

AN ESSENTIAL
Guide to
PUBLIC
SPEAKING

SERVING YOUR AUDIENCE
WITH FAITH, SKILL, AND VIRTUE

QUENTIN
SCHULTZE


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INTRODUCTION

During the last thirty years, I have spoken regularly at businesses, professional conferences, schools, churches, conventions, and civic meetings. I have also appeared on many broadcast programs as a news source, commentator, and media critic.

Yet I was a shy child who suffered from social phobias. Speaking publicly was the last thing I imagined doing later in life. When I became a college teacher, I felt inadequate, like Moses: “Lord, send Aaron.”

Public speaking is inevitable. We may need to give eulogies, lead group discussions, pray publicly, present awards, participate in civic meetings, and much more.

Unfortunately, the materials available for learning how to speak publicly have become excessively technical, focusing on skills without paying adequate attention to purpose and ethics. The biblical context—speech as a gift and a responsibility for the service of our neighbors—has nearly vanished.

This bias is unfortunate, because Christians historically contributed some of the most important insights on public speaking. Early Christians discerningly adapted speech practices from the ancient Greeks, who founded rhetoric (the art of persuasion).

By the time of Augustine in the fourth century, however, the art of rhetoric had become largely self-serving. Augustine, trained as a rhetorician before his conversion, eventually concluded that Christians needed to save rhetoric from insincere practitioners who (1) taught and practiced deception, (2) equated good

rhetoric (eloquence) solely with audience impact, and (3) believed that the real, inner character of a speaker was largely irrelevant in contrast to how an audience perceived that speaker.

For the sake of church and society, we should reclaim Augustine's vision of rhetoric, which is fitting for servants of God in a needy world. Many governments, businesses, and other organizations need leaders who speak with honesty, integrity, and civility. Professions ought to nurture responsible as well as effective speech. So should schools, churches, and families.

This book reclaims public speaking as a noble practice for Christians. I encourage readers to become servant speakers who (1) faithfully serve audiences as neighbors, in the biblical sense, (2) are virtuous speakers, and (3) skillfully use verbal and non-verbal methods. Faith, virtue, and skill are the keys to servant speaking.

None of us knows when we will be called on to speak. Once my wife and I attended a wedding where we barely knew the groom and had never met the bride. We were invited because the groom happened to meet the bride when he was in our neighborhood to advise us about interior decorating. During the reception, the groom asked me to speak about our role in getting them together. How could I refuse such a gracious invitation?

So there I was, with minutes to plan an impromptu speech. What should I say? How should I say it? Then it dawned on me that I was just a messenger. God was the one who had really brought the bride and groom together. So I warmly offered a few thoughts about God's grace.

I feel the same way about this book. I never set out to write about public speaking. The more I spoke over the years, however, the more I felt called to encourage and teach others this important art. As stewards of God's gift of speech, we are all called to be servant speakers, skillfully offering our verbal and nonverbal messages as living sacrifices in the service of our neighbors and to the glory of the Lord.