



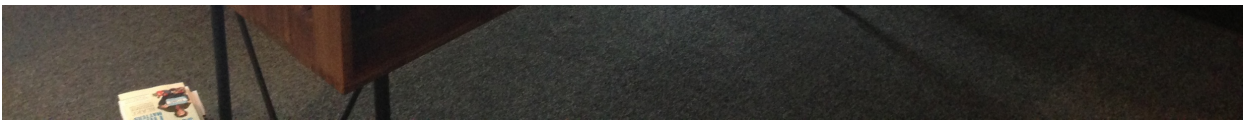
Helping People
Pursue Jesus.

6 Steps To Prep A Sermon Start To Finish

April 25, 2013

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, "The work of preaching is the highest and the greatest and the most glorious calling to which anyone can ever be called." I'm so thankful to be a preacher. It's my favorite part of being a pastor. While I love the act of preaching, I often find the art of prepping sermons tedious. I love to study and preach what the Lord gives me. It's the blood, sweat, and tears in between that makes me long for the time when I was a vocational coffee maker.





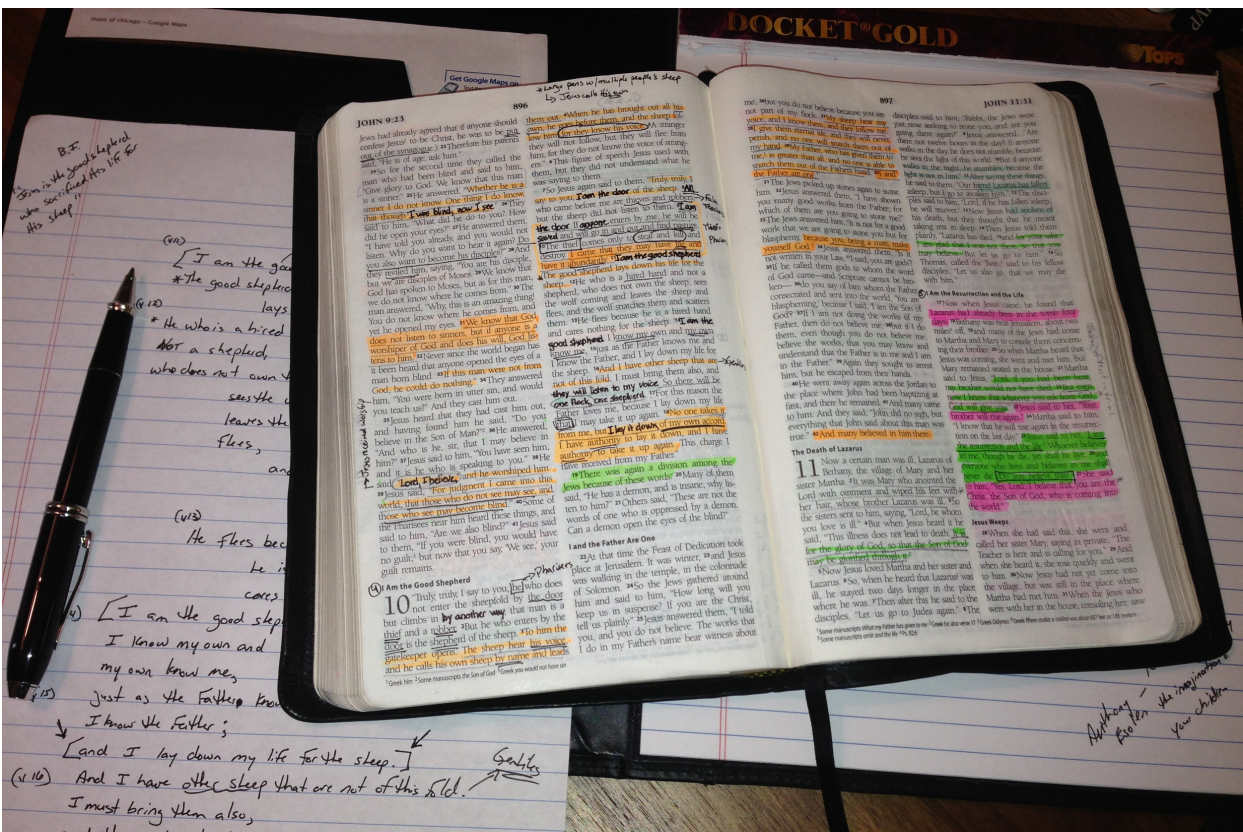
Because I preach about 45 times a year, I'm always prepping a sermon. I've tried just about every means possible, but finally seem to have fallen into a consistent rhythm. I'm a bit of a nerd, but I'm obsessed with hearing about the process other preachers use to prepare sermons, so I thought I'd share my own. Here are the 6 steps I take to prep a sermon start to finish...

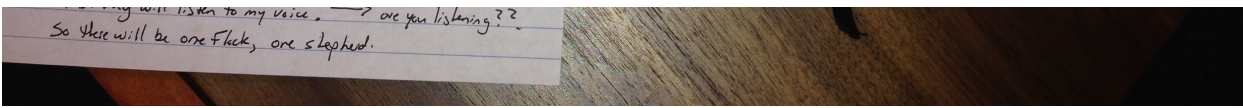
1. Pray With Persistence.

The development and delivery of Spirit-filled, eternity-altering, life-changing preaching demands a posture of prayer. Preachers are called to a task we're incapable of accomplishing. Prayer is an acknowledgement of our dependence. We petition the Spirit of God to do what we can't do. Prayer must persist throughout the preparation and presentation of the sermons we proclaim.

2. Read And Record.

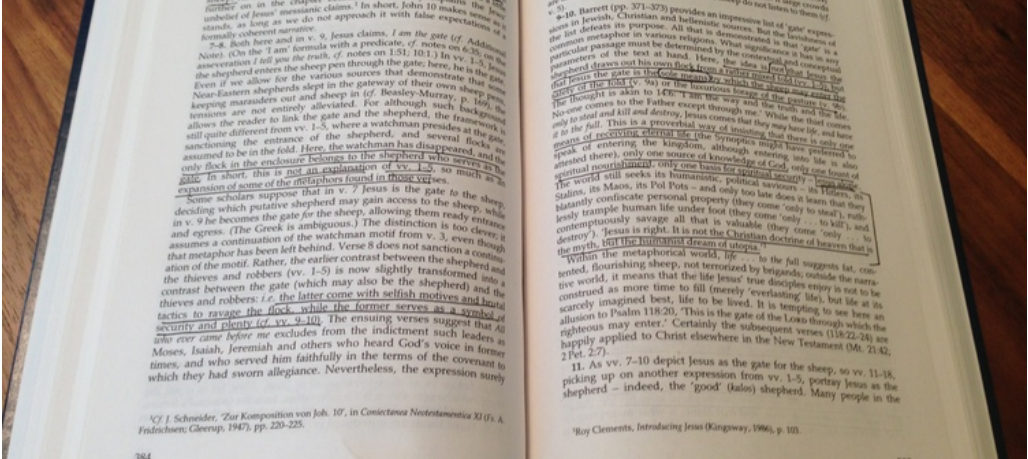
If your sermon prep starts with something other than an open Bible, you're doing it wrong. The Apostle Paul told a young pastor named Timothy to "preach the word." We don't preach our creativity, thoughts, feelings, ideas, or stories. These may be PART of the sermon, but if they ARE the sermon we've wasted the time of our listeners.





Monday's for me are marked by coffee, my Bible, and a blank piece of paper. I'm marking up the text, writing it out by hand, recording my observations and questions, and beginning the difficult, but rewarding work of letting the text speak. I LOVE this part. Every week, even when I'm worn out, the Spirit reminds me that the Word of God is living and active (link). Every sermon starts with Scriptures and a sheet of paper.

3. Supplement Your Study.



By Tuesday morning, I've done my own work and have hopefully begun to get my heart and mind around the text. While the Holy Spirit speaks to me directly through the text, I also know that He uses the work of other men and women to sharpen and clarify my thinking as well. This means on Tuesday I have Logos open and I'm checking my own interpretation against the best commentaries I can find. I typically have one primary commentary that I'm studying in depth and two or three others I'm skimming as well. BestCommentaries.com is a very helpful site for picking and choosing the ideal commentary.

4. Frame It Out.

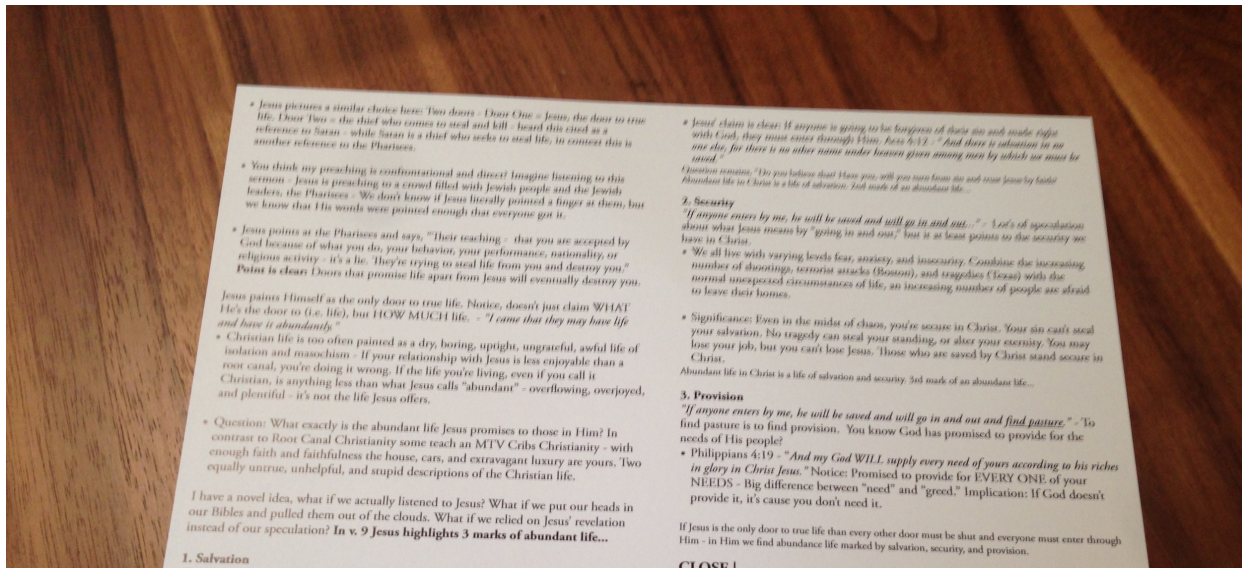
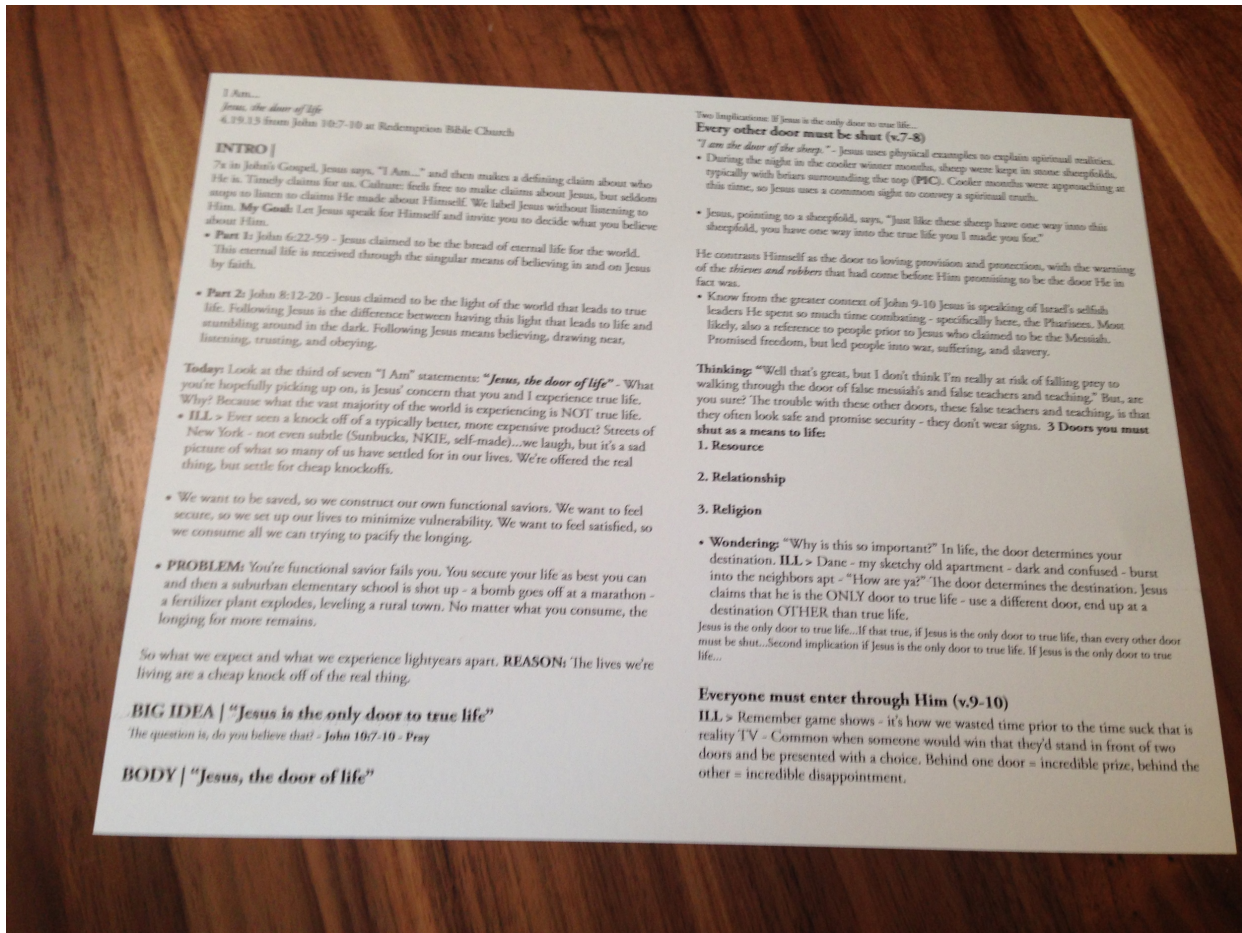
Wednesday is my day off, so all the work I've done on Monday and Tuesday is marinating throughout the day. Thursday morning I'm back in my office, my Bible and notes are out, and it's time to find and frame the sermon. I'm crafting my Big Idea and looking for how to best outline my main points.

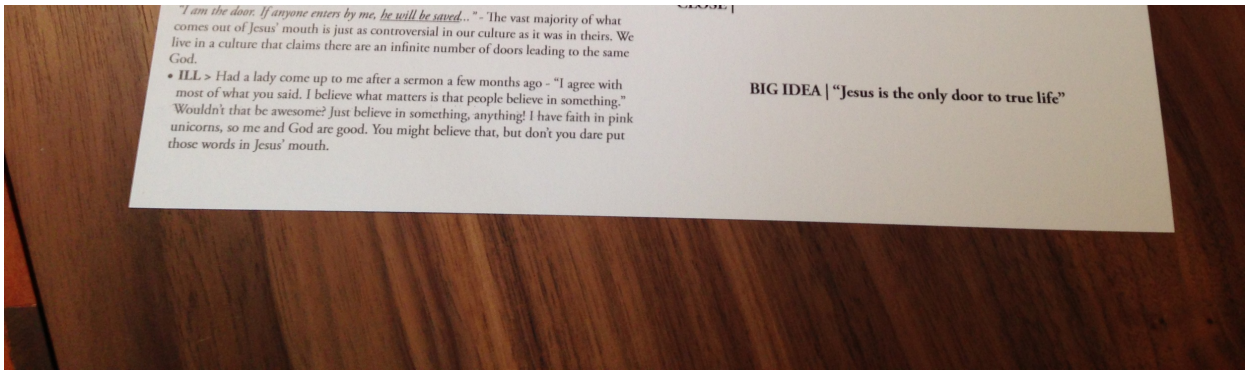
My outline changes week to week, but with each point I preach I'm seeking to do the same three things: 1) Interpretation 2) Illustration (3) Implication - explain what the text is saying, illustrate for the purpose of clarity, and bring the text to bear on our lives. For me, this is the most difficult step. Once I have this in place the rest is merely discipline.

5. Write. Write. Write.

I know a growing number of people preach with no notes. While fine for some, preaching with no notes often results in rabbit trails, rants, and random thoughts that go unfiltered. Unless you have an abnormally strong memory, I believe everyone should take some type of notes into the pulpit with them.

For me, this means spending each Friday holed up in my office. With my door shut and my headphones on, I write. I write what I call a "broken manuscript." It doesn't contain everything I WILL say, but it contains everything I MUST say. Here's how I format my notes:



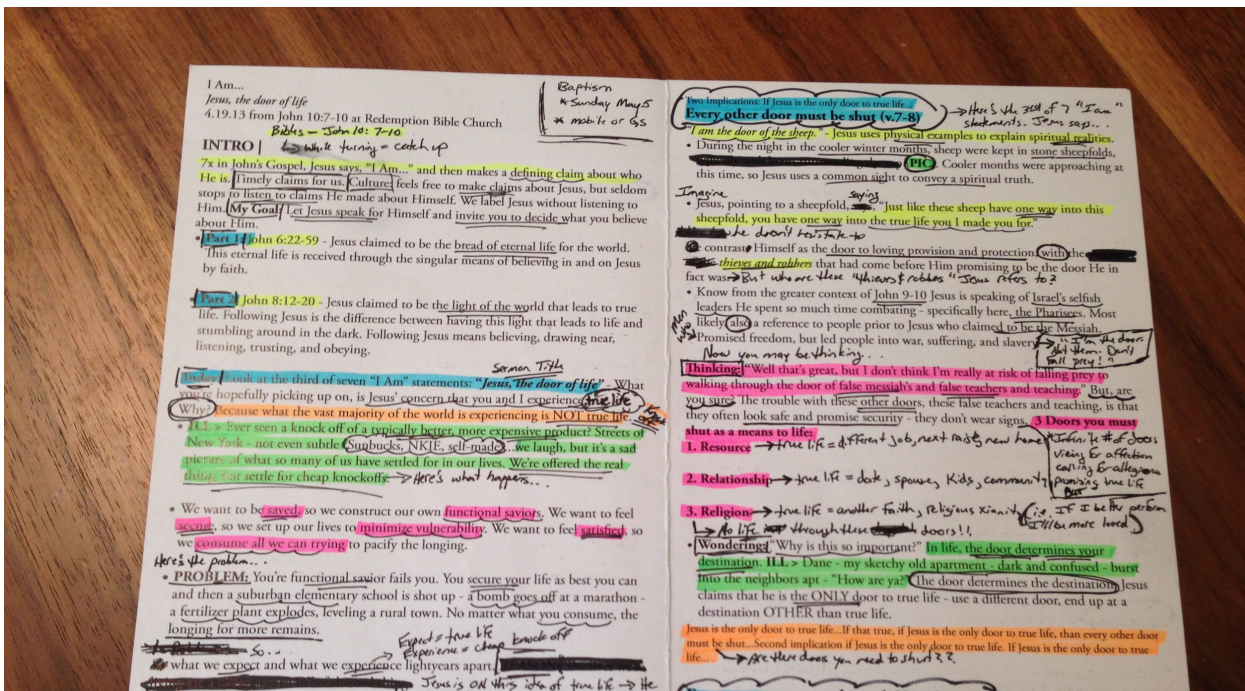


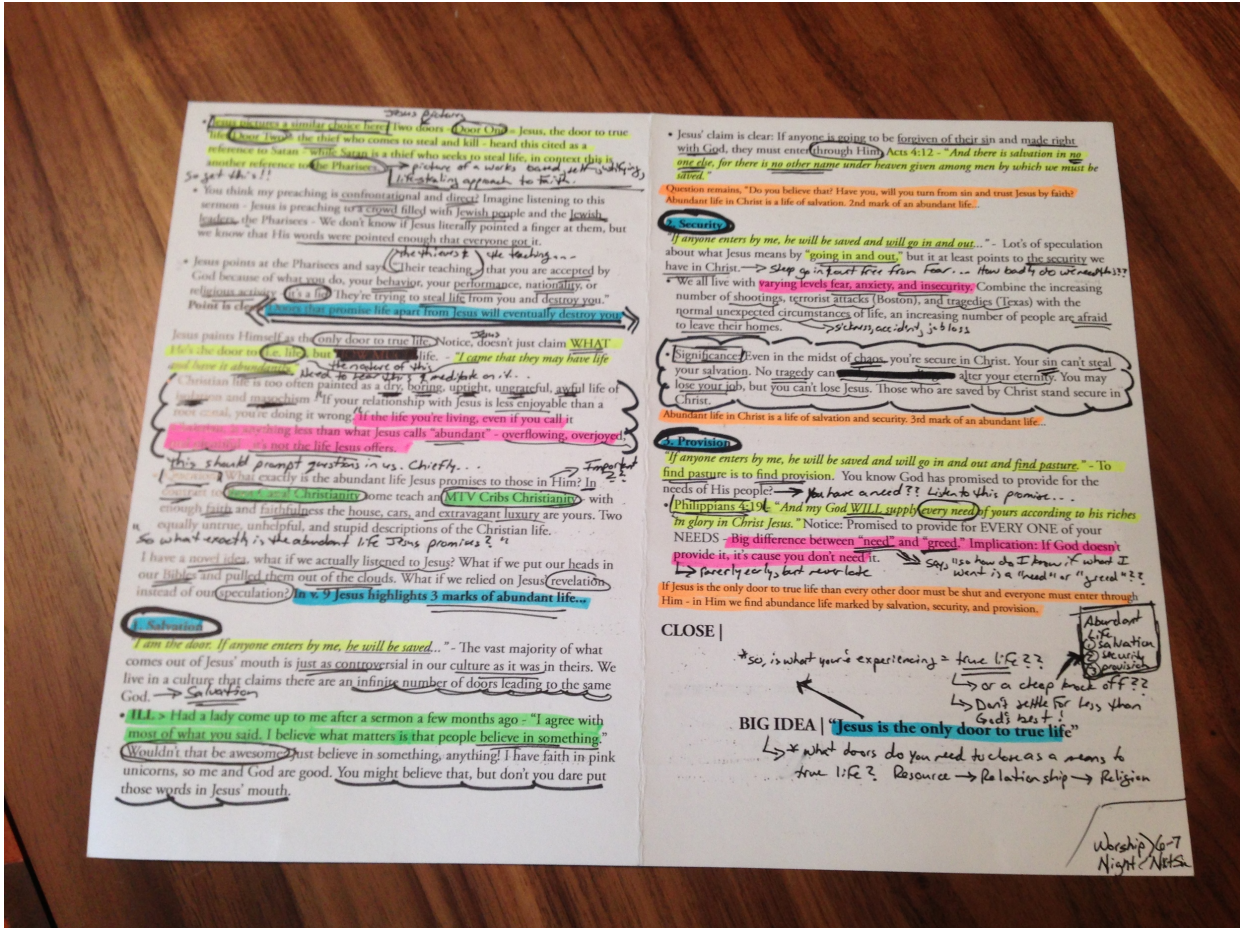
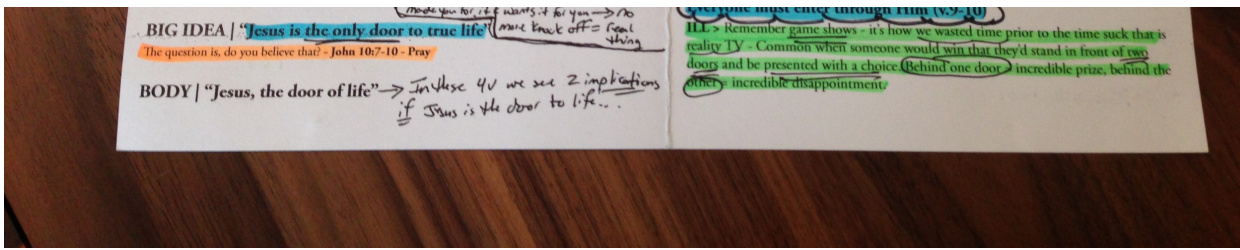
- Two pages printed front and back on cardstock in landscape with two columns so my notes can be folded in half to fit in my Bible.
- Typed in Adobe Garamond Pro with main points bolded at 13 and regular text at 11 with all Scripture italicized.
- I use bullets to better visualize complete units of thought.

If I have framed my sermon well, writing takes as few as four hours. More often than not I write from 9am-2pm each Friday and at times have to write a bit more on Saturday. It's tedious and I often loathe Friday. However, when done right, I feel the fruit of this work on Sunday.

6. Vandalize To Internalize.

I'm not sure there is anything worse than a pastor taking a word-for-word manuscript into the pulpit and proceeding to read it to his people (I fell asleep writing that sentence, it sounds so boring). NO ONE WANTS TO HEAR YOU READ! You can't just write a good sermon, you have to PREACH it! This means you have to get all the work in you so that it can come out of you with conviction, clarity, and compassion. I have to vandalize my notes in order to internalize them.





I edit, circle, and underline. I write out transitions, jot down illustrations, and clarify my application. I also highlight. BLUE is main points, GREEN is illustrations, YELLOW is textual, PINK is implications, and ORANGE is transitions. At times on Sunday mornings, someone will catch a glimpse of my notes and think I've lost my mind. When I'm done they look like the walls of every serial killers hideout in every movie you've ever seen. But, somehow this is how I get them in me.

Conclusion.

In talking with pastors about preaching, one thing has become clear: Every preacher has their own process. This is mine. It's hard work, but it's fruitful work. I'm humbled that God uses this work to grow others, but I'm most grateful that God uses this work to change me. I have a pastor friend who says, "Sermon prep is the crucible of my sanctification." I couldn't agree more and I thank God for the honor of studying and preaching His Word.

 Ryan Huguley /  19 Comments

 Church Planting, Discipleship, Preaching

 Sermon Preparation, Persistence, Sanctification

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Josh Brown

5 months ago

Well said, Ryan. This is good stuff.



Ryan Huguley

5 months ago

Thanks Josh! Glad it was helpful!!



robert adams

7 months ago

this is my first sunday sermon how should go aboutv it kind of nervous



Ryan Huguley

7 months ago

Hey Robert! First, congrats on being entrusted with the honor of preaching! Second, assuming your notes are prepared here's what I'd recommend: 1. Get a good night's sleep if possible. Eat a light breakfast in the morning. Spend time in the Word and prayer. Pray God would plant this sermon in your heart. Pray you wouldn't be too tied to your notes. Pray the Spirit would encourage, convict and open hearts to faith. Preach through your sermon in the morning. Trust God and do your best. You'll do great. Remember God's power doesn't rest on your preaching. Be faithful to his word and he'll speak. If you'd like, I'd love to pray for you tomorrow morning before you preach. Email me your number: ryan@redemptionbc.org



Jason Jordan

A year ago

Ryan! Thanks so much for the post! If there is an ounce of "preacher" in anyone, they love this post! Question: Do you have any type of coloring coating system for marking in your bible? Also, is a lot of the writing in your bible updates to the ESV text? Thanks again man to your faithfulness to preaching God's word verse by verse!



Ryan Huguley

A year ago

Hey Jason - no I don't really have a system. The marking and writing depends on what I'm holding in my hand and is meant to help me internalize particular things. Sorry that's not very helpful:-) hope you're well and thanks for reading!



CD

A year ago

Thanks

Good information; conformation and new ideas



CD

A year ago

Thanks

Good information; conformation and new ideas

Mike D'Attoma

2 years ago

Ryan!

Thanks so much for the post! Really enjoyed it! This is a silly, but, technical question! You said that you printed two pages, front and back, and folded them to fit in your bible- when you get on stage to preach, do you unfold them? Because to leave them folded would cause a page to be missed since they were printed on two sides. Does that make sense? Just curious! Thanks!



Ryan Huguley

2 years ago

Hey Mike,

I end up with one page in my Bible total but its a two page doc printed front and back...make sense? So open its in landscape. I print in two columns and fold in half, so I'm always looking at one half of a page and flipping as I go.



Jason Vana

2 years ago

I love your point about internalizing your message. I lead a multi-site college ministry and speak quite a bit to students, young adults, and at various churches, and for me, internalizing my message is HUGE. I make it a goal to not even need my notes. I bring them with, cause you never know when you might have a brain-fart and forget, but I've seen the best kind of preaching comes when we know the message so well, we don't even need notes. Great thoughts here Ryan!



Scott

2 years ago

Hey Ryan! I enjoyed it! Question...you state "I'm not sure there is anything worse than a pastor taking a word-for-word manuscript into the pulpit and proceeding to read it to his people (I fell asleep writing that sentence, it sounds so boring). NO ONE WANTS TO HEAR YOU READ! You can't just write a good sermon, you have to PREACH it!"

Would you say this to Jonathan Edwards or Mark Dever? Just thinking out loud....



Ryan Huguley

2 years ago

Hey Scott,

Thanks for the question. What I'm referring to is a particular type of reading. Dever "preaches" a manuscript. He's amazing at it. So is Piper. I actually think most preachers should manuscript in some fashion. I don't think anyone should read one like a term paper...make sense? Sorry I wasn't more clear.



· Scott

2 years ago

Hey Ryan! No worries. You are helping us by your posts. Finally, Edward's read his manuscript and so does Dever (trust me...I have seen him a number of times:)

Keep preaching the word Ryan! Praise God for you.



· · Ryan Huguley

2 years ago

Yeah I'm sure there are exceptions to every rule. To be honest, I'd listen to Dever read a term paper:-)

— jasonzellmer

2 years ago

Thanks for this Ryan. Very helpful to read and learn from your process. I'm glad that I'm not the only color-coding vandalizer out there!



Ryan Huguley

2 years ago

Thanks Jason!

 Michelle Nero

2 years ago

(Shh! Nerd to nerd, I love seeing and hearing about your "behind the scenes" process.) I am amazed each week by God's words that you internalize with such depth, and then share with such clarity each Sunday. I will appreciate you and your sermons even MORE knowing the planning and preparation and vandalism (love this!) involved, and I will be praying for you on Fridays for sure!

I can only imagine how helpful this is for preachers - experienced or not! Love how you took the time to be reflective, write it out, and then share it. Helpful to you as well, I'm sure. Famous quote from a preacher I recently heard: "Not in the notes. Shouldn't have said it. Let's all get back on the bus." Thanks for being real too. :)



Ryan Huguley

2 years ago

Thanks Michelle! So awesome to know you found it helpful as well. Love you both and thankful for you!

RYAN HUGULEY





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