

## Develop good study habits each week

Most of us who preach on Sundays are pastors of some kind. Pastors are busy people. Often the hardest task each week is taking the time necessary to prepare next Sunday's sermon.

Our attitude *toward* Holy Scripture is the most important thing. I believe the Bible is God's Word 100% inspired and inerrant in the original manuscripts (**Ps 119:160; Jn 17:17; 2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:20-21**). When we read or preach the Bible, God is speaking to us. If we do our best to present an accurate interpretation and application of the text, I believe the Holy Spirit speaks God's words thru us to change the lives of people!

Look how seriously Paul took his 3-year preaching ministry to the Ephesian Christians:

**Acts 20:25** “And now I know that none of you will ever see my face again—everyone I went about preaching the kingdom to. **26** Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of everyone's blood, **27** for I did not shrink back from declaring to you the whole plan of God. **28** Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock that the Holy Spirit has appointed you to as overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood. **29** I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. **30** And men will rise up from your own number with deviant doctrines to lure the disciples into following them. **31** Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for 3 years I did not stop warning each one of you with tears. *Holman Christian Standard Bible*

Few of us pastors and preachers today could make the bold claims Paul did in these vss!

So our attitude needs to be that of all the things we do each week as a pastor, preparing to preach is *one* of the most important, if not *the* most important thing we do each week! That means we need to develop good study habits and keep to them religiously (no pun intended)!

Here are a few suggestions I have found helpful in my own study habits. Please email me if you have other ideas that work for you!

1. Find the time of day to study and prepare when you are *most* alert and at your *best*. I am an evening person, so I do some of my best study late after others have gone to bed. However, historically, some of the greatest preachers have been morning people, rising to study and write long before sunrise!
2. Find ways to guard that time so you are not regularly interrupted. Your spouse or church secretary can help screen calls or visitors. If you aren't married or if your church can't afford a secretary, then ask for help from one or more of those faithful retired people in your church who have extra time on their hands!
3. You can train your people, like children, pets and ourselves ☺, to call or visit us based on our weekly study schedule. If you block out every Mond-Wed morning from 7-10 AM at your church office or home, then those are the “Do Not Disturb the Pastor” hours! Barring emergencies, of course! This will be a learning curve for some congregations based on the poor study habits of *previous* pastors, but if you are patient and if you are serious in the pulpit about preaching and people see the good results in your preaching, then in time they will respect your request to not be disturbed at certain times. And if a new or immature church member does not understand, then the needs of the many sheep must outweigh the need of that one bleating lamb!

And of course, if you study at home, then your spouse and children must respect this too. It's hardest with little children in the house who don't understand the importance yet of what you're doing. By the time your children get to be teenagers, you can't *pay* them to disturb you! Then when they go to college, they start disturbing you all over again, but for different reasons! ☹

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4. As you practice, find out what is the most difficult part of the preparation stage for you and try to do that part in your most guarded time when you have the least interruptions. That's different for different people. Some people find the initial study the hardest part. Others finding illustrations. For me, the hardest part is just getting the 1<sup>st</sup> draft of the sermon manuscript finished. Once that's done, I find editing and polishing far easier.
5. Find a place with conditions conducive to good study. If you don't have an office at your church or home, then find a room where you can read, write, and think in private without noise or distractions. A few people can study while listening to music. I cannot. You need a good chair and desk or table where you can practice good posture. A soft armchair or sofa that's *too* comfortable may put you to sleep! You need good natural or artificial lighting to be able to see and read. Be creative. If you don't have a place you can work at home or at church, then your local public library could be ideal for the conditions I've listed above. If there's not a library, perhaps the pastor of a large church in your city would let you come and use one of their rooms 2 or 3 times a week.
6. Be on your guard against your own weaknesses that may work against good study—laziness, procrastination, tyranny of the urgent, distractions, letting your mind wander are a few problems many of us encounter. If you have problems in one or more of these areas, ask others to pray for you. Be humble. Share your need for improvement. Get an accountability partner in another local pastor or other members of your church staff or even a conscientious business person in your church can help you.
7. Don't make a habit of waiting till the end of the week to study and get your sermon ready. That's like a student cramming to prepare for finals! People will notice when you preach if you consistently do last minute preps! Some of the best ministry and social opportunities are on Friday and Saturday evenings. That also happens to be when many parties, socials, and weddings get scheduled! If you have waited to the last minute to prepare, then you will be forced to skip the event, leave early, or stay up too late after the event is over to finish cribbing for your sermon!

Having said this, there will always be emergencies or other disasters that happen to eat up your time on the weekend. That's all the more reason to make a habit of preparing earlier in the week!

8. I also think you need a standing arrangement or understanding with your congregation that you need to be excused from any event at a reasonable hour on Saturday nights in order to be home in time to get a good night's sleep. Good sleep on Saturday night is one of the *best* preparations to preach well on Sunday morning!
9. Planning your sermon schedule ahead of time is critical will help you in your study. Knowing what you are going to preach next saved you from one of the biggest headaches and time wasters of pastors who don't plan: "What am I going to preach next Sunday?" Another paper in this series will deal with planning what to preach and setting up a preaching schedule.
10. I think praying before you start to study is critical—ask God to help you study well, to teach you by His Holy Spirit, to use your time wisely, to protect you from distractions or even attacks from the Enemy as you study and preach. Ask others to pray for you during your study time. Again, some of your older, retired members who have extra time make wonderful prayer warriors to pray for us while we study and preach!

The bottom line is: Developing good habits in preparing to preach will help you in other areas of your life and ministry. If you learn to be on time to study, you will also be on time to appointments or pastoral visits. If you are successful at carving out quality time to study God's Word, then you'll also be successful at carving out quality personal time for yourself, your spouse and your children. And sincere application of your mind and heart to do a good job each week in preaching will help you apply yourself well to other tasks like bookkeeping, running errands, home chores, or other church duties.