

TTT 400. "Your Voice Matters" Tips for new and inexperienced speakers. Part 5. 04 February 2025

Teaching Tip 400 | "Your Voice Matters". Part 5 - The one-sentence summary. Tips for new and inexperienced speakers | Malcolm Cox

Introduction

Last week, we explored the importance of preparation. This week, we explore watering can nozzles and reduced stews.

Today's Tip

Today's tip comes from my friend Rob Payne. Rob says:

"Keep working at the material until you can sum up the whole sermon in one succinct sentence and end with that sentence."

Thanks, Rob. Your point is vitally important. What does this mean? Why is a one-sentence summary important, and how do we get to it?

Why? The Nozzle

I have what is called a 'rose' as an optional attachment for my watering can. When I want to water a flowerbed, I attach the watering rose because it gives a wider spread of water. However, I remove it if I want to water one plant pot because the watering can nozzle is narrower and aims the water into the pot. There is no point in spraying water all over the driveway if I only want one plant watered.

Preaching a sermon is more like watering one pot than a flowerbed. Focus your thoughts through the spout of your metaphorical hose and water the plant (congregation) God has given you for that occasion.

Condensing your lesson into one sentence forces you to distil your message into a single, clear idea, ensuring that your sermon has a focused purpose rather than wandering into unrelated

topics.

The sentence acts as a compass during the sermon-writing process, helping you select scriptures, illustrations, and points that directly support your central message.

A concise summary helps your congregation easily grasp the main takeaway, making it more likely they'll remember and apply it.

Consider the parables of Jesus. Most of them have one main point, and it is not hard to figure out what it is. I expect you could summarise most of the parables of Jesus in one sentence without too much difficulty.

How? Boil

One of the dishes I enjoy cooking is a reduced stew. You start with lots of ingredients like tomatoes, haricot beans, tomato paste, onion, celery, garlic, miso paste, herbs and spices (and the rest!), but boil it down until it's almost like a paste. The flavours are concentrated, the piquancy is powerful, and the textures are tangible. If it were not reduced, it would be a watery, flavourless mush. Who wants to eat that? Finding your one-sentence summary is to boil down everything about your text or topic.

For example, one of my recent sermons was titled "Perfectly Safe". Based on Psalm 91.11-12

"For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."

A one-sentence summary of the lesson could be: "We are perfectly safe when we choose to trust God."

How did I get to that summary?

1. If God is guarding us in *all* our ways, it must mean that we are *always* safe.
2. If God is perfect, the extent of his guarding us must also be perfect.
3. Therefore, we are perfectly safe.
4. Are there any preconditions to this safety?
5. Yes. As explained at the beginning of the Psalm: "You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust."" (Psalm 91:1-2 NRSV).
6. The people who experience the perfect safety provided by God are those who have made a conscious decision to trust him.

How to get to a summary sentence

1. Meditate on the text and pray through it.
 2. What is it telling you about God?
 3. What is it telling you about us and God?
 4. In what ways does the wider context bear on your main text?
 5. Write out your findings in one sentence as if you were stating it to somebody you know.
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Conclusion

Having a summary makes everything else easier. As the illustration below shows, it helps us ensure that everything is connected to the one central point.



Questions

Are you convinced about the value of a one-sentence summary? If not, why not? Will you at least give it a go when you prepare your next lesson?

Suggestion

Send me your one-sentence summaries, and a note on how you got to them. Was it easy, or hard? What did you learn in the process?

Please add your comments on this week's topic. We learn best when we learn in community.

Consider joining us at [AIM](#) UK & Ireland for faith-building teaching:

<https://aim.moodlecloud.com/>.

Do you have a question about teaching the Bible? Is it theological, technical, or practical?

Please send me your questions or suggestions. Here's the email: malcolm@malcolmcox.org.

If you'd like a copy of my free eBook on spiritual disciplines, "How God grows His people", sign up at my website: <http://www.malcolmcox.org>.

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Keep calm and carry on teaching.

God bless, Malcolm
