

# Once Ignorant of God's Word... I Now Am a CBSI Leader!

The cliché, "God works in mysterious ways," certainly applies to Sasha, a CBSI Country Coordinator in Eastern Europe. He tells the story of God's creative transformative power this way:

"While I was attending university, one day some Jehovah's Witnesses knocked on my door and asked if I would like to study the Bible with them. I lived in a former Soviet Union city--shortly after the Soviet Union collapsed. I didn't know anything about the Bible, and so I agreed.

"For six months they came to my house regularly "to share God's Word"—i.e. according to their beliefs. For reasons I still don't understand, while meeting with them all that time, I really never wanted to go to their Kingdom Hall meetings.

"The ironic thing was that they didn't actually yet have a Russian New World Translation of the Scriptures (the Jehovah's Witnesses' version of the Bible), so they were using a standard, traditional Russian Bible—**which the Holy Spirit used to open my eyes to the things of God!**

"One day some friends, who are true followers of Jesus, invited me to an evangelical church. There, in a friendly atmosphere and with good teaching, I received Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord."

This is Sasha's story—at least the beginning of it. He goes on to share that, over time, he grew in his faith, eventually responding to God's call to pastoral ministry. He has now been a shepherd for 25 years. He also has been part of an dynamic Christian movement in the former Soviet Republic.

When the Iron Curtain fell at the end of 1991, the USSR splintered into 15 countries in the space of four months. It was a seismic shift for millions. Economic chaos and political instability mixed with 70 years of atheism led to a huge interest in the gospel. Consequently, Christian materials flooded into these new countries, and many new churches began. Sasha shares about that period:

"In the 90s, there was a wonderful small group movement in my country. These communities began quickly--meeting in homes. Many were very fruitful, as people really grew in their faith. Unfortunately, by the year 2000, most of the groups had begun to significantly decline as quickly as they had grown: My church, which once had 15 small groups, shrunk to two. Leaders were discouraged. Pastors felt very disappointed.

"I was deeply troubled by this situation and began to pray about it. I knew the great value of getting people together around God's Word, and it just wasn't happening anymore. Instead, the churches were taking on a consumer culture. Pastors were trying to entertain their congregations. Many pastors and small group leaders were doing topical studies, but sometimes these weren't very biblically based. Megachurches in the West influenced many to seek worldly success.

## Europe's Immigrant Population

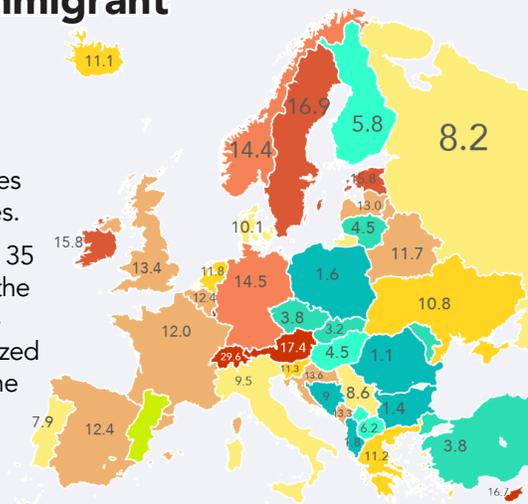
Europe's diversity and complexity present significant opportunities and ministry challenges.

CBS has a presence in 35 of the 44 countries in the region so far. While 24 languages are recognized with official status in the European Union, 122 languages are commonly spoken.

Researchers count 87 distinct "peoples of Europe" among the 770 million inhabitants. Add

to that the steady inflow of immigrants from around the world, and it is easy to see the region is growing more complex all the time. [See map above.]

Europe is arguably the most diverse CBSI region culturally, politically, socially, economically, religiously, and historically. Please pray for wisdom and clear direction for our regional leaders. Ask God to call and equip godly and accurate translators. Please pray for open doors among the many people groups, and ask God to call passionate Christ-followers into leadership roles.



(Immigrant population percentage, United Nations, 2015)

## Taster Sessions:

### Let Folks Taste and See What Bible Study Can Be

CBS leaders in Europe developed “taster sessions” to let interested people “test drive” our caring, Bible study method.

Participants are given a single sheet of paper with a Bible passage and a few questions to answer individually based on the passage.

After they have had time to study the passage and answer the questions, they are gathered into small groups to discuss their answers and the insights gleaned from the passage.

That is followed by a short wrap-up talk highlighting key points in the passage and a life application.

This “try-it-before-you-buy-it” approach is more effective than brochures or websites in engaging inquirers with CBS’s caring, in-depth Bible studies.

“I was concerned about the kind of disciples we were making! At that time, I recall thinking, ‘20 years previously, people’s Bibles were worn out and broken with over-use. But these days the Bibles are clean and shiny.’ Many people stopped studying God’s Word, and I could see that they didn’t want to join small groups any longer.”

**About four years ago, Sasha met a CBSI representative at a large Christian conference in Central Europe. He listened to her explanation of Community Bible Study and took some sample materials. He was rather skeptical, but decided that it would be worth a try.**

Sasha then shares: “Eventually, a CBS Ambassador came to my church and held a ‘taster session.’ Our church leaders decided to implement CBS studies in our ministry, and subsequently, several new groups started.

“I’m pleased to say that over the past few years, CBS has grown, becoming a great blessing to our community and to our pastors themselves! Quotes from a few of them express what I mean:”

“CBS makes my life as a pastor so much easier. I trust it. The authority of the message is absolute. It’s not about a human author or teacher, it’s all about God. The Bible is like a mirror for us and shows us who we really are. **God speaks to individuals through His Word and challenges them.** CBS shows that the Bible interprets itself—and proves itself.

“The people in my congregation who use CBS have greater spiritual health. I can see it. They aren’t just reading the parts of the Bible that they like—the parts that give them peace and make them comfortable. Instead, they are being challenged and they are changing.

“One of our groups is made up of young mothers. I’m also using a CBS study with potential leaders in my church, and it is great for that. I encourage pastors to use CBS themselves. It will help their leadership and their preaching, because it helps us all to look at our own hearts, attitudes and goals. I love CBS. It is a great blessing.

God certainly does work in mysterious ways, doesn’t He? He brought a young man ignorant of the Bible to faith through a religious sect. He then led that same young man into pastoral ministry. Providentially, the Lord exposed Sasha to CBSI at a non-related CBSI conference, which led to an Ambassador’s visit and groups beginning in his church. Sasha now is in CBSI leadership—and his leadership is impacting other countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

**That, my brothers and sisters, is transformation through God’s Word!**

I hope this story inspires you to worship God in a deeper way as you reflect on how He can use unusual circumstances, events, and people to draw unbelievers into a loving relationship with Himself. Hopefully your worship is also accompanied by prayer for the millions who, like Sasha was, are still separated from God by false religions or who have no faith at all.

Finally, please consider contributing to the Europe Region as it engages the daunting task of reaching both European nationals, with all the inherent diversity, as well as the large number of foreign-born residents within its borders.

With gratitude,



Keith Sparzak, International Director

**To partner with us financially, you may donate online at [www.communitybiblestudy.org/giving](http://www.communitybiblestudy.org/giving), or by mail to Community Bible Study/790 Stout Road/Colorado Springs, CO 80921.**