

How many sermons are enough?

How many sermons do you usually hear in a typical week? In the UK, with 2 Sunday services and one meeting mid-week, most Christians probably average 2-3 sermons a week (not counting those we download.) This, of course, is based on hearing one message per service. Is that too little, too much, or about right to give you enough food to fuel your spiritual growth? I suppose it depends on what they are like, and what we do with them.

In Eastern Europe where we labour, the usual church traditions in many Evangelical Baptist churches are quite different from our own. In Poland, Bulgaria, Belarus, Ukraine, Romania or Russia, you will quite often hear 2, 3 or sometimes even 4 preached messages during each church service you attend. That means, at an average of 3 per service, you might well hear 9 sermons a week if you go to church twice on a Sunday and once mid-week.

What an amazing opportunity, you might think! What a vast amount of spiritual food to encourage the growth of your soul and to deepen your understanding of the Bible.

Or perhaps not. You see, our experience over the last 2 years in Eastern Europe has been that our Christian brothers & sisters in the very churches and groupings who have such high numbers of preached messages every week, are the very ones who are often short on Biblical teaching and are often doctrinally fragile. Perhaps only a quarter

of the messages we hear have much expository quality to them. Hence in many congregations people are “underfed,” with all manner of wrong ideas and applications creeping into the church. Many have said to us that they sometimes “*leave church hungry*” for more of God’s word.

The issue is quality, not quantity. It’s sadly true that many of those who preach are not skilled or equipped to do so, most with little or no training in theology or in how to preach. In times past this was a necessity, as many pastors under Communism were imprisoned, so others took their place each week. But the practice continues today despite the new freedoms, and this affects the spiritual health of the church. Many of the messages that you hear in parts of Eastern Europe are lacking Biblical depth, theological backbone and valid application based on Bible principles.

How can we grow properly when the preaching we hear isn’t sufficiently challenging and isn’t teaching us the Word of God in all its depth and fullness? How will the church survive theological attack when its foundation is thin and shaky?

Our passion is to equip as many preachers as possible to better handle the Word, so that they can preach messages that are Word-centred and expository in nature, which teach the principles of Biblical truth, rather than man-inspired alternatives and stories. This is an interesting challenge in a country where

people feel they have plenty of preaching, yet don’t always recognise its lack of quality. From next year, we hope to invest in a new generation of young preachers, to offer 9 months of full-time training, aimed at providing some expository tools which they need to improve and develop the way they preach.

It will probably take a whole generation to make real progress in raising the standard that people here expect from their preachers. But do please pray for the setting up of this new Preaching Apprenticeship Scheme for Slavic young men – that it will have a great impact on the quality of preaching and the health of the church.

Surely quality is MUCH more important than quantity.

Andy & Tatyana, Eastern Europe

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