



A Conversation with an Angel: A Parable for Today's Time

Jan Cooper

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A Conversation with an Angel is a compelling Christian novel in which a young boy is guided toward his destiny.

In Jan Cooper's insightful Christian novel *A Conversation with an Angel*, a man who had a lonely childhood discovers God's purpose for him.

Winston is sensitive and is raised in a military family. He is overweight, poor at sports, and lags in his studies. He comes to feel that he's always on "the wrong side." Having traveled a lot with his family, he's seen that he's not the only one who is unhappy—people all over the world are suffering.

In his despair, Winston asks the God whom he's not sure exists to send him a sign to let the world know that God's there. God dispatches an angel to help Winston. On his way to Earth, the angel is also overwhelmed by the suffering of the planet. When the bubblegum-chewing, yo-yo-swinging spirit arrives, he introduces himself as the boy's guardian angel, Winston responds with, "Nice to meet you. I'm the Boy Wonder, able to leap tall bubblegum-faced lunatics in a single bound!" Thus begins a tight relationship between a boy who was losing faith, and the angel tasked with guiding him.

Winston's drive to succeed pairs with his preconceived notions of what it means to be a man to almost consume him, but his sporadic encounters with the angel prick his conscience and keep him more or less on track. Still, Winston's greatest transformation occurs later, through a conflict with his son, Michael, an artist who resists his father's attempts to dissuade him from his chosen career. Their pointed conversations make the tension palpable: Michael unleashes his repressed hurt and anger against his father, and Winston counters with forceful diatribes against art as a career and the stereotypical character defects of artists.

Elsewhere, characters' exchanges are more incisive. Some are witty or humorous, helping the narrative to rise and fall. Selective word choices and a consistent cadence reflect the natures and emotional states of each character well, even divine ones: God calls the angel, in tears over the pain of the world, "wet-cheeked one," revealing, in a few words, something of both of their natures.

The parable itself is focused on human empowerment through alignment with God's purpose. It works toward an unexpected, tragic, and satisfying conclusion. It also assumes a philosophical tone when revealing the power of questions to keep the mind open and flexible: Winston recognizes the harm in making judgmental statements, and notes that "if we ask questions of each other, we have to talk, interact. You can't question someone and make war on him at the same time."

The parable is sandwiched between an introduction suggesting that it mirrors Cooper's own coming to faith in Jesus and two humorous final sections—one reversing word spellings to reveal different meanings, and another likening various types of Christians to different bird species. These extra portions of the book, which are filled with exhortations, Bible verses, and the excessive use of all caps, are at odds with the elegance of the parable itself,

though. Errors in punctuation, spelling, and word usage further mar the text.

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KRISTINE MORRIS (September 14, 2021)

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