

Some people are very good at talking one-to-one but freeze at the thought of having to address a group; whereas others enjoy speaking to a large group but are unsure of themselves when talking individually. I suppose we all fall more or less into one or other of these camps. Personally, I am more at home standing up in front of a congregation whereas Sharon, my wife, prefers a more personal, intimate conversation.

I remember once hearing a missionary executive give a riveting, challenging and inspirational talk and then half an hour later I happened to be at the same table as him for lunch. This chap obviously fell into the same group above as me, as he tried to make small talk and failed abysmally. Obviously panicking, he turned to the man sat next to him and asked; "What's the worst thing that has ever happened to you?" I think most people would recognise that as an unwise, if not dangerous, question and when my friend, after taking a deep breath, decided to answer honestly and briefly described some of the awful things he had suffered in his life; I think the visiting speaker realised he would have to think of another way to make conversation in future (perhaps asking; "what's the best thing that's ever happened to you?" would be a good start).

Do you remember where you were on 18 October 2008? The television and radio presenter Jonathan Ross certainly does. That was when he broadcast that now infamous, offensive phone call that he and bawdy comedian Russell Brand made to Andrew Sach's daughter. Ironically, the programme in question was broadcast two days after Ross's autobiography was released, which is entitled "Why Do I Say These Things?" Why indeed.

While I would not be Ross's biggest fan, not one at all to be honest, I can certainly relate to his frustration with foot-in-mouth disease and you may well be a fellow sufferer. Some of us aim for humour but cause offense; others aim to smooth things over but actually make them far worse and others show incredible ignorance when we should just keep quiet. And some of us manage to do all three in one ill thought out sentence. No wonder James warns us to keep a tight rein on our tongues: "The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body" (James 3v6). Simon Peter often got into trouble for his lack of thinking/ over abundance of talking and yet he ended up preaching an eloquent sermon to a huge crowd and 3,000 people came to faith. What a difference God can make to our lives, even to our tongues!

As Easter approaches we focus on Jesus' suffering and death. Now, we know how brilliant he was in answering trick questions, challenging people in just the right area and offering a word of compassion while he ministered; but have you ever thought of his words while he was suffering? When he had the chance to defend himself - he kept quiet, when the soldiers tortured him - he prayed that God would be merciful to them and when a selfish, exploitive criminal asked for mercy - Jesus gladly granted it to him, even though he was in agony and only minutes away from death.

It is my prayer that God would purify all of our tongues, like he did Peter's and that we would be able to open our mouths with confidence to bless, encourage and even entertain without ending up bewildered, thinking "Why Do I Say These Things?"

May God richly bless you,

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