The moisture on the palms of my hands and the uneasy feeling in my stomach started to be noticeable as I took my seat in the fourth row. This was speech class, a required course for my major, but one I had dreaded having to take. I had never felt comfortable speaking in front of a group of people although it was required in several of my high school classes.

Soon it was my turn to stand and move to the podium for my 5-minute speech. As I organized my note cards, my hands shook nervously and I felt the blood rush to my face. Somehow I was able to locate the card for my introductory comments, but I suddenly had to swallow just as I began to talk, causing an awkward pause. At 2 minutes and 47 seconds I found myself holding my last note card and realized I had not prepared enough material. I lowered my head and avoided eye contact with everyone in the room as I returned to my seat. At that moment a career path involving public speaking would have seemed totally absurd.

Romans 1:20 is a Bible verse about the natural wonders of the world giving evidence of God’s existence. The presence of God is also demonstrated by changes in people who have a personal relationship with Him. My ability to speak in front of a large group of people is a very real evidence of God’s work in my life.

Not long after the events that took place during my third year of college (see CFF faculty materials at http://cff.uga.edu) my home church had a lay-witness revival. This was a weekend series of activities and church meetings led by a group of people from around the state who were not clergy. The coordinator was a hospital administrator and he volunteered his time to schedule revival activities. I got to know him during some lunch table conversation, and he invited me to participate in an upcoming revival at another church. I told him I would without thinking about what might be involved.

A couple of weeks later I arrived at the church where the revival was being held beginning on a Friday evening. To my surprise my name was on the program to speak the next night along with several other members of the revival team. After spending the next 24 hours being increasingly anxious about what I would say, I came to the Saturday service feeling very unprepared. When the time came for me to speak I just talked about my spiritual journey and how God had used the influence of a fellow student to help me better understand how a Christian should live.

Wondering what happened to my fear of speaking in front of a group? I was still nervous when I stood up to speak, but a few sentences into my talk that feeling went away. Over the next several years I participated in several lay-witness revivals, each time becoming more and more at ease in speaking before a group.

Some might say that these changes in public speaking ability were a natural result of experience. In part, that is true, but in my case God gets the credit on two fronts. I would never have willingly placed myself in a situation requiring public speaking were it not for the influence of my Christian faith. I also know without a doubt that God’s calming influence and guidance was an important part of my growing confidence.
Many years have passed since I participated in those lay-witness revivals. As a university professor my work now includes daily situations where speaking and communicating effectively is an essential part of my job. In addition, several of the courses I teach include content related to public speaking, verbal and non-verbal communications, and interpersonal dynamics. Almost everything I do is affected by God’s influence on how I learned to handle the stress of public speaking.

Over the years I have worked with literally hundreds of students to help them improve communications skills. Listed below are some key concepts from classes and workshops I have conducted related to public speaking.

**Tips for Public Speaking**
1. Do not begin with an apology. Even if some type of problem has interfered with preparations, most people will never know if you don’t tell them.
2. Avoid using repeated words or sounds like uh, um, indeed, or like. Listen to a recording of yourself to determine whether this is a problem.
3. Don’t read materials word for word from your notes, PowerPoint slides, or from any other source. Speak naturally.
4. Maintain eye contact with your audience. Don’t overlook anyone. If a teacher, manager, or other person in authority is in the room, avoid directing your public speaking just to that person.
5. Body piercings and tattoos convey a negative message to some people but few will acknowledge this unless asked. Remove or cover them to avoid being disadvantaged.
6. Avoid pacing back and forth, having hands in pockets, fidgeting with keys or a pen, or any other activity that is distracting to your audience.
7. If PowerPoint or visuals are used, avoid talking while looking back at a screen or marker board. Always face your audience when speaking.

**Tips for PowerPoint Materials**
1. Keep your message simple. Your slides should provide key points rather than a complete transcript of a talk that will be supported by the PowerPoint slides.
2. Maximum of seven sentences per slide.
3. Limit of seven words per sentence.
4. Use upper and lower case letters. All-caps is more difficult to read.
5. Multiple lines of text should be flush-left – not centered. Reserve centering for titles, headings, or lists of major topics. Text boxes with verses of music or poetry can be moved to screen center for effect, but lines should remain flush-left within the text box for legibility.
6. Italicized lettering is difficult to read; limit use of italics.
7. Use no more than three letter sizes or fonts per slide. Use these selected sizes and fonts throughout the presentation.
8. Use care to select high contrast between colored text and background. Avoid red on blue color combinations, especially red letters on blue backgrounds.
9. Limit use of punctuation. Do not put periods at the end of bullets.

These are practical tips for making an effective presentation. If confidence is a problem, however, there might be a larger issue involved. The answer I found can work for you too. Think about it.