



The Bilyaks in Ternopil, Ukraine

4th Quarter Report, 2021

October

Greetings, friends and coworkers with the BIEM mission.

In this letter I want to tell you about the ministry among athletes. I've probably already mentioned Igor to you. He serves in our church. He is a professional athlete, a trainer in Greco-Roman wrestling, a professional rehabilitologist, and a masseur. He has a large circle of acquaintances. A lot of people in the city know him. Many know that he is a Christian. If you go to him for training or for a massage, before he does anything else, he will pray with you. Some people like this, some don't, but that is what he does.

He often shares with me the needs of athletes. One of those needs is the crisis when an athlete drops out of major sports. He becomes unneeded by anybody. Yesterday he was a star, people recognized him. Today he's a nobody. The second problem is that of sports injuries. Nearly all trainers press their athletes to achieve victory at all costs. When an athlete sustains an injury, if he cannot compete, he's out of the sport. A third problem is anger and aggression. Athletes, as a rule, are not taught how to lose. The goal is victory and only victory, victory at any cost. The victor is the strongest; you can't depend on anyone, only on yourself. As a result, in most cases athletes have no room in their lives for God.



Igor ends up having to deal with all these problems. People talk with him about this. They open up to him about their problems. Many have family problems, problems with their children, addictions... Often, athletes have their own homemade worldview. In search of a meaning for life, they embrace elements of various religions. It's syncretism—an amalgamation of different religions. This complicates conversation and working with them. You have to start with the very most basic things. For example, that the Bible is the Word of God and that you can trust it.

Sometimes Igor will call and ask me to speak with an athlete he knows. Generally, these are more complicated situations in which he isn't sure what to say or what advice to give. And I end up more or less delving into the problem. Literally yesterday we had such a meeting. There is a guy who owns an expensive car and his own business, but he needs healing from the Lord.

In the church, we've already been praying a long time concerning outreaches to athletes. As you know, in our basement we have a fitness room. We are praying concerning completing the remodeling there so that it can serve to minister to sportsmen. Not just for professional athletes, but also for holding meetings for children and youth. There, we can hold group training, where there would be an emphasis not only on developing the body physically but also working with the eternal soul, with the character, with special emphasis on the inside to introduce people to God and lead them to Jesus Christ. This is quite an expensive project because it involves more than simple remodeling. The room will need quality ventilation. It will need sports equipment, and these things are not cheap. So, we are praying. We hope that someone will want to support this project, where athletes will hear God's words, where we will train not just their muscles and agility, but where their souls will be strengthened. Please pray with us concerning a possible outreach to athletes. Please pray for Igor, for his growth as a minister. It seems that he could become a very good pastor in the future. Pray for his remarkable family and their little son. That he and his wife will serve the Lord together and be a united team.

With thankfulness to you,
Your brother in Christ,
Vitaly Bilyak

November

Hello, dear friends and coworkers of the BIEM mission.

In this letter I would like to tell about a particular event in the church—a baptism. Alexander and Sofia are two people who came to us from different backgrounds, different worldviews. They are two people who were saved at Calvary. These two people urgently wanted to be baptized. In my experience as a missionary pastor, no one else has so strongly and persistently looked forward to being baptized. From time to time, each of them would ask me when the next baptism would be. That date was November 11.



Alexander (nicknamed Sasha) is a man from the rehabilitation center. His life and story before meeting Christ are very sad. Dramatic conflict in the home, cast off by his mother, he spent time in prison, and was addicted to alcohol. One time while in a drunken state he was struck hard in the head with a pipe. He woke up in the hospital recovery room, but part of his skull is missing. Now he looks quite unusual. In his head there is a big hollow spot or dent above one ear. In worship services we allow him to wear a hat so as not to cause embarrassment from his appearance. One of the guys at church noted that his head resembles the logo of the Apple corporation, which has one bite taken from it. Sasha liked that joke. But he is disabled, a man whom sin has greatly crippled. His body coordination has greatly suffered, and he can hardly see. Despite that, he is an intelligent guy who understands the Gospel very maturely. He is probably the most sincere and emotional man in our church. When I preach, Sasha is the most attentive listener. And he doesn't merely listen—he reacts to what he hears. If the Word touches him, he might cry, or he might laugh from joy. The salvation of such people is a special grace.



In his life as in no other, the contrast brought by salvation is clearly seen. His life before and after encountering Jesus Christ are extreme contrasts. For over a year we've been able to observe the changes in his life, his growing love for the Lord. Before his baptism, when he was asked how he would like to serve the Lord in the church, he said that he could preach to sick people. He stated that he understands them and has a word of hope for them. He himself requires constant assistance. He's about 45 years old, but he needs help to get seated in a car, and to get back out, not even to mention more complicated movements. Nobody has ever heard any

complaints out of him. He has not expressed even a hint that he has any sort of complaints toward God or other people. Nothing but gratitude, and only hope in the Lord.

Sofia (nicknamed Zosya) is a young lady in the youth group. We met her sometime back through the camp ministry. She came to the children's and teen meetings, and then disappeared for a while, and then showed up again. Her testimony is interesting. She attempted to fill the emptiness in her soul and her need of God with various things that young people use these days in order to feel normal. Unfortunately, she even had experience with occult things. But the Lord touched her heart. She is a very social and communicative girl. Girls from the youth group kept company with her. Together, they read the Bible and talked. She accepted Christ, and she has a great desire to serve the Lord. Right now, she is a student, a very talkative student who tells others about the love of God. Her parents and sister have begun to visit our church. It turns out that one of her grandmothers was a believer. It's evident that this grandmother prayed a lot for her and for this family. We invited Vitaly Yurchenko to this baptism. He's one of the missionaries with our mission. He and his wife Alyona participated in the worship service. They sang and rejoiced along with us. Vitaly preached and offered a word of edification for the church and for those being baptized. This was a wonderful service. Unfortunately, a baptism is a holiday for us because they occur rarely. I would really like for baptisms to become regular, triumphant services that we could hold often.

Friends, pray please for Alexander and his faithfulness to the Lord, that he would grow spiritually as a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. Please pray for Sofia. She has a dream—to become a missionary.

Thank you for your dedication to the ministry of evangelism in Ukraine. Thank you for praying and supporting all the outreaches we are involved in here. We understand that we are members of a large spiritual family, a large ministry team; therefore, it's important to us that you know what is happening here in Ternopil. This is your ministry, too—our combined labor to the praise of the Lord.

With best greetings and wishes,
Your brother,
Vitaly Bilyak



December

Greetings to you, dear friends, coworkers with God in the work of evangelism!

One of the ministries that we are doing in Ternopil is the outreach to orphans and the children in the boarding school in a new village. For over a year, we have been speaking with the staff of the boarding school about the possibility of bringing the children to our church. At first, the obstacle with that was the quarantine. Then the boarding school had some changes in work connected to new laws. Again, a return to quarantine standards posed a problem for the children to visit the church. We try to visit the children a minimum of once per month to speak with them and to bring take some sort of help. The last time we went, we again raised the question regarding bringing groups of the children to our church here. At the end of October, the assistant director agreed with me on a date. We decided it would be December 12. They began to prepare the children for it, and we began to prepare the church so that people would be ready to minister to them, and we prayed for this meeting.

Now in Ukraine the government has declared an idea of abandoning boarding schools. The idea itself is quite correct. It is proper for each child to be with parents. But, as always, everything is done “in our way.” I would say, “In the Soviet way.” At one time, it was this way: “The Party spoke, and the people carried it out.” What am I here for? This isn't done simply by making one announcement, “Each child goes to a family.” These should be good-quality families. But it seems they have decided that if they allow fewer funds to the boarding schools from the budget, the situation will begin to resolve itself. Unfortunately, all these “reforms” affected the quality of food. They've begun to designate less to the children for food. People from the village have begun to help, farmers... We, too, decided to collect some groceries to supplement what the government allocates. People in the church enthusiastically began to bring food. Some gave money with which we could buy more food.



The boarding school children prepared a program called “Thankfulness to God.” Another brother from the church and I drove to the boarding school early in the morning to drive the children to the church. We also set aside funds for fuel for the minibus. Seventeen kids and 4 adults squeezed into three vehicles. The road was slippery, so it took about an hour.

Our worship service with the participation of children began, as always, with songs of worship, Scripture reading, prayer, and then the children presented their program.

I must confess, I was amazed. This was done in a high-quality way. Considering that this is a special school, I understood that, for this trip, they picked the best ones. I was ready for something less. But they were terrific—harmonious, straight, and with feeling. They spoke and sang about God and gratitude to Him. Their program was about a half hour. Then our deacon preached on the topic, “There are no other people’s children,” in which he reminded us of God’s love to us children, about how we can learn to be good children and parents. The younger children were in Sunday school during the preaching time, but the teens listened to the sermon.

After the services there was a lunch for the guests and the children from the church. Our sisters prepared a remarkable meal. After the children had eaten, the leaders of the teen club spent a memorable time with them. They played games, sang songs, and discussed important things. At the conclusion, each one received a nice gift. By evening, our tired, happy, and joyful guests returned to the boarding school. All the vehicles were loaded with food aid. In their trunks, there were also gifts of candies for all the children in the boarding school (there are now 80), a sack of sugar, a sack of buckwheat, much sunflower oil, potatoes, apples, 50 kilograms of macaroni, and other tasty items.



But that is still not all. From time to time, our brothers at the rehabilitation center work for a farmer. They told him about this need, and this one farmer set aside much various cereals for the boarding school and also told another farmer friend about it. That other man has a big farm, and he provided eggs. The brethren loaded yet another minibus and delivered all this first thing on Monday, the morning after the kids' visit. Right after lunch, the assistant director telephoned and poured out a long, emotional thank you for the aid. She said the kids were already asking if they could come back to our church again.

Friends, thank you for supporting the ministry in Ukraine. With your support, our people burn with a desire to serve. The Lord is glorified through your good deeds! Please pray for the kids in this boarding school. Only a portion of them are official, genuine orphans, but many of the children come from difficult families and are basically orphans even though they have parents. Many of the parents are drug users, alcoholics, and prostitutes. Please pray that these kids will come to know Christ's love in their lives and will break this vicious circle of sin and cursing.

With best wishes,
Your brother and coworker,
Vitaly Bilyak