



What Is the Proper Use of Humor in Our Plays?

By Tim Brown

Proverbs 17:22 says “a merry heart does good, like medicine.” Humor is helpful to the learning process, but when done incorrectly does more harm than good.

I’ve seen effective plays where we laughed at a number of well-planned and proper jokes, comments, or actions. The plays were well written and in good taste and the humor improved their quality. But I’ve also seen times where the humor was misplaced and lowered the quality.

Humor is one of those things where you need to strike a careful balance. A joke that some people laugh hysterically at offends others. If you want to use humor, first consider your audience. Are you performing for children, teens, adults, or a mixture? Jokes that teens or adults laugh at might go over the heads of children.

We used to have several longer plays (10 to 12 minutes in length) we reserved for older or mixed audiences. They got great laughs from the adults, but when tried on just children didn’t get any at all.

Here’s a guideline I try to follow regarding humor. If I’m doing the joke just to get a laugh, it’s probably not worth doing, but if it will add to the entertainment and learning value of the audience, it’s probably ok. Also, if the humor overwhelms or distracts from your message, it’s probably best not to use it.

I watched a play with a lot of humor and had the audience laughing through the entire play. The problem was the humor completely overshadowed the message so much, it was lost. People left having had a good time, but with no thought of applying the message.

If I do a joke just to get a laugh, the focus is on me and my presentation. With a wrong focus, it’s easy to push the boundaries and, if you’re not careful, say something inappropriate. If your focus is on the audience and their entertainment and learning value, you’ll be careful to choose humor that won’t offend. Before using a joke you’re not sure about, share it with several people that fit the audience who will hear it, and get their opinion. If someone is offended by a joke early in the play, they may not listen to the rest and will miss out on the message.

Sarcasm is a form of humor that can be really funny to some and inflict pain on others. If you include sarcasm in your play, be careful you don’t push it too much. What’s funny to you may not be funny to someone else. If a puppet makes a sarcastic comment that an audience member takes offense to, you’ve just lost your chance to minister to that person.

I heard a pastor one time share a lesson he learned about sarcasm. He and a friend had a tendency to use sarcasm on each other. They would make sarcastic remarks back and forth and found great humor in it. One day, he made a sarcastic remark that hit too close to home and offended his friend. Their relationship was hurt for a couple of months until his friend finally told him the problem. Be careful with sarcasm.

Getting a laugh at someone's expense should also be avoided, even if it's a puppet. The children watching your plays will copy the actions of the puppets. We once did a play where two puppets put each other down in a humorous manner that got a lot of laughs. They fought and then made up and we taught on the importance of forgiveness. The problem was, after the program, the children were mimicking the putdowns and fighting and missed the lesson. We stopped using that play.

Humor is a good way to loosen up an audience and break down walls that will allow you to better minister and get your message across, when it's done right. We tend to use humor early in our program to loosen up the audience. Then, when we focus on the main message, reduce the amount and make sure it doesn't detract from the message.

The bottom line when it comes to humor is to keep the focus first on what is pleasing to God and second on whether or not the humor will help the audience more readily receive the message you're trying to give. If the humor takes away from the message then it shouldn't be done, no matter how funny it is. Make sure it doesn't do more harm than good.