

TTT 412. "Your Voice Matters" Tips for new and inexperienced speakers. Part 17 - Make Them Laugh. 29 April 2025

Teaching Tip 412 | "Your Voice Matters". Part 17 - Make Them Laugh. Tips for new and inexperienced speakers | Malcolm Cox

Introduction

Is there a place for laughter in sermons and Bible lessons? This week, we build on last week's episode - "Jesus made them laugh".

Today's Tip

Today, we further explore a tip from my friend Lance Owen.

Use humour. Someone said, "I open a man's mouth with laughter so I can pour a dose of truth into it." Humour can be a very effective way of communicating important information.

The use of humour in teaching about God is legitimate. Have a look at the video last week about the teaching of Jesus, or you could also take Elijah as an example - "At noon Elijah mocked them, saying, "Cry aloud! Surely he is a god; either he is meditating, or he has wandered away, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened."" (1 Kings 18.27 NRSV; see also Isaiah 44.15).

Today, we're going to talk about the pros and cons of a good giggle, and how to develop your humour muscle.

The Pros and Cons of a Good Giggle

Like any tool, humour has its advantages and potential drawbacks:

Pros:

- **Increases Engagement:** As we've discussed, humour can grab attention and make your lesson more interesting.
- **Improves Retention:** People often remember stories and funny moments more than dry facts. Humour can help solidify truths in the mind.
- **Builds Rapport:** Sharing a laugh can create a connection between you and your audience.
- **Reduces Tension:** Humour can provide a mental breather and make complex topics feel less overwhelming.
- **Makes You Relatable:** Showing your human side through appropriate humour can make you seem more approachable.

Cons:

- **Risk of Offence:** Humour is subjective, and what you intend as light-hearted might offend someone.
- **Distraction:** If not used carefully, humour can **detract from the main point** of your lesson. The joke might be remembered, but the message forgotten.
- **Diminishes Seriousness:** In certain contexts, especially when discussing solemn or serious topics, humour can trivialise the message and be inappropriate.
- **Can Feel Forced:** Trying too hard to be funny can fall flat and feel unnatural.
- **Cultural Differences:** What is considered funny varies significantly across cultures, so be mindful of a diverse audience. As an example, I told a self-deprecating story against myself when visiting the United States. It fell completely flat. I think the audience felt sorry for me.

Developing Your Humour Muscle

Now, the thought of being funny can be daunting, especially if it doesn't come naturally. But like any skill, your humour capacity can be developed. Here are a few tips to get you started:

- **Start Small and Safe:** You don't need to become a stand-up comedian overnight. Begin with gentle, inoffensive humour, perhaps self-deprecating jokes or observations about common experiences.
- **Observe Daily Life:** Pay attention to the funny things that happen around you – the ironies, the absurdities. Often, **observational humour**, which flows from the incongruities of life, is the most relatable and effective.
- **Learn from Others:** Notice how speakers you admire use humour. What makes it work? Is it their timing, their delivery, the type of humour they use?
- **Practice Your Delivery:** Humour often relies on timing and how you say things. Practise telling your anecdotes or jokes out loud to get a feel for the rhythm. Don't worry about

getting it wrong. Sometimes, your struggle to tell the joke will be as helpful to your audience as the joke itself.

- **Know Your Audience:** What one group finds funny, another might not. Be mindful of your audience's background and sensitivities. Testing the waters with less risky humour initially can be a good strategy.
 - **Connect Humour to Your Message:** The best humour isn't just random; it **supports and enhances your message**. Think about how a light-hearted remark or story can illustrate a point or make it more memorable.
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Final Thoughts

Jesus and other biblical figures used humour to make deep spiritual points. They were not comedians, but they understood the value of comedic elements in their speaking. Wisely used, humour opens up hearts and minds so that biblical truth can find a smooth path to its target. Experiment, be brave, and note what works and what does not.

"[It is] less a crime to cause a momentary laughter than a half-hour's profound slumber".
Charles Spurgeon

Questions

How has this episode and the previous one shaped your thinking about the appropriateness of humour in sermons and other biblical lessons? What changes will you make in this area as you progress on your speaking journey?

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@malcolmc Cox.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.malcolmc Cox.org>.

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

Keep calm and carry on teaching.

God bless, Malcolm

