

“A Time to Laugh”

Using Humor as a Teaching Tool

by Brent C. Amato

Do your students laugh in your classroom? While teaching is a serious business, it should also be fun! Humor helps prime the pump for an effective learning experience. So as teachers strive to create an environment most conducive to learning, humor should not be overlooked.

Some teachers object to this concept. “I am not a humorous person,” they say. Or, “I don’t know what’s funny.” Many are afraid they will fail at their attempts at humor and look ridiculous instead. If you are one of those teachers, be encouraged! Everyone has a sense of humor; some are just a bit more hidden than others. With a little effort, you can express your own sense of humor and engage the sense of humor that is in your students.

The How

Here are some tips to consider in developing humor in your teaching:

1. Don’t be afraid to move out of your comfort zone. The Holy Spirit prepares your heart to teach, and he also prepares the hearts of your students to learn. This preparation doesn’t exclude the use of humor as a teaching aid. Let some of your inhibitions go. But be careful; don’t step too far outside your comfort zone. Some things make us uncomfortable because they are in poor taste. Don’t sacrifice propriety just for the sake of a laugh.

2. Seize the moment! Some humor will just come naturally, like when you make a mistake or something unexpected or silly happens during the lesson. Don’t be afraid to recognize the humor of the moment.

3. Study the art of humor as practiced by others. Watch and learn from teachers and speakers who make their audiences laugh. Good resources are available by Christians noted for their humor. Some examples are Charles Swindoll (*Laugh Again*), Barbara Johnson, and Patsy Clairmont. You can also find books written for public speakers that have funny stories for many topics.

4. While you’re studying other people’s humor, be sure to tailor your humor to who *you* are. Don’t try to mimic others.

5. Make humor part of your lesson plan. Actually script it in.

6. Practice on a spouse or friend. Every well-planned performance has a dress rehearsal.

7. Use humor that is tied to the lesson. You are not there to be a stand-up comedian, cracking jokes just to get a response or to warm up an audience. Humor, like every other part of your lesson, should have the objective of leading your students to an important truth.

8. Avoid humor that is critical of others. I have found that self-deprecating humor is always safe.

9. Use silly, bizarre visual aids. If you cannot draw a perfect map, go ahead and exaggerate the flaws. Just be sure the map still communicates the essential information.

10. Include humorous role-play activities. Many of your students are natural “hams” when in the spotlight.

11. To the extent possible, find humor in biblical situations. For example, Numbers 22 tells the story of Balaam and the talking donkey. Anyone can find humor there! Balaam has what seems to be a stubborn donkey, so he beats it—but then the donkey protests. And Balaam just answers the donkey as if it's the most natural thing in the world for a donkey to talk. Now *that's* funny!

12. Pay attention to current events and news stories that are humorous. You may be able to weave these into your lesson.

The Why

Everyone needs to laugh. Teachers need to laugh. Smiling will always make you more attractive to your students. One manifestation of spiritual health is joy, reflected in part by laughter. Students need to laugh. They not only need minds sharpened with truth, but hearts lifted and lightened by laughter. Your students may remember the fun that they had with you as much as the truth that you taught them.

So don't let a class go by without bringing some smiles and laughter. At those times you will most assuredly have the attention of your students; then teach them!