

FORBIDDEN

SUNDAY SCHOOL



This story was written, so that children here in the West can understand just what it's like being a child in the Soviet Union.

Forbidden sunday school

Author: Karin Moret

Illustrations by: Ada Groothedde-ten Brinke

Forbidden Sunday School

English Edition

Copyright 2015 Voice Media

info@VM1.global

Web home: www.VM1.global

All rights reserved. No part of the publication may be reproduced, distributed or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic, or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, email the publisher, addressed “Attention: Permission Coordinator,” at the address above.

This publication **may not be sold, and is for free distribution** only.

I

«It's mean, it's really mean.»

Victor was standing in the middle of the room stamping his feet. His face was pale and angry. His father and mother were looking at him in amazement. What on earth had happened? Suddenly the door had been jerked open and Victor had come dashing in puffing and panting and stood right in the middle of the room. »They're rotten! It's not fair what they get away with. It's mean. It's really mean!«

His mother and father glanced at each other. Their eyes seemed to ask »What's wrong with Victor?« Something awful must have happened. Had he had an argument or even been beaten up? Perhaps he'd been attacked by boys who were too big for him?

»You just come here, Victor.« Protectively his mother laid her arm around his shoulders. Pulling Victor towards her she said, »You just come and sit quietly for a minute with me.« Half against his will, Victor remained standing at her knee, he was in such a bad mood. Then suddenly his resistance disappeared. Tears filled his eyes. Sobbing he clung to his mother, who held him still more tightly as if to say, »Now, just don't you be afraid, Victor. If the big boys come, they can't get you.« She stroked his hair again and again, backwards and forwards to calm him down. Victor's hair got into a real tangle but that didn't matter. It's so good being with Mum, even if, like Victor, you're nearly eight years old. Slowly he began to calm down. Then, still wiping away the odd tear, he started to tell them what it was all about.

»It was so mean. We were in class, Mum, and Yuri was there too. The teacher was telling us a really nice story — and it was a

true story — it really happened.« Victor's eyes lit up a little as he thought back to the story.

»It was about two men, Mum. They were really clever, They flew right up out of the Soviet Union but not in a plane, in something much better than a plane. And it went really fast. Suddenly, just like that, whoosh! Right away from the ground, almost up to the moon! It went so far. And then there was nothing but stars. They were so far away, that they could see the whole earth. The earth looked just like a marble it was so small! That's lovely, isn't it? I wanted to go with them — but you see I can't, teacher said that you've got to do a lot of learning first. And you've got to become a loyal member of our Communist Party too. When I grow up I'm going to be a Cos... Cosmo...« Victor looked at his father for help.

»Cosmonaut,« his father said.

Victor looked at his father and smiled, »It's a lovely story, isn't it?«

But then his face darkened, troubled once more as he suddenly remembered what had happened next. He'd completely forgotten about it because of the lovely story.

»But then, Mum, it was so mean! The teacher asked if there were any children in the class who prayed. And Yuri put his hand up. What does that mean, Mum, 'prayed'? The teacher said that Yuri was really stupid. 'Only stupid children pray,' she said, 'because there's no such thing as God. Even the Cos... Cosm... Cosmonauts didn't meet him.' The children all burst out laughing at Yuri, and then when we were out in the street, it was so mean, they beat Yuri up. He didn't hit back, he just cried and cried. They hurt him so much and he didn't even hit back, not even once — not

even when they made fun of him and called him 'thick' and things like that. But Yuri isn't stupid at all. He must surely know whether he believes in God or not. They were really rotten and Yuri is my friend.«

Victor's mother held him closer still. When he'd finished his story, she quickly pressed her cheek against his blonde hair. Over his head, she gave Victor's father a meaningful look. Her eyes seemed to say, »So **that's** what's wrong.«

»So what did you do then?« his father asked. Victor glanced at him almost angrily.

»Helped Yuri of course! I told the rest of them that they were really mean and that... I wanted to hit them back too... but Yuri wouldn't let me.«

Victor was now staring straight ahead of him just itching for a fight. His father could very well imagine how things had turned out. Victor was a right little hot head.

Father's face was serious though when he said: »I'm very proud of you, Victor, that you stepped in to help your friend. What those children did was very wrong. But it was also a bit silly of Yuri to tell the teacher that he prayed. After all, you do learn in school that God doesn't exist. It would be better if Yuri kept his mouth closed — then at least he wouldn't get into trouble like he did today.«

»Yes, but I think Yuri's really honest. And the others are just really rotten. I don't want to be friends with them at all. I'm going to stick with Yuri. I couldn't care less what he believes. And his mother has said that I can go and play with him.«

Victor was now standing next to his mother's chair, his mind firmly made up, buttoning up his coat. He started walking



Protectively his mother laid her arm around Victor's shoulders.

quickly past his father, to go out. His father playfully pinched his cheek as he went past.

»Have a good time Victor, but don't you become a believer, I can't stand fairy tales like that. They'll cause you nothing but trouble.«

When Victor had gone, his mother asked, »Do you think it's sensible to let Victor play with Yuri? You can never tell what will come of it.«

»Let's just wait and see. Most of these Christians are decent people. And if we think he's talking too much about what they believe, we can always stop him going there.«

II

»It's Yuri's birthday! It's Yuri's birthday!«

Victor could hardly think of anything else at all. After school he was allowed to go and spend the whole afternoon at Yuri's and could even stay and eat with them. His mother and father had said so.

«What's the problem?» his father had said, »The boy's only got one birthday a year.«

Yuri's house was really friendly and welcoming. He had seven brothers and sisters and there was always something happening. Victor was the youngest in his family and only had one brother and one sister. He would like to go to Yuri's more often. But his mother did not like him going too many times and he always had to come home for his meal. But **that** day he was allowed to stay at Yuri's. That would be really great.

At lunch Victor pushed between Yuri and his brothers and sisters to find himself a place at the table. He flopped down onto a little chair. The meal smelt gorgeous. And it was lovely having so many people round the table.

But what was happening? The seats next to him were still empty. Looking up in amazement, Victor saw all the children standing up, with their hands together and their eyes closed. Victor blushed red as he jumped to his feet. He copied the others and closed his eyes tightly. Then what would happen?

Yuri's mother's voice rang out in the silence:

»Our Father in Heaven,«

Who on earth can that be, thought Victor. Yuri's father works in the factory, why is she saying thank you for Yuri's birthday? And for the food? Surely Yuri's father has worked for it?

»We thank you that Victor can be with us today. Grant that he may become your child.«

What was Yuri's mother talking about now? Victor had already got one father. But wasn't it nice that Yuri's mother was pleased he was there?

Then Yuri's mother said a strange word: 'Amen' or something like that. Then the children all repeated it one after the other. After the last strange word had been said, suddenly they all sat down. Victor sat down too, slightly embarrassed. Was that praying then? So that's what it is.

Victor began to watch carefully what the other children were doing. He didn't want to draw attention to himself again. Anyway, it looked as though nobody noticed. It was just as nice and friendly as the other times when he'd been round to play there.

Yuri's mother made sure that Victor soon felt completely at

Victor saw all the children standing up, with their hands together and their eyes closed.



home. It wasn't long before he'd forgotten his mistake. But he didn't forget the questions which he wanted to ask Yuri later. There was something so loving and warm in Yuri's mother's voice when she was talking to the 'Father in Heaven'. He must be very dear to her. Victor decided he would like to know more about him.

The children thoroughly enjoyed themselves. The hours seemed to fly past. Before they realised, the afternoon was over and Yuri's father was home.

There was another meal but this time Victor knew what to do. He'd got his hands together and his eyes closed even before the rest of the children. He waited eagerly to hear what Yuri's father would say. Again he was surprised at the loving way Yuri's father spoke to this 'Father in Heaven'. Yuri's father didn't say much that was really new. But after the meal...

»Daddy, will you tell us about the lost sheep?«

Victor looked at Yuri, with his large and questioning eyes.

»Daddy always tells us a Bible story after supper and then afterwards, we all pray together,« Yuri quickly explained.

»Do you know the story about the lost sheep, Victor?« Yuri's father asked. Victor shook his head in embarrassment. Now Yuri's father would really think him stupid.

»But I do like stories,« he said, quickly trying to cover up his ignorance.

»Well, that's good, Victor. You just listen carefully then.«

Yuri's father was a really good story teller and the children listened with bated breath. They could almost see the shepherd wandering through the desert with his sheep. The shepherd knew just where he could find something for his sheep to eat, so his

sheep stayed close to him. Near to the shepherd they found everything they needed. There was just one sheep which was stubborn and went its own way. It wandered further and further away from the shepherd, thinking it could find something to eat by itself. A lovely little place for food over there, just further on another one, and another. Then suddenly the rest of the flock was nowhere to be seen, and it was getting dark. Soon the wild beasts of prey would come. What a stupid, stupid sheep! That was just what happened. He looked everywhere but couldn't find the flock anywhere. In fear, he started bleating. But who would hear him bleating in this endless wilderness? Far away with the flock, the shepherd was standing counting the sheep... 90, 94, 98, 99. Surely there was something wrong — there were supposed to be 100. He counted them again. No, he hadn't made a mistake — there was one sheep missing. He looked at the sheep carefully. Yes, just as he thought: it was the self-willed sheep that was missing. The shepherd knew that that sheep did not like being obedient. He always wanted to go his own way. How often he had to call him back! Oh you silly animal — you'll die without me.

The shepherd's heart was full of compassion. In his imagination he could hear the frightened sheep bleating far away in the desert. Also he could hear the howling of the wolves looking for prey. If they were to find that sheep... Quickly he glanced over the flock. The sheep were peacefully grazing close to one another. He made his mind up — he'd leave them to go and look for the silly sheep. But would he find him? Yuri's father described very vividly how much trouble the shepherd took. Finally he managed to find the sheep. It was tired, and worn out, but still alive. Because the sheep couldn't walk any more he picked him up and

put him on his shoulders. How happy the shepherd was! He told everyone the story.

Yuri's father continued, »And our 'Father in Heaven' is just as happy as that shepherd when people turn to Him, when they don't remain foolish any longer like that stubborn sheep. For if people decide for themselves what they're going to do, then it costs them their lives. And the Lord doesn't want that — He loves them far too much.«

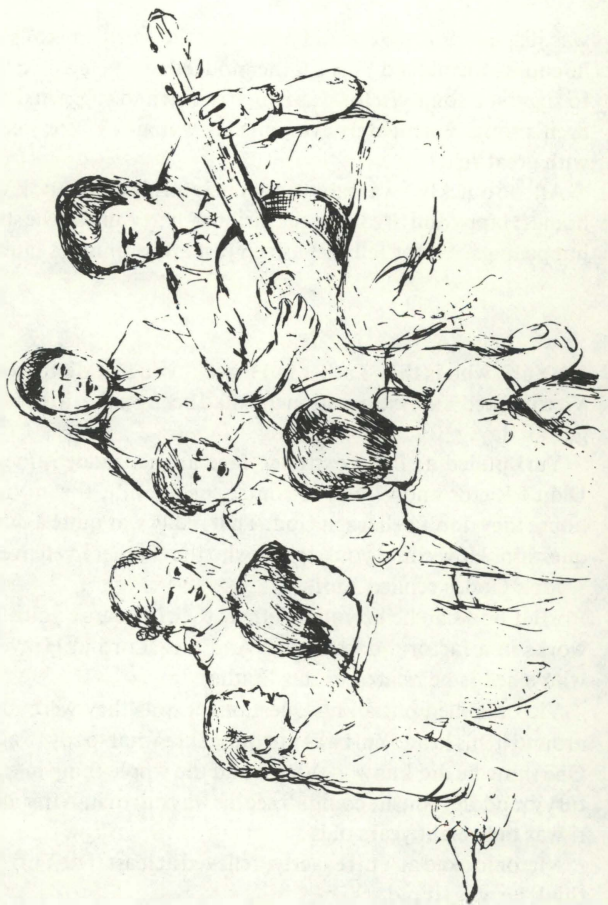
With a deep sigh, Victor roused himself from his rapt attention.

That was a good story! He was glad that the shepherd had been able to find the sheep after all. It would have been a crying shame if a big lion or even a tiger had eaten it up. But that bit at the end about 'The Lord in Heaven' and 'the people' — he didn't understand that. It must be a man who was just as nice as this 'Father' who lived there. He'd have to ask Yuri.

»Didn't the evening pass quickly,« Victor was thinking. They got down from the table and the children went and knelt together in a corner. Yuri's father and mother joined them. Quickly Victor joined them too. It would be nice. Were they going to play a game? Victor waited with great eagerness. Yuri's father started talking about his work in the factory, about school, about everybody here in the house and about other people. It sounded similar to what had happened before the meal but just a little different. Then Yuri's mother spoke and then all the children took their turn. And even the children talked again with this 'Father in Heaven'. And after this last strange word they all stood up again.

And then Yuri's father picked up a guitar and they all sang together — Victor thought it was great. It sounded really lovely. It

Yuri's father picked up a guitar and they all sang together.



was just a shame that he did not know the words, because then he could join in. Had Yuri's father noticed that? He asked Victor to suggest a song. Victor was embarrassed and suggested a children's song. Fortunately everyone knew it and Victor joined in with great relief.

All too quickly it was time to go. Yuri and his father took Victor home. Happy and tired with the birthday party and all the strange happenings, Victor fell fast asleep just a few minutes later.

III

»Yuri, who is this 'Father in Heaven' you all talk to?« Shyly Victor asked Yuri the question that had been on the tip of his tongue all day.

Yuri pulled a slightly strange face at this sudden question. Didn't Victor know? No, of course, he doesn't, for in Victor's house they don't believe in God. That really was quite a difficult question. How could you explain who the 'Father in Heaven' is?

»It's God,« replied Yuri.

»But how can he be your 'Father' then? Because your father works in a factory, doesn't he? And this 'Lord in Heaven' — who's he? Is he related to this 'Father'?«

Victor spilled out all his questions just as they were rushing around in his head. Yuri was not quite sure what to say to all this. One thing he did know — Victor had the whole thing in a topsy turvy muddle! And he couldn't see his way out of it. After all, Yuri was only eight years old!

Victor looked at Yuri eagerly, relieved at least that Yuri didn't think he was stupid.

»I don't really know. Let's ask Dad. He knows an awful lot. And the Sunday School teacher does too. It's all in the Bible.

Victor's face showed his disappointment. Yuri could see his disappointment and felt quite stupid. Dad would certainly know how to answer and so would the Sunday School teacher. All at once, his little face lit up.

»If only it were possible to...«

»Perhaps if you were to come to Sunday School. The teacher there knows everything and you can ask all your questions.«

Victor's eyes lit up. That would be really good. But would his father and mother let him go? Victor had a nasty feeling that they might just say no. Then he wouldn't be able to, and he would so very much like to know the answers. He just wouldn't say anything at home. That would be the best thing to do.

Victor told Yuri that he wanted to come with him to Sunday School.

It was a really odd word actually: 'Sunday School'. Fancy having school on Sundays! But Yuri's Sunday School was not always held on Sundays and not always in the same place. It was almost always on different days and in different places. You never knew where and when the next Sunday School would be. You only found out a few hours beforehand. Victor thought that this was really exciting. You're not supposed to tell anyone in authority either, because in the Soviet Union, it's forbidden to tell children about God. If the police were to find out about it, they would come and lock up all the Sunday School teachers. And then the fathers and mothers would also get into trouble with the police.

Victor promised not to say a word to anyone. He was not to say anything to his mother or father either. Only if they ask, for

Yuri said you're not supposed to tell lies to mother or father. God doesn't want that.

Victor waited impatiently for news as to where and when the Sunday School would take place. Again and again he asked Yuri if he knew yet when it would be. But Yuri still didn't know.

Every morning Victor asked Yuri about it. But Yuri still did not know. »You've got to be patient,« Yuri wisely told him. »It will come, you can be sure.« Yuri was quite used to not knowing when he could go to Sunday School. Finally though he became affected by Victor's impatience and waited for the news just as eagerly as Victor. It was so exciting that his friend was to come to Sunday School with him.

Yuri told Victor all sorts of stories about Sunday School and Victor did not get tired of asking more and more about it. They talked about almost nothing else apart from Sunday School. It seemed such a very long time until the next one.

IV

Yuri had just given Victor a dig in the ribs. His eyes were sparkling.

»Now, it must be now,« Yuri had whispered to him, as he saw a young girl crossing the street.

Victor had looked at him in astonishment.

»Over there, look. She also goes to the Sunday School.«

Suddenly Victor understood and jumped for joy. News was on its way.

But the girl just raised her hand and disappeared in a doorway. So there was no Sunday School...

The boys were bored just wandering through the streets, not feeling like playing at all. All these games — they were not very keen on them really. If only they could go to Sunday School now...

That would be really good. But the afternoon passed by and still no news.

»I'm going home,« Victor said, bored. But he didn't stir, as he had not completely made his mind up. There was nothing to do at home either.

»Hello Yuri! Hello Victor!« a boy called cheerfully.

»It's Pavel!« They greeted the son of Yuri's old neighbours. Sometimes the three of them played together. It was good that Pavel had joined them. He was bound to know a good game. Pavel always had got very practical ideas. For a moment they forgot their disappointment about Sunday School.

»Do you want to play with us, Pavel?« Victor called.

»No, I don't feel like it,« replied Pavel and then whispered behind his hand to Yuri, »Come here a minute!«

Yuri slowly strolled over.

»Back in a minute,« he said glancing back at Victor.

Victor could feel his anger rising inside him Pavel had certainly spoken quietly but all the same Victor could see that he wasn't wanted. Oh — how stupid! And Yuri's stupid too! Just look at how they're whispering to each other. As if he could hear from where he was!

Sad and angry Victor turned round and started running home. He could quite well do without this Sunday School.

»Victor... Vi-i-ictor!« Yuri called after him loudly. Victor paid no attention to him at all, but just kept on walking without



Just look at how they're whispering to each other. As if he could hear from where he was!

turning round. Yuri quickly ran after him. Victor really was strange at times.

»Victor!«

Yuri was right by him now, breathless because he had been running.

»Wait... please... wait just a minute,« he said quite out of breath. »We've got it now!...«

Victor looked at him but didn't understand. His whole expression was one of questioning.

»Listen, we've got the news... The news about Sunday School!«

Victor's annoyance disappeared in a flash. He listened with great excitement to what the breathless Yuri told him.

»So then, Victor, here on the corner, in an hour's time. I've got to go and tell Vladimir first, then he's got to go and tell Andrei. See you soon!« With that Yuri had gone.

For a moment, Victor didn't know what to do. He'd really like to dance for joy right there in the middle of the street. But he couldn't do that. It was a secret. No-one was supposed to know that anything unusual was happening.

Where on earth will they go? Yuri didn't say. But he definitely knew. He'd got to tell Pavel and he in turn must tell Andrei.

Victor was so excited that he didn't know what he was going to do for the next hour. He wandered up and down for a while, still undecided. Finally he rushed off home.

V

After going along all kinds of streets and alleyways Victor and Yuri finally came to a house. The room had been more or less cleared out and wooden benches brought in. Already there were lots of children there. Victor couldn't take it all in at once. A man stood up.

»Now we're starting,« Yuri whispered. The teacher said how pleased he was that so many children had come once again. Firstly they prayed. Victor stood up like all the other children. He was proud that he already knew what to do.

The rest of what happened seemed like a dream to Victor. The children were asked to say what the teacher said last time. They sang and also learnt a new song. The teacher told them a story out of a big fat book. Victor now knew that that was the Bible. It was all about a boy who wouldn't do what his father said. He asked his father for a lot of money and then he went far away. In a far-off country he spent all his father's money, right down to the last penny. So he had to endure hunger. Then the boy became very sorry and he went back to his father. The father wasn't angry with him at all. He was so full of joy that his son had come back that he gave him new clothes and held a big party for him.

»And the Lord our God is a Father who is just like that,« the teacher then said. »All men have turned away from God and no longer listen to Him. That's why they're no longer really happy and joyful. But if they are sorry that they've run away, they can come back to the Lord, for the Lord rejoices just like this father did, when we want to listen to Him again. Then He makes us really joyful and happy.«

What happened seemed like a dream to Victor...



So, gradually, it dawned on Victor that God is also the 'Father in Heaven'.

Every time a Sunday School was held Victor was there. He heard about the Lord Jesus who came to this earth to take the punishment for men's evil. In Victor's heart there grew an ever greater desire to become a child of this 'Heavenly Father'. Victor wanted to know more and more and the teacher didn't get tired of answering all his questions.

VI

Soon Victor's mother realised that sometimes he was gone for a really long time.

»Where on earth has the boy got to now?« she said to his father when, once again, Victor was nowhere to be found, Victor's mother was beginning to guess... »I don't know, but I'm not too keen on his being so friendly with this Yuri. They're soon going to turn him into another Christian. Sometimes he just sits there lost in thought and says such strange things. I just hope they're not secretly trying to influence him with their Bible. Not that I've got anything against Christians, it's just that I've never met a single Christian who's managed to get on in our country. There's not one of them gets a decent job. I'm not letting our Victor turn into one of them.«

»No, I'm not either,« Victor's father replied. »As soon as he gets back, I'm going to have a talk to him.«

A short while later, their youngest son was standing in the middle of the room, quite breathless because he'd been running so much.

»Where have you been then?« Victor's father asked him.

»I've only been out with Yuri,« Victor said, dodging the question. Then he waited, quite worried really. Would his father be satisfied with that answer? It didn't look like it unfortunately...

»Where have you been?«

Victor's cheeks slowly turned red. »To Sunday School.«

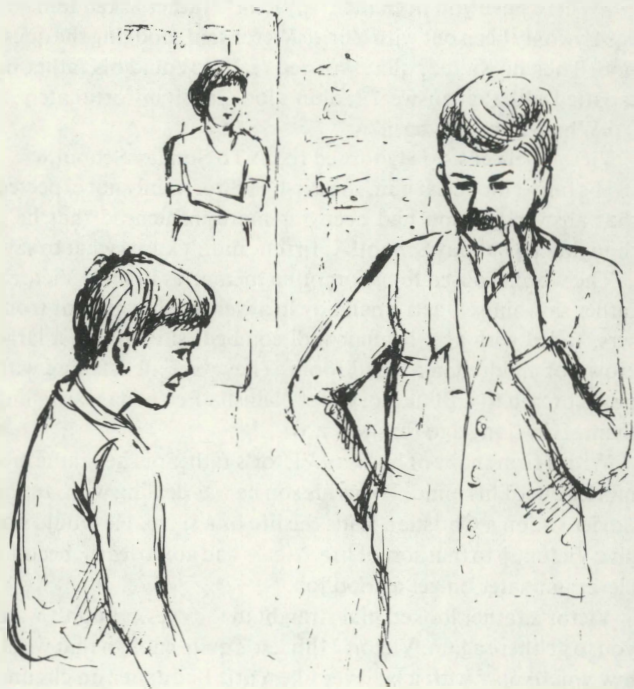
His father looked at him, shocked. He'd certainly not expected that answer! His son had been far more influenced that he'd thought. To Sunday School! At first he didn't know what to say.

The word aroused long-forgotten memories in him. Victor's father saw himself as a small boy in a well-washed pair of trousers, faded with age, his hair well combed, sitting with a large crowd of children in a small room. They were all listening with bated breath to a Bible story that Natasha Petrovna was telling them. How long ago that was now...!

With a firm shake of his head Victor's father pushed these memories out of his mind. It was his son he was dealing with. In the Soviet Union a Christian leads the life of a slave. He would not give Victor up to that sort of life. Victor had got to learn, become clever and later on get a good job.

Victor's father looked him straight in the eyes. »I don't want you to go there again, Victor. I think it's quite enough that we allow you to play with a believer like Yuri. But under no circumstances do I want you getting involved with these silly ideas. And that's why you're not going to the Sunday School anymore. Now is that clear?!«

»Yes... but... Dad... we don't do anything stupid. It's really good in Sunday School. They tell you so many lovely stories... And we sing too.«



«I really want you to have a good life. That's why you can't go to Sunday School.»

Victor's lips trembled slightly. His face was really pale. For a moment there was complete silence. Victor did not know that his father was thinking back to his own childhood.

Then Victor plucked up courage. Perhaps his father was open to be persuaded.

»It's really good there, Dad... just listen...« Stumbling over his words every now and then, Victor told the story of the lost sheep. »This father peered into the distance every day to see whether his son was coming back or not. He wanted to see him so much. And when the son did come back he wasn't angry at all, just pleased. And he held a big party. And the Lord is pleased just like that when someone comes back to Him.«

Victor's father still did not say anything. It looked as though he was lost in a dream world. Victor had butterflies in his tummy. What could be the matter with father? Was he angry with him after all?

»Dad?« A small hand touched his father's arm. Victor looked up at him pleadingly.

»My son,« his father's hand lay heavy on Victor's small shoulders.

»I really want you to have a good life. That's why you can't go to Sunday School. I'm counting on you to obey me.«

The following week Victor did not go to Sunday School.

»I'll listen carefully. Then I'll tell you the stories,« Yuri said to comfort him. »And I'll teach you all the songs too.« Victor looked at him thankfully, but all the same...

That afternoon seemed endless to Victor. Deep in his heart there was a painful longing growing and growing. It felt as though his Heavenly Father was now quite far away, far away at

Sunday School where Victor could no longer go. He sat at home and didn't want to play until his mother sent him outside, because he was getting under her feet too much.

»Victor, I told the teacher about it. And we've all prayed for you. Look this is for you. It's from the teacher. It's good isn't it?«

Together they looked at the text which the Sunday School teacher had sent for Victor the day before. Victor was very happy inside. But his longing to go to Sunday School became all the greater. Should he go with them the next time? But his father had said he wasn't to. That would be disobedience. Certainly the Lord God wouldn't find that right either.

Victor didn't know what to do and nor did Yuri. When Yuri went to Sunday School next time, Victor suddenly couldn't care less whether he was obedient or not. He just wanted to hear more about the Lord Jesus. And so he went to Sunday School with Yuri again, not just once but many times. At Sunday School, he could forget all his worries. But afterwards, when he was back home, he often glanced nervously at his father because he was still being disobedient. Should he ask his father once more whether he could go to Sunday School?

But what if Dad were to say no again? He certainly would say no if he knew Victor had been disobedient. Victor could not think of a way out.

His Sunday School teacher noticed how upset Victor seemed to be. »Victor, can you help me afterwards for a short while?« the teacher asked him one day. Very eagerly Victor helped him to put the room back in order.

»Does your father know that you're coming to Sunday School again, Victor?«

Victor's face went bright red.

»No,« he said quietly. His eyes filled with tears and he explained what was bothering him so much.

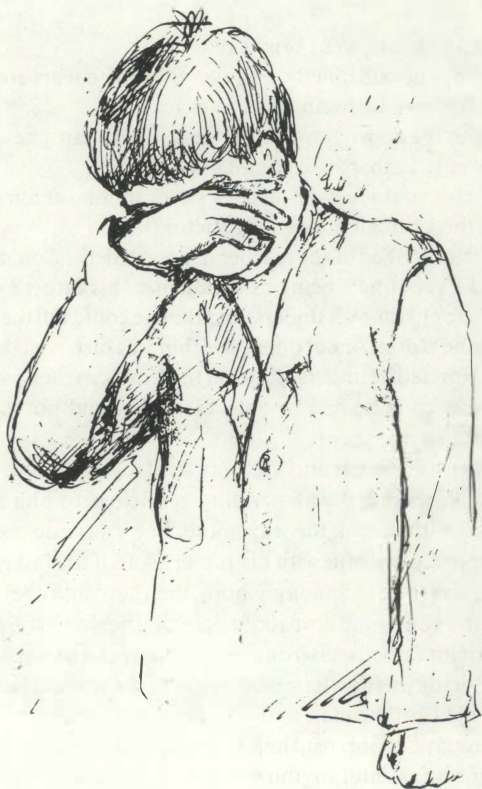
»But if I do what my father says, then I can't be a child of my Heavenly Father,« he complained softly.

Victor could feel the teacher's eyes smiling at him. »Have you told the Lord all about this, Victor?«

Victor looked at the teacher in amazement. Could he really do that? Even if he's being disobedient to his father?

Victor hadn't yet understood that he could tell the Lord everything he'd done or not done, and that was just what the Lord wanted. Nor had he understood that the Lord can then put everything right, even if he had to obey his father and not go to Sunday School anymore.

Then the teacher and Victor prayed together. It seemed to Victor as if the Lord was standing very close to him and that He stayed with him all the way home. For Victor now wanted to be completely truthful with his father. And if his father still didn't want him to go to Sunday School, then he would obey him. Victor was still young and it was only right that he should obey his father, even if his father was wrong to forbid him to go to Sunday School. But Victor was nowhere near as sad now as he had been. He knew that the Lord wanted to live in his heart, even if he couldn't go to Sunday School. And he knew that he could tell the Lord everything, and ask him anything — even if he could go back to Sunday School.



Victor's eyes filled with tears...

VII

As soon as Victor got home, he told his father everything. Once again there was a silence when Victor had finished his story. He looked at his father, expectantly. Dad wasn't angry, he realised with relief.

Just imagine if... Wouldn't that be wonderful! Then he could go to the Christmas Celebration just like Yuri! And it was supposed to be so beautiful! And the children also got a small present possibly a song book with pictures in and some sweets and nuts. All the mothers and fathers could come too. His parents certainly wouldn't want to. Why was his father still not saying anything?

Victor sighed deeply and it was just as if he woke his father up with his sigh. Quietly his father started to speak.

»Many years ago, when I was a little boy just like you, I also went to Sunday School.«

Victor's eyes grew large and round with astonishment. His father didn't notice but carried on.

»I found the stories very beautiful and I too wanted to be one of the Lord Jesus' little sheep. But when I grew up, I saw how those who follow Jesus in this land are not allowed to study and only get the worst jobs... Then I ran away from God... just like the Prodigal Son. I wanted you to have a better life the I've had. That's why you couldn't go to Sunday School, Victor. But you're wiser than me. I won't put any more barriers in your way.«

Victor couldn't take all that in straightaway. Father went to Sunday School! That couldn't be right! But one thing he did understand — he could go to Sunday School again! He threw his arms around his father's neck, shouting for joy.

A few weeks later in an old Russian house in the town centre there were some cheerful celebrations going on. Adults and children sitting together, their faces shining, for that evening was the Sunday School party. People had come from everywhere, but very quietly, because the police were not to find out.

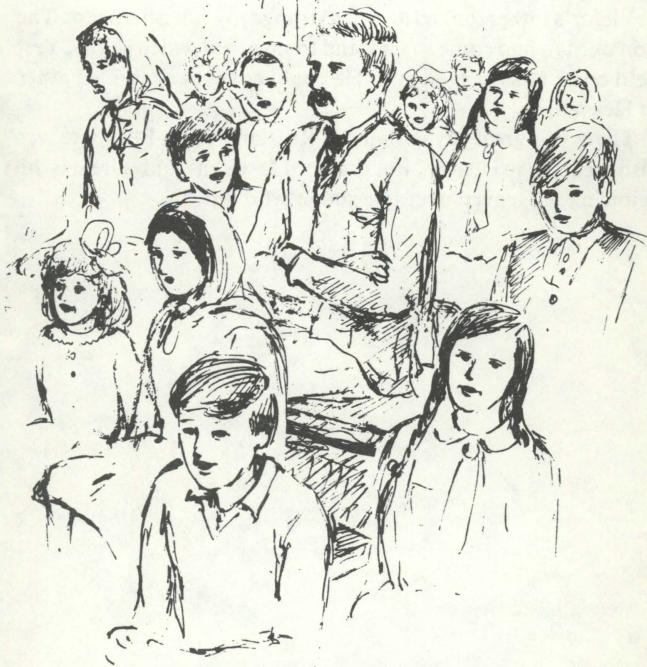
The celebration began as they prayed and sang together — how beautiful it sounded! There was a lot of singing because everyone was thinking of how the Lord Jesus came into the world to save sinners like them and to lead them back to God. Who, then, wouldn't be joyful and sing?

The teacher looked around the room, happily. All the children were sitting comfortably between their parents.

Suddenly the teacher's gaze was caught by a child whose face was beaming. It was Victor! Thoroughly enjoying himself, Victor was joining in with the singing of the well known Christmas hymn, which he had only learnt a short while ago. While he was singing he kept looking up happily next to him. What was he looking at then? The teacher followed his gaze. Then he checked again. Who could that be? He had another good look. No there was no doubt about it. The man next to Victor must be Victor's father!

Was he seeing right? He could hardly believe his eyes. Victor's father was joining in with the Christmas carols, singing his heart out. The teacher could also see that his eyes were filled with tears.

Deep joy flooded the teacher's heart. Silently and reverently he thanked his Heavenly Father for His great love to sinful people, people like Victor and his father. You could hear a pin drop as soon as the last carol came to an end, it was so quiet in the room. Then the teacher's voice sounded joyfully through the room.



While he was singing Victor kept looking up happily next to him.

»Dear mothers and fathers, boys and girls! This evening we are going to celebrate... celebrate Christmas. 'For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost!«

Victor's father looked down; a strange joy filled his heart. The Son of Man had come to seek and to save that which is lost. Yes, he'd come to save even him. He could come back to his Father in Heaven.

There was great joy in that old Russian house. But there was also great joy in Heaven. For the Lord Jesus has said»Great is the rejoicing in Heaven over one sinner who repents.«

This is a true story of a Christian family's experience of life in the USSR (only the names have been changed). Their father was arrested because of his faith and ministry as church leader.

Time and again in the USSR, Christian fathers, mothers and children have to go through house searches, arrests and many years of separation if they want to follow the Lord Jesus. But in all their suffering they know and can testify to the Lord Jesus' continual power and help—new every day. May this spur us on to be faithful to Him, here in the West where we have so much freedom.

You could bring cheer to a Christian family and children in the USSR by sending them a letter or a card. Their addresses can be obtained from Friedensstimme (UK) with the ages of the children—so you could pick out a boy or girl of your own age and write to them.

ORDER FROM:
Living Sacrifice Books
P.O. Box 938
Middlebury, IN 46540