10 Classes You Won’t Take in Seminary

Have you ever had that dream where all of the sudden someone from school calls and says that you missed that *one* class and you have to go back to school? It’s a serial nightmare for me—usually after a Sunday of preaching. Still, if you feel called to pastor the average church (if there *is* such a thing), be advised that you really *did* miss a few courses. You missed them because they aren’t found in any syllabus. They are only learned in the Seminary of Hard Knocks. Here are a few classes I’ve audited from that fine institution over the years.

#1: How to Make the Church Smell Good after the Septic Pump Quits on Saturday Night



You walk down the hall and you’re greeted by a slightly malodorous sensation. “This hall stinks,” you say to yourself on Sunday morning at 7:38am. You go to the Welcome Center. “The Welcome Center… stinks too!” And then your head begins to spin with a harsh, whiff of reality. “THIS WHOLE CHURCH STINKS!” Trust me. You can clear the disinfectant spray shelves of every Dollar Store in a ten-mile radius and you aren’t getting rid of that stench before the first-time guests arrive.

#2. Avoiding Debates Inside the Church over Calvinism, Drum Volume, and the Fellowship Hall Table-Lending Policy

Church is a sensitive subject and there will always, *always* be a controversy. Your job as pastor is not to ease the tension but to manage it. In fact, we see in the ministry of Christ that the gospel should sometimes provoke the tension. But it's not fun. It's demoralizing. It can wipe you out. But you can leverage it to your advantage. You'll provide perspective and vision when you find the conflict is brewing. But beware. Those little foxes will tear up the vineyard in millisecond if you aren't careful.

Side note: I hate conflict. But it's like the watermelon patch in North Louisiana. Give it time and those green monsters will surface.

#3. Five Casseroles to Stay Away from During Covered Dish Supper



I'll save you some tuition and just tell you what they are according to my 52 years of church homecomings, small groups and funeral wakes.

- Broccoli Velveeta Asparagus Mush
- Green Been and Carrot Gelatin Delight
- Spicy Frito Tamale Surprise
- Gooey Crock Pot Pizza
- Baked Tater Tot Pasta

I, like most pastors, often have an inherent sympathy for cooks and casseroles that haven't been touched at a church get-together. The rule of thumb is simple: If your stomach turns, even slightly, at the eclectic medley of ingredients in a culinary creation which hasn't been touched in a line of 500

parishioners, DO NOT pick up the serving spoon. This will not end well for you.

#4. How to Time the Filling of the Baptistery

Although Baptisteries vary from church to church, here's a basic rule of thumb: 15 minutes before the football game of your choice, go to the church and start the faucet. Around the middle of the third quarter, just to be safe, go check the progress. In most cases it will be filled adequately. However one caveat: If there are several injury time-outs or replay reviews you might want to bring a mop and a wet vac. Obviously this formula doesn't work for bowl games with extended half time festivities. One side note: Do not drain the Baptistery on a Saturday night. (See #1 Septic Pump Seminar)

*Important- This method doesn't work if you are ADD. Delegate.

#5. Surviving Three Funeral Weeks

One of the tensions most pastors face is the unpredictable nature of the ministry. Most critical moments and mandatory ministries occur with less than 48 hours notice. No-brainer: Nobody dies on schedule and they don't spread the funerals out evenly over the course of a year. There *will* be those three funeral weeks and you'll be expected to be awesome at everything else that week as well. Funerals can be amazingly powerful experiences but they always end the same way. Every person's funeral that *I've* conducted is still, to this day…resting in peace. So you aren't Jesus, but you can offer his comfort to families in their most intense and desperate moments.

#6. Discerning the Will of God VS Your Sudden Urge to Resign on a Sunday Morning, Drop the Mic, and Scream "Free at Last!"



Every pastor has a moment where he fantasizes saying all those things he'd love to say at his weakest moment. Every time I have a passing moment where stupidity looks attractive I say to myself, I don't want to be like *that guy*. Dropping the mic is rarely a good thing to do. Unless you are like… the Son of God. The best thing to do of course is pray. Pray without ceasing, especially when you're angry, desperate, frustrated and thinking about a job change. Remember those who suffered and are suffering through so much more than you are now. There's always someone who has it worst than a couple of people rubbing your name in the dirt at Starbucks. And just to be honest- if you're a pastor, somebody is *always* doing that. You just got wind of it.

#7 How to distract your congregation from the screaming baby.

Let's face it guys. You may be an amazing communicator but you no match for the colic baby on the 5th row. You could be revealing the Ark of the Covenant's exact location and upwards of 50% of the attenders are contemplating whether it's a wet diaper, gas, or teething. Give it up. Share that thing you've never told anybody and you're fine. They won't hear it.

#8 Verses Appropriate to Cease Church Softball Altercations



This comes with a story. Many, many years ago Christians, seeking missional opportunities to connect with the unchurched through sports, decided that rather than risking the dangers of going into the heathen city leagues to develop relationships, they would simply create our own petri dish of dysfunctional, overly dramatic competition. Seriously though, sports offers a great way for us to build community with the unchurched but I have known a few Brother Rodmans.

#9 How to be Biblical, Relevant, Contemporary, Traditional, Conservative, Merciful, Decisive, Prudent, Articulate, and Meek all at the Same Time

I am one of those guys who walks through the scripture verse-by-verse John McArthur-style, providing spot-on contemporary illustrations, while parsing Hebrew, quoting poetry, helping split the metaphorical babies of contemporary living, counseling addicts, healing 1.3 marriages a week, involved in camping, sports, coffee shops, and 30 parachurch organizations, waxing Cloud-and-Townsend on tough love while having the grace of Brennan Manning, the relevance of Craig Groeschel, and the humor of Andy Stanley with several movie ideas that would rival Spielberg. That's the kind of guy I am… for 5 minutes a day… in the shower… Then I brush my teeth, put on my Dockers and just try to figure out who God intended *me* to be. Somewhere underneath the bold, impregnable, phantasmagoric fascist architecture of my superego is an ordinary guy who loves God and is desperately trying to shut up the delusional guy in the shower.

#10 How to forget the insulting innuendo of a Loose Cannon.

The insanity of insecurity is that a pastor could go through a Sunday, see God use him in ways that boggle his mind, and then one person could throw a lighthearted verbal sucker punch in the church office suite and every extraordinary epiphany is immediately frozen in a Mac spinning wheel of death. I've compared notes with a number of other pastors and they all say the same thing. We constantly have to battle our own leadership insecurities. It is a learned skill. I'm still learning.

These are only a few of the timeless lessons offered at St. Paul's Seminary of Hard Knocks at the corner of Arminian Drive and Calvin's Cove. Every pastor goes there and every pastor learns.