

Conversation: Make It Better for Christ

By Jim Elliff



Good conversation went fugitive with the invasion of electronic media. Yet you long for it, and so do those in your circle of acquaintances. Believers in Christ ought to be excellent at it. Even our non-believing friends ought to leave us saying, “That was the best conversation I’ve had for months.”

There is an art to develop in conversation, granted, but we should be committed to the process. In my view, it is attainable by any of us.

Hint: Self-consciousness works against good conversation. There are two types — self awareness of your inadequacy and self-consciousness of your adequacy. Both work against the goal. Keep your focus on the other person as you talk to each other. Look at him or her, probe for insight (there is a perspective inside that person that you need to reflect on, even if it seems unwise), reach into their mind, imagination, and experience out of genuine interest. Be persistent to find out how this person thinks, feels, experiences, hopes. Conversation is an adventure in knowledge acquisition. And if you grow in that, you are going to have to make the conversation about the other person most of the time, and not about you.

I like what I have to say. That’s a problem, but I’m speaking truthfully. I’ve thought deeply about many things and I am sometimes enamored with sharing what I know. But this is not only prideful, it is also yet another way to beat down healthy conversation. It will come soon enough that I’m able to say some important things if I put others first. Conversation is a two-way avenue after all. But I don’t deserve to say much if I’m all about me.

A conversation isn’t a speech. I should relate what I know or feel in conversations, but they are not monologues. We don’t accomplish some sort of “coup” when we talk a lot. Chances are that we lessen our potency, even if we are loaded with remarkable things to say. My experience in better conversation shows that genuine interest in

the other person opens the ears and piques the interest of the other person, so that when appropriate he proceeds to open the doors of my mind as well, seeking my understanding and experience. Begin with listening as a rule. Your artful questioning and interest makes both sides of the conversation more possible.

There are no absolutes for perfect conversation. It may be that you talk more on some occasions than I have indicated above, and appropriately so, if you are being approached about your views. But our default should be in reverse of this and it should be as genuine as possible. That genuineness is read by those you converse with as a kind of respect and valuing of your conversation partner. Sometimes, it is an all-too-rare experience for that person so that your interest takes the person by surprise. I still remember one conversation I had at a restaurant in DC with a relative I hardly knew. What I thought would be a strain, turned out to be one of the all-time best conversations I’ve had. And, he was the one questioning me about my life, philosophy, and interests. He was artful, and I was caught off guard, in a very pleasant way. We should be thrilled to provide interest in others as selfless believers.

Finally, here’s the motto for good conversationalists (which is more than a motto, but a true command): “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others” (Philippians 2:3-4).

Good Conversation NOW!

It is a rare thing when there is no opportunity for conversation. If I’m right, then the above thoughts can be implemented right now. It’s true. I hope you will not let anything stop you from developing your conversation skills for the glory of Christ immediately, whatever the seeming boundaries to your opportunities. I’m not sure I have ever known a time like ours when conversation is so badly needed. Please . . . do something about filling the vacuum.

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