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In the land of David



Waller Family spreads peace by building relationships

By Carole Robinson, staff writer
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While a war instigated by hatred and a lack of understanding between two religions rages in Israel and Gaza, people around the world pray for peace, but a local family is actively laying the groundwork for real peace and understanding by reaching out and working with Jewish farmers in Israel, despite the war.

According to members of the Tommy Waller family on Greenbrier Road, true and lasting peace can only come through understanding, friendship and love.

"Israel is not like any other country," said Tommy Waller.

Before 1948 it was just a dot on the map, he explained. Nothing was there and nobody had a desire to be there. It was a dry, desolate place until the hard work of the Jewish people awakened the land and the people – Christians, Jews and Muslims.

The United States as a nation has long been a supporter of the State of Israel, but there is a wall that divides people of the Christian faith and people of the Jewish faith in both countries, according to Tommy.

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That wall is tall and thick – built from years of misunderstanding, misconceptions and misgivings between two faiths that share the same roots, as evidenced in Israel where Messianic Jews are often shunned by Orthodox Jews and in the U.S. where Christian churches and Jewish synagogues rarely interact.

“Every day we read about Israel, but the (Christian) church is silent,” said Tommy. “Scripture is clear about our role. Those who bless Israel will be blessed. Our country has been blessed because we support and protect Israel. We want to not just have the government friendly to Israel and our secular community; we want the church to be involved. The church very rarely talks about Israel even though Israel is referenced (in the Bible) more than 5,000 times – only the Lord’s name is referenced more.”

During the past five years, the family – all 13 members – have been working alongside Israeli farmers in Samaria, building relationships, breaking barriers and as in the Bible, “planting the grapes in Samaria,” with the people of Israel and at the same time, chipping away at that wall.

It all started after an invitation to visit to Israel. It was then Tommy and his family knew their life was in for another change. “When we went there, God spoke to me,” Tommy said. “I understood where we were supposed to be.”

That is strengthening and supporting the “often overlooked small independent farmer in Israel through creative networking, education, tourism and activism.”

“There are a lot of misconceptions about Israel,” said Tommy. “Jesus was actually a Jew – the foundation of our Christian faith is Judaism. That’s lost sometimes.”

According to Tommy, Jews and Christians have had problems throughout history – the Spanish Inquisition and the Holocaust were both perpetrated by Christians against Jews.

“They don’t look at our faith as a very loving religion, so we go to Israel with a heart to serve,” he said.

According to Tommy and his wife, Sherri, the decisions they have made over the past 15 years lead them directly to their current mission.

Fifteen years ago Tommy was an engineer in the corporate world. With a sizeable salary and a nice house, he thought he was living the good life. But long hours at work kept him away from his young, growing family. One day Tommy realized he needed to change his life. With Sherri’s support, the family left the hustle and bustle of the corporate world and moved to a rural community where they learned to live together and simply off the land and closer to God.

Now twice a year they are in another land. They are up at dawn to catch a bus to HarBracha or the Mountain of Blessings where they work the land until 4 or 5 p.m. using the agricultural lessons they learned along Russell Creek in Lobelville in the land where Christianity was born and sharing with people who have similar religious beliefs. They are interacting and learning about a different culture, how to shop and get around in a different world, and feeling more and more at home in a foreign land.

“If we can help them, they don’t have to bring in foreign workers,” Tommy said. “They can prosper and they don’t have to get into debt.”

Working side by side with Israeli farmers in the vineyards and olive groves the family is learning, understanding, reaching out and developing relationships.

“In Israel we’re working in a vineyard with about 8,000 vines, and on the Mountain of Blessings with 30,000 vines,” said Tommy. “We still work as a family, but this is a community effort. It’s an amazing thing, the people we work with look a lot like people we lived with in (the Amish community) Lobelville

(Tennessee).”

Since they started their work in Israel the family helped build a winery, harvested tons of grapes and olives, trimmed acres of vines and olive trees, moved rocks and boulders for roads and most importantly, built relationships with both Israelis and Palestinians.

This fall the Waller family was joined by several other families who wanted to help bring down the wall of division.

“For us it’s a spiritual deal – a faith deal,” said Sherri Waller. “The battle is over the land because God gave it to the descendents of Abraham – that includes us.”

So they return to Israel each spring to prune vines and trees and in the fall for the harvest, despite the war and unrest.

“If we have fears, we have to overcome our fears,” said Sherri. “We are not deterred.”

When your core faith is Israel should be wiped off the face of the Earth, you can’t get rid of that idea by giving them what they want, Sherri explained about the Islamic ideology she has witnessed first hand.

“We live with the misconception that we are safe here, but there are terrorists all around us,” she said. “I’m sure the people in the Twin Towers felt safe and comfortable and didn’t expect anything to happen. It’s important to listen to the quiet, small voice of God speaking into our lives.”

“I am enjoying the life we are living – it’s counter cultural,” said 22-year old Brayden. “The big thing our ministry focuses on is healing the wounds of past atrocities.”

But it’s not all work, they also get to visit holy sites and play tourist, also part of their mission.

For more information about the Waller family and their mission, visit their Web site at www.HaYovel.com.

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