

SECOND EDITION

An Essential
GUIDE
to PUBLIC
SPEAKING



Serving Your Audience
with Faith, Skill, and Virtue

Foreword by Martin J. Medhurst

Quentin J. Schultze

Afterword by Clifford G. Christians

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Introduction

Billionaire Warren Buffet says that learning public speaking skills can boost your value to employers by 50 percent.¹ He understates the benefits. Becoming an effective public speaker can change your life. It did mine.

Like most people, I feared public speaking. I had terrible anxiety and panic attacks. I would do just about anything to avoid giving presentations. The larger the audience, the worse my fear.

But God has a sense of humor. I became a teacher. Then a professor. A communication professor! Bit by bit, I learned how to overcome my fear and speak well. Speaking became fun. I still get anxious, but that helps me remember to prepare well.

Anyone can learn to be an effective speaker. All that is needed is a willingness to give it a try. If you are willing to learn, I am willing to teach you.

In this book I show you step by step how to go beyond fear to comfortable speaking, from comfortable speaking to effective speaking, and from being effective to being courageous.

As Buffet says, you will increase your value in the marketplace. More than that, you will increase your self-confidence for life. Learning public speaking is a lifelong benefit.

God is in the business of using people like you and me to make a difference in others' lives. As I explain in chapter 1, God calls people to speak up. All kinds of people. Not just great speakers. Often anxious and fearful ones.

I wrote this book for Christians who want to learn public speaking with faith, skill, and virtue. I learned public speaking by doing it myself,

mentoring others, and teaching at Christian universities and seminaries. In this book I share decades of experience.

From a Christian perspective, public speaking is what I call “servant speaking.” We can serve God, our audiences, and others every time we speak. Learning to do this well has become one of the most rewarding things in my life. It is a gratifying way to serve.

You can use this book on your own as a handbook, or you can use it to learn with others. I wrote it specifically for classroom settings, but I filled it with examples and illustrations so readers can learn on their own as well.

This book includes the following features:

- clear, reader-friendly prose with minimal idioms, only obvious metaphors, and no complicated grammar for second-language users
- concrete examples and illustrations from others’ and my own public speaking (including humorous tales of things that went wrong as well as right)
- many examples and illustrations of speech topics of interest to students, including career, anxiety and depression, social media, and interpersonal relationships
- chapter-by-chapter spotlight topics on many aspects of planning, rehearsing, and delivering speeches
- “servant speaking tips” throughout the book that offer short-but-essential practical tips
- engaging discussion questions at the end of each chapter, which can also serve as reviews of key concepts and practices
- online materials to help educators use the book (most of these eSources are on the Baker Publishing Group website—<http://bakeracademic.com/professors>—with some on my personal website and YouTube channel)

I wrote this book to help you use the gift of speech to love others with faith, skill, and virtue. I thank God for calling me to this project and giving me the patience and courage to complete it.

Please let me know how I might serve you with instructor or other resources. I am always delighted to conduct live video discussions with university classes and other groups reading my books. My website (www.quentinschultze.com) includes my contact information.

ONE

Speak to Serve

Rick and Barb were Christians and decided to marry. Rick was a virgin; Barb was not. Before they wed, Barb discovered she was HIV positive. She wondered if Rick would end the relationship. Doctors said Barb had less than a year to live, but she and Rick married anyway. Barb lived on, for over twenty years and counting. So did their marriage. Along the way, Rick and Barb discovered that they could serve others by speaking publicly about living with HIV/AIDS and forming healthy marriages.¹

They never imagined launching a speaking ministry. They were not trained public speakers, and their story was embarrassing. Nevertheless, they faithfully responded to God’s call for them to serve others.

This chapter is an invitation to accept God’s call to become a faithful public speaker—a servant speaker. *Servant speaking* is using God’s gift of speech publicly to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Start with Neighbor Love

Speech is part of how we live as God’s image bearers. We speak in order to grow friendships and marriages, to teach and to preach, to lead and to learn. Some of our speech is *public*—in front of groups or larger audiences.

When we begin public speaking, we tend to focus on skills. But what about our motives? Should we speak primarily to serve ourselves or others? How do we serve the Lord as public speakers?

Desire to Love Others with the Gift of Speech

God calls and equips each of us to use the gift of communication to serve our neighbors, who potentially include everyone in need. Our ability to speak is a present from God. We inherit the gift as God’s creatures, made in his image.

What should we do with such an amazing gift? Give thanks for it, develop it, and even enjoy it—all in the service of others as well as ourselves. In short, we are called daily to love others with the gift of communication. Servant speaking is one way for us to respond faithfully to God’s command that we love God and our neighbors as ourselves (Luke 10:27).

Sometimes we are asked to speak formally, perhaps at work, church, or a wedding. Other times we might feel we must speak up in order to right a wrong. In any case, our words should come from our loving hearts (Matt. 15:18). When we desire to love others, our words can specially bless them.

Seek Shared Understanding for Community

Communication is *sharing understanding*. Successful communication creates shared understanding. Whether we agree or disagree with one another, we still can seek to understand one another. We just need to keep trying. The alternative is *ex-communication*—breaking off our communication.

God’s gift of communication is also the gift of community. Communication is how we build communities of understanding, hope, and love. Communication is one of the most powerful ways that we put our love of God and neighbor into action for community. When we break off communication, we dissolve community. When we deliver an effective speech, we form community with our audience.

Listen for Ways to Serve

If we listen to others and to the Holy Spirit’s prompting, we discover many speech callings in our lives. In Scripture, *listening* is becoming intimate with reality—with the way things really are in our relationships, communities, and the wider world. When we listen to God and others, we become personally aware of particular neighbors’ needs.

The greatest listener was Jesus Christ, who humbled himself by taking “the very nature of a servant” (Phil. 2:7–8). Jesus “did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt.

Our Responsibility to Listen to Speakers

Listening well to speakers is a responsibility as well as a skill. We are morally obligated to do our best to understand speakers, just as they are obligated to make themselves understandable. We need to give every speaker our full, undivided attention, take notes if it helps us, and avoid letting our own biases interfere with gaining an understanding of what the speaker is saying. We should evaluate a speaker's content only after we are sure we understand it. Sometimes we might even need to discuss a speech with someone else who attended before we assume that we understood the speaker.

20:28). He started speaking publicly as a boy in a synagogue. His public speaking continues today through Scripture.

As followers of Jesus, we humbly pay attention to others' needs. As we listen, we discover which of our neighbors we might serve by speaking—and what to say to best serve them. A servant speaker must be a good listener, and a good listener, with an open heart and mind, will feel called to serve others.

We do not normally speak just to promote our own interests, although sometimes we should speak up in order to protect our names, defend our faith, and even appropriately advance our careers in church or society. The principles of public speaking are excellent for job interviews.

Even as we practice public speaking in a classroom or online setting, we should do our best to serve others. As we think and practice “service,” we are well on the road to becoming servant speakers.

We learn to find things to speak about when we listen to our own life experiences. Our lives include many parable-like experiences, which are stories waiting to be told. In fact, we tell personal tales all the time to friends, family, and coworkers. Such personal storytelling is a major part of our *interpersonal communication*—face-to-face or digital interaction between persons. Our own life experiences can be powerful examples and illustrations for speeches. For instance, we might personally have been a victim of verbal bullying or harassment. We might have been shunned by friends or coworkers. These could be stories worth sharing.

We might have been wonderfully blessed by people who walked alongside us when we lost a loved one. Our faith might have been deepened by a parent or grandparent, a particular minister, teacher, counselor, or physician. These too might be stories worth sharing.

Jesus Calls Us to Love

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” . . . “Love your neighbor as yourself.” There is no commandment greater than these.

Mark 12:30–31

See Audiences as Neighbors

The biblical analogy for servant speaking is the story of the Good Samaritan, who stopped along the road to help the man who was robbed, beaten up, and left for dead after religious people passed by without assisting him. Jesus uses the parable to explain that fulfilling God’s law is about loving God and loving neighbor as self. Our neighbors are all of those in need, including our audiences (Luke 10:25–37).

Speak Up for Neighbors beyond Audiences

In addition to serving our audience-neighbors directly, we can love our audiences by informing and persuading them to serve others. If we have the power and platform that others lack, we can speak up for them. In effect, we serve our audiences by becoming Jesus’s ambassadors for the *voiceless*—those who do not have a means and audience to speak up for themselves.

What gets in the way of our speaking up for others? Primarily ego and fear. Even when we overcome the fear, we tend to think that we own our

Be a Good Samaritan

Ask God, “Please give me a heart like the Good Samaritan’s to serve others with my voice and ears.” Consider adding that simple, one-sentence request to your daily prayers for the next month. If you do, you will discover that you are gaining a more willing, servant-oriented heart to love others with the gift of communication.

We speak as Good Samaritans in a world robbed of spiritual, psychological, moral, and social goodness. We speak up for people who have been beaten down by liars and manipulators. We speak to people who need encouragement and hope. We speak to those who seek knowledge, information, and skill. We speak to give others joy and delight. In short, we speak to love our neighbors as ourselves.

U2's Bono on Rock Singers' Egos

[The] only thing worse than a rock star is a rock star with a conscience. . . . But worse yet is a singer with a conscience, . . . [an] activist with a Lexus and a swimming pool shaped like his head. . . . A singer is someone with a hole in his heart almost the size of his ego. When you need twenty thousand people screaming your name in order to feel good about your day, you know you're a singer.

Harvard University Commencement Address, 2001, <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/bonoharvardcommencement.htm>

ears and voices solely for our own self-interested use. Our egos keep us focused on ourselves.

Parents of a disabled son discovered that the Christian school system in their area did not adequately address the needs of such children. They researched the best ways of serving disabled children, shared their findings with other parents, and soon were speaking to school administrators and wider community audiences. They spoke up in love for “the least of these,” advocating for God’s young image bearers who were not able to speak up for themselves (Matt. 25:40). Their convicting message was that when disabled children are served well, the entire community benefits.²

Listen for God's Calls

God calls us to use our voices, when he desires, for his plans. We are his speech agents, no matter how fearful or unskilled we are.

God called Moses, a very reluctant and challenged speaker (perhaps a stutterer, with “faltering lips”), to address the Israelites and Pharaoh (Exod. 6:30), even giving him Aaron to help (Exod. 4:14–15). God called Jeremiah, whose excuse for not wanting to obey God was that he was too young (Jer. 1:6).

God called the apostle Paul, who admitted he was not a great speaker, to become the first major Christian evangelist (2 Cor. 11:6). Paul told the Corinthians, “I did not come with *eloquence* [smooth, effective speaking] or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God” (1 Cor. 2:1). Paul might have lacked speaking skills, but he made up for it in being a hard-working servant to particular audiences.

These biblical examples can give us hope in God’s power to speak through us. I was an awful communicator for many years, gripped by a

Called from the Ku Klux Klan to Speak for Jesus

Richard Harris

Professor of Communication

One afternoon when I was four years old, I listened to my parents arguing with my grandmother about taking me to a speech therapist. She insisted that I should be speaking plainly by now. My parents kept telling her they understood what I was saying and saw no need for a speech therapist. My grandmother won. I was in speech therapy for seven years. After that, I could speak plainly. But during those seven years I was constantly bullied by kids making fun of the way I spoke. I was angry. I wanted to get even. I wanted to be the bully, not the bullied.

At sixteen, I joined the infamous Ku Klux Klan (KKK). Because of my ability to speak publicly, I rose to leadership quickly. By the time I was eighteen, I was the Grand Dragon of the Indiana KKK, giving speeches all around the nation. I used my gift of speech to spread evil, hatred, and violence.

Four years later, I met Jesus, who radically changed my heart. I quit the Klan. They let me out after putting a gun to my head with the warning, “You talk, you die.” I kept quiet for fifteen years. But God’s call was to use my speaking gifts to serve others with truth, love, and justice. I started speaking out against racism, the KKK, and other white supremacist groups. I committed my life to using my voice to build bridges of understanding and better communication between races. Answering God’s call to use his gift responsibly has opened doors for me to speak to churches, to civic groups, to corporate gatherings, and even on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC.

As I serve my audiences with my new message, my new goal in life is to help people relate, communicate, and resonate across racial lines.

panicky fear of public speaking. Yet God kept calling me into situations where I could serve others with speech. Often I protested, “God, why me?” I eventually became a professor of communication and a frequent public speaker. I am still astonished. I worked hard, but the Holy Spirit accompanied me, revealed my neighbors’ needs, convicted me, and gave me courage. This is what God does if we attentively listen for his calls and follow faithfully.

At a minimum, we can be prepared to answer everyone who asks us to explain the source of our hope by giving testimony to our faith (1 Pet. 3:15). This usually happens in interpersonal situations, but sometimes we will feel called to share our faith in small groups or with larger audiences.

We need to stay attentive to all opportunities for *impromptu speaking*—speaking when we have little or no time to prepare. I went to a board meeting at a Christian elementary school just planning to listen, but I ended up feeling called to speak comforting words of hope in the midst of a tense situation with angry parents and defensive school administrators. Thanks to the Holy Spirit’s guidance, my words redirected the course of the meeting for good. If I had thought I would have had to stand up and speak, however, I probably would have stayed home.



IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Common Speech Situations

- praying during worship
- leading a tour
- coaching a team
- giving a eulogy
- teaching a lesson
- introducing a speaker
- offering a wedding toast
- giving a brief devotional

Speak Courageously

An acquaintance asked me to lead a prayer on the street for a group of residents concerned for the welfare of their missing neighbor. I was uncomfortable praying, partly because I did not know the missing person well. Once asked, however, I felt called to serve my neighborhood. The Holy Spirit seemed to be prompting me. I prayed for the police and relatives as well as nearby neighbors. I prayed for comfort and hope. I just tried to express what we all were thinking and feeling.

Months later, the neighbor was found murdered. I was stunned. Suddenly my shaky prayer seemed even more important. My impromptu prayer was not fancy, but it came from my heart on behalf of my neighborhood community. I was glad that I had the courage to accept the call to serve my literal neighbors.

Conclusion

Barb and Rick heard the call to become servant speakers, helping married couples grow in the Lord and teaching the church the truth about HIV/AIDS and its victims. They did not imagine Barb’s discovery that she was HIV positive would have led to such a calling. God opened up opportunities in the midst of their difficulties.

God often uses our weaknesses to demonstrate his glory (2 Cor. 12:9). God does not require us to be perfect speakers. He wants us to learn how to speak the truth in love, with a servant’s heart, just as the Good Samaritan reached out to a needy victim on the side of the road.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. When is public speaking a call to serve others? Is everyone called?
2. When did you feel like you should speak up but then decided not to? Why?
3. What difference would it actually make if we thought of our audiences as our biblical neighbors? How might we plan speeches differently?
4. Why not think about public speaking just as a way for speakers to influence audiences? Is that unbiblical?