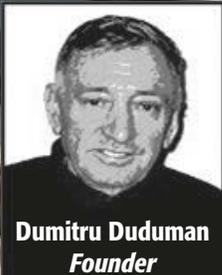


Hand of **HELP**



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Ash & Despair



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Ash & Despair

If you had no choice but to pick one, most people would prefer a flood over a fire. Sure, with a flood, you'd have to dig mud out of your basement for a while. Perhaps you might even employ the use of a water pump, but for the most part, unless it's one of those devastating once in a century floods, you still have four walls and a roof, and a few memories that the floodwaters didn't carry away.



Whether it's that box of photographs in the attic or the wedding dress you were married in, a corsage from your prom or the diaries you used to pen feverishly by candlelight when you were a teenager, for the most part, floodwater is more sparing than fire when it comes to things that cannot be replaced.

The people of Ukraine were not given a choice; having already suffered through enemy oppression, war, poverty and COVID, we can only speculate on what they would have picked. When it comes to a disaster of this

magnitude, all one can really do is try to weather it, and be thankful that they survived.

It is still unknown how the fire started. Speculations persist, but there has been no official conclusion. What is known, obvious, and evident, is that this was a massive fire that engulfed 127 homes, 47 in just one village, and turned over 12,000 acres of forest into ash, which was the way many in the surrounding settlements earned a living. The devastation occurred in a community where logging and cutting down dead trees to sell for firewood was an important means of income.

They tried their best to put out the fire, they fought the flames, and as a result, seven people are dead. Fire is unsparing. It does not care that you have very little, and the little you have will soon be turned to ash or that if it destroys your home, you have nowhere left to go. Fire has but one mission, and that is to burn until there is nothing left to consume.

As is often the case with providence, a team from Hand of Help was already en route to Ukraine when they heard about this calamity and were able to change their itinerary and assist with emergency food and water. When they arrived, the smell of smoke still hung heavily in the air and save for ash and despair on the faces of the survivors, very little remained.

Although shaken by what they saw, the team went to work prioritizing needs and making sure that the essentials like food and potable water were squared away before moving on to other things. Once the essentials were secured, they



were also able to install six makeshift showers, purchase chainsaws for the cleanup, and electric stoves for cooking. It was an unexpected and much-appreciated blessing.

This was by no means the end of our involvement there; on the contrary, it is only the beginning. The need is evident, and to some who have never been faced with such devastating circumstances, overwhelming.

The goal is to meet needs as they arise, coordinate volunteers, and purchase supplies for rebuilding homes as well as start a home group to minister to those who have lost everything. These may seem like big plans, but we serve a big God, and we know that He can do big things.

The Hand of Help Family



The Alamarus, family of 10, praising God for their cow and calf.



A Matter of Vision

Some men confuse a dream for a vision, and though it's easy enough to do sometimes, it explains why so many ministries fail or change course midstream as though where they were headed was not where they wanted to go, to begin with. When dreams and visions get conflated, when we come to believe that we can interchange, splice, and swap them out at will, disappointment, disillusionment, and heartache are almost a guarantee.

Having a dream and receiving a vision are two very different things, and one of the easiest ways to know which is which, is to determine whether the goal is in any way self-serving. If the endeavor is meant to benefit the individual at some point during the journey, if there's a payoff somewhere down the line, then it's not a vision, it's a dream. No, dreams aren't necessarily bad or evil, but when we take our dream and attempt to convince others that it's a vision, at some point, the entire exercise will fall apart under its own weight.



their own vision, every crossroads, every fork in the road, every moment of difficulty will become an insurmountable obstacle. It's like setting out on a thousand-mile journey with no map or compass, just a vague, general direction of where you want to go. Worse still, there really isn't anyone you can ask for direction along the way, because it's your vision; therefore, it is a destination to which no one has ever traveled.



Then there are visions received from God. These visions are clear, direct, and, more importantly, they don't change with the times or individual circumstances. When God births a vision in your heart, there is no doubt as to whether you will succeed in the endeavor, or complete the task to which you have been called. There are no probabilities; there are only certainties.



Establishing the origins of a vision, once it's determined that it is a vision, is equally important, especially when it comes to longevity. No matter how noble, grand, or all-encompassing the vision, if it originated with an individual rather than being received from God, the journey will be plagued with doubt and uncertainty. When one is the originator of



You're not starting a journey sans map or compass. You've got constant GPS with a booming voice telling you every turn you need to make, warning you when the road will be icy ahead, and sometimes even insisting that

you decrease your speed because you're trying to force it, and are going too fast for the current road conditions. Better still, God will never lead you down dead-end roads or over bridges that haven't yet been built, so you end up in someone's pond or backyard. He has seen every inch of your journey, beginning to end, before you took the first step, and all that's left for you to do is trust Him to guide you.

Hand of Help has been a ministry now for close to forty years, and never once have we changed direction, backtracked, or been uncertain of where we were headed. The reason for this isn't because we were so brilliant and forward-thinking, but because throughout the years, we've always trusted that the One who birthed the vision would be faithful to carry it out if we remained steadfast and obedient. We didn't try to appropriate the vision, mold it, tweak it, change it, or transform it; we followed it because it wasn't ours to tinker with. It belonged to God, and we were just the servants He chose to use to carry it out.



It hasn't always been easy, but it's always been simple. Yes, there have been difficult times, there have been hard times, there have been times of privation and need, but through it all we trusted in the faithfulness of our Father, knowing that He would see us through. When your trust in God is absolute, everything is simple. It's His vision, it's His work, it's His ministry, and He will make a way. Even when the way revealed itself at the last possible moment, even when to human understanding it was cutting it a bit short, never once has God failed us.



This journey of ours began in a two-bedroom apartment in Southern California. Not only did seven of us live in a glorified box, but it was also where we packed countless boxes, filled dozens of containers, sent out thousands of Bibles, and ran a ministry that many mocked, wrote off, or believed to have outlived its usefulness.

"You have to rebrand," a friend of ours said some twenty years ago. "Every ministry does it. You have to branch out, do other things. People will stop giving if it's just buying food, building churches, or helping orphans. You need a bigger vision."

At the time, we explained that this was the extent of the vision God gave our ministry, and we had no aspirations for anything more. Twenty years later, we're still feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, distributing Bibles, caring for orphans, meeting individual needs, and being a present help to those in desperate circumstances, and God is still providing.

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We recently came across our ministry photo archive and thought many of you would enjoy to see not only the beginning of the work, but also that by God's grace we have stayed the course and not much has changed.



A Matter of Vision (cont.)



We have not changed because the vision has not changed. We have not changed because God's mandate remains the same. For as long as He wills it, we will continue to do the work to which we have been called, confident that He will make a way even in the most difficult of times.

The message, the vision, and the work of this ministry are as relevant now as they ever were, perhaps even more so. The work goes on because the vision has not

dimmed, nor has God said it is complete. As long as the poor are among us, as long as the hungry exist, as long as orphans need to be cared for, and as long as the gospel of the Kingdom needs to be preached, we will be here, standing on the battlements doing the work. Thank you for standing alongside us.

The Hand of Help Family



Please pray:

For the salvation of the children at the orphanage, for provision and for the staff that minister to them on a daily basis.

That God would continue to guide and to grant wisdom and direction in all of our outreaches.

For the people of Ukraine, that as God's people serve them, the hearts of many would be pierced by the Holy Spirit and many would come unto salvation.

Last but certainly not least, pray for the coming election. That eyes be opened and that voters understand the times we are living in.

Child of the Month

Andrei Narcis was abandoned at birth (his mother left the country and his father is deceased) and was sent in a state-run infant orphanage where he remained until the age of two. One of the workers there decided to foster him; she left her job at the orphanage and became a foster parent, not only to Andrei Narcis, but also to other orphan children (including Raul O. who is now part of our family as well), giving a home to the little ones and filling the void in their hearts and lives with genuine love and affection.

For 12 years, he was offered an environment where he could grow up harmoniously and he slowly overcame the challenges of coping without his parents. The foster family selflessly sowed into him, while carefully monitoring his health (he suffers from persistent bronchial asthma).

Years later, his foster “mother” had turned 60. Since Romanian laws prohibit anyone over 60 from providing foster care for children and after thoroughly researching and exhausting all options, she asked us to take Andrei Narcis into our family, knowing the love and care that we would offer him.

Two weeks after his arrival at Hand of Help, Narcis was already feeling at home at our orphanage. He was thrilled to meet new friends and enjoyed the company of so many other “brothers” and “sisters” who met him with the same love and affection that they were once welcomed with.

While Narcis’ time with us was relatively short, it was long enough to stir up his heart towards following the

Lord and seeking out the truth in the Word of God.

In the fall of 2016, Andrei started high school – majoring in electronics. With the attention and push needed, Narcis not only graduated high school with good grades, but he has also just now received a full scholarship to the University in Suceava and will be studying to be a social worker so that he can impact the lives of children, just like his life was impacted by the loving care of others.



Hand of Help will continue to support Narcis during his academic journey and ask that you would continue to pray for this young man, that he surrenders his life to the Lord and lives according to His will.

“What I am today I could not have become without the support and help of the Hand of Help family. Hand of Help extended a lifeline to me when I was on the brink of collapse, and they shaped me into what they knew I could become.

I witnessed and understood God’s love throughout my time spent at the orphanage. Many people contributed towards my upbringing, and in the beginning I was skeptical of their intentions, but soon I realized that their selfless intentions were in fact an earnest desire to see me through these critical teenage years and make me aware of the importance of working towards my future.

I am most appreciative for being shown God’s love in such a real, beautiful, palpable way that led me to want to draw closer to Him.

The children here are so blessed. Thank you, Narcis.”

A Testimony to Be Heard, An Example to Follow

As we spent hours driving through the Ukrainian countryside in deep conversation with the team of brothers hosting us, the testimony of Alexander Homchenko stood out as something all of us need to hear. He was a pastor in Donetsk, a city that is now under Russian occupation. When the war started, he committed to congregating in the city center and interceding with believers from churches throughout the area, who were burdened to pray for the peace of Ukraine. No one was excluded, everyone was welcome, no matter the denomination.

He did not bow to Russian threats, and without fail, Alexander was constantly reminded that anyone who prays for the Ukraine is an enemy of Russia and that his day would come. Alexander continued to show up and pray, confronting all opposition, and did so for 200+ days, in all types of weather, without skipping a beat.



He was arrested and subjected to extreme abuse, locked in an underground cell where he heard the never-ending cries of inmates being tortured in adjacent cells, wondering when his time would come. Brother Alexander was neither charged nor tried but was illegally held in a makeshift prison/torture facility by Russian terrorists.

Some of the tortures he endured were having a plastic bag tied over his head, until he was ready to pass out, then having his head held underwater immediately after so that when he would desperately gasp for air, he would be forced to inhale water instead. He was then hung upside down and beaten within an inch of his life.

Other times the terrorists holding Alexander would have him face a concrete wall and play a game, shooting around him, seeing who could get closest to his body without actually grazing his flesh, leaving the shape of a man surrounded by bullet holes forever etched into the concrete, attempting to break him through psychological anguish.

The Russian terrorists holding Alexander had decided that his day to die had come, or so they thought.

Alexander was taken to the edge of a mass grave and allowed to say a final prayer. His life flashed before his eyes; he was reminded of all the things he should've done and didn't, and all those things he did and shouldn't have. With what he thought were his final words, he addressed the executioners, while looking over the bodies of others who had already been murdered. Crying out, he proclaimed, "I am not concerned for myself because I know where I am going, I am concerned for you because I know where you are headed." They immediately responded in rage, firing off their machine guns. Bodies laid to the left and right of him, but he was still standing. The only sign that remained was a bullet that was lodged in his leg and some shrapnel.

They took him back to the cell. The soldiers reported that they were unable to kill Alexander. The commanding

officer said, “I will do what you could not,” pointed his revolver at him and shot twice - the officer was shocked to see that no bullets had been fired; he then pointed his pistol at the ceiling and squeezed the trigger. A bullet fired and hit the ceiling. The officer threw his gun down and said, “I have never seen anything like this; take him back to his cell.”

The church assembled in front of the building, where their dear pastor was being tortured to protest for his release. God’s providence so ordained that the day they were protesting, an international committee was visiting for a peace summit, and the terrorists did not want the international press to see the crowd and run a story of Alexander’s illegal imprisonment and torture. He was released with a final warning that he could never return to Donetsk.

He continued his ministry as close to the city as possible, all while knowing that a bounty had been placed on his head.

Whenever anyone would ask why he chose to continue ministering in this most dangerous area, on the frontlines of a war where he was well known and actively hunted,

he would simply smile and say, “Do you think I can add a single day to my life if I fear?” And then would go on to quote Psalm 127:1 *Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.*

A few years later, Alexander died of kidney failure - supposedly caused by the pain medication needed to cope with the pain from the injuries he had endured in standing for the truth and praying for peace.

Matthew 10:28 *And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*

The time has come when standing for our faith will have repercussions. Shallow Christianity will neither endure nor suffice. Let us seek our Lord with a renewed love, fervency, and in all seriousness, preparing to stand firm amidst the opposition against genuine believers that is already here.

Together in the race,

Daniel Boldea



Dear Brethren,

Dear Brethren,

My youngest daughter is precocious, and that's putting it mildly. It may have something to do with her age, but I believe it has more to do with her personality than anything else. She is the most loveable thing this side of a life-sized teddy bear filled with cotton candy. Even strangers with otherwise grim looks on their faces have to smile when she's around, and she'll wave hello to anyone or anything, whether it's a person, a dog, or a fire hydrant.

The other day we went to the park along with her older sister, and somehow she managed to wiggle her way onto the monkey bars. I was having a conversation with her sister, so I don't know how she got up there, but by the time I turned, she was swinging to and fro, with a smile on her face. Before I could register what was happening, she looked down at me, smiled, and said, "Catch me, daddy." And that was it. She didn't wait to see if I would, she didn't ask if I could, she just let go of the monkey bars, and fell into my waiting arms giggling all the way.

I've often said that if you want to understand how God feels about you, the best way is to have children of your own. That moment between her asking me to catch her, and her landing into my arms taught me more about faith than ten of the volumes I've read on the subject throughout my adulthood.

There was certainty in her actions which declared that not only was I able to catch her but that I would, no matter what. There was no pause, no hesitation, and no shadow of a doubt. The moment she let go of the monkey bars, she already saw herself land safely into my arms. At that moment, she was wholly dependent upon my willingness and ability to catch her, and she knew I would not fail.

That is how we should feel about God, and it would be easier to do if the devil weren't always within earshot, whispering incessantly that God's not going to catch us if we let go and trust Him. "He is too busy," the devil whispers. "He is preoccupied. You're not that important to Him. He's got so many other children He needs to look after."



But then you look down, and He is there. He wasn't preoccupied with something else, He is right there, arms outstretched, ready to catch you because He loves you more than you will ever know. You are that important to Him and don't you let the enemy convince you otherwise.

The times will soon be upon us when the just will live by faith. Faith is something we must possess, nurture, and grow far in advance of letting go and being confident that God will be there to catch us. It is that certainty that gives us peace in the midst of turmoil. It is that certainty that allows us to smile and be of good cheer even when everything that can be shaken is being shaken.

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.