

From The Pastor's Study What?

The pastor was glad he had a pulpit to stand behind, we was shaking so badly he was certain people in the first two rows could hear his knees knocking. Perspiration ran from his neck all the way to his socks, even his hands are sweating. As he looked out over the congregation he felt completely inadequate to be standing there. The breakfast he had that morning flipped in his stomach threatening to cover his sermon.

Yeah, that was Pastor Jim nine years ago and I didn't have a clue about what I was doing. Oh, sure, I knew my Bible pretty well and I had stood in front of a bunch of sailors in a classroom, taught and worked with youth for over twenty years, I had supervised large numbers of sailors, inspected electrical connections in a nuclear facility and even stood in pulpits in a few churches but this was different.

I felt a weight on me like nothing I had felt only a few times in my life. What if my sermon is poor, what if I mess it up, what if I offend someone, or say something wrong. I stopped, took a couple of deep breaths, said a quick prayer, "Not my words but Your's Lord", and began my sermon.

I can't tell you what that first sermon was, what it was about, or what the scripture was but I can tell you when it was over I felt like a ton came off my back. The only words I am certain I said that day were, "Amen" and "Thank you Lord." I also came to the realization that I would have to do this again next Sunday and started sweating all over again.

When I was a Quality Assurance Manager and visited other companies (some our customers, some our suppliers) I was a representative for my company and that was a big deal for me, very scary. I knew I could lose a customer, or a supplier and that would hurt the company, maybe cost them money or business. But that was nothing compared to that first few months as the Pastor of Greenbrier Presbyterian church.

I know I was terrible in the pulpit that first year, maybe longer. I wasn't prepared to be in that pulpit every Sunday. Most pastors have at least ten years supporting a head pastor before they end up with their own church. They have the opportunity to work side by side with someone more experienced and capable and when they feel they are ready, they work to get their own church, that wasn't my case. I was perfectly comfortable in the role as number two, I never expected to have my own church.

The pain of taking over came quickly when the first family announced they were leaving the church. I was completely lost at that point. Then a conference that included some of the elders with a church energizing group where I was told I was burned out and that I should just allow the Presbytery to take over and close the doors. I shut down after that discussion and I begged God to take the church from me. It was a dark time for me and I am certain my sermons were the worst.

Still, every week I prepared a sermon, did my research, checked and double checked my facts, my scripture, my stories, and examples. I read my sermons four, five, six times looking for mistakes and often finding them. In a way I was going through the motions, imitating other preachers methods, never finding my own.

One day I found an article by a pastor who had gone through something very similar. I honestly can't tell you much the pastor said, I just know it helped me find my own method. I discovered my own delivery, my own presentation, my own presentation. I began to sweat less, to feel a little more comfortable, and even a little confident.

When I begin process now I ask God's guidance for a series to do, I spend a great deal of time with Him. Sometimes I find an idea on the web, other times I discover a series outline and I use that. But whether it is my original idea, or outlines I discover I know it is by God's hand that guides me and His words once I get in the pulpit.

I will never be the greatest pastor or preacher but I will always do what I feel God wants me to. At times I am certain I will say things that some find offensive, I will make mistakes, and, as a result, some people may leave. For that I apologize, my goal is to present the truth in scripture and methods of applying scripture to our lives.

When I stand in the pulpit I turn the sermon over to the Holy Spirit when I state, "Lord, for the next few moments may only God's Word be spoken, may only Your Words be heard. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable, my Lord and my Savior." I am confident that when I get out of the way and allow God use me to say what people need to hear, He will be heard.

So, if there are mistakes on Sunday, they are mine; if you feel I am singling you out, it isn't me, it is God knocking on the door of your heart. (9/8/2019)