

Near the Frontlines of Ukraine

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It was a Monday and we were sitting in the basement of a shelled-out, empty Ukrainian apartment building about a mile from the front lines with the Russian army. It was a building empty of the families who should be living there but still providing a small measure of safety for some Ukrainian soldiers and their dog. It is here that they get their break from fighting on the front lines.



Small bits of light ensured we weren't in complete darkness. It was dusty and dirty. A bit chilly. Different forms of beds were situated around the edges of the room, some were just old mattresses, and some were simply made from couch cushions. Random variations of blankets scattered about. A couple of tables in the center and a pot of hot water sat on a propane stove. Military gear was scattered throughout.



It's hard to describe the faces and demeanor of the soldiers who sat with us. There was a general feeling of weariness. There were also smiles and laughter. Serious at times and lighthearted at others. We spent several hours with two different groups of soldiers in what remains of the town of Chasiv Yar. They treated us to coffee and shared small fragments of their experiences. They also wondered why we had come all the way from America and were sitting this close to the front.

This past April, Paul Bradley and I were in Eastern Ukraine and had the privilege of providing encouragement, comfort, and training for Ukrainian chaplains and soldiers. A "ministry of presence" goes a long way in communicating the love of Jesus. In fact, a few times we shared that we came all the way from America to a war-weary land because we were following the example of Jesus, who came all the way from heaven to earth to show His love. What an opportunity to share the gospel tangibly and verbally.

We also provided training in frontline trauma care to various groups of soldiers. We helped them understand what was occurring within them physiologically, emotionally, and spiritually as they dealt with the many experiences that were traumatizing. We trained them in some very practical ways to lessen the impact of the trauma and help with the

healing. We sowed seeds of hope in them for the healing of their minds and hearts.

We also experienced God's presence in very powerful ways. Sometimes, we were keenly aware of His physical protection of us, and at other times, we saw how He used our words to impact their hearts.

Proverbs 16:9 was also apparent throughout the journey: "The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps." This included my suitcase not making it to Poland before we got on the train to Ukraine, so I went with only my backpack! It also means that in a war-fighting country, most of the scheduled meetings are easily canceled when the soldiers must stay on the front lines. And yet, the Lord established our steps and showed us where He wanted us to be. And He provided very fruitful ministry opportunities.

Your partnership is enabling us to be a part of shining the bright light of Jesus in a very dark place of the world. Thank you.

In the love and light of Jesus,
Brian Kleager
VP for Strategic Partnerships and PR

