



Conquering the Shy Chromosome

Jim Elliff

Like it or not, much of church life and our impact on society depends on conversation. Do you do much of that? It is the responsibility of everybody in the church—including the shy people.

There may be a shy chromosome in the genes somewhere, but if it excuses us so that we become preoccupied with ourselves and with people's perception of us, it is a natural characteristic gone awry. We've crossed the line into that selfishness God abhors. If shyness can be said to be inherited, unfriendliness certainly is not. Unfriendliness is a choice—a refusal to make the efforts demanded by love.

I once spoke at a church for three Sundays consecutively. For the first two Sundays I did my best to engage individual teenagers in conversation. There were thirty of them. Not one of them would even say "hello." On the last Sunday I put a \$20 bill in my pocket in order to give it to the first one who would respond with an audible expression resembling a human response to a greeting. I don't think they were mad at me; they were just focused on themselves. Sadly, I had to keep my \$20.

Excuse my forwardness (forwardness may be in my genes), but preoccupation with ourselves is what the Bible calls sin. God is forever attacking it, even in the majority of us who think we have a genetic excuse for keeping to ourselves.

Some think that making conscious efforts at conversing is artificial. But premeditating in order to make yourself act does not make an act artificial. Rather, it may mean that you are being *more* than usually thoughtful of others.

"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit," said the apostle Paul, "but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phil 2:3-4). Is Paul speaking to *you*?

Even a shy person indwelt with the Spirit of God can make the choice to be considerate through conversation. Here are a few suggestions. After awhile these actions may become second nature:

- Acknowledge every person crossing your path, if possible. Don't slither by people with your head down on the way to your personal pew—that "haven of rest."
- Focus your eyes on the one you are talking with and *concentrate* on what he or she is saying.
- Remember names. Later, jot them down on a card or small notebook so that you will not forget them. Using their name in the conversation after first hearing it will help.

- Ask thoughtful questions.
- *Enjoy* the other person. People are interesting!
- Uncover the person's true interests. Everybody knows something better than you do.
- Seek to help the person expand his or her world. "Have you ever thought about . . .?"
- Smile. This is the default position of the believer.
- Listen with energy that shows in your posture, and your face.
- Improve word choices. Learn new words; it will make conversation easier and more enticing.
- Practice good manners such as refusing to interrupt, properly introducing new people into the conversation, being sensitive to others waiting, etc.
- Stay focused and *never* stare at the floor. That says, "This floor is more interesting than you are!" (Don't do that in church meetings either!)
- Venture out and arrange for additional opportunities to converse—a priority God promotes.

The above is not exhaustive, but it may get you started. I knew someone who carried around a list of engaging questions to stimulate conversation. On the sly, she would skim over them. It was an act of love of the highest sort. She really wanted to serve people and I respect her for it. She was a naturally reserved woman who was determined not to hide behind her shy chromosome. It worked.

Finally, don't ever become one of those persons who grunts, "I'll be friendly when people start talking to *me*." Don't love people "if;" love people "regardless!"

Now—the test! The next time you gather as a church, *resolve* that you will show love to others by engaging several people in conversation. Move around. Don't sit down until you have to. Seek out people to talk with.

A good place to start is with those who are just like you used to be—the ones sitting there waiting for friendliness to "happen."

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