

How I Go About Preparing My Sermons

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In terms of the mechanics and the art, preparing a sermon is a little like preparing a cheesecake. The essential ingredients must be present but different folks may prepare the product a bit differently. This is not to treat the study of God's Word in a flippant way, but it serves to highlight the *art of sermon preparation*. There are necessary ingredients (prayer, exegetical work, application, etc.) but sometimes the putting together of the sermon manuscript comes in different forms. This is how I've come to prepare my sermons.

I preach two full-length expositions at Christ Fellowship Bible Church (Wednesday & Sunday nights) & I carefully protect my mornings for study. Let me share with some detail how I go about preparing my expositions.

1. Every morning I begin my time of 'meeting with God' in prayer and specifically, I pray through my upcoming text I'll be preaching. For instance, on Monday-Wednesday mornings, I devote time to praying through my psalm for the Wednesday night exposition. On Thursday-Sunday mornings, I'll pray through the text that I'll preach on Sunday night. This allows me not only to be in the Word but for the Word to get *into me*. I want to meditate on the Word. I want to chew on the Word. I want to meet with God on my knees over the Word. This is essential for me.
2. Most days during the week (Tues-Fri), I take a lengthy walk (30-60 mins) with my sermon text printed out (in Hebrew if I'm preaching the OT or in Greek if I'm preaching the NT) and I walk and pray through my sermon text. I familiarize myself with the text as I read it constantly. I pray through it repeatedly, I preach it to my soul zealously, I repent of my carelessness quickly, and I beg for God's illumination regularly. This time of walking and meeting with God poring over His Word allows my soul to see emphases, an outline is formed, many times application points are gleaned and various illustrations/anecdotes come to mind.
3. When I finally come to the stage where I'm writing things down (or, typing things out since nearly everything I do is typed), the first thing I type out on my blank document is the outline of my sermon. This serves as my skeleton upon which I can hang all the ligaments, bones, and flesh of the sermon. For my Wednesday night sermon, this usually takes place Monday afternoon or Tuesday morning. For my Sunday night sermon, this step usually takes place Tuesday night or Wednesday morning. Then when I have my document with my sermonic outline, I can enhance, add to, and supplement my gleanings from the text of Scripture into the document itself.
4. Meanwhile, I have a separate document where I take copious notes. This document specifically relates to the sermon text that I'll be preaching from. It'll have various outlines, various thoughts, many applications, a host of observations, commentary notes, pertinent quotes, illustrations, etc. This document exists because I simply can't fit all that I glean in my study into my sermon notes (or the sermons would be painfully long & seemingly endless). For example, in recent sermons on the Lord's Supper, I gathered a document of nearly 30 pages of typed notes. But my sermon notes that I take to the pulpit with me may only be 4-6 pages of typed notes. So the other document provides a resource for future study and it keeps my thoughts, gleanings and observations that don't make it into my final sermonic manuscript.
5. My next step is filling out my sermon notes with my own observations, my own word studies, my own cross-references, illustrations and anecdotes, etc. This way the sermon is really *mine* — even from the outset. I don't begin by copying and pasting other men's work; I do all my own work at the outset, always. It must be *my* sermon. It must be what God has taught *me* in the Word and how *my* soul has been affected as I've met with and communed with and learned from the Living God & from His breathing Book. This step includes word studies where I'll search (I use BibleWorks) for key words, phrases, Greek/Hebrew meanings, cross-references, theological terms, etc.

6. Then I look at commentaries. These are very important to me because there are many men who have done much of the hard work and have written it down to aid me in my studies. I have three kinds of commentaries that I always incorporate — exegetical (Greek/Hebrew based that deal specifically with the nuances, emphases of the original language/text), expositional (more theological and helpful for English readers without a working knowledge of the languages), and devotional/puritans (for help with applications, quotes, implementation ideas). Commentaries show me if I'm on the right track with my preliminary gleanings, with my theological understandings. Commentaries also provide many cross-references that can be tremendously helpful in substantiating a particular point.
7. If the text and topic allows, I'll go to various theological books, monographs, or other Christian living books to help my own understanding on a various topic (e.g., Thomas Watson, *The Doctrine of Repentance*, or JC Ryle, *Holiness*). These can help my own theological precision and it can help the broadening of my understanding on various doctrines.
8. At this point in my sermon preparation, I incorporate application points (and implementation) into my sermon manuscript. Yes, I believe application is vital. A sermon isn't a sermon without applying the text of Scripture to God's people and showing them how they must live in light of God's revealed Truth. In many sermons I preach, I often gather a verse, a phrase, a central theme of the text/paragraph, or a relevant issue and highlight it by specifically applying it and showing how believers should implement it in their daily lives.
9. Throughout the sermon but especially as my manuscript is nearing the finished product, I always, *always*, ensure that the full gospel is clearly stated. I resolve to always preach Christ and Him crucified. I never want to preach a sermon that a Jewish man could heartily 'Amen.' May it never be that I should herald an exposition that an Imam or a Catholic Priest could 'Amen'. I want Christ and His magnificent glory and His cross-work to bleed through the sermon so that believers see Him in His radiant glory afresh and that nonbelievers would be fearful of His wrath and drawn to His atonement through repentance and faith.
10. For my Wednesday night sermon, I usually have my manuscript printed Wednesday morning before I leave the house and for my Sunday night sermon I typically have the manuscript printed by Friday night/Saturday morning. I am a man who needs to mark up my final, printed manuscript with a Red Pen and become very familiar with my sermon notes. I feel incredibly hindered going up to the pulpit if I haven't gone over my notes and marked them with a Red Pen at least a handful of times.
11. I pray over my notes. I sometimes take off the paperclip and pray page by page through all the points. I often will compile a list of items to pray for on my phone so that as I'm at church, walking, or at home in my study, I can pray for my sermon (e.g., I'll pray for such things like unction, clarity, regeneration, sanctification, marriages, passion, clarity, preach without distractions, the youth to be converted, the deceived to repent, God's glory to shine, and for Christ's majesty to be seen by all).
12. Then, I have my final manuscript (usually 4-6 pages typed — 5 pages typically allows me to preach a 1 hour sermon). I have so little notes with me because I've gleaned so much in my studies and I want my heart to bleed through the sermon. I don't want to mechanically read commentary-like notes but I want my heart that has been touched by God's Word through His Spirit as I've beheld Christ to speak personally, warmly, affectionately and *pastorally* to God's flock that sits before me to feed on God's Word.
13. When I have my Bible and my notes paperclipped inside the back cover, my final step of preparation moments before I preach is to beg for God the Spirit to work in and through me. I pray to the Spirit to empower me, to give me clarity, to grant unction, and to enable me to proclaim a glorious Christ & an irresistible gospel! Then, I ascend to the pulpit to preach *even still praying* for God's anointing & for His help. Then I preach as if I would never preach again and I preach depending on the Word to work powerfully.