



Dear heavenly Father, we worship You this morning with our tithe and offerings. We pray for the courage to put You first in our lives. In the name of Jesus, amen.

OCTOBER 9, 2021

Pavel and Valentina Dmitrienko put God First

Pastor Pavel and Valentina decided to put God first even through their struggles. What can we learn from their story today that will help us put God first in our own lives?

Pastor Pavel and Valentina had a 9-mile (14.5-kilometre) trek to serve the people in a house church. That risky trip made them tired and hungry. But it was impossible to find bread on store shelves in Sukhumi, capital of Georgia's breakaway region of Abkhazia.

It was 1993 and a months-long armed conflict between Georgian and Abkhaz forces had resulted in a major food shortage. Some bakeries sold bread at night, but they were sold out every time Valentina dared to make the risky trip.

One day after the worship service, Maya—a church member—gave Valentina bread, but she refused to accept it. Maya insisted and cried. So Valentina divided the loaf into two, half for her and half for Maya.

Valentina and her husband were happy since they had not eaten bread for six months. She was think-

ing of eating it with barley soup.

While walking home, they met an old, thin, and filthy woman begging for food, saying she was starving to death. Valentina remembered the joy Maya had experienced when she had shared the bread with her. Would they have the courage to share even in such a difficult situation?

Valentina gave the half loaf she had in her bag, and the older woman accepted it with tears of joy.

Valentina and Pavel continued on their way home, joyful smiles lighting their faces. They were happy they had been able to give their precious bread to the elderly woman. Sometimes, putting God first involves sharing what you have with others, even when resources are hard to come by.

Pastor Pavel and Valentina put God first despite the sacrifice. Their courage inspires us today. Jesus gave up everything to redeem us and His love compels us to put His kingdom first in our own lives. As the deacons collect the tithe and offerings, we are challenged to put God first.