

A walk with Mr O (26)

3-G conversation

Mr O, what's the secret of a good conversation?

That's a stimulating question. Thank you. But what lies behind it?

I've been watching you. People seem to enjoy talking to you, don't they?

I'd like to think so. But that hasn't always been the case. If Doll, my late wife, were here, she would tell you that I'm actually quite shy. Years ago, I think, most people would have found me quite awkward.

So when did things change? And what made the difference?

I was browsing in the self-help section of a bookshop and came across a book which devoted four pages to what it called 'The 3-G Method'. I didn't enjoy the self-satisfied tone of the book, but those four pages transformed my whole approach to conversation.

I'm intrigued. Go on, please tell me more.

The book claimed that every worthwhile conversation contains three ingredients. To me, those three ingredients seemed quite biblical. And so now, in every conversation, short or long, I make a conscious effort to include them. I find that having a definite purpose makes conversation easier.

The first ingredient is **gratitude**. The Bible repeatedly tells us to be thankful. First of all, obviously, we should be thankful to God. But why not also express our thanks to those who are made in His image? Every person we meet enriches us in some way. In every conversation, then, I look for something to say 'thank you' for.

Okay, but what happens when there isn't anything?

Well, as the conversation ends, I simply say, 'Thanks for the chat!'

The second ingredient is **good will**. As I understand the Scriptures, the words I speak must be for the glory of God and also for the good of the person I'm speaking to. My mouth does not exist for me. It's God's gift to me for the benefit of others. Self-promoting speech is, frankly, ungodly.

Can you flesh this out for me, Mr O? What does that mean in practice?

We never leave people as we find them. We do them good or we do them harm. There is no neutrality. Our tone, therefore, our facial expressions, the things that we say and how we say them – everything about our speech must convince our hearers that we wish them well.

You're not saying, are you, that we only tell people what they want to hear?

Not at all! As Christians, we will often have to tell people things that they definitely don't want to hear! But we must do it in a way which reveals that we are for them, and not against them. We want the best for them. So we are kind, but not patronising or superior. We listen patiently. We don't interrupt. We're not rude or ill-mannered.

Most of our conversations, however, aren't confrontations. If people are excited about something, we wish them joy. If they are afraid, or worried, we show our concern and promise to pray for them. If they need help, we try to give it. We set out to be like Jesus. Whatever their attitude to us may be, we are their friends.

That is very helpful, Mr O. So in this '3-G Method', what is the third ingredient?

It is **good wishes**. The way we end a conversation is very important. Our last words ring in people's ears as they walk away. 'Have a good day' or 'Enjoy your afternoon' are all right, but they don't mean very much. Most of the time we can do better than that.

What do you suggest, then?

I think it's best to say something that fits in with our previous conversation. If we have really put ourselves in other people's shoes it is not usually that hard to come up with something appropriate. It just needs to be simple and sincere. 'Bye – I'll be thinking of you when'. 'Remember, give me a bell if I can help with' 'I'll be praying for you'. 'God bless you'.

For myself, I usually just say, 'I wish you well' – which is what I'm saying to you right now!

698 words.