



Hope in the Red Zone: Children's Camps in Kherson

From the front lines of one of the world's most dangerous conflict zones, a story of grace is unfolding. In the Kherson region of southern Ukraine — where daily explosions are the backdrop of childhood — a team of faithful believers is bringing the light of Christ into deep darkness. This is a report from the field: raw, hopeful, and filled with the unmistakable fingerprints of God.

The Daily Reality of Children in the Red Zone

The children of Kherson region do not know war from social media. They know it from the sound of explosions outside their windows, from the anxious faces of the adults around them, from the uncertainty of whether tomorrow will come at all. The constant danger presses heavily on a child's mind in ways that are difficult to put into words — it breeds anxiety, emotional breakdowns, and a creeping sense of hopelessness that no child should ever carry.

The atmosphere in these villages is one of **heaviness**. **Uncertainty** hangs in the air like smoke. **Tears** are not uncommon. For the youngest residents of the red zone, the horizon of their childhood has been narrowed by conflict, and the simple joys that children in safer places take for granted — laughter, play, wonder — have become precious and rare.

This is the world into which our ministry teams step when they arrive with camp supplies, music, and the Word of God. We do not come with grand promises or political solutions. **We come with something far more powerful: the living hope of Jesus Christ**, offered freely to every child who shows up, cautious and curious, to see what all the fuss is about.



The majority of the Kherson region is still under Russian occupation. The city of Kherson and the region around it have been liberated (in yellow), but because of the proximity to front-lines, they are under constant shelling and drone warfare.

Running a Camp Like a Military Operation

Life on the Front Line

In an area where active fighting is taking place, running a children's camp feels — in the words of our team — like a regular military operation. Nothing in seminary, school, or ministry training prepares you for coordinating a Bible camp in a combat zone. **Life on the front line is reduced to its most essential form: you live day by day, decision by decision, trusting the Lord for each hour.**



The logistics alone are staggering. Transportation routes must be assessed for safety. Timing must account for shelling patterns. Every team member understands the risk they are taking simply by showing up. And yet, they show up — faithfully, repeatedly, with trampoline equipment and craft supplies and joyful hearts full of songs for children who desperately need to hear them.

In this context, success is redefined. If the camp can be held and everyone remains safe and unharmed — that is already a victory worth celebrating. That alone is a testament to God's protection and the courage of every person who serves in this ministry.

From Caution to Trust: What We Saw in the Children

When the children first gathered and waited for camp to begin, the team could read every emotion on their faces. There was caution — the careful, guarded look of children who have learned not to trust too quickly. There was curiosity — a spark behind the eyes that war has not yet fully extinguished.

They stood in the yard and watched the team set up the trampoline, arranged the activity stations, and prepared the space with a kind of quiet intensity: *Are these believers our friends? Will it be interesting with them? Will they hurt us?*

Children always arrive much earlier than the scheduled time. They were trying to solve the puzzle — whether these people were trustworthy. And so they watched, and waited, and measured.

Then the camp began.

The Moment Everything Changed

Cheerful Music Breaks the Ice

The moment upbeat worship songs filled the air, the children's walls began to come down. Music speaks where words hesitate. It swept through the crowd like a warm wind, and within minutes, small feet were moving and small faces were smiling.

Bible Lessons Capture Their Hearts

Within hours, the same children who had watched from a cautious distance were now listening attentively to the leaders, asking questions, and participating openly in the Bible lesson. The Word of God was doing what only the Word of God can do.

Fun Relay Races Unleash Joy

The relay races pulled them fully into the moment. The competitive spirit, the laughter, the shared exhilaration of movement and play — the children were swept up in a whirlwind of excitement, one joyful event after another.

Made Visible

By the end of the day, children were hugging the team members, looking at them with eyes full of trust. In a matter of hours, the Lord had melted hearts that war had hardened and filled them with hope and light. This is the miracle of the Gospel at work.




Even in the compressed time of a single camp day, the transformation was visible and undeniable. These are not manufactured emotions. This is the Spirit of God moving among the youngest and most vulnerable souls in the conflict zone, and it is breathtaking to witness.

Seeds That Grow Into Churches

KINGDOM IMPACT

The fruit of a camp day does not end when the children go home. In fact, in many ways, that is precisely when the real work begins. Our teams have observed a consistent pattern: after gatherings like these, small Bible study groups often form organically in the very communities that hosted the camp. A few families begin meeting. A leader from the church follows up. The Word planted in a child's heart during a relay-race-and-Bible-story afternoon takes root quietly, steadily, and sometimes explosively.

These groups can — and do — eventually grow into new churches. In some of the most dangerous villages in the Kherson region, house churches have been born from the seeds planted at children's camps. The ministry does not merely provide a day of respite from the war. It plants the Kingdom of God in communities that have every worldly reason to despair, and offers them a reason to hope that transcends every bomb and every threat.

 After camps, small Bible study groups often form in these areas — groups that can eventually grow into new churches planted in the heart of the conflict zone.

This is why the work is worth every risk, every logistical challenge, and every prayer offered up for safety before a team departs into the red zone. The eternal stakes are staggering. The harvest is real. And the Lord of the harvest is faithful.

The Gospel Spreads Through Families

Children as Messengers

We know how eagerly the children tell their parents about everything that happened at camp and what they learned. This is, in the most literal sense, the spreading of the Gospel. A child's unbridled enthusiasm for what they have experienced is one of the most powerful evangelistic forces in any community — and especially in tight-knit villages where every family knows every other family.

The excitement a child carries home from camp — the songs still on their lips, the Bible verse still fresh in their mind, the joy still glowing on their face — becomes an irresistible invitation for parents to see for themselves what their children have encountered.

Like the Samaritan woman who shared about Jesus with her people — they believed, and then upon meeting Him themselves could say, *"We have seen and experienced it personally; we know it is true."*

"We have seen and experienced it personally; we know it is true." — John 4:42, the pattern of Gospel-spread we witness at every camp.

A Muslim Family on the Front Line — and a Story Just Beginning

Among the most remarkable stories to emerge from this season of ministry is the journey of a Muslim family living in a village on the very front line of the conflict. It was they who first expressed the desire to come to camp — and later to take part in other activities organized by the local church. For the ministry team, this was remarkable and unexpected: parents allowing their children to attend Christian gatherings and Bible lessons, and then, gradually, reading the Bible together as a family and rejoicing in these meetings.

These parents love their children deeply. And they can see — with their own eyes — how joyful and happy their children are when spending time with believers. That joy is its own testimony. It speaks of something real, something life-giving, something that the darkness of war cannot extinguish. Love that transforms a child's countenance is a powerful apologetic in any cultural or religious context.

This Muslim family's journey has only just begun. They are encountering the living Jesus through the joy of their children, and the entire team is watching with wonder and gratitude.

For us, it is a great joy and encouragement to witness how God is working in this Muslim family.



A Blessing Granted by the Lord

Camps like these, along with the follow-up ministry that continues afterward, are crucial for reaching and influencing entire families with the Gospel.

1 — **What We Have Witnessed After Camps**

Children study the Gospels each week. The parents regularly bring them to gatherings — not reluctantly, but willingly, with open hearts. They themselves participate in events and have even begin helping the ministry team.

2 — **What We Continue to Pray For**

We continue to pray for the salvation of parents and children alike, trusting that the seeds of love planted in these moments will accompany them throughout their lives. These seeds have been planted in rich soil. We trust the Lord of the harvest to bring the increase in His perfect time.

3 — **What Your Partnership Means**

Your giving, your prayer, and your partnership make these camps possible — in one of the most dangerous and spiritually needy places on earth.



How You Can Stand With the Children of Ukraine

All camp ministries in Ukraine, including the team on the ground in Kherson asks for two things above all else: **prayer and partnership**. Prayer, because every camp day begins and ends with a plea for divine protection and guidance. Partnership, because the physical resources required to reach these children — transportation, supplies, camp materials, follow-up ministry — require faithful, generous support from brothers and sisters who share the conviction that no child is beyond the reach of God's love, not even those living in the shadow of war.



Pray Without Ceasing

Pray for the safety of every team member in every camp in Ukraine. Pray for the hearts of the children and families they serve. Pray for the small Bible study groups formed after camps, and for the churches yet to be born. Your prayers are not passive — they are the frontline of this work.



Give Generously

Your financial gifts directly fund camp supplies, transportation into dangerous areas, follow-up ministry resources, and the ongoing work of the local churches. Every dollar is a statement of faith that the Kingdom of God is worth investing in, even — in places the world has written off.



Mobilize Your Church

Share this story with your congregation, small group, or network. The children of Ukraine need advocates in the West who will not let their reality be forgotten. Your voice can multiply the impact of this ministry far beyond what any single donor or church could accomplish alone.

These camps do not merely offer a distraction from the war. They offer an encounter with the living God — and that encounter changes everything.

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