

The Best Conversation I Ever Had

By Jim Elliff



I am surprised that after so many decades I still remember one remarkable conversation as the best I've ever had outside of my immediate family. I've often reflected on it with amazement.

A cousin by marriage met me in a restaurant in a suburb outside of Washington, D.C. I didn't know him well. Since I was in the area speaking and he had begun a Christian counseling ministry in the suburbs close by, I contacted him to see if we could meet. He was likely ten or so years my senior and was married to a favorite older cousin that I knew better as a young child before she married. My encounter may well have been the last time I saw him.

This was many years ago, yet my opinion about that conversation has not changed over all those years.

I don't mean that the content of this conversation was the most life-changing, the most challenging, the most corrective, or the most instructive. I would put others into those categories. About all I can say is that it has for these many years seemed to me to be the best conversation I have ever had. It has for almost all of my adult life epitomized what a good conversation should be like.

Here's a surprising fact about it — I don't remember even one thing that was said!

Here is what I do recall:

First, my conversation partner was **mentally present**. That is, he was fully engaged with the conversation. He wasn't looking at a phone or looking around at the people walking by, or thinking about two things at once. This in turn caused me to act the same.

Second, he **listened with his whole person**. Something more than ears are at work in a great conversation. He moved his chair squarely toward me, and looked straight at me. He talked to me like this was all that mattered. He also nodded and commented all along to indicate he was taking it in. I naturally did the same at his lead.

Third, the conversation, as far as he was concerned, was mainly **aimed toward me**. He seemed to genuinely be more concerned to find out my thoughts than to make his known. That's rare. It was so appealing that I copied his style and volleyed back some questions in kind.

Fourth, he **asked thoughtful personal questions**. They must not have been the quickly answered type because he had me pondering the question, responding more carefully than normal. Because I sensed that he cared about my answers to his questions, I found it comfortable to respond.

Fifth, the conversation was mostly **about how I felt about this or that, or what my philosophy was about various matters**. He wanted to know perspectives and emotions. And he kept probing to dig more deeply into my views. How could I not reciprocate?

Does being a good conversationalist matter?

Oh yes! Talk is so important for Christians.

Many people never have a good conversation with anyone, including their family. Believers ought to master this skill because we have the greatest subject to converse about. God can use us if we are poor conversationalists, and he always has to overcome our inadequacies, but we should still aspire and learn how to become better communicators. Words will always be important and they are what the Spirit most often uses to reach the hearts of others.