

## Preaching with a broken heart

By [McKinna Rae Daugherty](#)

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Shortly after my most recent move, my long-time boyfriend and I ended our relationship. The next week, I was scheduled to preach.

I'm part of a multi-pastor church, and my colleagues graciously offered to step in and preach in my place. But I was stubborn. I decided that I wanted—no, needed—to preach.

All week I struggled with the Gospel text. In between jags of crying, I tried to read commentaries, but I couldn't focus. I made notes. And more notes. And more notes. But all the notes were just interesting facts I learned about the scripture and little questions to ask. Nothing substantial had come to me. Just when I needed the gospel to speak to me, I couldn't hear a thing. As I stumbled, tired and exhausted, through the week, the sermon still wouldn't come. I had no idea what it would mean to preach the gospel on that text.

I read articles online. But mostly I just prayed. I prayed for my broken heart. I prayed for my ex. I prayed for my church and apologized to God in advance for what I knew would be a really crappy sermon. I prayed without words, with sighs too deep for any vocabulary I might be able to find.

Nothing.

On Saturday night I ventured out of my apartment in sweatpants and a baseball cap, trying to hide my puffy skin and red eyes. As I sat in a drive-through line, I called my mother. The first words out of her mouth were to ask about my sermon. I told that I had basically nothing. And then she dropped a wisdom bomb on me.

She said, "McKinna, I get that your heart is broken. But that relationship was for three years, and you've been working toward being a minister for 13 years. This is your call. You have a job to do. Your job is to preach the gospel. So figure out what sort of gospel you preach with a broken heart, to other broken hearts, and you just

preach it. Do your job."

So I got my waffle fries with a side of sermon wisdom and went home. I opened up the lectionary texts, switched to the epistle, and started writing. I wrote the sermon I needed to hear. I got angry at my ex, I used the anger to focus, and the words poured out. The text was from the letter to the Colossians, first chapter, [verses 15-17](#).

In sermon writing, I was forced to find the gospel that I wanted so desperately to hear. I remembered all the times in the last 13 years that God had stood by me as God called me to ministry, over and over again. At a moment when I felt so empty and exhausted and wrung out, God's word breathed life into my weary spirit. I wrote through the night until 3 a.m., slept until 6, finished the sermon, and preached it at 8:30. My thoughts were scattered; I was scared to death that I hadn't written complete sentences. I briefly considered asking the senior minister to preach the sermon for me. I prayed.

Then I stood up and preached the gospel I was called to preach. I did my job and the job healed me. The Holy Spirit moved.

Now, I don't always advocate preaching the sermon you, the preacher, need to hear. If you are your only audience, then you might want to reconsider your sermon. But when our own lives are falling apart, we are most susceptible to the gospel's healing power. When you're preaching with a broken heart, it's necessary to trust that in Christ all things really do hold together.

Worst-case scenario, you preach a poor sermon. There are worse things.