

BECOME A BETTER RACONTEUR

More than any other age group, junior highers love a good story. For fear of being accused of hyperbole, I won't say storytelling is the quintessential ministry skill. But it's a great tool to have in your quiver whenever you speak or teach.

Although I've never been named storyteller of the year, I do find ways to inject stories into what I do. Here are a few tips for maximizing their power:

- **Ensure that the payoff equals the setup.** The longer the story, the more meaningful and applicable its lesson must be.
- **Use stories not as content but to supplement it.** This is a general tip, not a rule. Using a story to emphasize a point or teach part of a bigger truth is usually more effective than building an entire lesson around it. Jesus often did the latter, but he was better at it than you or me!

- **Stick to personal stories.** Everybody loves a good "a boy was walking down the beach and saw thousands of starfish lining the shore" story. Hundreds of such beauties are available in books, but use them sparingly. Stories from your own life are way more meaningful to junior highers. There's not a store-bought story anywhere that can hold a candle to the one I tell about getting pooped on by a bird the first day of my freshmen year of high school. My hunch is you'd much rather hear the rest of *that* story than the one about starfish.

- **Avoid the temptation to tell stories in which you're the hero.** I played varsity football as a sophomore, married the homecoming queen, and was voted "best personality." I've won awards, written books, and traveled the world. I'm pretty awesome, actually, but my students don't know any of that stuff. They do know, however, that a bird pooped on me the first day of high school.

- **Tell made-up stories...but let kids know they aren't true.** Don't exaggerate for the sake of a good story unless you tell kids it isn't a real event. Older audiences understand that communicators take liberties with stories, but junior highers aren't as sophisticated. Don't abuse their trust by presenting fiction as fact.

- **Never tell a story you hope kids won't repeat.** If you wouldn't tell it with parents or supervisors present, don't tell it.

Take a chance. Tell a story. Junior highers will be glad you did. ☺