For example, a few months ago Nastya became inexplicably sick, experiencing pain all over to the point that she could hardly function. At first she did not understand what was happening. Gradually, however, it dawned on her that what was happening was not just physical but had a spiritual side to it. She felt like God was challenging her to learn to lean on Him for deliverance. And deliver He did – quickly and completely – from her disease. I find that in every question, what is most important for Nastya is, “what does God want?” Her faith is remarkable for someone of her age (26).

By contrast, the Nastya who came to the Harbor had little more than a vague sense that there was a God. She had a drive and dream to be somebody, and that was what told her that she wanted to move to the Harbor. When they rejected her application, she ended up living in a dorm for the first month of college, but she was so convinced she needed to be at the Harbor that she prayed, “God, if you exist, then make it work for me to come to the Harbor.” *Two days later* she got a call from Luba, the director, who felt that God had revealed to *her* that Nastya needed to be in the program, and she went over the head of the psychologist to accept Nastya.

Nastya's true self was so hidden behind a wall of lies about who she was from years in an institution that no one at the Harbor could even recognize Nastya's potential. Harbor staff nonetheless invested countless hours in her until the real Nastya began to emerge. As Nastya has told me, she came with a completely closed heart, but it was impossible to keep it closed when the staff were so open and loving themselves. She opened up and blossomed despite her best efforts!



Sometime in those two years, Nastya had to admit that God was real, that Jesus loved her and died for her, and that she owed Him everything in return. Nonetheless, she resisted baptism for a whole year after that, realizing that it was like getting married – the most serious commitment she would ever make.

We started inviting Nastya over to our place within a few months of meeting, and she quickly hit it off with Lydia. They would go on walks together; Nastya would take Lydia on outings around town; and they shared a love of clothing design. Besides just liking Lydia, Nastya wanted to give back to us for our hospitality by helping Lydia with her Russian.

Nastya would stay late, and we'd talk about God, her place in life, and relationships. She seemed to have a natural bent and inclination in counseling, so she was fun for me to talk with. Her appetite for meaningful conversation is voracious.

Unfortunately, between studies and (later) work obligations, there have always been long periods of time when we haven't seen each other. But sooner or later Nastya always shows up, and we pick up where we left off, and my desire to help her succeed in God's calling just grows.

Many times we talked about getting Nastya involved in the Harbor, because she has felt such a keen sense of gratitude to the Harbor for how she was impacted there that she wanted to give back somehow. How to make that happen was not so simple. What did she (or any potential volunteer) need to know beforehand? Who would supervise them? There was no structure to make it happen.

Outside the Harbor, Nastya is the kind who gets along with most everyone, and many of her fellow graduates from the Harbor seem to turn to her for wisdom and guidance in life, relationships, and work. At least this was an area where she could function on her own. As one of the most senior graduates of the Harbor (founded in 2002), she has a large network now of young adults.

Her influence among them is such that she now has several friends who have joined her in giving regularly financially to the Harbor. Let me help you understand the significance of this feat. Charitable giving is extremely rare in Russia, and all the more so among orphans. For Nastya, having orphans give back (financially and otherwise) is a huge value and goal, because it directly fights the spirit of *xalyavo* (which I would roughly translate as bumming off of the generosity of others – a life of expecting to be taken care of).



All about dream coaching

Enter Inna, a residential counselor at the Harbor. Inna has been soaking up everything she can in the areas of life coaching and counseling for the past year and a half. Recently, however, she had been feeling that her job wasn't fitting who she is, so she resigned. Inna's reputation as an employee had been so good, however, that when Melinda Cathey (the Harbor's founder) found out about Inna leaving, she asked me to find out what else might work for her. I did some coaching with her to assess her gifts and interests, and Inna confessed that she really wanted to focus on counseling and coaching if possible, but she didn't like being a residential counselor because it was so nonstop. I had no idea what would work but agreed to speak with Melinda.



Meanwhile I was to have another in a series of conversations with Nastya with the same purpose: to find out God's purposes in her life so that we could support her. I've mentored other Harbor graduates, but Nastya is one whom both I and Melinda have wanted to help super-charge for years. She is a complicated case because she has a heart to minister directly to others, but she is also very gifted in the profession that she has studied for and entered within the last year: sewing. Nastya works for a company that does high-end custom-made curtains and shades. Nastya's leadership has also been coming through at work: recently the boss left for two weeks, and Nastya filled in for her. Upon returning she sarcastically informed Nastya that she was told that Nastya did a better job of administrating in her absence than she herself.

All we wanted for Nastya was to help her find her place, whether it be in the world of ministry or business, or some combination of the two. I was getting frustrated with the process, because it seemed that Nastya couldn't make up her mind what she wanted. Then she made a remark that tipped me off: "I just want to know where I am needed." Right then I saw that I was approaching things from too much of a Western mindset: empower people to do what they are called to do. Nothing wrong here, but it was

coming up against another equally important mindset: where can I feel at home? Nastya wanted to serve, she wanted to be obedient to God's call, but she also wanted to be wanted and belong. So I just blurted out what I wanted: "Come help me reach the graduates. I need you."

That was all it took.

Although Nastya gave an immediate "hurray!" she started talking seriously with God. Her job pays about twice what a typical Harbor employee gets, and her life has been going as smoothly as she can remember. She assumes not everyone will greet her change of careers positively, and that there will likely be trials. Nonetheless, her excitement is growing, as is her conviction that God is really behind this move. In fact, she's 100% convinced.

Our big BUT

I called Melinda to share my conversations with both Inna and Nastya. After I discussed Inna's strengths and desires, Melinda immediately suggested that Inna serve as the Harbor's liaison to the graduates to help those who want to serve find a place, and to help them learn how to testify as to how the Harbor helped them. I couldn't believe my ears, because I hadn't yet shared what Nastya and I had discussed, but it was a perfect fit: Inna would be the link to the Harbor, and Nastya would be the link to the community. Could it be? Was I about to get not one but two awesome people to work with me? Two people whom I already knew well and had invested deeply in? Two people who share my values and goals? It was overwhelming for me.

God's hand was all over this dream, and we had to just admit it and follow. There was but one BUT. The Harbor will be covering Nastya's salary. I need to raise the funds for Inna and others we bring on to our team.

So what does this project look like?

Our vision: Young adults, formerly without fathers or mothers, but who now know the love of their true Father, joyfully pursuing His dreams for them and becoming spiritual fathers and mothers for the generation after them. One day orphans will father a new reformation in all spheres of society!

Our mission: To build bridges of relationship with Harbor and other orphan graduates that model the love of the Father, encouraging healing, growth, the pursuit of dreams, and generosity.

Specifically, Nastya wants to reach out to the graduates and:

1. connect with them, and connect them to each other through hospitality and events
2. provide opportunities for counseling and coaching them (she is training with me)
3. mentor them with life skills as the needs arise
4. point them to expertise and resources for challenges they face in life
5. develop a supportive community and sense of belonging

Inna, in turn, will be responsible for:

1. working with Harbor staff to develop avenues for serving the residents
2. counseling graduates to help them overcome personal challenges
3. coaching graduates to help them clarify and pursue their God-given dreams
4. building bridges with present Harbor residents so they can feel free to join our community upon graduation
5. networking with others in the community who are serving graduates

And what about me? My job is really fun:

1. train Inna and Nastya in coaching and counseling to a high level of competence
2. coach them in running this ministry so that they have clear direction and high motivation
3. provide oversight for the ministry for times when extra challenges arise
4. model spiritual fathering for the young adults, including a heart of hospitality
5. ensure that communications with the Harbor leadership and supporters remain solid



What do we need?

Financially: Inna needs only \$600 a month in income. I have my sights on one young man who has been in my training for over a year now with experience in orphan work to serve as well. He needs \$400 a month. Additionally, I want to raise an additional \$100 to cover ministry expenses that will come up.

I think you will agree that this is a more than worthy and yet modest goal. Let me tell you a little more about why I am happy to not only lead this new ministry but raise money for it.

1. *We are empowering new leaders from among “the least of these.”* We are combining service to orphans with leadership development, which is incarnational ministry, because who knows how to reach orphans better than other orphans? I don't know of another example out there, and Nastya is only the first of many to come.
2. *It's not so much a program as it is a process.* We don't have to focus on buildings, budgets, and bureaucrats; we can focus on people. As such we can walk with them, show them they are important, and give attention to what is important to them so we can disciple their hearts.
3. *Everyone's participation is voluntary.* Although in principle participants at the Harbor need to want to be there, in reality there are other factors at play that sometimes make them less than really committed. Now we don't have free housing or food to attract them, so everyone whom God sends to us will be there because he or she wants to be.
4. *We will have no restrictions on speaking about Truth.* As a legally secular agency, the Harbor has to be careful in how it brings up God with residents. Although we are not interested in being pushy (not all of our target group are Christians), we will be speaking freely about Christ and how following Him changes everything.
5. *This is a strategic ministry.* As part of my overall call to raise up leaders in various parts of society and to create teams of leaders committed to each other and spiritual transformation, this ministry is a perfect microcosm of the bigger picture. I'm investing heavily in two emerging leaders who will in turn invest heavily in the leaders who emerge – which means the most hungry for growth. It's a recipe for Kingdom growth!

If you've read this far, then I have no doubt that God is saying something to you about joining us in this new adventure. Get our newsletter. Pray for us. And help us reach our goal of \$1100/month. Online giving can be done through [this link](#) for Orphans Reaching Orphans at CRM, the parent ministry for both me and the Harbor.

Meanwhile, I will be in thanks that you are willing to say Yes to God's prompting in this.

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