

TTT 406. "Your Voice Matters" Tips for new and inexperienced speakers. Part 11 - Spark. 18 March 2025

Teaching Tip 406 | "Your Voice Matters". Part 11 - Spark. Tips for new and inexperienced speakers | Malcolm Cox

Today's Tip

Today we conclude exploring a tip from my friend Anna Oliver. Anna says:

"Who is your audience? What is their age/culture/religious background? Aim to engage them by saying or doing at least one thing they would be able to relate to. Our current society is no longer interested in listening to a 30-minute talk on a topic if there is no attempt by the speaker to engage them/draw their attention.👍 Hope that helps."

Anna's tip is so significant we've taking three episodes to unpack it because it has several different facets. If you watched the previous two episodes, you will know that we have discussed understanding the needs of the people we are speaking to and how that shapes the message. Today, we will explore the importance of beginning with connection.

Introduction

Let's be honest—people don't listen just because we're talking. We need to capture their attention from the start. And Jesus, the greatest teacher of all time, knew exactly how to do that. So today, we're talking about the power of a spark—a way to engage people right from the beginning so they actually want to listen.

Remember in the previous episodes that we talked about considering our audience? Now, think about those people. What can you say to them at the beginning of your talk that will create curiosity?

Beware irrelevance

I remember a visiting American preacher coming to the UK in the 1980s. He opened his talk with an anecdote about an American football player's cleats. There were several problems with this. Firstly, almost no one in the UK understood American football in those days. Secondly, we don't use the word 'cleats'. People who play field sports play in boots. Talking about cleats was confusing. Thirdly, nobody had heard of the player he was talking about (Roger Staubach, for reference).

Of course, I should be merciful. At that time, very few people travelled internationally to preach. I am also cognisant that when I have gone abroad to speak, I have more than once trodden on toes or shared something that bewildered my audience.

Irrelevant stories, facts or quotes, no matter how powerful or funny, will alienate your audience.

Connect with their world

Jesus didn't just teach abstract theology. He used sheep, farming, lost coins, and family conflicts—things His audience cared about—as examples in his teaching. He was aware of current events and used them as a means of expressing his teaching.

Luke 13.1-5

“At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He asked them, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.””

When Jesus spoke to a group that was already discussing Pilate's behaviour, he had an attentive audience. When he moved on to talk about a recent well-known disaster, everyone connected to his message.

Start with a spark

What does this look like?

1. Keep it short. A spark should grab attention quickly—if you take too long, you'll lose them before you even start.
2. Make it relevant. If your audience can't relate, they won't care.
3. Connect it to your main point. A great spark is only useful if it leads into what you're actually talking about.

For example, if you're teaching on faith during hard times, you could start with:

- A personal story about a moment of doubt.
- A question: "Have you ever felt like God was silent?"
- A surprising fact: "Did you know even Mother Teresa wrote about struggling with doubt?"

Each of these leads directly into the lesson—not just a random attention-grabber.

Questions

Think about your next opportunity to speak—whether it's a sermon, a small group, or even just a conversation about faith. What's one way you can spark your audience? Try starting with a question, a story, or a surprising fact—and see how people respond.

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>.

Please pass the link on, subscribe, and leave a review.

Keep calm and carry on teaching.

God bless, Malcolm
