



# Chosen to Speak

## Chapter 1

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DAVE ARDEN

## Chapter 1: Jambalaya Lingo

People are not generally born with jumbled speaking patterns. Newborns communicate in many ways without even uttering a word. Cries for dinner and burps when full usually send a clear and true message.

But then something goes haywire.

Somewhere on the way the tongue is tied into knots of nots. As in, others are **knot** understanding. Others are **knot** on the same page. Communication is fractured and breaks down as the words do **knot** make sense.

*Welcome to my jungle.*

Tongue tied.

Stutterers are us...us...us.

The plane. Lands. In the water.

I don't remember how old I was when I recognized that I had a problem speaking. But over time I realized that my spoken words were not rolling out smoothly like icing on a velvet cake. Rather, my words came flying often like a haphazard pepper spray.

"Can you repeat that?"

"Pardon me?"

"Say what?"

I've heard it not once, not a hundred times, but thousands of times. On average, it's about 3 times a week. Sometimes I hear it 2 or 3 times a day.

**Good first impressions are difficult to make when people struggle to understand.** Relationships are weakened when there are communication gaps. Sharing and revealing our feelings is what helps us to grow in intimacy. Yet how can we communicate the innermost feelings of our hearts when we are held hostage by the tyranny of our tongue?

## **The Opportunity Behind the Torqued Tongue**

By God's grace, however, I've learned to survive and to override these heartaches. I have developed a way to connect with people and thrive relationally as "utterly" flawed as I have been. Weaknesses are part of what it means to be human and helping people to excel past them has become The Great Opportunity to serve others and give true support.

**More than just overcoming these speaking hurdles, this story is about the struggle to build character, to renovate our attitudes, to inspire vision, and to make an impact despite such flaws.** More than just developing the speaker, the vision is to develop the leader who speaks.

The choice is straight-up: To maintain the status quo or to face the hurdles and work to overcome them. Stay the same or move forward.

The challenges of public speaking have been long been regarded as mankind's greatest fear. Getting in front of people to speak at a wedding, or at a gathering, or give a basic business presentation is an obstacle for many that is too high to climb.

Getting out in front of others is a test of character. Every hesitation is exposed out before the glaring eye of the listener.

Are you deterred from sharing your dreams and visions this way?

Are you going to allow these snags to continue to sag your goals?

Or, are you ready for a change?

Do. Not. Stop. Reading. Now.

## **Lad on the Launch Pad**

The problems communicating with others started in my early childhood. Multiple ear infections led to a specialist putting drainage tubes in my ears.

When the ears are infected and inflamed, sounds arrive as if one were hearing under water.

So then I needed speech therapy in early childhood as well. The humbling reality is that *'The Struggle'* has been a part of the story from the very beginning.

Solid speaking truly comes as the result of solid listening.

I was under water in more ways than one.

Searching upward for air.

### **The Rambling Youth Becomes a Rambling Man**

The struggle is to mumble.

And to mumble is to stumble.

That is, the mouth is prone to garble and to ramble.

*Have you mangled your words so badly that instead of "sticking the landing" (like the elegant gymnast coming off the parallel bars), the "landing" sticks you?*

The origin of the word "garble" refers to a type of sieve that was used to sift spices centuries ago. The idea of "garbling" is that words are being sifted out as through a strainer/sieve so that the listener has to piece back together or to rearrange the order for the words to make sense. The word "garbling" even sounds like what it is.

Broken words lead to broken conversations.

Jumbled conversations lead to jumbled relationships.

Conversely, vivid and impactful words create the kind of word portraits that motivate, inspire, and challenge.

### **Will Speak for Food**

At 24 years of age I stepped up to the platform seeking to acquire my first position as a pastor in a small church in Central Texas.

Sure, I had spoken publicly a few times at church before, but nothing quite prepared me for standing in front of a small church to speak—knowing that my future work with them somehow depended on it.

Just married two months earlier, I really needed a job to start providing for a family that I was just getting started.

*Will preach for food.*

Added to this, when I became nervous my rate of speech accelerated like putting gasoline to a blaze.

Step up to the platform and step into the future.

What followed next could only be called a “communi-catastrophe.”

Some people speak like silk or lift their words ever so smoothly like a flute.

Not me.

I sprayed out words for 35 minutes like a cock-eyed sprinkler head spattering a sputter of spew. The pace was particularly blistering.

*But there are no speed records or gold medals given in moments like these.*

After I spoke that morning, the pastor search team met up with my patient wife and me and responded to us.

They. Were. Not. Impressed.

“We understood about every third word,” one of the old guard said.

This is the like the golfer shanking the ball into the wrong fairway. He may eventually find the ball, **but the impact is lost.**

Nevertheless, by God’s grace the church did not have a lot of options back then, so they called me as their pastor anyway.

*Why would the Lord call somebody into speaking ministry who has so much trouble in this arena?*

Grace. (That’s for starters anyway.) Despite rattling tongues and brash fears, the good Lord gives grace over and over again.

**Chosen to Speak** is the reality that our calling is forged in fire.

*Call it Grace with a capital G.*

Undeserved favor and blessing.

Just like a good father wants to spend time with his children, so our Father likes to spend time with us.

It’s still a mystery really though—Jesus, could you just find somebody else?

This moment in the spotlight is what brings our spots to light.

**Keeping a positive voice matters** because this **voice of ours** is what **connects us to ourselves, to others around us, and even to our God.**

Finding and **sharing our voice is part of how we find our significance and find where we fit.** Try binding the hands of an expressive gentleman whose custom is communicating with vibrant body language. Try stifling the passionate lips that love to serenade a lover. Bind up the delicate fingers of the master flutist and watch those dynamic dreams diminish.

However, when we sit in the lap of a powerful Father who loves to dream, to create, nothing can slow us down.

Where we see limitations, faith sees opportunity.

### **“The Butt” of Being Poked Fun of**

Speech problems are difficult to hide.

There’s only so long you can make eye contact or show “body language” to somebody before having to actually speak.

People have responded to this over the years in a range of ways. On the lighter side, many have chosen to poke fun or even be playful. Usually, this comes in the form of a jesting, jovial type of “knock” at the speed of communication. I mean, there are some plus sides, right? For example, people are generally in a hurry to pray before they have dinner. So, it makes sense to ask the guy who speaks at the speed of sound to bless the food.

*Let’s dig in people.*

Others have just stared at me, and I’ve needed my daughter to translate. In 2018, I approached the counter server taking our order at Panera Bread and simply asked, “How’s-yer-day-goin?” (This came across as one word.)

The server just stared at me a minute and looked at my daughter for a reply. She had no idea what I just said. It’s that blank “deer in the headlights” look.

My daughter had to translate for me.

Yet for others, this is just the type of behavior they can pounce on.

Some have tried to fix me.

Others have tried to nix me.

And somewhere after hearing even the playful barbs a hundred times this ceases to become funny anymore. Rather, it stings and at times is hurtful.

Some people have even used this weakness and insecurity to malign me, discourage me, or undermine my leadership or my influence. Oh yes, I have had people “write me off for speaking” more times than I can count.

**And yet when other people write us off, I am encouraged that the story is not yet complete. By God’s grace, He has given us His Word to write upon our lives.** His last words about you have not yet been spoken.

A new chapter is about to be composed.

So, let’s be composed.

So that we can do some composing of our own.

Follow me?

### **The Plot Thickens**

Life became more complicated when Jesus revealed a call on my life to serve in leading and teaching a church flock.

What sense of humor does the Lord have calling someone into the speaking ministry and into teaching who really struggles to find rhythm?

To quote the leader of the Hebrews, Moses himself:

**Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue. (Exodus 4:10)**

In this study, we will be looking through the story of Moses’ early ministry to identify the Biblical pattern of principles for renovating our communication skills.

The theme verse of our **Ramblers United** organization is Exodus 4:11–12:

**The Lord said to him, “Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes him mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say.”**

### **Not Alone**

Another mystery to me is why the Lord does not snap his fingers or touch my tongue and instantaneously make me a “normal talker.”

Certainly that would *seem* to be the most natural approach—or at least the easiest. Yet, any radical cure bypasses the opportunity to grow in faith, in character, and in leadership.

Thank Heaven God has chosen to use others to come alongside my pathway. Integral to my “sub-story” and the main story of Moses is the support of coaches that the Lord brings along the path to move the speaker past the lifestyle of garbling.

**Two key mentors who came into my life both affirmed that it takes years to overcome speaking blockages.**

“It’s more difficult to change a speaking pattern than it is to quit smoking,” Coach Don Burns told me.

For this writer, it was the caring people in my life (family, mentors, coaches) that God used to help me turn the corner. The Lord gave me a mother who would love me unconditionally no matter what odd form of dialect or quirky language I expressed.

He gave me a wife and children who had to work extra hard to listen to me and translate words that often get spoken with a curveball type bent.

A key elder in our Arizona startup church named Terry Witte gave me consistent feedback to sharpen my language and the message. These were the people who were instrumental in helping me to face the pains and hurts of the undercurrents. I’ll share more about them later.

A local pastor allowed me to borrow his sanctuary to practice. Thanks, Andrew.

## **Facing the Struggle**

Facing the struggle was difficult. I had heard the complaints and the criticisms for many years—even decades. If I had a quarter for every time I received barbs over the years, I could take a great vacation somewhere—overseas even.

It was easier to deny that I had any big issue.

It was easier to “kick the can” down the road.

It was easier to ignore the obvious signs.

***Then. The time finally came for a true change.***

These positive influencers, Don and Terry, reached out to me and offered me hope. They offered me their unconditional support; they provided what no others had previously given—the vision of a different world for me to connect deeper in speaking and relationships. Just as importantly, the Lord used them to provide the onramp and pathway to get there.

Thereafter, by God’s grace, and through His Spirit, the changes gradually came. We spent several months working on slowing down the pace and interjecting more strategic pausing. More and more people responded positively.

“You don’t talk as funny as you used to,” a trusted friend told me in 2013.

During the two year period between 2013 and 2015 I heard more positive feedback than I had heard in the 17 years of previous teaching ministry.

The Lord used my new teaching approach to build faith and to influence others.

My only regret is that I waited so long to face this struggle.

*Could God be bringing this book into your life at just the right time to help you move past your fears and insecurities? Are there people in your life right now who will lovingly listen and help give you feedback?*

## What's the Win?

What's the Win?

Literally, what are the best objectives to accomplish?

**For starters, the Win is to overcome the speaking obstacles that can be changed and accept those speaking limitations that cannot be altered.**

Discernment is vital in knowing how best to move forward. This book contains no magic, nor is this a “quick fix” to addressing the deep waters that influence speaking. However, the goal is to put you into a position to speak during a wedding or funeral. This could also be a testimony at your church. For the future business leader, the win is to give a short sales presentation with confidence. **The main objective is to get a win under your belt** and STEP UP with the confidence to move forward.

Along this journey, there will be some “character tests” and “leadership tests” that will come to frustrate and greatly annoy “the Rambler” in you. In order to learn from these barriers it is imperative that the student work through these obstacles. The ultimate win is to develop and to mature past them. In following this journey, our prayer is that your leadership will deepen and grow stronger.

**Another win is to develop the friends and relationships along the way that will help you grow and thrive.** My prayer is that you'll connect more deeply with others and even connect deeper with God.

The Lord already knows your sputtering speaking practices. Nevertheless, He still cares about you immensely. I care greatly too. I have been there. I know how these struggles undermine confidence.

**Along this pathway, another Win is to give you the vision to articulate to others how you can bring freedom to the brokenness in your own community.** Walking alongside Moses—who encountered great obstacles in freeing a nation—we experience our own burden to overcome the “local bondage” in our own cities. We will go into this concept in later chapters.

What is difficult to measure right now is this: The more you expand your speaking influence, the greater the impact that is made to those lives around you. The smooth rock you throw in the wide lake will ripple out through the years.

### **Communication and Fulfillment**

The goal of growing in communication is not merely to better connect with others, but in so doing to deepen relationships, belonging, and fulfillment.

The stronger the communication  
the stronger the relationship  
and the deeper the fulfillment.

For so many years I struggled for intimacy (with God and others) and therefore struggled to overcome aloneness and find the deep waters of fulfilling relationships.

There's been no greater joy and contentment than to rest in the abiding love of Christ.

Jesus put it this way:

**These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full. (John 15:11)**

This love and joy comes from close relationships. And, when there are close relationships, there is potential to create meaningful and constructive life changes. That's powerful, my soon-to-be-transformed reader!!

### **When You're Ready for a Change**

Do you struggle with confidence in speaking to groups?

Have you been rambling through life without clear goals and direction?

Do you verbally or emotionally struggle to find your rhythm?

Do you struggle to live out the dreams God has called you to because of chronic limitations or communication obstacles?

*Do you bury your feelings deep enough that a treasure hunter would be baffled?*

*Does your community need a strong advocate and a voice for change?*

**If you answered yes to any of these questions, this book is for you.**

Opening up our hearts to the truth about who we are inside may sound like a dangerous plan, but it is far more dangerous to ignore these signs and minimize the struggles we face.

Change can happen, by Faith. Faith changes things. His Spirit draws near.

**For nothing will be impossible with God. (Luke 1:37)**

The cost of maintaining the status quo is also incredibly high. Camping long term in a cone of silent isolation keeps us from being fruitful and influencing others. One day we will “wake up” ten years from now and find we have not moved an inch.

It does not always have to be this way.

I believe in you. I really **do**.

It's time to move ahead. This is the very day to start fresh.

Let.

This.

Be.

Just.

The.

Beginning.

**Practical Notes:**

Each chapter in this book will close with some coaching questions. If you want to move forward and walk through the process of strengthening skills, you will need a coach, mentor or friend to help ask key questions.

**Questions for this session:**

(To be shared with a coach or a friend.)

- I. What positives did you find in this chapter? What challenged you?
- II. What struggles have you faced in the past when speaking in public?
- III. What will motivate you to push forward even when this journey gets difficult?
- IV. What is the “Win” to keep moving forward to gain confidence in speaking? (Examples: give a business presentation, speak at a wedding/funeral, strengthen your ability to teach, teach a Bible study, sing in public.)
- V. What are your strengths right now as a public speaker?
- VI. What weaknesses and growth opportunities do you have as a speaker?
- VII. How would you define a “leader”, and what dreams could you fulfill with a stronger voice?

**Speaking Exercise:**

What’s your name and why are you interested in Ramblers United?

Confidence assertion (speak to yourself):

*“Though I struggle to be heard and to be understood, my life has purpose. I am not on this earth by accident but have been given a higher purpose. My life has value in spite of those who have criticized me or undermined me. The Hand of the Heavenly Father is not finished with me yet.”*

Paul puts it this way:

**[M]y message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. (1 Corinthians 2:3–4)**

**Disclaimer: What if I have learning disabilities?**

Extra special attention and guidance needs to be part of preparation for anyone with learning disabilities. If you struggle to communicate basic words, extra guidance is going to be necessary. There are some difficult scenarios this book will not address.

# Thank you for reading!

**For more information about Chosen to Speak, visit:**

<https://speak.ramblersu.org>

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