



# BAPTIST INTERNATIONAL *Challenger*

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## A Trip to the Frontlines

*To evangelize and alleviate suffering in eastern battle zones, BIEM personnel in Ukraine have taken numerous trips to share both physical and spiritual food. Below is a condensed description of such a trip by Vitaly Bilyak.*

**W**e live in the west of Ukraine. The greatest influx of refugees has passed. At least, we think so. As a church, we've helped and continue to help refugees and migrants. But now we understand we must aid people who are in the most difficult circumstances.

So, I decided to travel to Donbas. We thank BIEM for helping to buy a trailer. Brothers and sisters from the church assembled two types of food packages as aid: 80 packages of groceries for those who have a way to cook. The other packages are for those who don't have opportunities to cook. For example, people in hospitals or those dwelling in basements. These packages included ready-to-eat products—canned soups, cookies... I also took bottles of cooking oil. A brother from Zaporozhe agreed to donate bread. In total, my car and trailer held more than 1.5 tons of aid items.

I left for Kyiv, where I had an opportunity to meet and pray with other

*At a time when many citizens have fled eastern Ukraine, BIEM personnel have been providing aid to some who remain.*



missionaries, including Sam Slobodian. From Kyiv, I set out for Dnipro. On those roads, I often had to drive slowly due to columns of military equipment, which also moved eastward. The farther east I drove, the more military I saw. At gas stations, few laughed or even smiled. I overnights in Dnipro.

On Tuesday at 6:20 a.m., brother Sasha from Zaporozhe arrived with 100 loaves of fresh bread. Then I was ready to continue eastward.

In Pavlograd, I was joined by friends, Alexander and Svetlana M. They know that area and minister in Donbas. In Kurakhovo (nine miles from the front), we visited a hospital with many wounded. The worst injured are sent to hospitals further back from the frontlines. The less seriously wounded are sent home or to relatives to keep the hospital ready for emergencies.

There's also a military hospital. At the entrance, there were gurneys with tarps covered in blood. I considered taking a picture but stopped. I couldn't show such a photo to anyone. I delivered medicines, hemostatic drugs, tourniquets, and other items to the medics.

Next, I continued to Romanovka, near the front line. Shells constantly fly overhead in both directions. People no longer react. There were about 60 villagers left. No store. People were waiting for us. First, we talked; then we distributed aid and even snapped photos together.

Alexander and Svetlana and I drove back to the refugees who had fled Maryinka

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*Church members helped to divide foodstuffs into packages for distribution.*



*Smoke rising in the distance marks the front lines.*





## A Wartime Quest

Nine years ago, BIEM's Pavlo Usach pioneered an innovative young-adult event among our churches in Ukraine—the Bible Quest. Although these Quests encourage young believers from distant churches to meet, fellowship, and worship together, the primary goal is to encourage serious study of God's Word. Here is Pavlo's summary for 2022.

Dear friends, brothers and sisters, I want to tell you about the blessing we received during martial law in 2022 by conducting our 9th Bible Quest. The Quest is a youth event that encourages young people to study the Word of God and apply it in their everyday lives. We'd begun preparing for this year's Quest at the beginning of 2022, but war brought many changes. We got involved in other



*Because the war had canceled so many youth functions, young believers were eager for the annual Quest.*

ministries and assumed we wouldn't be holding a Quest.

As time passed, I decided to take a survey. Would young people be willing to prepare for such a youth event? We discovered that young people were thrilled with the idea. They were eager because the war had canceled so many youth activities.

However, as we began preparations, we ran into obstacles: (1) The facility we've rented in past years wasn't available. It's now housing displaced persons. (2) Because of all the young people coming for the Quest, we needed to organize overnight lodging for everyone. (3) Right before the Quest, massive rocket attacks struck all over Ukraine, so many people panicked. But the Lord is great and wonderful. He knows best how to resolve issues that seem insurmountable to us.

We held the Quest from October 14 to October 16. The young people arrived at our church on Friday. There, we enjoyed wonderful fellowship, got acquainted, and the youth listened to preaching from the Word of God and testimonies of the miracles and protection God has done in the life of Tim, our missionary brother who was with us. The young people also reviewed the book of Mark, which they were studying for the Bible Quest. That evening, everyone present enjoyed a



*Each team headed into the woods not knowing exactly how each stopping point would test their knowledge of Scripture.*

delicious dinner, and the young people went to homes, where they rested that night.

The next day, the Quest itself took place at a location 20 km from our city in a wonderful, picturesque forest. This is land our church had purchased for ministry. It features a summer kitchen, restrooms, and a small, unfinished house.

For our group meetings, we set up a large tent borrowed from friends. We worshiped inside the tent, and we were much more comfortable there than outside!

Upon arrival, the young people had a chance to talk with Brother Tim. At

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*"Reaching the world for Christ since 1981"*  
 Dr. Peter Slobodian, Founder

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One challenge was to recall specifically where certain events in the book of Mark occurred.

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ten-minute intervals, the teams set out on their seven-kilometer hike, during which they had to find six control points and solve tasks based on their knowledge of the book of Mark. Also, the final assignment was

Group services provided soul-stirring sermons and opportunities to glorify God with singing and musical instruments.



a practical evangelistic experience. Each group had to find a person in the nearby village and share a testimony about salvation through Jesus Christ with him, take a picture with that person, present the Gospel, and invite him to a service we had planned for the next day, Sunday. That Sunday we held a festive worship service in the tent. About 300 people attended. The meeting was God-blessed, complete with a string orchestra and preaching from the Word of God! After dinner everyone left for home.

The youth rejoiced to participate in such an event. These fellowships contribute to their spiritual growth and stimulate young believers to study Scripture. Therefore, we sincerely thank the BIEM mission for its financial support and prayers.

In turn, BIEM thanks you supporters, without whom we couldn't sponsor such worthy events. May God bless and use these young people's new, deeper knowledge of His Word!

...Trip to Frontlines continued from page 1

to Kurakhovo. Maryinka is the front line towards Donetsk. There are constant battles and shelling. The village is practically gone, but some people stubbornly remain in basements. I spoke with people at their doors and gave out the rest of the bread. We ended up having an excellent outdoor meeting.

Everywhere, there were opportunities to share the Gospel and distribute New Testaments. At checkpoints, we gave the

men coffee and New Testaments. The closer to the front, the more melodious (howling) the asphalt. Caterpillar treads have pressed prints into it. In Donbas many homeowners have boarded their windows to protect the glass from bomb blasts and shrapnel...

We returned the way we'd come. From east to west, military and civilian ambulances are constantly heading toward Dnipro.

I gained mixed impressions of people who won't leave the war zone. I used to

think it's only ones waiting for Russians who don't leave. But some of these people are strongly pro-Ukrainian; they stay for the sake of possessions. In one photo you see a man missing a leg, Oleg from Maryinka. He's 35 and was brought to the hospital five days ago. He'd stepped from his basement to phone relatives and—just that fast—a blast from an airplane caught him. His wife died, and he lost a leg. Oleg had planned to evacuate the very next day. I asked why he delayed leaving. He replied, "I put my soul into the house. I bought the furniture on credit. The pigs were already big..." Weeping, he concluded, "Take my picture. Tell others—it's not worth it."

We spent the night in Dnipro again. This is a huge city of a million people. It's crowded with refugees.

The next day, Wednesday, was shopping day. We bought an electric stove, a kettle, food so that Alexander could

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With many neighbors gone and no store operating, these villagers gratefully accepted food aid.





*Oleg delayed evacuating to stay with his possessions. That decision cost his leg and his wife's life. In tears he warns others, "It's not worth it."*

**...Trip to Frontlines** continued from page 3 help more people, and then we bought medicines for people near the front lines. Alexander had a list of ten people who need medicine. We spent about \$300 on it.

Thursday, I drove home. On Friday I read that Kurakhovo — where we'd been Tuesday night — had been shelled. People died.

Everyone is so weary of the war. You can't get used to it. I drove 1,250 km one way to minister to those people. Was going so far worth the cost? If the Lord allows, I'll go again.

Friends, thank you for your help, for the resources, for funds for tourniquets and hemostatic drugs. Thank you very much for your prayers.

Pray for our travels. If the Lord permits, next week I plan to go east again. In these dark times we carry the Light of Christ. Pray for wisdom and strength from God for ministry.



To see videos of Vitaly and other BIEM personnel delivering aid, log onto our website and click "View Video Updates." ■

## Another Soldier Comes to Christ

Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, we at BIEM have received many prayer requests from our friends and personnel in that country. Here's a series of translated messages about a young soldier named Misha.

### Wednesday, Oct. 26

Please pray for my wife's nephew Misha. He is a Ukrainian soldier and was just sent to one of the hottest battle fronts. His father is a pastor. Misha grew up knowing the way of salvation but has not trusted Christ as Savior. He told me he doesn't think he's coming back from this battle. Please pray that he comes to saving faith in Jesus Christ before it is too late. He's very heavy on all our hearts. I spent most of two days chopping firewood with him and sharing the Gospel with him last week while he was on leave.

### Friday, Nov. 11

Two weeks ago, I tried to share the Gospel with my nephew's commander after having brought some relief items to them. He refused and said, "I know what you want to talk to me about. I don't want to hear it. Thank you for your humanitarian aid, though." I left with a heavy heart. Today I learned he was killed in action yesterday. Many are excited for the help but have no desire to hear the Gospel. Pray that hearts would be opened. Satan is fighting hard to blind eyes.

Please pray for my nephew Misha. It was his commander who was killed. His father is Vasya, one of our church planters. Misha, even though growing up in church, is an unbeliever. On all sides of him in the battle, fellow soldiers are being cut down by artillery and bullets. He keeps coming through unscathed but still needs to fall on his knees before God and repent of his sins and trust Christ as his personal Savior.



*For a long time, Misha delayed putting his faith in Christ. Now his soul is safe with the Savior.*

### Saturday, Nov. 12

Turns out Misha's commander had been wounded while they were side by side. The commander's leg exploded and fell off. Misha applied a tourniquet and was carrying him off the field under heavy fire. As Misha was running with him, his commander's intestines started to fall out as he ran. He died in Misha's arms. Twenty went out; only Misha returned. Misha is having massive stress breakdown right now. Three days in a row, he's the only one who returns.

### Sunday, Nov. 13

Praise God! Misha trusted Jesus Christ as his Savior! Please continue to pray for him as he's still in very dangerous battles, but his greater danger is past. His name is written in the Lamb's book of life. The second death will not swallow him any longer. He's been given Life. Thank you for your prayers.

*No doubt, there are countless other "Mishas" being thrown into battle. Some have heard the Gospel, some haven't. Thank you for praying for the war to end, but please remember to pray for the salvation of souls both in and out of uniform. Missiles, drones, and artillery have snuffed out the lives of so many who never saw their end coming.* ■