Speaker Power

How to Get It and Use It

Steve Williams
SpeakerPower
How to Get It and Use It

Steve Williams
Contents

Thank You 5

Take My Life 6

Mandy 7

PART 1—GETTING STARTED 8
  Chapter 1—Setting A Goal 9
  Chapter 2—Choosing a Topic 11
  Chapter 3—Finding a Mentor 13
  Chapter 4—Playing By the Rules 15
  Chapter 5—Getting in Sync 18

PART 2—DEVELOPING YOUR SPEECH 21
  Chapter 6—SpeechMatrix™ Step 1: Visualizing 23
  Chapter 7—SpeechMatrix™ Step 2: Mobilizing 26
  Chapter 8—SpeechMatrix™ Step 3: Organizing 29
  Chapter 9—SHARPening Your Speech 30
  Chapter 10—Making Smooth Transitions 33
  Chapter 11—A SpeechMatrix™ for Your Speech 35

PART 3—PREPARING TO GIVE YOUR SPEECH 41
  Chapter 12—Be Natural 42
  Chapter 13—Avoid the Seven Disconnects 43
  Chapter 14—Master the Seven Connecting Skills 48
  Chapter 15—Practice, Practice, Practice 54
  Chapter 16—Get Feedback 57

PART 4—GIVING YOUR SPEECH 60
  Chapter 17—Have Confidence 61
  Chapter 18—Rest Up 64
  Chapter 19—Nail It! 66
  Chapter 20—Be Thankful 68

A Checklist for Youth Speakers 71

Notes 72
THANK YOU

I am indebted to so many people for their encouragement and support as I wrote this book. Space does not permit the naming of them all, but I must thank three of them, without whom the book would not be what it is. One is my friend and mentor, Bert Decker, who taught me so much of what I know about speaking. Another is my friend and co-worker, Steve Craver, who let me try out all kinds of ideas on him. And, last but certainly not least, my wife Melanie, who encourages me at everything I do and is always ready with wise and timely feedback. She is also the world’s best editor and is largely responsible for the book being as readable as it is.

Steve Williams

Steve Williams is Chief Creative Officer of High Impact, a non-profit dedicated to helping churches, church leaders, and non-profits achieve maximum impact. High Impact provides media coaching and training, PowerPoint development, video editing, resource development, and church leader development.

High Impact ● 770.887.0148 ● Steve@highimpactcomm.com
**Take My Life**

Take My Life and let it be  
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee  
Take my moments and my days  
Let them flow in ceaseless praise  
Take my hands and let them move  
At the impulse of Thy love  
Take my feet and let them be  
Swift and beautiful for Thee

Take my voice and let me sing  
Always, only for my King  
Take my lips and let them be  
Filled with messages from Thee  
Take my silver and my gold  
Not a mite would I withhold  
Take my intellect and use  
Every power as You choose

Take my will and make it Thine  
It shall be no longer mine  
Take my heart, it is Thine own  
It shall be Thy royal throne  
Take my love, my Lord I pour  
At Your feet its treasure store  
Take myself and I will be ever, only, all for Thee

(Frances R. Havergal, 1874)
Mandy was born with a hole in her heart. She was so tiny her doctors held out little hope she would live long enough and gain the strength to endure a series of corrective surgeries. What her doctors didn’t know was this four pound bundle of splotchy red flesh had an incredible will to live. She did live and, after three surgeries to repair the defects in her heart, she began to grow.

Fast forward a few years. At age 14, Mandy began to notice that some people were better speakers than others. She asked her mother why that was so. Her mother said she wasn’t sure but she guessed it was because they got it from their parents. Mandy wasn’t sure that was the right answer so she began to ask her pastor and others how they became good speakers. Their answers surprised her. Almost all said it was because they studied other effective speakers and practiced regularly.

Something in Mandy clicked and she decided she wanted to be a good speaker, too. She began to pester her youth pastor and her teachers to let her speak whenever there was an opportunity. They did, and Mandy began to take her first small steps toward becoming a public speaker. She even asked people she trusted to give her feedback when she spoke. I was one of those Mandy asked for feedback and I watched in amazement as a small and shy 14-year old began to gain confidence and skill.

Mandy went on to win the state Speaker’s Tournament. At 16, she had the polish of someone far beyond her years. Today she is the mother of two girls and works with teenagers, helping them develop speaking skill and confidence. I tell you this story because I want you to know that no matter who you are or where you live, you can become a good speaker, too. If Mandy could do it, so can you.

The Speaker’s Tournament is an excellent way to develop your speaking skills. It gives participants an opportunity to develop a speech, practice giving it numerous times, get feedback, and learn how they measure up against other students. But, more importantly, it is a way to glorify God, the giver of all talents and abilities. And it’s a way to honor Him though our speech. I think that’s what the author of the hymn, Take My Life, expressed so eloquently.
GETTING STARTED

I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us up to Heaven.
(The Apostle Paul, Philippians 3:14, NLT)

All through high school my two closest friends and I dreamed of hopping in a convertible and driving out west when we graduated. We wanted to see California, Montana, Arizona … places we had never been. No itinerary or maps—just start driving and go wherever the roads led. We never got to make that trip. I still think it would have been fun but practical things like a lack of cash and starting college in the fall got in the way.

Participating in the Speakers Tournament is kind of like going on a journey. For many students, it becomes the journey of a lifetime as they discover things about themselves they never knew. However, it’s not a journey you want to take without doing some advance planning. Five simple actions as you’re getting started will help make your Speakers Tournament participation more meaningful and possibly a lot more successful.

We’ll cover those five actions in the first five chapters:
Chapter 1 – Setting a Goal
Chapter 2 – Choosing a Topic
Chapter 3 – Finding a Mentor
Chapter 4 – Knowing the Rules
Chapter 5 – Getting in Sync
Chapter 1
SETTING A GOAL

What’s your goal for participating in the Speaker’s Tournament? Is it to win a college scholarship? Or overcome stage fright? Or hone already well-developed speaking skills? Or do you just want to be able to give a speech without feeling like your heart’s going to pound its way out of your chest? Everyone needs to have a goal.

Having a goal can help you remember why you’re in the tournament. It can also help you determine your “win factor.” Just entering the Speakers Tournament makes you a winner but having a goal clarifies what is a win for you so you’ll know it when you achieve it. You might say it helps you know when you get to your winner’s circle.

Think about your goal for the Speaker’s Tournament and write it here in 15 words or less:

Knowing what kind of speaker you want to become also will help you determine your win factor. And it will help you know what you need to do in the next few months. There are essentially three different types of speakers.

Presenters
Some people are content to be able to give facts and information in a logical, low-key manner. I call them Presenters because their primary goal is to present information and they feel it is up to their listeners to get what they need from the speech. In other words, I’ll tell you what you need to know but whether you learn it or not is entirely up to you.
Entertainers
Everyone likes Entertainers because their goal is to make people feel good. They like to tell stories and make humorous references about themselves and others. If they are successful, everyone walks away feeling just a bit better about themselves and the world.

Impact Speakers
The third type of speaker is quite different from the first two. Impact Speakers are very clear, even adamant, about their objective—they want to influence people. No matter what topic they are speaking about, they want to cause people to stop and think and, if needed, change their minds and behavior.

There is some of all three speaker types in most effective speakers. However, the more determined you are about the type of speaker you want to become, the more likely you are to become that kind of speaker. Weighing the pros and cons of each type will help you decide. Then you can be sure about which type of speaker God wants you to become.

What do you think are the pros and cons of each of the three speaker types? List them here:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presenter...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainer...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact Speaker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One of the most important decisions you will make is choosing a topic for your speech. That’s because many of the people who hear you will be able to tell whether you chose the right topic. The difference is like between being assigned a topic you hate and being allowed to choose one you like. The good thing is you get to choose your topic in the Speaker’s Tournament. Numerous suggested topics are offered for you to choose from. Some states even let you make up your own topic.

This four-part test will help you make sure you chose the right topic:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic Test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ Interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Relevancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ The “God Factor”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interest**

One of the easiest things for an audience (and judges) to spot is whether a speaker is interested in his or her subject. It shows in your body language, your vocal energy, and the amount of time you spend on your speech. Passion is a great thing to have when speaking. Choose the right topic and you’ll have passion. Choose wrongly and you may sound as though you’d rather be doing anything else besides giving your speech.

**Knowledge**

You don’t have to be an expert about your topic but it does help if you know something about it. Otherwise, you’ll spend too much of your time learning about it and too little time practicing and polishing your speech. You will have plenty of opportu-
nity to study your topic but you’ll be more confident speaking about a subject you know something about.

**Relevancy**

The relevancy test is not as easy as the other two. That’s because you’ll be giving your speech to a variety of audiences made up of people with different interests, backgrounds, and lifestyles. So, choose a topic you believe will be relevant to and practical for most of the people you will be speaking to.

**The “God factor”**

There is a topic that God especially wants you to choose. He knows that topic will be a source of lasting growth to you and will have the greatest impact on the people who hear you speak. You can know what that topic is by praying “with a blank sheet of paper.” Praying “with a blank sheet of paper” means asking God to lead you to the right topic before choosing the topic you like best. In other words, ask Him to reveal His choice to you rather than asking Him to affirm your choice. There is a big difference between the two.

Seeking suggestions from others is always a good idea but you should make the final decision about your topic. That’s because no one knows your heart and your mind like you and your Heavenly Father do.
Bert Decker was my mentor when I got serious about improving my speaking skills. Nobody knows more about public speaking than Bert. As a result, he was able to teach me things I had never thought of before. He also cared about me and wanted to see me sharpen my effectiveness. You too need a mentor if you want to get the most you can get out of the Speakers Tournament.

A mentor is someone who serves as a trusted coach or guide. Anyone can be a mentor but the most effective mentor is someone who understands the art of communicating and is able to communicate effectively with you. That means your best mentor is not necessarily the person you think most highly of. Your mentor needs to be an effective communicator and willing to give you the right kinds of feedback and encouragement. Otherwise, he or she may not help you improve.

People who make good mentors for speakers include youth pastors, speech teachers, senior pastors, professional speakers, and speaking coaches. When you find the right person to mentor you, explain why you want a mentor and ask this person to pray about taking the job. If his or her answer is yes, ask for a commitment to work with you at least until the end of the Speakers Tournament.

The right mentor can do six important things for you:
1. Listen to your hopes and dreams as well as your frustrations and disappointments.
2. Encourage you to always do your best and never allow you to wallow in despair and self-pity.
3. Teach you good speaking skills and help you understand why they are important.
4. Show you how to communicate effectively. This is very important because it’s how a mentor demonstrates what he or she talks about.
5. Give good feedback after hearing you speak. You may not like everything your mentor tells you but feedback is one of the best ways for a speaker to improve.
6. Care for you as a person as well as a speaker, and pray for you and with you.
Her prayers should be for your personal well-being as well as for your growing ability as a speaker.

In fact, if having a mentor is good, how about having a whole team to back you? The Speakers Tournament is a spiritual exercise so ask lots of people to pray for you. I don’t mean asking the whole church to pray for you, though that’s okay too. I’m talking about asking a group of people to commit to pray for you daily. It will make a big difference.

Then, add some people to the team to give you feedback every time you speak. Later, I’ll show you how to get feedback that’s effective and balanced. Finally, if you play sports, you know how good it feels to hear the fans rooting for you. So, ask people to come and hear you every time you speak. It’ll be good for them and for you too.

CHAPTER 3  IN THE REARVIEW MIRROR

1. What’s the most important thing you would like your mentor to do for you?

2. Can you think of someone who would make a good mentor?
Chapter 4
PLAYING BY THE RULES

The Speakers Tournament is a competition. That’s good because most students like to compete. Since it is a competition, there must be rules so every participant knows what to expect. Speakers Tournament rules can vary from one state to another so you should ask your state’s Speakers Tournament coordinator or director for a copy of its rules. However, everybody’s rules are enough alike that we can summarize them here.

Each speaker must compose his or her own speech. This does not prohibit you from consulting with or being coached by someone else. However, your speech should reflect your original thoughts as well as the views of the sources studied.

You are encouraged to research your topic extensively. Recommended sources include: The Holy Bible, concordances, Bible dictionaries, commentaries, books, Web sites, and other people. Proper credit must be given in the written speech for all quotations. Include a footnote for each source quoted, giving the author’s name, book title or source, publisher, and copyright date. When delivering your speech you should tell who you are quoting but you do not have to give the complete source of the quotation.

Each speaker is supposed to turn in three (3) typed copies of his or her speech at each level of the tournament.

Speeches should be at least 4 minutes in length but no more than 6 minutes when delivered. Speakers are penalized 2 points for every ten seconds they are under 4 minutes or over 6 minutes.

Speakers are judged on two broad criteria, content and delivery, and can earn up to 100 points at each level of the tournament. Content/composition counts for 50 percent of your total score and delivery counts for the other 50 percent.

The Speakers Tournament is open to students in grades 10-12 only.

The use of notes is discouraged and may affect your score.

A speaker may be disqualified for not being grade eligible or using a speech composed by someone else.
Judges have specific criteria they use to judge each speaker. They read each speech to determine scores for content/composition and they listen to speakers to score delivery. Judges use a scale of 1-10 points to score speakers in each of ten different areas:

Content (50 percent of total score)

1. **Originality/Related to Subject.** Does the speech deal with the subject? Does the content appear to be the original work of the speaker? Does it give evidence of conviction and creative thinking by the student?

2. **Organization/Logical Sequencing.** Does the content flow logically, and are ideas and information properly sequenced? Is the speech’s core belief or idea clearly evident to the audience? Are the speech’s opening and closing effective?

3. **Structure and Grammar.** Does the speech use complete sentences and are sentences grammatically correct? Are words spelled correctly? Are paragraphs constructed properly?

4. **Use of Resources and Proper Credit.** Is there adequate usage of Scripture, books, and other resources? Do resources used clearly help the audience understand the topic and the speaker’s point? Is proper credit given for all resources used?

5. **Purpose Accomplished.** Does the speech accomplish the speaker’s purpose?

Delivery (50 percent of total score)

1. **Delivered from Memory.** Does the speaker rely excessively on notes? Does he or she require prompting?

2. **Articulate and Expressive Manner.** Does the speaker use good vocal energy and enunciate clearly? Does the speaker speak loudly enough for the audience to hear without straining? Does he or she smile, use appropriate facial expressions and maintain good eye contact with the audience? Is the speaker convincing, interesting, and understandable?

3. **Poise/Posture/Confidence.** Does the speaker appear relaxed and confident? Does she use good posture, appropriate body movement, and effective hand and arm gestures?

4. **Personal Appearance.** Is the speaker well groomed? Is clothing appropriate, neat, and in good taste? (Check out your state’s guidelines for dress. This is the easiest ten points you can earn.)

5. **Within Time Allotment.** Was the speech between four and six minutes in length? Deduct two points for every 10 seconds the speech is under four minutes or over six minutes.
1. Where can you get a copy of the rules for the Speakers Tournament in your state?

2. How do you feel about competing with other students?
Getting in sync spiritually is very important while participating in the Speakers Tournament. That’s because the tournament is more than a competition; it’s a great time to grow in your relationship with your Heavenly Father. Your relationship with Him is unique and it’s unlike any other relationship you will ever have. Four things about it make it a very special relationship.

**God Did Something for You That No One Else Could Do**

He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to pay a debt that neither you nor anyone else could pay. *Salvation is to be found through him (Jesus) alone; in all the world there is no one else whom God has given who can save us.* (Luke the Physician, Acts 4:12, TEV)

Jesus lived a perfect life, died a terrible death and rose from the dead so you could trust Him for abundant and eternal life.

When you trusted Jesus as your Savior, God adopted you. He removed all the barriers that had built up between the two of you and He declared you His very own son or daughter. A friend of mine and his wife adopted a Korean baby to be their daughter. I’ll never forget when they told her how special she was because they chose her to be their daughter. Always remember that God chose you, too.

**You’re OK with Him**

That’s because all believers are covered by Jesus’ righteousness. That’s a good thing because our righteousness is not very good: *All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags* (The Prophet Isaiah, Isaiah 64:6, NIV.) Our sin keeps us from being made right with God, which is the definition of righteousness.

On the other hand, believing in Jesus changes everything: *Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes* (The Apostle Paul, Romans 10:4, NIV.) When we accept Jesus as our Savior, He gives us His righteousness, which is more than enough to make us okay with Him.
You Don’t Have to Earn His Love
In fact, you can’t earn it. He gave it all to you when you trusted Him to be your Savior. And He keeps giving it to you every day. Only God can love you with a love like that. So don’t think that participating in the Speakers Tournament will make you any more righteous or make God love you any more. You can’t be any more OK to Him than you are, and God can’t love you any more than He already does. What the Tournament can do is make you more conscious of God’s presence and His plans for your life. And it might even cause you to want to follow His plan for your life more closely.

God is Always Working to Provide the Best For You
You have dreams and goals for yourself. So does your Heavenly Father. The difference is, you think you know what’s best for yourself but He knows for sure. And He always wants the very best for you. That’s why the prophet Jeremiah said: For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future. (Jeremiah 29:11, NIV)

One plan God had for you before you ever knew it was to participate in the Speakers Tournament. He looked into your future and saw that it would be a great way for you to develop some of the abilities He gave you when you were conceived. He also knew it would be a way the two of you could get to know each other better. He’s been looking forward to spending this time with you for a long time.

Daily Disciplines
Try these seven daily disciplines to get, and stay, in sync with God:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seven Daily Disciplines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Love God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Read your Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Pray for wisdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Think pure thoughts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Do good to others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Share your faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Give God thanks, no matter what</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Getting in sync spiritually with God is like lining up two bars so together they form a solid line. One bar is what God has planned for you and the other bar is what you want to do with your life. Keep working with the bar you control until it lines up perfectly with God’s bar. Then you will experience the peace of mind that only being in harmony with God can bring.

1. Do you think God really cares about you and what happens to you?

2. Why do you think He cares?
DEVELOPING YOUR SPEECH

The ability to express an idea is (almost)
as important as the idea itself.
(Bernard Baruch)

Content is worth 50 percent of your score in the Speakers Tournament. That means even if you do a great job giving your speech but your message is weak or ineffective, you probably won’t score very well overall.

To be effective, a message must pass several important tests. Things like: Is it relevant? Does it capture and hold the attention of the audience? Is it developed around a solid core idea? Does it have a strong bottom line? Is it logically organized? Does it accomplish its purpose? Is it memorable? Unfortunately, many of the messages we hear fail these tests. If you want to do well in the Speakers Tournament, your message must pass these tests.

I use a system called SpeechMatrix™ to develop messages. It’s an excellent way to focus on a topic, develop facts and ideas, and organize it all into a highly usable format. Using SpeechMatrix™ will almost guarantee that your message is relevant, on target, and encourages the audience to take action. And, a bonus is it’s a good way to write reports, papers, and even books. In fact, I’m using a SpeechMatrix™ to write this book.

I’ve taught variations of the SpeechMatrix™ system to thousands of people and almost all of them have said it makes developing content easier and more logical.

There are three steps in the SpeechMatrix™ system. We’ll take them one at a time so you can learn them. But there are two SpeechMatrix™ tools you need to know about first: trigger words and sticky notes. Trigger words are words or short phrases you can use to remind yourself of what you want to say. Sticky notes or Post-its® are what you write trigger words on. Be sure and use the smaller sticky
notes (1 3/8 by 1 7/8 inches.) The yellow ones are the easiest to read.

After reading about the three steps in the SpeechMatrix™ system, you’ll find a sample SpeechMatrix™ and a set of worksheets to help you develop your own speeches.

Here’s what we’re covering next:

Chapter 6 – SpeechMatrix™ Step 1: Visualizing
Chapter 7 – SpeechMatrix™ Step 2: Mobilizing
Chapter 8 – SpeechMatrix™ Step 3: Organizing
Chapter 9 – SHARPening Your Speech
Chapter 10 – Making Smooth Transitions
Chapter 11 – A SpeechMatrix™ for Your Speech
Chapter 6
SPEECHMATRIX™ STEP 1: VISUALIZING

Visualizing what you want your speech to accomplish should be the starting point of any message. It’s like seeing what you want to happen before it actually occurs.

Imagine you’re playing baseball or softball. It’s the bottom of the ninth inning and your team is behind by one run. You step up to the plate and take a deep breath. Then you close your eyes and imagine seeing the ball sail over the left-field fence. Next, you’re rounding third base on your way to home plate to score the winning run. It hasn’t actually happened yet but seeing it in your mind makes it more likely to happen. That’s visualizing.

There are five parts to visualizing a speech. Flip over to the Visualizing worksheet on page 38 so you can see how they all work together. Then come back to this page and read about each part.

**Topic**
It goes without saying that you can’t develop a message until you have a topic but let’s say it anyway. You have to choose a topic before you can develop your message.

**Audience**
Considering who will be in the audience when you speak will help ensure that your speech is relevant and that they will be interested in what you say. Think about the different kinds of people who will hear you (adults, other students, youth pastors, skeptics, etc.) How do you think they will react to your topic? What do you think they might want to know about it?

**Bottom line**
What’s the main thing you want your audience to know? The bottom line is your central theme or core idea. It can be an important fact, an irrefutable biblical truth,
or a strong feeling you have about your topic. It’s the one thing you want the audience to remember if they forget everything else. Think about what you would say if you suddenly learned you only had 30 seconds to speak. That’s your bottom line.

Be sure and nail this part of your speech. If you don’t know what your bottom line is, you won’t be able to communicate it to your audience.

**Action**

What do you want the audience to do? Memorable and exciting speeches always challenge people to do something. An action can be as simple as asking the audience to think about something or to make a choice. It’s better if it’s a bit more specific but the important thing is to ask or challenge people to do something. That helps them remember what you talked about and can even lead to lasting change in their lives.

Dr. Martin Luther King said in his famous “I Have a Dream” speech that now is the time to end injustice and “open the doors of opportunity to all of God’s children.” Jesus told His followers in the Sermon on the Mount to let their light shine before others, serve God alone, and trust their Heavenly Father to provide all they need in this life and beyond.

W. Clement Stone was a self-made billionaire when he spoke to my college graduating class. He told us to ask ourselves every morning for the rest of our lives, “How’s my PMA?” PMA stands for *positive mental attitude*. He said as long as we have a positive mental attitude, life will go well and we will enjoy success. I still clearly remember what he said many years later.

**Benefit**

Here is the pay-off for the audience. The benefit is what your listeners will gain if they do what you ask or challenge them to do. Spelling out how they will benefit is important because people always want to know what’s in it for them. Even if you have a great action you want them to take, they still want to know how they will benefit. Giving them the benefit up front makes it more likely that they will do what you ask them to do.

*Visualizing includes a topic, an audience, a bottom line, an action, and a benefit.*
CHAPTER 6 IN THE REARVIEW MIRROR

1. Why is it so important to “visualize” your speech before you start writing it?

2. How important is it for a speech to have a good bottom line?
Chapter 7

SPEECHMATRIX™ STEP 2: MOBILIZING

The Mobilizing step is designed to help you plan exactly what you want to say to the audience. A big part of that is gathering the right facts and deciding what you personally think about your topic. This step is called Mobilizing because it helps you mobilize and use one of the most extraordinary things on the planet—the human brain.

Many speakers make two mistakes when speaking—either they say too much and/or they don’t say the right things. Effective speakers always tell people what they’re going to tell them, tell them, and then tell them what they told them. This step will help you decide what’s most important to you and your audience, and it will help you say less so you will have more impact.

One of the greatest but lesser known principles about effective speaking is “saying less for more.” It’s not how much you say that matters; it’s what you say. The less you say, the better, as long as what you say is on target. President Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, considered one of the greatest speeches ever made, is only 246 words long and took less than 3 minutes to give. Contrast that with the 2-hour, 13,609-word speech that preceded Lincoln’s. It was given by Edward Everett, regarded as the greatest orator of that day. Ever heard of Everett or his speech?

It’s important when working through this step to remember your bottom line and who the audience is. That’s because the bottom line is the heart of what you want to say and the audience is who you’ll be saying it to. So, with those things in mind, here are two ways you can mobilize. But before you read any farther, look at the Mobilizing worksheet on page 39 to get an idea of how this step looks on paper.

**Mobilizing Plan A**

1. Determine the three most important things you want to tell the audience about your topic. Those become the *key points* of your message. Don’t worry about going into great detail about each key point yet; you can do that later.
2. Make sure the three key points are arranged in the most logical manner so they make sense and help the audience understand your message. Depending on your topic, key points can be organized in sequence or just in a way that makes sense. For instance:

- If you’re talking about creation as described in Genesis, you could sequence your key points like this: Key Point #1—God created the heavens and the earth; Key Point #2—God filled the earth with living things; Key Point #3—God rested.
- However, if your topic is prayer, you could organize your key points just to make sense: Key point #1—What prayer is; Key Point #2—What prayer does; Key Point #3—How to pray.

3. Take your first key point and decide on the two most important things (facts, ideas, or thoughts) you want to say about it. Those become the sub points under key point number 1. Don’t worry about going into detail about your sub points yet. Now do the same thing for key points 2 and 3. When you’ve finished you will have planned the heart of your message.

4. Now decide what you want to say in detail about each key point and sub point. Study each one and determine how you want to explain them to your audience. Be sure and remember your bottom line in this step because the primary function of key points and sub points is to help you communicate your bottom line to the audience. You’ll probably want to research your topic as you study about each point. It’s a good idea to use a variety of sources to make sure you’re getting the best possible facts. Of course, the Bible is always a great place to start your research. Commentaries, Bible dictionaries, concordances, books, videos, other people, and the Internet are also good sources of information.

A good way to organize your research is to catalog it all by key points and sub points. You can label each point and use the same labels on your research documents. For instance, label your first key point “Key Point #1” and then label all documents related to it “Key Point #1.” If you’ll keep all your materials together in a file folder, everything will be easy to locate when you want to work on your speech.

**Mobilizing Plan B**

Plan B differs from Plan A in only one way. Sometimes it’s better to research a topic before deciding on your key points and sub points. That’s especially true when it’s a
topic you don’t know a lot about. So, when using Plan B, research your topic first and then determine your key points and sub points. Otherwise, do everything the same way as you would in Plan A.

CHAPTER 7 IN THE REARVIEW MIRROR

1. Why is the “saying less for more” principle important for speakers?

2. Who is Edward Everett?
This is usually an easy step to complete because by the time you get here you’ve already done most of the hard work. Step 3 is called the Organizing step because this is when you put together all the pieces you have to make the speech you want to give. A quick glance at the Organizing worksheet on page 40 will reveal just how many of those pieces we have already discussed.

When you get to step 3 while actually planning your speech, you need to move your sticky notes from the worksheets for steps 1 and 2 to the worksheet for step 3. Simple, huh? That’s because you have already planned most of your speech.

Two things we have not talked about yet are transitions and SHARPs. Both are very important to your speech. SHARPs will help you get the audience’s attention and touch each person emotionally. Transitions help you move smoothly and effectively from one point to another.
Effective speakers know the value of “SHARPening” a speech. To prove it, try this the next time you hear a speaker you like. Ask yourself what parts of his or her speech were the most interesting. For most people it’s the SHARPs like stories, humor, quotes, and visuals. That’s because SHARPs touch our emotions and make us laugh, smile, cry, empathize, or reflect. A 5- or 6-minute speech should have at least four or five SHARPs in it.

SHARP is an acrostic. You know, one of those odd-looking words in which each letter stands for another word. Each letter in the word SHARP stands for something you can use to get and keep people’s attention when you’re speaking:

### SHARPs
- **Stories**
- **Humor**
- **Analogies**
- **Reference and Quotes**
- **Pictures and props**

### Stories
Everyone likes to hear stories because they’re interesting and they remind them of their own stories. Look for stories that make a point, raise a question, or pose a dilemma related to the bottom line of your message. Stories that evoke emotion are especially good. Consider personal stories about family, friends, or even yourself.

### Humor
Be especially careful with humor. Think funny but don’t tell jokes unless you’re naturally funny; only about two percent of people are. Instead of telling jokes, tell something humorous that has happened to you or your friends. And don’t be afraid of

---

Think funny but don’t tell jokes unless you’re naturally funny.
laughter, even when it’s directed at you. Laughter is a great tension reliever and it stimulates interest and learning. Take your subject and your listeners seriously, but don’t take yourself too seriously. And don’t forget to smile.

**Analogy**

Using analogies is a great way to make something complicated sound simple. Or to help make biblical truth relevant to a contemporary audience. Analogy can also help you make your bottom line crystal clear. For example, forgiveness is a concept some people have trouble wrapping their brains around so compare it with something everyone does understand: Forgiving someone is like canceling a debt they owe you. Think of simple, everyday objects and activities that can help you explain truth.

**References and Quotes**

People are interested in what you have to say but they also like to know what others have said about your topic. Look for unusual quotes that can help explain your bottom line or make one of your points. Use references that have personal significance for you. Good sources for references and quotes include: the Bible; books of quotations; Web sites; Bible commentaries; dictionaries; books; movies, etc. And always give the source for references and quotes.

**Pictures and Props**

Think visual when planning your speech. Ask yourself how the audience will “see” things and whether showing them something will help them get what you’re talking about. A picture, an object or a prop can sometimes take the place of a thousand words. Make points with visuals quickly; don’t drag it out. Be big, bold, and colorful but don’t overuse visuals. (Caution: Some states discourage the use of props in the Speakers Tournament. Check the rules for your state before using them.)

All SHARPs are important, but the “Opener/SHARP” and the “Close/SHARP” are the most critical. That’s because the first one helps you get the audience’s attention and the second one reminds them of your speech’s bottom line and what you want them to do.

They are also important because people tend to remember most what you say first and what you say last. In fact, most people decide within the first ten seconds of your speech whether they want to listen to you or not. If you lose them then, it’s hard to regain their full attention.
1. Why are SHARPs so important when speaking?

2. Which of the five different kinds of SHARPs do you like most?

3. How many SHARPs should a 5-6 minute speech have?
Chapter 10
MAKING SMOOTH TRANSITIONS

Transitions are a key part of any effective speech. In fact, transitions can make the difference between a mediocre speech that misses its mark and one that captures an audience and moves people to action. You hear speakers use transitions all the time even though you may not always recognize them. Remove the transitions from speeches, though, and I guarantee you would notice the difference.

Transitions are verbal bridges that speakers use to connect the points and ideas expressed in a message. Their value is in helping the audience connect your facts and ideas together, and make sense of what you’re saying.

Transitions actually serve three important functions:
1. They connect what you said previously to what you’re about to say. This helps people understand.
2. They help convince the audience that you know what you’re talking about.
   This builds confidence.
3. They make for a smooth shift from one idea or part of your speech to another.
   This keeps the audience connected.

Transitions can take different forms. A transition can be a single word, a phrase, or even an entire sentence. Whichever form you use, transitions should connect what you just said to what you’re about to say next. The actual word, phrase, or sentence you should use depends on the type of transition you need to make.
Examples of different types of transitions include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transition Type</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Similarity</td>
<td>Also; Just as; Likewise; Similarly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exception/Contrast</td>
<td>But; However; In spite of; On the other hand; In contrast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sequence/Order</td>
<td>First; Second; Third; Next; Then; Finally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>After that; At last; Earlier; Meanwhile; Recently; Later; Now; During</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example</td>
<td>For example; For instance; Specifically; To illustrate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis</td>
<td>Even; In fact; Of course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cause and Effect</td>
<td>Consequently; Hence; So; Therefore; Thus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Support or Evidence</td>
<td>Also; And; Besides; Further; In addition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion/Summary</td>
<td>Finally; In conclusion; In the end; In summary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. What is a “transition”?

2. Why are transitions important?
Chapter 11

A SPEECHMATRIX™ FOR YOUR SPEECH

Now that you’re familiar with the SpeechMatrix™ system itself, it’s time to use it to develop a speech of your own. Here’s how:

1. Get a pad of yellow sticky notes (1 3/8 x 1 7/8 inch size) and a file folder or several sheets of paper.

2. Go to page 38 and complete the Visualizing step for your speech. Use a different sticky note for each of the 5 parts in Visualizing. Use trigger words on each sticky note and write large enough that you can read them while speaking. Complete the Mobilizing step on page 39.

3. Move the Bottom Line, Action, and Benefit sticky notes to the Organizing worksheet on page 40. Then move the Key Point and Sub Point sticky notes to the Organizing worksheet.

4. Develop strong SHARPs for the Opening and your Close. Write trigger words for each one on sticky notes and place them on the Organizing worksheet.

5. Study your Sub Points and decide if there is a SHARP that might help you explain any of them. If there is, replace the sticky-note for that Sub Point with a sticky note for the SHARP.

6. Although there is no place to write them on the SpeechMatrix™, think about how you will transition between your Key Points and Sub Points. Make some notes on a separate sheet of paper to help you plan your transitions.

After fully developing your SpeechMatrix™ it’s time to begin writing out your speech. Read through your SpeechMatrix™ several times to make sure it flows well.
then begin to write out everything you want to say. You may find that changing 
some of your points will strengthen your speech. If so, just rearrange the sticky notes 
you have or substitute new ones. Don’t be concerned if it takes you several drafts to 
get everything the way you want it. That’s normal for most people.

When you have a good draft of your speech fully written out, ask your mentor 
and others to read it and give you feedback. Ask for feedback on everything: the 
points you make, the clarity of your argument, the appropriateness of your sources, 
the overall flow of the speech, punctuation, etc. Give them a copy of the Speakers 
Tournament rules for content/composition to help them know what to look for. 
Then rewrite your speech again until it’s just right.

Finally, it’s time to start practicing. Read through your speech several times until 
you learn it well. Mark and underline words and phrases you want to emphasize 
strongly. Then, practice your speech several times alone or for your friends, follow-
ing only your SpeechMatrix™ as little as necessary.

Two important things you’ll want to work on when you practice are pacing and 
timing. This kind of pacing is not the kind you do with your feet, but what you do 
with your mouth. Many people talk too fast when they give speeches, especially if 
they are nervous. You’ll read later about the value of rhythm and pausing.

You also need to time your speech. Even thought the Speaker’s Tournament al-
 lows for a speech of up to 6 minutes in length, your speech should not exceed about 
five minutes when you begin practicing it. That’s because most speeches actually last 
ten to fifteen-percent longer than they do when you read them or practice them ini-
tially. Adjust your written speech as needed to make it fall within the five-minute 
range.

See pages 54-56 for more on practicing your speech.
A bush in my yard died...

Key Point #1
God used Moses in spite of himself

Sub Point
Moses told God he couldn’t do it

Key Point #2
God still uses ordinary people

Sub Point
1. Billy Graham
2. Mother Teresa

Key Point #3
God wants to use us.

Sub Point
All it takes is:
1. Willingness
2. A right spirit
3. Spiritual gifts and abilities

Sub Point
1. Billy Graham
2. Mother Teresa
3. Eric Liddell
4. Michael W. Smith

Sub Point
1. Willingness
2. A right spirit
3. Spiritual gifts and abilities

Hold out hands and think of 1 thing you have that God can use

If you let God use you, your life will change

Any old bush will do...

If you let God use you, your life will change

Any old bush will do...

Action
If you let God use you, your life will change

Benefit
Hold out hands and think of 1 thing you have that God can use

(Nursery catalog)
Any old bush will do...
Step 1—Visualizing

Visualizing what you want to accomplish will help you develop a strong message. It's like seeing what you want to happen before it happens. If you begin by visualizing what you want to say, your vision becomes a guide to help you plan to take your listeners where you want them to go.

You can even speak briefly using just the last three parts of Visualizing.

1. TOPIC
   What is your topic or the title of your speech? Write it on a Post-It and place it here.

2. AUDIENCE
   Who will you be speaking to? Write what you know about them here.

3. BOTTOM LINE
   What is the main thing you want your listeners to know or understand?

4. ACTION
   What do you want your listeners to do?

5. BENEFIT
   What benefit will listeners receive if they agree with your Bottom Line and do what you want them to do?
**Step 2—Mobilizing**

Use this page to decide what you want to tell the audience about your topic. Most speakers say more than is necessary or they get off-target. The Mobilizing step will help you decide what’s most important.

- Start by moving your Bottom Line Post-it to this page.
- Then, decide on the three most important things you want to say about your topic. Write each one on a Post-it and place them over the Key Point boxes below.
- Finally, decide what else you want to say about each Key Point and place each of those ideas or facts on the Sub Point Post-its below each Key Point. If you generate more than two Sub Points for each Key Point, go with the two that are most important to your Bottom Line.

If you need to research your topic, complete the above steps while you do the research or after it is completed.
Step 3—Organizing

The Organizing step assembles all the parts of your speech’s content. Move the appropriate Post-its from steps 1 and 2 to this page. Also, develop an Opener/SHARP to capture the audience’s attention and a Closer/SHARP to wrap up your speech.

NOTE: You can speak for as long as 30-40 minutes from a Matrix this size. For longer messages, create additional Sub Points and/or Key Points.
PREPARING TO GIVE
YOUR SPEECH

For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your
adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.
(Jesus Christ, Luke 21:15, NIV)

The next part of the book is about the way you give your speech. You can have the
best content possible but if you don’t deliver your speech well, most of your audi-
ence won’t hear it. You’ll be talking but they won’t be listening, not to you anyway.

Everything in this section is about making your speech clear and interesting and
gaining the attention and confidence of your audience. If you do those four things,
people will not only listen to you, they will be affected by what you say.

Here’s what we’ll cover in this section:
Chapter 12 – Be Natural
Chapter 13 – Avoid the Seven Disconnects
Chapter 14 – Use the Seven Connecting Skills
Chapter 15 – Practice, Practice, Practice
Chapter 16 – Get Feedback
Chapter 12

BE NATURAL

Organic foods are huge today. Check out your local grocery and you’ll find everything from organic burritos to free-range beef that’s never tasted a hormone or been near a pesticide. Organic foods are natural, as close to the way God made food as you can get in the 21st century.

A speaker who is natural is as close to the way God made her as she can get. And that’s good. After all, God does a pretty good job when He makes us in His image. “No junk” is the way a popular singer once described all of God’s creation.

You were born with an incredible capacity to communicate. It’s called lungs. And for the first couple of years of your life you were not at all shy about using your lung power to let people know how you felt. You were uninhibited, which means you expressed yourself and you didn’t care what others thought.

That’s the way it is for most of us until we start to notice how other people react to our outbursts. Inhibitions usually begin to show up around age three or four. Next thing you know, shyness kicks in and we do our best to become invisible. That’s when most people begin developing a fear of speaking in public. And we try for the rest of our lives to overcome that fear so we can be the way God made us.

You still have a great ability to communicate with other people. It’s there because God put it there. What you have to do is to peel away all the accumulated layers of fear and trust God to help you become an effective communicator once again. The goal is to regain your natural speaking style. Not the kicking and screaming tantrums of a hungry six month-old, but the confident assurance of someone who trusts God to speak boldly through him or her.

1. Where did your ability to communicate come from in the first place?
Chapter 13

AVOID THE SEVEN DISCONNECTS

Everybody I know has a cell phone. In fact, some people I know have more than one. Cell phones are a really good thing to have, when they work. The problem is, I get disconnected in the middle of a lot of conversations, especially when I’m traveling. Usually I can get reconnected if I drive a few miles or walk a few feet. But by then, I sometimes forget what I was talking about. Like cell phone users, speakers need to guard against getting disconnected.

Communicating with other people is a lot like making a phone call. You start off by saying something, they look up and begin listening, and you keep talking. Everything is okay until something causes your listeners to lose their concentration. Sometimes it’s something beyond your control but more often than not the problem was preventable. I call problems like these “disconnects” and they are every speaker’s worst enemy.

A disconnect is anything that causes a listener or an audience to lose their concentration and stop listening. We could fill a book with them but I’ve chosen the seven that are most prevalent and give speakers the most trouble.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seven Disconnects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Nervous gestures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Poor posture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Lack of movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. A lifeless voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Poor grammar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Non-words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Lack of eye contact</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A disconnect is anything that causes a listener to lose concentration.
Disconnect #1—Nervous Gestures

Nervous gestures are those distracting things you do with your body that cause people to wonder why you’re doing them. They are primarily things you do with your face, hands, arms, legs and feet. A few examples:

- **Stern Father.** That’s the gesture I did when boys started coming to take my daughter out on dates. I stood at the door with my arms folded across my chest and gave boys my most serious “you had better behave yourself” look.

- **Hand Wash.** You’ve seen this one a lot. It’s when people keep rubbing their hands in front of them like they’re washing them, only there is no soap and water.

- **Knuckle Pop.** Come on, I don’t have to describe this one, do I? Guys are the worst. It’s why their knuckles are so big.

- **Pinky Pull.** Just start pulling on a finger or thumb on one hand with the fingers on your other hand. Keep doing it and you’re doing the Pinky Pull.

- **Head Rub.** I have a friend who does this. He doesn’t have three hairs on the top of his head but he rubs his head when he speaks. I guess he’s trying to make his hair grow back.

- **Ear Pull.** This one is mostly a girl thing. Some tug on an ear lobe, others play with earrings. Both are distracting.

- **Hyper Hands.** Sometimes I call this one the windmill because that’s what it reminds me of. Some people can’t seem to talk without constantly waving their hands around in front of them.

- **Jangling.** I used to love to do this one. Didn’t know I did it until a friend told me. I would put my hand in my pocket and jangle the change. Others could hear the coins jangling together but I was clueless.

- **Cover Up.** More people do this one than any of the other nervous gestures.
Adam and Eve did it after they ate the forbidden fruit. You see people do it all the time, you just didn’t know what to call it until now. The Cover Up is arms extended downward in front of the body, hands together, covering the crotch. A lot of politicians do it. So do a lot of teachers.

So what’s wrong with a few nervous gestures? Are they really all that bad? Well, if you do just one or two briefly a couple of times during your speech, there is little harm done. The “disconnect” occurs when you do them enough that people begin to notice and have trouble concentrating on what you’re saying.

What really makes disconnects so bad is that many people in the audience are already distracted before you start to speak. They all have things on their minds but some find it hard to concentrate on what you’re saying from the start. Throw in a few disconnects and some in the audience will check out mentally and hear little or nothing of what you say.

**Disconnect #2—Poor Posture**

*How* a speaker stands or sits is important. That’s because people have less confidence in speakers who stoop, slouch, or lean on something.

**Disconnect #3—Lack of Movement**

*Where* you stand is even more important than how you stand. Speakers who stand or sit in one place the entire time miss an opportunity to connect physically with their audience. It makes them look like their feet are mired in wet cement. The other extreme is just as bad, though. Pacing or moving about constantly makes people nervous, so you shouldn’t do that either.

Two of the biggest obstacles to movement are lecterns and tables. The best advice is not to stand behind them. Besides hindering movement, they act as barriers between you and your audience.

**Disconnect #4—A Lifeless Voice**

There is nothing worse than a flat or lifeless voice. It robs a speaker of energy and makes it hard for the audience to concentrate. It can even put people to sleep. I almost flunked a high school math class because the teacher spoke in a monotone voice. If you’re a monotone, I have good news for you. Monotone is not genetic; it’s a learned behavior and you can change it.
**Disconnect #5—Poor Grammar**

I enjoy watching stock car racing but some of the announcers butcher the English language. To many people, listening to bad grammar is like hearing the sound of fingernails scraping across a chalkboard. Split infinitives, dangling prepositions, incorrect pronouns, misspelled words, and noun-verb disagreements all cause listeners to make judgments about the speaker’s intelligence and preparation.

All speakers are expected to use good grammar. If yours is not good, get help. Poor grammar will not only affect your success in the Speakers Tournament, it can keep you from getting into the college you want, make you miss out on a scholarship, and keep you from getting a job you want.

**Disconnect #6—Non-Words**

Non-words are “filler” words that have no meaning or add nothing to what is said. They can be a huge distraction. If you use non-words very often, people will concentrate more on them than on the rest of what you say. When I train speakers, I often show a video clip of a famous female singer in which she uses the same non-word fourteen times in 24 seconds. People say it’s hard to hear anything else she says.

Some of the most commonly used non-words are: *Uh; Well; You know; Like; Er; Um*. If you’re wondering why people use non-words, it’s because they’re nervous. Nervous speakers think they have to fill every breath with sound so they use non-words to hide the fact that they’re thinking about what to say next. Later, we’ll learn how to think without distracting our listeners.

**Disconnect #7—Lack of Eye Contact**

Lack of eye contact is the worst disconnect because it disrupts the speaker-to-listener connection in at least three ways. It affects confidence, concentration, and the speaker’s energy.

It affects confidence because we don’t trust people who won’t look at us when they’re speaking. We subconsciously think they are either hiding something, not telling the truth, or don’t believe what they’re saying.

Lack of eye contact also makes it harder for both the speaker and the audience to concentrate. The audience struggles because people want to know the speaker is talking to them and not merely reciting something from memory. The speaker can lose focus because she is not making a visual and emotional connection with the audience.

The energy thing is really big, too. Recently, I watched a tape of a well-known
speaker who uses a manuscript when he speaks. The difference when he was reading from his manuscript and when he was not was startling. When he was reading, his voice was flat and measured, almost subdued. But when he looked up and spoke from the heart, he was like a different person. His voice and body language both had energy that was totally lacking before.

My friend Bert Decker taught me three other things speakers should always avoid:

- **Eye dart**, letting your eyes dart quickly about the audience, never focusing on anyone long enough to establish a connection.
- **Slo-blink**, letting your eyes close for one, two or even three seconds while you’re looking at someone.
- **The Triangle**, which occurs when a speaker keeps looking, in sequence, at the same two or three people or things in the room.

It doesn’t matter how good your speech is, if you have too many disconnects while giving it, your audience will have a hard time listening. And the judges will lower your score. So, what is the answer to the dreaded disconnects? Read on.

---

**CHAPTER 13 IN THE REARVIEW MIRROR**

1. What is a “disconnect” as described in this chapter?

2. Which of the seven disconnects do you need to work on the most?
Chapter 14
MASTER THE
SEVEN CONNECTING SKILLS

The Seven Connecting Skills add to a speech everything the Disconnects take away. They add energy, demonstrate confidence, reveal transparency, and show that you know and care about your audience. They also determine whether you get and keep the audience’s attention. Remember the analogy of a phone call? It’s the Seven Connecting Skills that help get people “on the line” and keep them from hanging up.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seven Connecting Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Reinforcing gestures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Transparent posture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Positive language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Eye contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. SHARPs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Connecting Skill #1—Reinforcing Gestures

Gestures are things you do mostly with your face and hands. Nervous gestures distract the audience but natural gestures emphasize and reinforce what you’re saying. You probably did more effective natural gesturing when you were two or three than you do now. That’s because people gesture more naturally when they are confident and relaxed. So, here’s the formula:

Confidence = More reinforcing gestures and less nervous gesturing
Reinforcing gestures should always be used to make a point or emphasize something being said. They should never be used just to be dramatic or call attention to yourself. And they should rarely be used for more than a few seconds at a time.

Some examples of reinforcing gestures include: pointing; raising hands skyward; pretending to swing a baseball bat; stretching arms out in front with palms turned upward; turning your back to the audience; pretending to walk or run; frowning; and looking confused or perplexed. When you’re not making positive gestures like these, let your arms hang loosely at your sides. That puts them in the best position to be ready to make natural, reinforcing gestures.

One of the most effective gestures a speaker can make is to smile. That’s because we like and trust people who smile more than we do people who don’t. A fake, pasted-on smile won’t do it, though. Most people can tell a genuine smile from one that’s forced. Not everyone has a natural smile but everyone can learn to smile genuinely. If you want to win people over, be trusted, and get ahead, you’ll learn to smile, too.

**Connecting Skill #2—Transparent Posture**

*How* a speaker stands and *where* a speaker stands both reveal a lot about a speaker’s attitude and transparency. Good posture does a lot to promote confidence so it’s good to stand or sit up straight when you’re speaking. Three other things can also help you establish a transparent posture before your audience.

The first one has to do with movement. To show that you care and are trying to connect with them, intentionally move toward different parts of the audience. Always start your speech standing in the center. Then you can move to your left as you talk about key point #1, back to the center for key point #2, to your right for key point #3, and finally back to the center.

Movement keeps the audience more alert because it causes people to shift their line of sight as they follow you. However, it’s important that you not turn your back to any part of the audience. Angle your body when moving about so everyone can see at least part of your face and the front of your body.

Remember those physical barriers we talked about earlier? Actually, they’re not just physical barriers, they are psychological barriers as well. Lecterns and tables are like walls between you and the audience. If you can move them out of the way, do it so there is nothing between you and the audience. But what can you do if they are not movable? That’s when you move yourself and stand to the side or in front of them.

---

*We like and trust people who smile more than we do those who don’t.*

*Stand or sit up straight when speaking.*

*Stand beside or in front of lecterns and tables when speaking.*
Finally, what about using microphones? I strongly recommend the use of a wireless microphone in any room seating more than 40-50 people. A microphone keeps you from straining your voice and makes you sound more natural. And going wireless allows you to move freely about the room.

If the room you’re speaking in is large but the only available microphone is a wired handheld, hold the mic with the hand you gesture with the least. If you’re right-handed, that’s usually the left hand. What if there is no mic at all or the room is small? Breathe deeply and often, and speak as loudly as you can without straining your voice.

**Connecting Skill #3—Vocal Energy**

Energy is so important when speaking. It not only makes your speech more interesting, it says you are enthusiastic about your topic and the opportunity you have to speak. You can inject energy into your voice three ways: varying the volume, changing your tone, and using subtle inflections to emphasize words and phrases. Using all three appropriately can make a huge difference in capturing and holding the attention of your audience.

Try this to get the hang of vocal energy. Say: *I didn’t say Sam likes broccoli*. Now say it again five more times, emphasizing only one of the underlined key words each time. You can draw attention to words and phrases, and even change the meaning of the sentence, by increasing the volume, raising the tone and changing the inflection when you say each key word. For example:

- *I didn’t say Sam likes broccoli.* By saying “I” louder, longer, and higher, while pointing to yourself, you’re raising a question in the audience’s mind. You’re saying: *I didn’t say he likes broccoli. Someone else must have said it.*

- *I didn’t say Sam likes broccoli.* By saying the word “Sam” longer, louder, and higher, while pointing a finger at Sam, you’re saying; *I didn’t say Sam likes broccoli; I said Julie likes broccoli.*

One thing the best speakers learn is the importance of rhythm and cycles. You might begin a speech by speaking in a medium volume and a welcoming tone, then get louder and more intense, later backing off to a softer and less intense pace, then medium, etc.

The key is in establishing a rhythm and cycling the moods. Keeping a loud, frenetic pace the whole time will wear out an audience and leave them anxious. Being soft and calm from start to finish, however, will bore them and put them to sleep. It’s best to cycle the moods and get into a comfortable rhythm. Think of it like a run-
ner who stretches, then runs at a medium pace, then faster, then slows to a trot, and even walks for awhile before speeding back up and repeating the same cycle again.

**Connecting Skill #4—Positive Language**

Everyone is expected to use good grammar and have an adequate vocabulary. Both are seen as signs of intelligence and discipline.

The effective use of grammar and vocabulary are important both when writing a speech and when giving it. Make sure sentence structure is correct, tenses agree, punctuation is accurate, words are used appropriately, and that content flows logically and sensibly. If you know your grammar is not good, get help. If you’re unsure about the flow of your speech, ask people to read it and give you feedback.

We talked earlier about how distracting *non-words* can be. Let’s say someone tells you that you say “Um” a lot when you’re speaking. What can you do? Two of the most helpful things you can do are develop more confidence and learn to pause instead of saying non-words. Practicing your speech and trusting your Heavenly Father will help you gain confidence.

If you have a serious problem with using non-words, here are two practice techniques I have used effectively. One is asking a friend to blow a whistle every time you say a non-word when practicing your speech. Another is paying your friend a quarter every time you say a non-word and get a quarter back every time you pause. If you improve, you should get all your money back.

Pausing actually does more than help eliminate non-words. It also gives both you and the audience time to think and breathe. Both are important. Thinking lets you decide what to say next and it gives the audience time to think about what you’ve been saying. Breathing fills your lungs and makes you sound better. Letting the audience breathe can keep them from passing out.

**Connecting Skill #5—Eye Contact**

Eye contact is the most important Connecting Skill. If you and the audience don’t have it, it’s unlikely you will make a connection. That’s because you and the audience learn a lot about each other through the window of the eyes. It helps them see how confident you are and you can determine how interested they are. Eye contact is also a great way to get attention, involve the audience mentally and emotionally, and get them to trust you.

Having eye contact requires establishing a visual connection. You have to look at someone for about three or four seconds, just long enough for both of you to lock
eyes. When you’ve connected with someone, move on to look at someone else. Keep doing that the entire time you speak, taking care to look at everyone or at all parts of the audience. Look at your notes when you need to but spend most of your time looking at the audience.

Here is a big caution. Don’t look at any one person for more than 4-5 seconds at a time. If you do, they might think either you don’t like them or that you’d like to ask them out on a date. It all depends on your facial expression and body posture. If you look at someone of the opposite sex for 10-15 seconds, with a dreamy look on your face and a super-relaxed body posture, she may think you’re attracted to her. Do it with a menacing look and an aggressive body posture, and she will think you don’t like her.

So here’s the formula for having good eye contact. Look at people for 3-4 seconds, with a genuine smile on your face, while standing or sitting up straight. It’s not really all that difficult to do but learning to do it regularly does require discipline.

Not sure whether you practice good eye contact? Get feedback when you speak.

**Connecting Skill #6—Confidence**

Confidence or a lack of confidence is one of the first things an audience is aware of. Genuine confidence is based on three things: knowledge of your subject; comfort level with the venue; and faith in your own ability and in the supreme Giver of confidence. Everyone can develop confidence. You’ll find a lot more about developing confidence in “Have Confidence” on pages 61-63.

**Connecting Skill #7—S.H.A.R.P.s**

A lot of people believe that having good facts and ideas is all it takes to make a good message. It’s a popular notion but it’s not true. Facts and information are important but they are not enough to win over an audience. That’s because facts connect only with the thinking part of peoples’ brains. While that is important, reciting facts alone will put most people to sleep pretty quickly. If you don’t believe it, just try reciting the multiplication table to your audience (1 x 1 = 1; 1 x 2 = 2; etc.) and see how long they remain interested.

The solution is to appeal also to the feeling part of peoples’ brains. That’s the part of the brain that feels emotions like happiness, empathy, fear, sadness and disappointment. If you want people to hear everything you say and act on it, parts of your message will need to stimulate the feeling part of their brains. That’s what SHARPs can do. Five different types of SHARPs and how to use them are described on pages 30-32.
1. What’s the real value of the seven Connecting Skills described in this chapter?

2. Which of the Connecting Skills do you think you do best?
Chapter 15

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

What do Sarah Hughes, Tiger Woods, Michelle Wie, and Larry Bird have in common? They’re all champions.

Sixteen-year-old Sarah Hughes won the gold medal for figure skating at the 2002 Winter Olympic Games. For seven years she spent more than six hours a day, seven days a week, practicing her skating. That was in addition to two or three hours each day commuting from her home on Long Island to a skating rink in New Jersey. Why? Because she loved to skate and she wanted to be the best.

Tiger Woods has been the number one ranked professional golfer in the world forever. He started playing golf when he was just 18 months old. By the time he was six he was already an amazing golfer and began entering junior contests. His dad would sometimes jingle the change in his pocket or roll a ball in front of him to teach him to concentrate. His practice habits are legendary. He cannot stand to lose but when he does it doesn’t make him angry. He just goes out and practices even harder so he doesn’t make the same mistakes again.

Michelle Wie became, at age 10, the youngest player ever to qualify for a USGA amateur championship. She is ranked as one of the 10 best female golfers in America and one of the 20 best in the world. And she’s only 15 years old! Wie is already playing better at the pro level than Tiger Woods did when he started and many insiders say she is destined for greatness. She began playing golf at the age of 4 and was winning nearly every junior event she entered by the age of 11. Michelle practices for about four hours a day on weekdays and seven hours a day on weekends.

Larry Bird led the Boston Celtics to three National Basketball Association titles and is still considered one of the greatest that ever played the game. Bird was almost obsessive about being the best basketball player he could be. It is said that he would go back to his home in Indiana every off-season and learn at least one new skill. He wanted to make sure no one could outplay him. Bird later said, “I don’t know if I practiced more than anybody, but I sure practiced enough. I still wonder if somebody—somewhere—was practicing more than me.”
Did you notice a characteristic common to each of these champions? It’s their work ethic. They all practice, practice, practice! Even if they were gifted athletes from birth, having a gift didn’t mean they knew how to use it. I have no doubt that something in their genes made them capable of being great, but they would never have become successful if they had not spent many hours practicing.

If you want to succeed in the Speakers Tournament, you too will have to practice. How much? There is no set formula because each person is unique. Some students have more experience and greater confidence than others. One thing is certain, though. No matter how good you are, practice will make you better. Ask Michelle Wie. A minimum for anyone who wants to do well in the Speakers Tournament is two or three hours of practice each week for several months.

As valuable as practice is, there is no substitute for speaking before a live audience. The more you do it, the better. If you want to do well, you need to give your speech at least seven or eight times before a live audience before the Speakers Tournament actually begins. If you want to excel, you need to give it at least 12 times. More is better because you’ll become more poised and confident each time you give your speech. It will help you learn to relax under pressure, like Sarah Hughes and Tiger Woods.

There are lots of live audiences you can give your speech to but you may have to take the initiative to get before them. Any group of 20 or more constitutes a live audience that will help you prepare for the Speakers Tournament. Larger audiences are even better because they prepare you for the types of audiences you may face later in the tournament.

Sunday school classes, Sunday morning worship, Sunday evening worship, discipleship groups, civic clubs, and school speech classes all make good live audiences. You can even ask to speak at a friend’s church or at a neighboring church. Just tell them you’re in the Speakers Tournament and you’re looking for all the practice you can get. And don’t be bashful about asking to speak to some groups more than once, especially in your own church.

The important thing to remember about practicing is you can’t do it too much. Well, I suppose giving your speech six times in one day would be a bit over the top but giving it two or three times in one week is not excessive at all. Practice, practice, practice!
1. Do you think you can be the best communicator you can be without practicing?

2. What are three good things that come from practicing regularly?
Practice is half the preparation formula for success. Feedback is the other. One thing I didn’t tell you about Sarah Hughes, Tiger Woods, Michelle Wie, and Larry Bird is they all have coaches. The coach’s job is to observe and give feedback. And smart players listen to their coaches. You need a coach too if you want to do your best in the Speakers Tournament.

If you have a mentor, you already have a coach. If not, you need to get one. One of the first things you need to do is give your coach (and others) permission to give you feedback. Why permission? Because honest feedback is sometimes hard to swallow and you need to let them know you want it and that you will take it seriously. Notice that your coach is not the only person who can give you feedback. The more feedback you get the better, so ask others to give it to you too.

All feedback is helpful but some is more valuable than other feedback. That’s because some people know what to look and listen for and others don’t. Every time you speak someone will come up and say you did a great job. Someone else may tell you it wasn’t so hot. Either way, what have you really learned? Nothing. That’s why you need a method for getting feedback that tells you what you need to do to improve.

There are three types of valuable feedback: people feedback, audio feedback, and video feedback. All are helpful but two will give you the most valuable information: people feedback and video feedback. If you play a sport like football, basketball, or soccer, then you’re probably familiar with these kinds of feedback. Most coaches use them regularly to show players what they’re doing well and how they can improve.

People Feedback
People feedback is the easiest to get because you can ask anyone who hears you speak to give it. You could just ask them to tell you how you did but there is a better way. My friend Bert Decker taught me a method called “3 by 3 Feedback” and I use
it regularly. Here’s how to get it. Before you speak, hand people a card and ask them to watch for three things you do well and three things you need to improve. Tell them you want feedback on both your delivery style (disconnects, connecting skills, etc.) and your message. To make getting 3 x 3 Feedback easier you can make up cards like the one below and give them to people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Things I did well</th>
<th>Things to improve</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>3.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Video Feedback**

Video feedback can be even more valuable than people feedback, if you’ll use it. I have to warn you, though. You have to be very motivated and disciplined to use video feedback. That’s because it’s a lot easier to make a videotape of your speech than it is to watch the tape and give yourself feedback. Sometimes I view tapes of myself speaking and wonder: Who is that guy? But the payoff is I get great feedback on my speaking effectiveness.

If you have access to a camcorder, I recommend that you tape every speech you make, then watch the tape soon afterwards and give yourself honest and objective feedback. I use the same 3 x 3 method as I described earlier when watching my tapes: three things I did well and three things I need to improve. Even if it turns into “3 x 9” feedback, you will learn valuable things about your effectiveness as a speaker.

As valuable as getting feedback is, it’s no good unless you apply it. That would be like knowing the answer to world peace but keeping it to yourself. The first step after getting feedback is determining how to apply it. Nobody should be better to help you with this than your mentor. After agreeing on the changes you need to make, mark them on your written speech and begin to practice them. If you’re like most people, it will take a while for the changes to begin to feel natural.

Remember how I used to be a “jangler?” I didn’t have a clue about it until I started getting feedback. Then I started doing everything I could to stop. I thought positive thoughts. I muttered “don’t jangle” before speaking. I imagined my hands
being burned if I stuck them in my pockets. I even wrote myself a note and kept it in front of me while speaking. All these helped, but it wasn’t until I emptied my pockets that I was cured. Without feedback, I might still be jangling.

Honestly, how valuable is feedback? It is so important you will never fully realize your potential as a speaker and communicator unless you get (and apply) feedback regularly.

CHAPTER 16 IN THE REARVIEW MIRROR

1. Is all feedback helpful?

2. What should you do with the feedback you get?
For the Spirit that God has given us does not make us timid; instead, his Spirit fills us with power, love and self-control.

(The Apostle Paul, 2 Timothy 1:7, TEV)

By this time, you have been working hard preparing for the Speakers Tournament. You may have even changed some. That happens when we pour ourselves into something, especially a “God thing.” And the Speakers Tournament is definitely a “God thing.”

There is no time to let up now, though. No time to kick back and relax. However, you can celebrate what God has been doing in your life. Nothing happens without a reason and nothing happens without consequences. God wanted you to do the Speakers Tournament because He knew it would change you, draw you closer together, and cause you to see the world and others differently.

If you’ve done your homework the past few months, you’re ready for the actual tournament to begin. You can have confidence that God has prepared you, that you will do your best, and that the people who hear you will be blessed. There is not a better feeling in the world than this.

There are four chapters in this section:
Chapter 17 – Have Confidence
Chapter 18 – Rest Up
Chapter 19 – Nail It!
Chapter 20 – Be Thankful
Chapter 17

HAVE CONFIDENCE

Confidence is like the wind. You can’t see it, taste it, or grab a handful of it but you know when it’s there. It reminds me of a conversation I had with my assistant one time. I was always asking her to do things for me but my directions were not always very detailed. Finally, she looked at me one day and said: “You don’t really know what you want, do you?” I replied: “No, but I’ll know it when I see it.”

Confidence may not be easy to define or describe, but speakers and audiences know it when they see it. So do Speakers Tournament judges. In fact, it’s one of the first things people realize a speaker has or doesn’t have. That’s why it’s important for you to have confidence when you speak.

There are two sources of confidence. One comes from within yourself; the other comes from the one who made you. Each one is important and drawing from both will help you do your best when you speak.

God-given Confidence

God-given confidence is the kind of assurance David had when he defeated the giant-sized Philistine warrior, Goliath. While the most seasoned fighters in the Israelite army hid from Goliath, the youthful David strode out to meet him armed only with his shepherd’s staff, a sling and five smooth stones. Goliath ridiculed David when he saw that he was only a boy but David replied that he was facing him not in his own power but in the name of the Lord. He leveled Goliath with his first shot. Read about it in 1 Samuel 17.

It was also God-given confidence that led a super-reluctant Moses to confront the Egyptian Pharaoh. Remember how God spoke to Moses from a burning bush in the desert? He said He wanted him to go and tell Pharaoh to release the Israelite people from their captivity. Moses wasn’t all that excited about going but he did after God convinced him He had the situation under control. God told Moses: “Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say” (Exodus 4:12, NIV).
David and Moses were not alone when they stood before others, and neither are you. The same God who protected and empowered them will give you His confidence every time you speak a message on His behalf. The Apostle Paul said: *For the Spirit that God has given us does not make us timid; instead, his Spirit fills us with power, love and self-control* (2 Timothy 1:7, TEV).

**Self-confidence**

The other side of confidence is self-confidence. That’s the trust we have in ourselves that we can achieve our goals and expectations. If you have a goal to make an A in biology and you realistically believe you can do it, that’s confidence. However, confidence alone is not enough to get you an A. You still have to do the course work. But having confidence is a big boost to getting there.

Self-confidence depends on four factors:

*An optimistic spirit.* People who are optimistic about their own abilities and about life in general tend to feel better about themselves and to be more successful. Success breeds success and sustained success leads to confidence. People who believe they are likely to succeed are also likely to put forth extra effort.

*A can-do attitude.* Some people see every problem or disappointment as an opportunity to find a solution. They hardly know the meaning of the words *It can’t be done.* Telling them something won’t work is like throwing gasoline on a fire; it makes them work that much harder. Even if they don’t always succeed, persistence has its own reward: *confidence.*

*Hard work.* Losing is easy; winning is hard work. Winning requires long hours of study, practice, and perseverance. The difference between winning and losing is often how much time and effort you put into something. Knowing you’ve done the work leads to confidence in your own abilities.

*Discipline.* Winners do what it takes to win even when they don’t feel like it. That’s why the most talented team doesn’t always come out on top. Practicing when you don’t feel like it, watching tapes of past speeches, working on bad habits, and tweaking your message are all disciplines that lead to greater confidence.

Other people and situations can affect it but you alone determine your level of self-confidence. It’s how you respond that makes the difference. Even when others
get down on you and your chances look bleak, you can still have confidence as long as you have done what it takes to succeed. That’s because “confidence helps you take control of circumstances rather than be dragged along by them.”¹

Just so there is no misunderstanding, overconfidence is not the same thing as confidence. Overconfidence causes people to think more highly of themselves and their abilities than is warranted. Overconfidence occurs when someone fails to work hard but believes they can win anyway. It sounds a lot like arrogance, doesn’t it? The last thing you want to be is arrogant. God is never pleased with arrogance nor is He honored by it.

God gives you His confidence as a gift. It’s yours for the asking. He wants you to have it and He gives it up freely. Self-confidence, on the other hand, has to be earned. Nobody can give it to you. It’s a reward for hard work, discipline, an optimistic spirit, and a can-do attitude.

1. How does a speaker’s confidence (or lack of confidence) affect an audience?

2. What was the source of David’s confidence?

3. How can you gain self-confidence?
The last thing you want to do is pull an “all-nighter” the night before you’re scheduled to speak. You’ll feel better and have more energy if you get a good night’s rest. Audiences (and judges) can usually tell whether a speaker is well rested. Not only can you look tired, you’ll sound tired. A tired voice lacks energy and crispness, and a sleep-deprived mind doesn’t function as well as one that’s fresh and alert.

**Twelve Tips**

Here are 12 tips to help you be at your best:

Tip 1—Drink lots of water the day before and up until three or four hours before speaking. This hydrates the body and moistens your vocal cords.

Tip 2—Avoid spicy foods the night before speaking. They can cause stomach acid to back up in your throat while you’re sleeping and cause a burning sensation.

Tip 3—Elevate your head while sleeping. This will keep fluids from draining away from your vocal cords. Also, breathing will be easier and you’ll cough less.

Tip 4—Avoid ice and dairy products within 24 hours of speaking. Ice constricts the vocal cords and dairy products coat the larynx, making you want to keep clearing your throat.

Tip 5—Be as quiet as possible and let your voice rest on the day you speak.

Tip 6—Eat a light meal before speaking. A big meal will make you feel drowsy and it will be harder to breathe.
Tip 7—Exercise your voice gently an hour before speaking, then drink a glass of water. A good way to loosen up your voice is to sing “do-re-mi” scales the way singers do.

Tip 8—Wake up your face. Practice smiling by “over-smiling” a few times until your facial muscles are stretched and relaxed.

Tip 9—Take a throat lozenge before you speak if your throat feels dry. Avoid mentholated drops as they can dry out your throat.

Tip 10—Breathe deeply while you speak. This fills the lungs and gives your voice a fuller and richer quality.

Tip 11—Don’t clear your throat. Take a deep breath, yawn, or drink a sip of water instead.

Tip 12—Stand up straight while talking. It’s easier to breathe and your lungs fill with more air.

CHAPTER 18 IN THE REARVIEW MIRROR

1. Have you ever stayed up all night? How did you feel the next day?

2. How can “resting up” enable you to be at your best?
Chapter 19
NAIL IT

Jason White, University of Oklahoma quarterback, won the Heisman Trophy in 2003. The Heisman is college football’s most coveted annual award. Considered injury prone, Jason went undrafted by the National Football League after graduating in 2004. Undeterred, he sought opportunities to try out with NFL teams like the Kansas City Chiefs. When asked about his chances of making the team, White said: “All I can do is the best that I can do. I’m going to give it my best shot and see where it goes from here.”

Participating in the Speakers Tournament is a lot safer than playing in the NFL but it’s still an opportunity for you to do your best. So give it your best shot and see what happens. In fact, that’s all you can do. The judges are the ones who will add up the scores and determine a winner so you’d might as well relax and give it your best.

The Speakers Tournament is a contest but it’s not just a contest. I look at it like I do sharing my faith with someone. I’m supposed to witness to others but God never told me to worry about the results. The results are up to Him and the people I witness to. My responsibility is to share my faith but the results are always up to Him.

So give the Speakers Tournament your best shot and don’t worry about the judges or the scores. The only way you can impact the outcome is by giving the best speech you can. Even if you don’t get the highest score, you’re still a winner. Darrell Kent, winner of the 2005 Alabama Speaker’s Tournament, said of his experience: “I got a greater understanding of the Bible and I know I can stand up in front of 250-300 people and be comfortable with it.”1

And don’t underestimate the fact that the Speakers Tournament prepares you for life. No matter what profession you choose, you will have thousands of opportunities to speak throughout the rest of your life. The more skilled and confident you are when you speak, the greater the impact you will have on others. That means not only are you a winner, so are the people who will have an opportunity to hear you. So go for it, give it your best shot, and leave the results up to your Heavenly Father.
1. What two persons are most responsible for how well you do in the Speakers Tournament?

2. Is there lasting value to your participation in the Speakers Tournament? What is it?
**Chapter 20**

**BE THANKFUL**

Divine appointments are opportunities that God schedules to bring believers into contact with other people to accomplish His purposes. They may or may not show up on your PDA or the calendar on your cell phone but they are still appointments. I first learned about divine appointments when I was in college. That’s when I began to realize that nothing happens by chance. God is always at work creating opportunities for our good and the good of others.

Giving a speech during the Speakers Tournament is such an opportunity. You may not realize it but God knew long ago that you would be giving the speech you’re giving and He has brought people to hear it who will be blessed by it. No matter how often you give your speech, you have an opportunity to impact people’s lives. You may even have an opportunity to change the lives of some. Be sure and thank God every time you speak.

The following story was sent to me by a Speakers Tournament participant. I think it expresses the value of divine appointments and why we should be grateful for them, so I’ll let it speak for itself.

**Something to Think About**

One day, when I was a freshman in high school, I saw a kid from my class walking home from school. His name was Kyle. It looked like he was carrying all of his books. I thought to myself, “Why would anyone bring home all his books on a Friday? He must really be a nerd.”

I had quite a weekend planned (parties and a football game with my friends tomorrow afternoon), so I shrugged my shoulders and went on. As I was walking, I saw a bunch of kids running toward him. They ran at him, knocking all his books out of his arms and tripping him so he landed in the dirt. His glasses went flying, and I saw them land in the grass about ten feet from him.
He looked up and I saw this terrible sadness in his eyes. My heart went out to him so I jogged over to him and as he crawled around looking for his glasses, and I saw a tear in his eye.

As I handed him his glasses, I said, “Those guys are jerks. They really should get lives.”

He looked at me and said, “Hey thanks!” There was a big smile on his face. It was one of those smiles that showed real gratitude.

I helped him pick up his books, and asked him where he lived. As it turned out, he lived near me, so I asked him why I had never seen him before. He said he had gone to private school before now. I would have never hung out with a private school kid before.

We talked all the way home, and I carried some of his books. He turned out to be a pretty cool kid.

I asked him if he wanted to play a little football with my friends. He said yes. We hung out all weekend and the more I got to know Kyle, the more I liked him, and my friends thought the same of him.

Monday morning came, and there was Kyle with the huge stack of books again. I stopped him and said, “Boy, you are gonna build some really serious muscles with this pile of books every day!” He just laughed and handed me half the books.

Over the next four years Kyle and I became best friends.

When we were seniors we began to think about college. Kyle decided on Georgetown and I was going to Duke.

I knew that we would always be friends, that the miles would never be a problem. He was going to be a doctor. I was going for business on a football scholarship.

Kyle was valedictorian of our class. I teased him all the time about being a nerd. He had to prepare a speech for graduation. I was so glad it wasn’t me having to get up there and speak.

Kyle looked great on graduation day. He was one of those guys that really found himself during high school. He filled out and actually looked good in glasses.

He had more dates than I had and all the girls loved him. Boy, sometimes I was jealous! Today was one of those days.

I could see that he was nervous about his speech. So, I smacked him on the back and said, “Hey, big guy, you’ll be great!” He looked at me with one of those looks (the really grateful one) and smiled. “Thanks,” he said.

As he started his speech, he cleared his throat, and began.

“Graduation is a time to thank those who helped you make it through those tough years. Your parents, your teachers, your siblings, maybe a coach, but mostly..."
your friends... I am here to tell all of you that being a friend to someone is the best gift you can give them. I am going to tell you a story.”

I just looked at my friend with disbelief as he told the story of the first day we met. He had planned to kill himself over the weekend. He talked of how he had cleaned out his locker so his mom wouldn't have to do it later and was carrying his stuff home.

He looked hard at me and gave me a little smile.

“Thankfully, I was saved. My friend saved me from doing the unspeakable.”

I heard the gasp go through the crowd as this handsome, popular boy told us all about his weakest moment.

I saw his mom and dad looking at me and smiling that same grateful smile. Not until that moment did I realize its depth.

Never underestimate the power of your actions. With one small gesture you can change a person’s life, for better or for worse. God puts us all in each other’s lives to impact one another in some way. Don’t pass up the opportunities God gives you.
A Checklist for Youth Speakers

4-5 months before the church or associational tournament:

___ Determine my personal goal for the tournament
___ Choose a topic for my speech
___ Enlist a mentor
___ Begin (or continue) having a regular devotional “quiet time”

3-4 months before the church or associational tournament:

___ Get a copy of the rules and the schedule
___ Start developing my speech
___ Ask friends and family to pray for me the next several months

3 months before the church or associational tournament:

___ Notify my church and/or association that I intend to participate (if required where you live)
___ Get tournament dates and locations:
   • Church:
   • Association:
   • Region/District:
   • State:
___ Begin practicing my speech and getting feedback

2-3 months before the church or associational tournament:

___ Begin giving my speech before audiences and getting feedback
   • 7-8 times (Good)
   • 9-10 times (Better)
   • 11-12 times (Best)
   • 13-15 times (Outta sight)
Notes

Chapter 9
1Bert Decker and Hershael York, Speaking with Bold Assurance (Broadman and Holman, Copyright 2001 by Bold Assurance Ministries), pages 156-160.

Chapter 13
1Bert Decker, You’ve Got to Be Believed to Be Heard (St. Martin’s Press, Copyright 1992 by Bert Decker), page 88.

Chapter 16

Chapter 17

Chapter 19
1Copyrighted by Demopolis Times, June 2, 2005.