

Learning the Bible and Learning about the Bible

What would possess a group of 40 Deaf believers to gather into a small, cramped apartment in a city in Transylvania, Romania, for 6 hours on Sunday afternoon, after already having "been to church" earlier that same morning? It has to do with an experience they had to learn scripture, instead of learning about scripture.

A couple of weeks ago Ioan and Marcela returned home (from our *StoryOne* training center in Budapest) to spend a weekend with their respective families in Cluj, Romania. Both were looking for a bit of down time after 2 and a half months of intensive work on putting scripture into Romanian Sign Language. Ioan is the pastor of the Deaf church in that city and he knew that he'd be sharing with his congregation on Sunday morning in their traditional, 1 and a half hour gathering. He had no idea that his time of worship with his church would consume his day and his "down time."

That morning he began sharing his scripture story from John 15—the Vine and the branches. As he told the story in exact, graphic signs, the folks in attendance began to watch with intensity. He told the Bible story again and they were captivated by the scripture story told completely in their own language—not signed Romanian but Romanian Sign Language! Then the group began to interact with the details of the story and Ioan told the story, again! By the time the people began to interact with the story the second time, the 90 minutes scheduled for their use of the building had ended. No one was ready to go home but the "worship service" was now over.

Someone signed, "Wow! This can't stop now! This is the first time we've actually learned the Bible in our own language and not just learned what someone is telling us about the Bible!"

Sadly, the Deaf group couldn't use the building any longer and had to head for the exit. As they began to walk away from the church building some folks approached Ioan and asked, "Can we come to your house this afternoon and continue to learn the Bible?"

The pastor, anxious for some time with his family but knowing the hungry hearts that stood before him, signed back, "Of course!" After going home for a short lunch there was a flashing light indicating that someone was at the door of Ioan's apartment. When he opened the door it was not the people who had asked to come, but others from that morning, eager to learn more of the Bible. Soon the light flashed again and others arrived. Then it flashed again and more Deaf arrived. By 2 pm there were over 40 Deaf people gathered (or more accurately described—"crammed") in Ioan's small apartment. "Let's begin with the story from this morning again," someone signed. So Ioan began to share Jesus' words from John 15, and signed, "I am the Vine and you are the branches ..." He told the story again!

The group that had gathered listened to a story they knew about from before. Oh it had been explained to them but they had never seen it completely in their heart language. The scripture story itself gripped their hearts and many of them wept to know that they were learning the Bible, and not just what someone was telling them about the Bible!

The story was told many times that afternoon. The Deaf believers interacted with it, dialogued about it, applied it to their lives, and most importantly, committed it to memory. After more than 6 hours of cramped quarters and repeating the Bible story nearly 40 times, the group decided that they should prepare to go home. After all, their pastor needed some time with his family—plus he had to catch a train back to Budapest the next day.

As the Deaf believers left the home of their pastor they were encouraged like never before.

"More stories, more stories! You have to teach us more of the Bible when you come back next month! We don't want to hear about the Bible we want you to give us the Bible ourselves!"

Ioan was excited and, finally, convinced that the methods and programs modeled after the hearing church were never going to help the believers have ownership over their own scripture. What he had just done and experienced was something that would see that the scripture, in Romania Sign Language, would actually have ownership over them.

When he returned he signed to us, "I always thought it was about me and how well I was able to make a sermon, explain the principles, and apply what I thought to be important! But it isn't about me and my abilities to do any of that! I have shared in the church for years about the Bible but now I see that it is the scripture itself that does the teaching, makes the application, and has the power! The Spirit speaks thru the scripture stories and that's what the people need!"

Ioan, and his Deaf congregation, were forever changed that day! No more traditional sermons! No more limited worship "services!" No more program-oriented gatherings! From this point on it would be scripture stories that would drive the agenda of the church whether it met in the building set aside for Sunday morning gatherings, or whether it was 6 hours crammed into his little apartment!

Praise the Lord for the power of the scripture and how the Spirit of God uses it to change hearts. PRAISE the Lord for Ioan and his Deaf church in Romania. Pray that the scripture stories the Deaf believers learned that weekend will be shared among the Deaf community in their city. Pray for Ioan as he continues to work with our StoryOne project to help make scripture available in the heart language of his people—the Deaf Romanians.

Metadata

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