

1. I've learned that **prayer is the most essential work for a preacher**. A sermon that has not been prayed into existence is a sermon that will miss the target.
2. I've learned that **my angsty preacher jitters** about *will this sermon sing?* and *will it dance with the Spirit's creativity?* **decrease in direct proportion to the vitality of my prayer life.**
3. I've learned that there is a difference between **exegeting a text** and **discerning what the Spirit wants to do** among a particular people through that text. I may think I know what a text is trying to say/do, but that doesn't mean I have tapped into what the Spirit is up to *right here, right now, with these people*. Both are necessary: exegesis *and* discernment.
4. I've learned to **keep a note pad with me at all times** because you just never know when that creative lightning is going to strike.
5. I've learned that **regular exercise is crucial**. If I'm not careful, my mind will obsess over the sermon, but it is hard to obsess over a sermon when you are putting your body through the ringer. When I circle back to the sermon after exercise, my mind is clear.
6. I've learned that after all the preparation has been done—the commentaries, the translation, the sketching, the memorization—the best thing I can do is **sit with my own thoughts**. At this stage in my preparation the only thing I have in front of me is a pen and a legal pad, usually a cup of coffee, and some burning candles. This is holy ground and no screens are allowed. Having a screen in front of me at this moment feels like a threat because it represents access to everyone else's thoughts. To pull myself away from every other voice is to make myself ask myself: *So who am I? Why does this text matter to me? How have I seen it worked out in the soil of my own life? Where does this text scare me? Where does this text make me want to weep? And how does this text make my heart thrill and delight and come alive to the beauty of God's holiness?* Without this, I have not made the sermon my own, haven't internalized it yet.
7. I've learned that **not every sermon will be a Home Run**. What does that concept even mean? And who gets to determine if it *was* a home run? The preacher? The people? The *home-run-sermon* metric is fickle. Sometimes what's needed is a solid single up the middle or a double down the line. And let's all be honest: trying to make every worship service rise to the level of a World Series Game 7 is exhausting.
8. I've learned that often the best thing I can do is **take time off from preaching**. Preachers, pace yourself. Use your vacation days. Attend service as a worshipper. You can't be creative if you are exhausted.
9. I've learned to often **write a note to myself at the top of my sermon notes**: "God is with us. These are my friends. I love them. They trust me." Rooting ourselves in these simple truths helps us settle into the work. Take a deep breath. We are going to be fine.
10. I've learned that **God cares more about these people hearing His word than I ever could**. He has more skin in the game than I do. This work is ultimately His to perform, so trust the Spirit to do the heavy lifting.