

Hand of **HELP**

Don't Pray for Peace in Ukraine!



January–February 2020



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Don't Pray for Peace in Ukraine

Bullet holes in street signs, military check-points, buildings demolished by Russian rockets... Broken gas and sewer lines, sand-bags in classrooms, abandoned homes, and ruined cities... Freezing temperatures, no heat, hunger...

And a church adorned with the imperishable crown of life.

In November 2019, I had the privilege of joining Daniel Boldea and Hand of Help on a mission of relief to Eastern Ukraine. Workers in the nation who've been helping in





The only caveat? Oh, yeah, did I mention Ukraine is still occasionally an active warzone?

In 2013, anti-government protests broke out in Kiev, the capital of Ukraine. By 2014, the protests led to a revolution that toppled the corrupt government and replaced it with something more democratic, at least in theory.

Responding quickly, through a combination of military might,

relentless propaganda, political subterfuge, and covert operations, Russia invaded Eastern Ukraine. First, they took the Crimean Peninsula, obtaining valuable access to ports on the Black Sea, and next, they began occupying cities in mainland Ukraine itself.

that area for years told us this was by far the largest project they'd ever coordinated. It was a monumental endeavor – dump trucks loaded with wood and coal, hundreds of bags of food, trailers filled to the brim with fresh bread, and thousands of dollars of emergency assistance. A huge undertaking, especially when you factor in all the coordinating between churches and missionaries from different cultures speaking different languages, and traveling to various cities scattered across an area roughly the size of Wisconsin. Not to mention the fundraising necessary to make it all happen!

But I didn't have to worry about any of that. All I had to do was come along, take pictures, preach the Gospel, and write about what God is doing among our brothers and sisters overseas.



...Continued on page 4



Thousands of refugees fled to the west. Thousands who couldn't flee died, either direct casualties of war or tragic deaths brought on by the lack of food, water, and medical supplies that happens in a time of conflict. Others with nowhere to go have had no choice but to remain behind in devastated cities filled with ruined homes, struggling for life without heat or running water.

We traveled throughout Eastern Ukraine bringing assistance and preaching the hope of the Gospel in a number of villages and cities. We set up in conference centers, churches without heat or adequate lights, in collapsed city halls, in cold and drafty community centers, outside in the bitter winds of the steppe.

Normally, I'm a pretty quiet, introverted person. I like to read nerdy books about things like the history of salt (reading that one now) or how to build more effective churches (just finished that one). Give me a rugged

old biography of a rugged old saint, and I'm in heaven.

But when it comes to serving God, I'm a bit of an adrenaline junkie. I figure we've got one life to live, and it'd be a shame to waste it playing spiritual euchre with the in-laws every evening. This heart has led my wife and I all over the world to preach the Gospel. We moved from suburbia to the inner city, where we were told it wasn't safe for us to go. We lived for five years in Bucharest, Romania, planting churches and reaching out to prosti-



tutes, drug addicts, homeless, criminals, and Gypsies.

I've preached the Gospel on three continents, where I've been threatened, yelled at, reprimanded by police, put in headlocks, and chased by dogs. I had guns pointed at me; I was told by pagan witch doctors to leave them alone, I've shared a home with snakes and tarantulas in the jungle. I've been in meetings surrounded by armed gang members, had all my money stolen in a foreign land, held dying children in third world nations where I could have picked up any number of diseases.

Even as I write this article, I am living with a tribe of "Pygmies" who, despite their often indescribably selfish ways, are making great strides toward faith in Jesus as the Gospel penetrates their hearts. But I love them. Maybe it's because they're my kids. We have seven of them, and I think raising my family has been the greatest adrenaline rush of a lifetime.

When I first heard of the conflict in Ukraine, I began praying. I wanted to see what was going on, and I wanted to share the love of Jesus in an area thrown into darkness. I knew I couldn't solve the nation's problems, but I wanted to come alongside the weary and carry some of the burden.

So when my wife and I were eating dinner with Dan-



iel and Alexandra, and he mentioned his upcoming trip to Ukraine, my ears perked up. A sane person would have acted politely interested and then gone on to talk about the Monday Night Football or complain about the government. I don't know if Daniel extended an invitation to me or if I invited myself along, but somehow I wound up with my signature on the proverbial line. I would be going to Ukraine.

And there I was, a few months later, in the car headed to the airport, my wife behind the wheel.

By this time in my life, I'd been all over the world in all sorts of crazy circumstances, and I'd always made



...Continued on page 8

Don't Pray for Peace In Ukraine



Don't Pray for Peace in Ukraine

it home safe and sound by the grace of God. But on that Thursday morning, as we were backing out of the driveway, it hit me – this may be the last day I see my wife and kids. Literally. You can die anywhere, anytime – you could slip on a banana peel on the sidewalk and wake up in front of the Pearly Gates – but suddenly, this seemed somehow more real.

I was going into a warzone. This was insane. What was I thinking? What was wrong with me?

I'd already hugged each of my kids so much that day they'd grown tired of it, but as they naively gathered outside to wave me goodbye, hanging on the steps like a good tribe of Pygmies that would make any chief proud, my heart ached. I wanted to jump out of the car, grab them and hold them and tell them Daddy made a mistake; it was dumb to go to Ukraine, he wasn't a young bachelor anymore, he didn't know what he had been thinking, he'd just cancel and stay home and enjoy a normal life like normal people.

People have, at times, called me courageous for doing the things I've done. They've said I must have a lot of faith or that I must be unusually brave. I don't think so. I've just learned to ignore that voice of fear and press on.

I'd been in this situation before. I choked back the tears, fixed my eyes on the author and perfecter of my faith, said one more goodbye, and headed to the airport for whatever may come.



I spent one week in Ukraine with Hand of Help and some of the most remarkable saints whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. We saw inexpressible suffering in the midst of a tragic war, heard stories of heartache I will never be able to forget – an aged woman who lost both her husband and her only son, the latter shot twice in his sleep by a Russian sniper, sons of pastors taken out of church and executed by the invading enemy, the old and sick, with nowhere to flee, left behind to suffer alone in ghost towns cold and empty.

But I saw something even more remarkable in Ukraine, and this is what the nation has come to mean to me, more than the war or suffering or destruction.

Over 200 missionaries are active in the warzone. They are not foreigners but Ukrainians, coming from the western half of the nation. They've left behind safety, comfort, good jobs, and good homes to preach the Gospel, bring physical assistance, and plant churches. They're living in poverty, danger, deprivation, and need. They're taking care of orphaned children, housing the homeless, rehabilitating drug addicts through the power of the Gospel, and caring for the sick and elderly. Many of them have no funding, and every day is a test of faith whether they will be able to provide for those under their care, let alone their own families.

Some were bankers that gave up everything to spread the Gospel in the warzone. Others were former drug addicts or criminals who had nothing to give but a heart willing to answer the call of God.

Some are going into war-torn villages that have yet to rebuild. Others are going into Russian-occupied zones where shots are exchanged daily. All are bringing the message of a God who loves them enough to send these missionaries to be with them in their hour of need.

Everywhere we went, we saw suffering and lack and hunger and desperation, yes, but we also saw a church triumphant. We saw men and women of God taking the words of Jesus seriously and laying their own lives down for their brethren.

And Jesus is blessing their work. Many are calling it the greatest revival in the nation's history. We heard report after report of churches planted in areas where

none were welcome before, or churches growing from a handful of people before the war to multiple dozens today.

The growth of the Kingdom of God amid the war is startling.

Speaking with a pastor from the divided city of Bakhmut, I asked him how we in America can be praying for Ukraine. His response was telling: "We don't pray for an end to the war but for the spread of this revival. We pray that God does not bring peace until the work of this revival is completed."

Pastor Jake Stimpson

To all those who gave to make such a great impact through the Ukraine outreach, and those who have interceded for this work, thank you!



Dumitru, the young man who grew up at the orphanage and has cancer, is not doing well. The latest scans show that the cancer has spread. Please pray for God to keep him in perfect peace and that his faith will not fail through this lengthy trial.

Please continue to pray for a decision to be made regarding the orphanage licensing. We are believing God for a resolution.

Please continue to pray for the furthering of the Gospel in this nation and the world, provision, and direction as the Lord continues to use Hand of Help to reach the people of Ukraine and Romania.



The Testimony of a Pastor from the Occupied Side

Due to constant threats and security concerns, the pictures, location, and name of this pastor and church have been withheld.

They are living in constant danger, where Martial law, curfew and strict regulations are in place. Public preaching is not permitted and many pastors have been tortured or have gone missing in the region.

I began my service as a pastor to the area in 2013, just three months before the war had started. Being only a stone's throw from the border, a hot zone that even to this day sees shootings, as a church, we had a serious decision to make, whether we would leave or stay. We had established contact with 20 people that were willing to house us as refugees. They told us to leave and come and live with them on the Ukraine side.

I told the church at the time, let us go, let us leave, and find a safe place for our families. But to my surprise, the people refused to go. They said that God gave us this land, and we must stay here and preach the Gospel, regardless of the danger. I immediately shook off my cowardness and started praying as to how God might use us to reach the lost in the midst of the war.

After a few days, I went to the city officials and I felt led to ask them to help us start a soup ministry in the city market and feed the people. The city officials responded that not only would they allow us to do so but that we can use a building that used to be a restaurant and that was fully equipped, free of charge. "Just bring your people and use it!"

This was during the worst part of the war. We started to make two-course meals daily Monday-Saturday and fed the masses. Looking into the dining hall, you could see the homeless sit alongside doctors and other intellectuals. The war made all people of the same "level," the war had brought down any social differentiation. This is how we served the people. They would thank us and ask who we are and we would simply respond, "We are Christians and we want to show God's love for you." We would sit for hours, sharing the Gospel with them and praying with them. This was a blessed time. This is how the authorities changed their opinion regarding us - they initially saw us as religious sectants but their opinion quickly changed through our servanthood.

We started working with the local children that were traumatized. One day, as I was watching the children play in the park, heavy gunfire pierced the silence. What shocked me most was not the shooting but the children's lack of response. These children had been robbed of their jovial, naive nature and had now gotten used to the war. Shooting no longer shocks them; it is part of their life. We started a ministry

mainly focused on the children. We work with many children from the community. Parents bring their children to us and often participate themselves, hearing the Good News.

I praise God for the mature congregation He has trusted me with, had I not listened to them and remained in the area, we would not have witnessed God's hand at work in the lives of many.

Please pray that God would provide a furnace for our church building and that we would be able to renovate the necessary rooms for our children's outreach ministry. In an area where the tithing of a pensioner means \$4, the \$8,000 needed is beyond our imagination but nothing for our Almighty God.

Pastor, occupied side of Ukraine

Revelation 3:10 "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth."

Testimonies from the congregation:

God protected a family that had 5, 5 inch mines blow up in their home, and they came away unscathed.

One of the sisters in the church slipped and fell on her back. A bomb flew just above her body and hit a home 500 yards away. Had she not fallen, she would've been struck and killed.

God granted a brother boldness to refuse to kneel before a soldier pointing a gun at him. The brother proclaimed, "I only kneel before my God." The rounds that went off around him did not sway his position; they let him go.

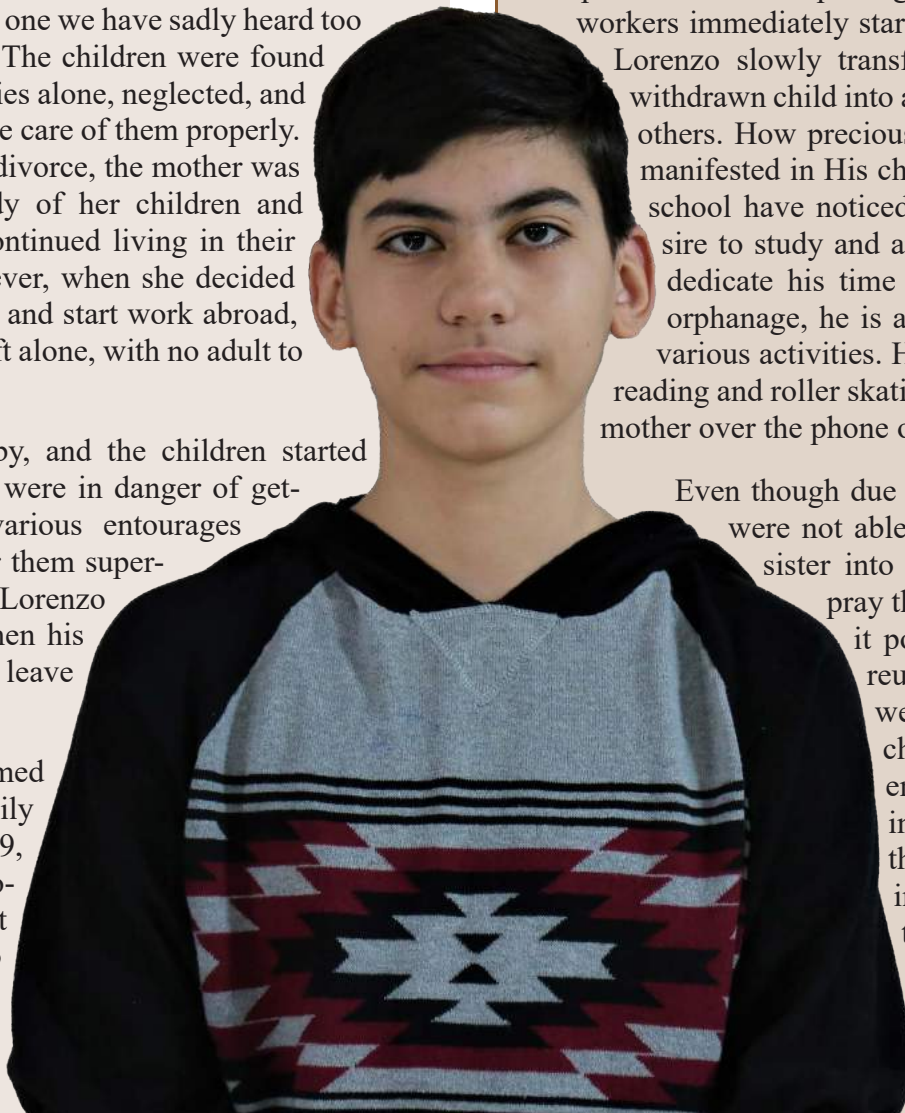
In 2015 members of our church, including myself, were arrested while helping a brother retrieve his belongings as he couldn't return himself. We were forced to lay face down in the mud, arrested and questioned in prison cells. They questioned the church family to name their leader but they remained silent. They got to me but didn't ask. If they had, I would have had to tell them the truth. That evening we were all released because God had promised He would protect His own.

Child of the Month

The story of Lorenzo, Naomi, and their younger sister Emanuela, is one we have sadly heard too many times before. The children were found by the local authorities alone, neglected, and having no one to take care of them properly. After their parents' divorce, the mother was granted sole custody of her children and for a while, they continued living in their family home. However, when she decided to leave the country and start work abroad, the children were left alone, with no adult to take care of them.

Months had gone by, and the children started missing school and were in danger of getting involved in various entouragees with no one to offer them supervision or advice. Lorenzo was heartbroken when his mother decided to leave them.

When we welcomed them into our family in November 2019, we immediately noticed how difficult it was for him to communicate and open up to us. He moved into one of



our apartments at the orphanage and one of our social workers immediately started working with him. Lorenzo slowly transformed from a silent, withdrawn child into a model young man for others. How precious the love of our Lord manifested in His children! His teachers in school have noticed his potential and desire to study and are encouraging him to dedicate his time to his studies. At the orphanage, he is a daily presence in our various activities. He spends his free time reading and roller skating and speaks with his mother over the phone often.

Even though due to age restrictions, we were not able to take their younger sister into our care, as well, we pray that our Lord will make it possible for them to be reunited soon. Until then, we are grateful for the chance that He has given us to sow His Word in Lorenzo's heart. We thank you for continuing to make stories like these possible and may He bless you abundantly for working while it is still day!

FOR MORE INFORMATION regarding sponsoring the Hand of Help Orphanage, please check out our website at www.handofhelp.com or email us at info@handofhelp.com.

Dear Brethren,

Philippians 4:6-7, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything with prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

True and lasting peace is impossible absent of Christ. Especially in this hour, this moment in human history, even the most sheltered, financially independent, and well-prepared men are having a harder and harder time clinging to peace.

Too much is going on, too many things are happening all at once, and though they’ve tried their best to insulate themselves, though they tried their best to make sure that they will have some semblance of peace while the rest of the world drowns in chaos and uncertainty, they have come to realize just how ethereal manufactured peace is, and how quickly it can slip through one’s fingers.

I don’t want to quibble about which is more important in life if one had to choose between health and peace. One’s health is certainly in the top three of what one requires to live a full life, but if you have health and no peace, all you are is a miserable healthy person who sees no reason to get out of bed in the morning or do anything productive throughout their day. I’ve met a few of those in my time; I’m sure you have too.

I’ve also known people throughout my life who did not have their health, not only in the latter stages of their existence, but who didn’t have their health from the moment they were born. Yet they had peace, and the peace they had allowed them to achieve with their infirmity what other perfectly healthy people could only dream about. In some instances, their infirmity made them more committed, focused, and disciplined, to the point that they expressed their doubt as to being able to achieve all they had without it.

Without peace, however, there can be no joy in one’s life. Without peace, even the greatest of accomplishments seems lifeless and brittle. Without peace, we race to acquire the things we do not need and put off the essential things; the things that make life worth living.

Words matter, especially the words Jesus spoke, and none was spoken in haste or without a deep and profound pur-

pose. Of all the things Jesus could have bestowed upon those closest to Him, His inner circle, those who had walked with Him, had been discipled by Him and fellow-shipped with Him, He chose peace.

He could have bestowed health; it was within His power to do so. He could have bestowed wealth; it was within His power to do so. He could have bestowed notoriety; it was within His power to do so. Yet, of all the things Jesus could have left to His disciples, He chose to leave them peace.

This was not a retirement party for junior management at a real estate firm where they get a Walmart cake, an engraved pen, and a happy retirement balloon. Jesus wasn’t trying to give His disciples some piddling thing and show them the door hoping they never came back. Jesus loved His disciples, and we know this. Because we know the love Jesus had for His disciples, we know that what He chose to leave them with would not be a worthless trinket, but something truly priceless.

Jesus chose to leave His disciples peace. He chose to give them peace when what He could have given them was limitless. He wasn’t scraping the bottom of the goody bag. He wasn’t haphazardly throwing something out because He’d forgotten all about His departure, and it would have been awkward to leave His disciples empty-handed.

This is how important peace is in one’s life. It’s so important that it was the one thing Jesus gave to those He loved the most while He walked the earth. If you have His peace, the peace He gives which is not as the world gives, though others may quake, though others may rage, though others may hide in fear, His peace will envelop you, and your heart will be neither troubled nor afraid.

Some things in life you can do without, while others are indispensable. May we have the wisdom to know which is which, and pursue them accordingly.

John 16:33, “These things I have spoken to you that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

With love in Christ,

Michael Boldea Jr.