

TTT 404. "Your Voice Matters" Tips for new and inexperienced speakers. Part 9 - Connect or Die. 04 March 2025

Teaching Tip 404 | "Your Voice Matters". Part 9 - Connect or Die. Tips for new and inexperienced speakers | Malcolm Cox

Today's Tip

Today's tip is 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."

Yes, it does. Have you ever sat through a talk that didn't connect? Or worse—have you ever been the one speaking and seen people zone out? Those talks feel like they go on forever.

Anna's tip is so significant we're going to take several episodes to unpack because it has several different facets. Today, we will explore one aspect of this topic. Come back next week for a second one.

Who are you speaking to?

What helps us ensure that we are connecting with our audience? The content and the style of your talk must be influenced by your audience. Let's explore two different contexts.

1. When speaking to a congregation other than your own, or a non-congregational group

I have taught a New Testament Survey module in several different contexts. The students attending the UK & Ireland School of Missions in 2012 were a different bunch compared to the AIM students of 2022 and 2025. Indeed, the people I will teach at the European School of Mission later this year in August are also very different.

How different? The ESOM students are relatively young, come from a wide variety of countries and do not all have English as their first language. The AIM students were, on average, older Christians. The UK & Ireland SOM attendees were mostly from one country with a shared ecclesial history. Knowing these contextual facts means I do well in reviewing the material to see if any of it needs adjusting before teaching it.

Later this month I will be speaking in Cardiff and Ireland. In the coming months, I have been invited to preach and teach in Edinburgh, North London and Northwest London as well as for a group of young professionals and students. I *could* take the same lesson to all locations. If I did, that lesson would have to be adjusted to the different contexts of those congregations.

What does that mean? It means reviewing what I *already* know about those congregations and any previous experience speaking there. It also means contacting local people to ask about current needs in those congregations. I might also look up news outlets online for what is going on locally. What are the big issues in Cardiff right now? What's going on in Edinburgh?

Paul had an unexpected opportunity to speak to King Agrippa. They were not friends, and the King was not part of Paul's congregation. However, Paul leveraged something he *did* know about Agrippa.

Acts 26.27

“King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do.””

When speaking to people you don't know so well, find out as much as you can in advance.

2. When speaking to your own congregation

You may object to my point if you regularly speak to the same group of people. You could say that you know the people you will be speaking to and have done so for some time. That may be true, but those people are changing—and so are you. They are being shaped by their experiences and the spirit of Christ working within them and among them.

Effective lesson preparation requires considering what's going on for the people you will be speaking to. How do we do this? Try prayerfully bringing as many members of your congregation to mind as you can and ask God to remind you what is going on in their lives. For example:

- Have they been bereaved?
- Are they struggling at work?
- Do they have any physical illnesses?
- What have they shared with you in fellowship?
- Where can you see God at work in their lives?
- What have they celebrated recently?

You may also wish to send messages asking members what they feel the church needs. How you do this will depend on the size of your congregation and the technology available.

Reflection

As you can see, this takes time. It speaks to a tip I've shared previously: We need to start our lesson preparation well in advance, preferably at least a month before we are due to deliver it. This prayerful research is time well spent. Not only will you have greater confidence that your lesson will help the people you are speaking to, but you will also have a stronger sense of God at work since he is the one guiding you towards the needs of the congregation or group.

Fundamentally, preaching and teaching are only partly about the practice of speaking. The other equally significant part is pastoral responsibility.

Next week, we will explore a biblical example of how different audiences shape lessons.

Questions

How will you reshape your next lesson in the light of what we have talked about today? How does connecting with your audience *before* you prepare your lesson help you to connect with your audience *when* you speak?

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
