

Finnish Pastor Tells Congregation to 'Get Into the Bible'

Running into a pastor who tells his congregation to “get into the Bible” is not something that happens daily in postmodern Finland. Add to that a congregation that takes time to memorize Scripture, and you have a rare combination.

Yet against all odds, what we find at United Community Church (UCC) in the capital area of Helsinki is exactly that.

According to UCC pastor and OMer Shaun Rossi, the church has “held a pattern of preaching expositionally through the Bible” throughout its history. Planted in 2007, UCC is an international English-speaking church ministering to both Finns and foreigners living in Finland. Rossi wants people to know Christ and to learn to trust and depend on Him.

“I suppose many think that to be relevant today, you must water down the truth of God’s Word,” Rossi says. “We decided we would speak the Bible for what it is to the best of our ability—really, what else do we have to give people?”

In addition to Sunday preaching, the Bible is being taught in what UCC calls “growth classes.” These Monday night classes are divided into three six-week segments that cover topics from Christian doctrine to world missions. Through these classes, people have learned to go to the Bible themselves.

“We have seen people respond with a real hunger for more and more,” Rossi explains.

Are You Reading the Bible?

When he was a new believer, Rossi read and studied a lot of theology. Then a good friend noticed that while Rossi was

reading a lot *about* the Bible, he didn't spend much time reading the Bible itself.

"He called me out, asking whether I was reading the Bible regularly," Rossi recalls, and he admitted he wasn't. He felt "a gentle conviction" and began to read the Bible daily, a habit that has since been "pretty consistent with the occasional lull."

Rossi wants to lead by setting an example. He believes Christian books and Internet sermons can be beneficial but insists that the real question is whether or not you are reading the Bible.

"For me, reading the Bible is not about wanting instant help," he says. "I think many are deterred from reading the Bible because they want all of their questions and problems answered during their morning devotions. For me, the real fruit of Bible reading can be seen in looking back over the years and seeing how the Word has strengthened and molded me and been a source of grace in my life."

Investing in Christian Men

An information technology project manager by profession, Rob Curtis is in charge of men's ministry at UCC. He believes "spiritual growth doesn't just happen." Rather, churches have to invest in it in order to see change.

According to Curtis, churches in the West have been "spoon-feeding" Christians for decades. The result is "large chunks of Christian generations feeling ill-equipped and inadequate" to evangelize, lead family devotions or have "anything that even vaguely resembles a daily walk with God," Curtis says.

"Young Christians need to be taught God's Word and how to use it and live by it themselves," he continues. Curtis wants to be a catalyst, rocking the boat and stirring things up.

“Telling people the truth comes easily to me,” he admits. “However, it only helps if you love the person with the love that God has put inside you. You can’t pass something on that you don’t have. I need to be living out a fresh, daily relationship with God myself. That is the greatest challenge, and it is only doable by walking humbly before God.”

Finding Answers

A few years ago, Minni Suova, a fashion designer from Helsinki, became curious about the Bible and decided to join a friend’s Bible study group. She was not attending a church at the time. However, what she learned through the Bible study started affecting her thinking.

“All those passages about the church being important—if I wanted to take what I was reading seriously, I had to find myself a church,” Suova recalls.

She came to UCC to visit and never went anywhere else.

“Why keep looking?” she asks. “I feel at home here, and besides, no church will ever be perfect and meet all of my requirements. By committing to this church, I can grow and help others to grow as well.”

Today, Suova serves as the missions coordinator at UCC. “I was never particularly interested in missions,” she admits. “But the position needed to be filled, the work needed to be done, and there I was. Why not take the job?”

“Sometimes we spend too much time trying to figure out what our calling is,” she adds. “Maybe I wasn’t so interested in missions before. Now I am. I have found my place in the church.”

Minni still attends the same Bible study. The group consists of women from different church backgrounds. While their theological stances vary, they all share a genuine desire to

know God's Word.

"We go through the Bible book by book," Suova shares. "I'm in a habit of getting stuck on hard questions, which I can't let go of until I understand what the Bible says about them. The group has walked with me and helped me find answers."

Joy Through Challenges

A student of theology and tourism, Satu Kolehmainen started attending UCC three years ago. Last year, she lived through a personal crisis that saw her relationship with Jesus change dramatically.

"I had been a listener rather than a doer," Kolehmainen explains, referring to James 1:22, which says, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" (NIV).

"But then God allowed such challenges and trials in my life that I had to depend on Him," she says.

In the midst of the challenges, Kolehmainen started reading the Bible in a new way. Pastor Rossi advised her to meditate God's Word. That prompted her to memorize Scripture verses, which she then repeated silently, over and over again.

"At first I didn't feel anything," Kolehmainen recalls. "I was simply putting together a collection of comforting passages."

But soon the words started molding and changing her. She clung to God's promises, and slowly but surely those promises started becoming true.

"My life in Christ is no longer about achievement," Kolehmainen says. "Now it's about having a relationship with Him."

Today, bursting with joy and excitement, Kolehmainen believes God allows us to sometimes face challenges simply because we

need to realize how much we need Jesus. And it's easy to believe what she says—her eyes twinkle, and one can almost touch the joy radiating from her.

Like Kolehmainen, many at UCC have found that God's Word is truth, indeed.