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Staying in Community When You Are an Introvert

How can you connect with others
when you'd rather be alone?





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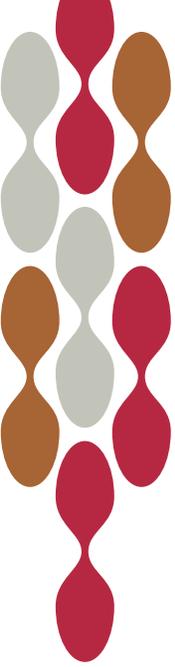


Community the Introvert Way

By JoHannah Reardon

I am an introvert who has been involved in church leadership for decades. My first foray into ministry was on the full-time staff of a campus ministry. When I joined that staff, they put me through a rigorous personality test that revealed to me for the first time how I am wired. It showed strongly that I most like working with ideas, followed by working with my hands, and that I liked working with people the least.

I was alarmed by this and asked the psychologist who was running the tests if I should be entering full-time ministry. He reassured me that I should, but that I had to remember to make time for ideas and working with my



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hands, or I would be constantly frustrated and exhausted. This was the best possible advice he could have given me. Over the years when I've felt too exhausted to meet with one more person, I'd realize that I had to schedule time to just read and write, or to take time to work on a household project. Those things saved me in full-time ministry.

However, the longer I stayed in ministry, the more being with people took a toll on me. I began to retreat and look for ways to get out of things. I needed to be reminded that good things happen in community that cannot happen in isolation. That's what this download hopes to help you with—creating community when you don't necessarily feel like it—and doing it in such a way that it fits your introverted personality.

I've written the first article that gives practical ideas for practicing hospitality (necessary in any ministry) when you'd rather be alone. Holly Vicente Robaina helps us see that Christian community provides protection from spiritual attack and sluggishness. Amy Simpson insists that God has equipped and prepared us for what he wants us to do. Randall Neighbour gives practical ways to get talkative people to remain quiet and quiet people to talk. And Jim Burns helps us to simply celebrate the introvert.

Blessings,

JoHannah Reardon

Contributing Editor for GIFTEDFORLEADERSHIP.COM

Leader's Guide

How to use this download for a group study



This download can be used for individual or group study. If you intend to lead a group study, some simple suggestions follow.

- 1. Make enough copies for everyone in the group to have her own guide.**
- 2. Depending on the time you have dedicated to the study, you might consider distributing the guides before your group meets so everyone has a chance to read the material. Some articles are quite long and could take a while to get through.**
- 3. Alternately, you might consider reading the articles together as a group—out loud—and plan on meeting multiple times.**
- 4. Make sure your group agrees to complete confidentiality. This is essential to getting women to open up.**
- 5. When working through the Reflect questions, be willing to make yourself vulnerable. It's important for women to know that others share their experiences. Make honesty and openness a priority in your group.**
- 6. End the session in prayer.**

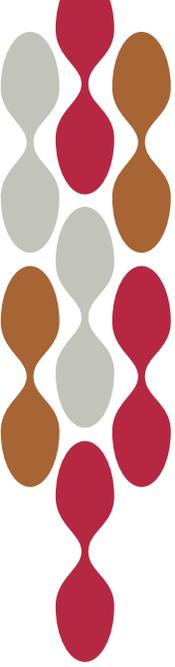
Hospitality for Introverts



How can you practice hospitality when you'd rather be alone?

By JoHannah Reardon

I don't have the gift of hospitality. I first truly understood that when I was at my friend Mary's house, along with a woman who was in campus ministry. This woman told us of an Indian student who needed housing. As she was telling us this girl's situation, I was saying to God, *I don't want to have her live with us, but if that's what you want, I'm listening.* But every fiber of my body was resisting the idea. Before she could even finish telling us about her, Mary said, "We'll take her. We'd love to have her!" In that moment I realized what the gift of hospitality is—unreserved delight in having people in your home.



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Not only do I not have the gift of hospitality, but I'm an introvert. The one thing I could not live without is alone time. Whenever such time is crowded out of my life, I feel like I'm being crushed in a vice, with so much pressure that I'm going to crack.

Extroverts may struggle with things like keeping their house clean and fixing eatable meals as they consider hospitality, but they will often find ways to overcome that because they want to be with people. In fact, they are so motivated that they are probably practicing hospitality naturally as they go about their days.

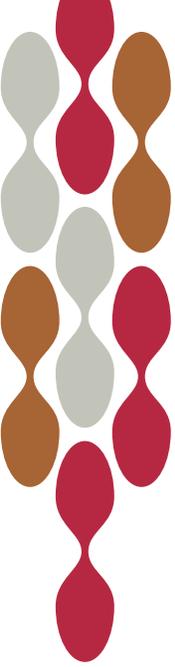
We introverts, on the other hand, usually look for ways to avoid people. We're the kind who look the other way when we see someone we know in the grocery store because it means we'll have to talk to them. Most of us are content with having just a few friends around us, but we certainly don't enjoy going out of our way to meet new people and invite them into our living space.

But I am committed to God's people and very involved in my church, so I can't ignore verses, such as **Romans 12:13**, which clearly tell us to practice hospitality. I sincerely want to be hospitable.

I've given this quite a bit of thought and come to terms with the command and my personality. So for those of you who belong to the introvert camp, I have some wisdom to share.

Concentrate on reaching out to one or two people, rather than feeling like you continually have to make new contacts.

We have a three-minute rule at our church. The first three minutes after the service, members are encouraged to meet someone new. Although I understand the importance of such a rule, it strikes terror in my heart. As the service comes to an end, I feel anxious and tense as I feel the pressure to meet someone new. So I've decided to tweak the three-minute rule and develop a



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relationship with someone new rather than simply saying hi each week to a different person. After each service, there are several new people I try to consistently talk to.

My friend Lenny takes it a step further. He always finds someone to mentor during the first service and then they together attend the second service. He concentrates on only one person at a time, but gives a great deal of input into their lives.

My friend Jane is an introvert, but she has a heart for international students. She and her husband have extra bedrooms now, so they've had exchange students live with them and have international students from the local university over for holidays. She finds this kind of hospitality fulfilling and worth the effort and likes the smaller nature of it, rather than bigger gatherings.

Set boundaries, such as making a clear ending time to the gathering before it starts.

One of the problems I have with inviting people into my home is the open-endedness of it. If I have a Bible study or a party in my home, there are always those who want to linger way past my comfort level. So for Bible studies, my husband and I set a clear ending time before it even starts. We explain that we both are early risers and need to keep the study within the time frame for our own health. Of course, there are rare occasions when we need to break that rule, but it helps to have it up front.

If we're having a party, we also let people know the ending time. We'll say, "We'd love to have you come over for dinner and some games from six to nine." That way, they know right away what we are expecting.

Because we've opened our home a lot, I've become pretty honest with some of my extrovert friends about my need for an



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ending time. I've politely told some of them that I have to have an hour before bedtime to wind down. So for those who stay longer than I'd like, I say, "It's been lovely, but I've got to get some rest."

For a larger gathering, ask an extrovert to co-host it with you.

This works really well for me. A friend and I have become the people who give wedding and baby showers for our friends. And I love that role because it's such a fun, joyous time. But the reason I love it is because she's an extrovert and takes care of the part that's stressful for me. I like planning a devotional, ordering the cake, and picking out cute paper plates. She takes care of all the invitations and working out the dates, in other words, all the people part of it.

So hospitality is not just for the people person. It's even for those of us who would prefer to be alone. We just have to find a hospitality fit that works for us. Because although solitude is a great spiritual discipline, so is hospitality.

JoHannah Reardon, a GFL contributing editor, is the author of two devotionals and seven fictional books, which can be found at johannahreardon.com. This article was first published on TODAYSCHRISTIANWOMAN.COM.



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Reflect

- *If you are a ministry leader, how can you make your introverted tendencies work for you rather than against you? Do you need to work with just a few people who will work with the larger group? If so, how could you implement that?*
- *What boundaries do you need to set in your ministry to make sure that you aren't getting burned out? Write down specific ideas, make them clear to your group, and put them into place.*
- *Do you know an extroverted person who can co-lead your ministry with you? If so, think through how you would incorporate that person into leadership.*

Strength in Numbers

Christian community provides protection from spiritual attack and sluggishness—even for introverts.

By Holly Vicente Robaina



I'm an introvert in the classic sense: I feel most energized after being alone. Spending time with others often leaves me exhausted. At times, I'd like to hide from everyone—even my closest Christian friends. I've dreamt of moving to a town where no one knows me, or permanently church hopping!

But I know it's not good for me to stay isolated. Oodles have been written about the negative effects of being alone too long—it takes a toll on body and mind. So it should be no surprise that isolation can hurt our souls too. Here are five reasons why every Christian needs to be in community.

1. You will encounter spiritual warfare.

During my second semester in seminary, I constantly felt tempted to overeat, oversleep, and to dwell on random lusty thoughts. I started experiencing emotional bursts of anxiety, fear, and depression that had no apparent cause. My dreams were plagued with such vivid horrifying images that I'd wake either shaking with fright or feeling disgusted and dirty.

At first, I attributed the mental tug-of-war to stress and fatigue. And I didn't tell anyone about my struggles because I was ashamed, thinking, *I'm in seminary . . . I'm training to be a church leader . . . I can't be this weak!*

I figured I must have inadvertently done something to bring on the dark thoughts, but I couldn't identify the source of my problem. I doubted the authenticity of my faith, and then felt too ashamed to pray. I considered leaving school.

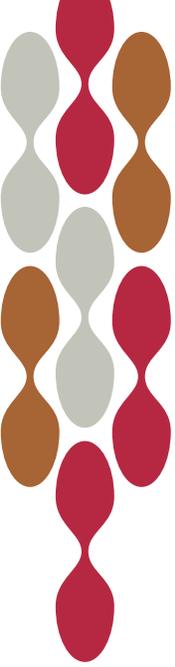
Thankfully, I had a wise accountability partner who, recognizing this might be spiritual warfare, prayed and fasted with me. I felt deeply loved to see her sacrifice personal comforts—especially food!—to fight alongside me.

I've since met many Christians who have experienced similar mental attacks. It's really no surprise. If we're dedicated to building God's kingdom, we *will* face attack because Satan doesn't want us to succeed. Close relationships with other believers can provide: accountability; confirmation that spiritual warfare is happening; prayer and biblical wisdom; a loving push when we feel frozen with fear and shame.

2. You may face serious trials.

Tierra's parked car was destroyed when two arsonists set it on fire—a racially motivated hate crime.

Grace was evacuated from her family's home because of area



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fires and flooding—for the fifth time that year.

Scripture tells us that God works out all our circumstances, including trials, for our good (**James 1:2–4**; **Romans 8:28**). Some believers, like my friends Tierra and Grace, get to see that truth up close.

Christian friends rallied around Tierra. One bought her new eyeglasses, as her old ones had burned inside the car. Some offered her rides, while others searched for a reliable vehicle. A collection was taken, enabling Tierra to buy a car that was much better than the destroyed auto had been.

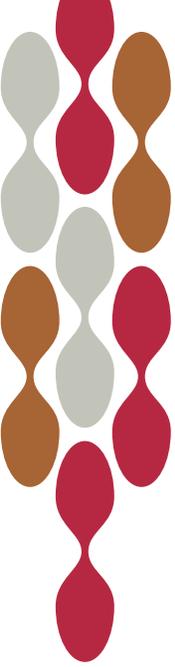
Grace got an offer to bunk with a friend who lived close to her college. The two later became roommates, which cut Grace's commute time by more than an hour and helped her become more active in building Christian community at her school.

When we're in community, we give and receive physical, emotional, and spiritual support. We rejoice together and ache together. By participating in one another's lives, we can regularly observe that God is at work—and often witness his amazing provision, which prepares us to rely on God during our own times of trials.

3. God uses others to grow your faith.

"Your sight in that eye is permanently gone." The ophthalmologist went on to explain there weren't any treatments. I accepted his diagnosis and prayed that God would help me adjust to the loss of sight in my left eye.

But my friend Yvonne asked God to restore my eyesight. I'd never considered praying for healing, but her words made me realize that the Creator of my eye was more than capable of fixing it. As soon as I began to pray in this new way, I was amazed by thoughts of God's great power. I felt deep peace at the idea that I could ask God to meet a physical need because I recognized—and



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believed—he could do it if he chose.

In community, we have the opportunity to push one another toward spiritual growth. Because Yvonne was bold, I learned to be bolder with my prayers and my faith became stronger. More important, I knew God better because I more fully understood the extent of his power. (This newfound confidence would have been satisfying enough for me, yet God had other plans for his glory and the edification of my church. A couple weeks after Yvonne prayed, I testified to our congregation that God had restored my eyesight. It has been stable for four years now.)

The good words of Christian friends have moved me to act, repent, and get rid of wrongheaded belief. When we're not in community, we're missing out on much God wants to teach us.

4. Building the kingdom of God is a community effort.

Before he became a believer, Tymme Reitz was one of the most sought after dancers in the secular music industry. He'd performed with artists such as Madonna, Missy Elliot, and the Backstreet Boys.

So on joining a Christian dance group, he assumed he'd glorify God as a principal dancer. He was shocked when the group's director explained his role in the performance: "Stand here, behind the curtain. See this CD player? When I cue you, I want you to push the 'play' button." Setting aside his pride, Tymme did as he was instructed. As the music began to play and the dancers took the stage, it hit him that this humble job was crucial: If he didn't push the button, the performance would never begin.

Tymme's story reminds me that every person and every gift is essential for kingdom building. We need one another to do what God has called us to do. All gifts are designed for community: Preachers and teachers need someone to teach;



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exhorters need someone to encourage; servants need someone to serve. Outside of community, even my greatest talent is useless.

5. We need one another to obey Scripture's directives on community.

Throughout the New Testament, more than 40 "one another" statements instruct on what Christian community should look like (e.g. "Love one another," **Romans 13:8**; "Submit to one another," **Ephesians 5:21**; "Teach and counsel each other," **Colossians 3:16**; "Cheerfully share your home," **1 Peter 4:9**).

The persecuted church exemplifies this biblical picture of community, observe the authors of *The Privilege of Persecution*, largely because the realities of extreme poverty and political persecution cause Christians in these countries to work together as a matter of survival.

But it's a different situation for Western churches, where circumstances usually don't force believers to commit to one home church. It's easy to pick up and leave if something or someone displeases us. "Here's the dilemma for the American church: In order to really practice the 'one anothers,' you have to be with one another. You have to be together in situations that you can't escape," the authors explain.

Affluence and freedom don't excuse the Western church from the biblical instruction to live in community. Neither does being an introvert. I know that the root of my retreating is a sinful, selfish attitude: I want to retain control over my time and energy.

God has blessed me with friends who call me back into Christian community. Yes, it can be exhausting at times. But I know these faithful friends move me toward a deeper holiness by helping me to become an obedient servant—and that's something I can't do alone.



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Holly Vicente Robaina is a regular contributor to TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN, where this article first appeared.

Reflect

- *If you feel everything is against you in ministry, could it be a spiritual attack? Take time to pray about this and seek the counsel of others.*
- *Think of how the Christian community has helped you in the past. How can you draw on that knowledge to help you persevere in community when you don't feel like it?*
- *Look up the verses mentioned in this article (Romans 13:8; Ephesians 5:21; Colossians. 3:16; 1 Peter 4:9). How do these verses help you in your commitment to community?*

Introverts in Ministry

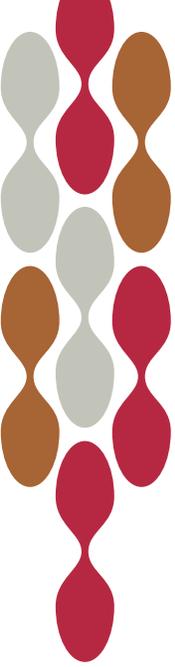


We need to understand that God has equipped and prepared us for what he wants us to do.

By Amy Simpson

Like many young adults in the church, in my 20s I got involved in youth ministry. It seemed a logical place to use my gifts: I cared about teenagers and was young enough that things hadn't changed all that much since I was in their shoes. I grew up in the church, and youth workers made a tremendous difference in my life. I wanted to lend that kind of help to someone else.

But starting on the first Sunday at a new church, when the youth pastor welcomed me by calling me up front to star in a game of "Butt Charades," youth ministry left me disillusioned and discouraged. I had hoped to make a positive difference; instead, I became positive I was different—and not in a good way. I just didn't seem to fit



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the mold of a good youth worker. Half the time, I felt hopelessly awkward. The rest of the time, I did a very poor job of pretending to be someone I wasn't and didn't even like.

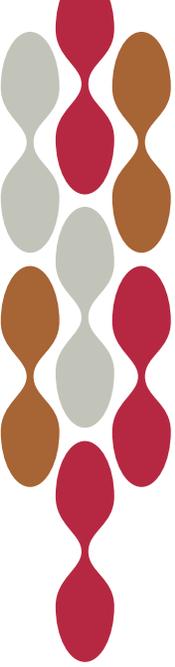
In that frame of mind, at a youth ministry conference, I chose to attend a workshop that promised to help attendees match their God-given temperament with the right role in youth ministry. Finally, I would find my fit.

The presenter gave an overview of Jungian personality theory, then had us form groups based on broad categories of personality. My group was the smallest, about 10 people in a room with hundreds. The presenter then described general categories of personality, talked about how they fit in ministry, and related each to a movie character who typified the people in that category. The movie characters were inspiring, gifted people who made a difference in the lives of young people. The descriptions and ideas were helpful and positive—until she came to the last group. Mine.

Instead of an inspiring, admirable movie character like she had chosen for the others, she chose the economics teacher in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, played by Ben Stein ("Anyone? Anyone?"). She laughed, then suggested some ways people with this personality type could help out without boring everyone to death, but this didn't feel like a joke to me. It felt like confirmation that I was in the wrong place—that I didn't even have a place. I had walked in feeling like a misfit and needing a vision for my relevance. I walked out feeling defective and ashamed.

Alienated Introverts

Much of my out-of-place feeling was rooted in one aspect of my personality: introversion. And I'm not the only one. As Adam S. McHugh wrote in *Introverts in the Church*, "Living as an



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introvert in a society and a church that exalts extroversion takes its toll, and shame cuts deep into introverted psyches that are bent toward self-examination. Add into that the hurtful experiences we all have in relationships, and our self-doubts are confirmed, pushing us toward isolation."

In your experience, do introverts seem disengaged, lacking in enthusiasm, and unlikely to volunteer? Perhaps they feel the way I did in a world of Butt Charades and all-night parties. They might believe they don't have a place in ministry.

When churches recruit for ministry roles, many emphasize extroverted gifts like "high energy," "people person," and "outgoing." We want quick-thinkers, fast-acters, polished communicators, high-energy handshakers, and outreachers. It's easy to see how to plug extroverts into people-oriented ministries, and to assume that introverts fit best in behind-the-scenes roles with little people contact and little obvious connection to ministry strategy and vision. Such tendencies show a fundamental misunderstanding of introversion and the gifts introverts can bring to a ministry. This is a serious and costly mistake. According to Susan Cain, author of *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can't Stop Talking*, "Groups also tend to follow the most dominant person in the room even though there's zero correlation between good ideas and being a good talker. The best talker might have the best ideas, but she might not." Any ministry team that's missing the influence of introverts is far less deep, wise, and effective than it could be.

Understanding Introversion

Once when I was interviewing a candidate for a job opening and asked him about his weaknesses, among them he listed, "I'm introverted." I couldn't help myself. I actually stopped the



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interview to correct him. And I hired him (not just because he was an introvert).

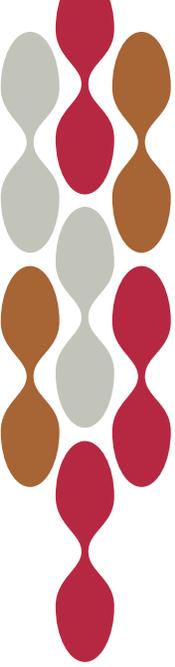
In our culture, both introverts and extroverts misunderstand introversion. It's not a weakness, a flaw, or a euphemism for antisocial behavior. It's not even rare. Various sources claim a range of 25 to 50 percent of the American population is introverted, with more recent studies finding higher percentages. A 1996 study found that introverts make up slightly more than half the population, a finding confirmed by a 2001 study, in which 57 percent were introverts.

Introversion is a basic trait of personality, a preference for focus on internal stimuli. In real life, introversion and extroversion are not polar opposites, but points along a spectrum. Few are extremists in one direction or the other. And because this internal or external focus is just one element of many that make us who we are, no two introverts are alike.

Psychologist Laurie Helgoe tells us, "What constitutes an introvert is quite simple. We are a vastly diverse group of people who prefer to look at life from the inside out. We gain energy and power through inner reflection, and get more excited by ideas than by external activities. When we converse, we listen well and expect others to do the same. We think first and talk later. Writing appeals to us because we can express ourselves without intrusion, and we often prefer communicating this way."

Another psychologist, Marti Olsen Laney, defines introverts this way: "Introverts draw energy from their internal world of ideas, emotions, and impressions. They are energy conservers. They can be easily overstimulated by the external world, experiencing the uncomfortable feeling of 'too much.'"

According to Olsen Laney, the main differences between introverts and extroverts are in energy, stimulation, and depth. "Introverts are like a rechargeable battery. They need to stop



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expending energy and rest in order to recharge. This is what a less stimulating environment provides for introverts. It restores energy. It is their natural niche. Extroverts are like solar panels. For extroverts, being alone, or *inside*, is like living under a heavy cloud cover. Solar panels need the sun to recharge—extroverts need to be out and about to refuel." Besides our differences in energy level, introverts are much more sensitive to stimulation than our extroverted friends. We also prefer—especially in human relationships—to go deeper instead of wider.

It's All in Our Heads

Temperament appears to be heavily influenced by neurochemistry—the collection of brain chemicals and the path of blood flow through the brain. Emerging brain science tells us introversion and extroversion show in our neural pathways. One study found that introverts have more blood flow to their brains than extroverts, indicating more internal stimulation. The study also found that introverts' and extroverts' blood follows a different pathway through the brain. In introverts, the pathway is longer and more complicated, with blood flowing to the portions of the brain involved in internal experiences like remembering, problem-solving, and planning. Extroverts' blood flows faster and follows a shorter and less complicated route. It goes to the parts of the brain associated with sensory processing. Introverts are wired to focus on internal stimulation; extroverts external.

This longer path through the brain explains why introverts' thoughts often come more slowly. When asked a question, introverts might stammer a bit, pause, or ask for time to think. And when you get their answers, you might be blown away by their depth, wisdom, and insight. This is surprising if, when people don't answer right away, you assume they have nothing going on in their heads. Actually, the opposite is true—all that



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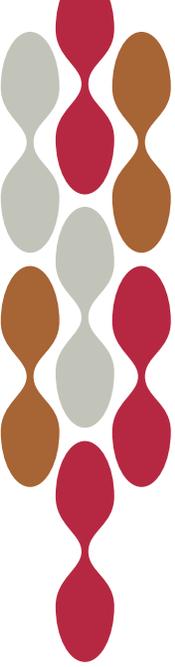
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thinking is what keeps introverts from speaking quickly. Their answers spend more time in the brain, processed and tested and deepened by a path that extroverts' answers rarely take.

Introverts aren't out of touch with the world around them; they're so in touch, they can take only so much of it. Their brains are more active, so external stimuli can quickly overwhelm them. When this happens, they have to recharge on their own. They don't need to be energized; they need space and quiet so they can draw on their internal energy.

Psychology Today tells us, "A chemical called 'dopamine' is released by our brains whenever we experience something positive. It's an automatic reward center and makes us feel good! Extroverts need more dopamine to feel an effect, whereas introverts have a low dopamine threshold. They don't require a lot of stimulation to feel rewarded." Extroverts increase dopamine by being active and social, producing more adrenaline, which in turn creates more dopamine. Introverts, on the other hand, are far more sensitive to dopamine and feel overstimulated with too much. They thrive on an entirely different neurotransmitter: acetylcholine. Acetylcholine is related to attention, learning, and long-term memory. It helps produce a calm, alert feeling. It rewards not adrenaline-laced activity, but quieter activities: thinking and feeling.

Here's another misconception. Extroverts often believe introverts "don't like people." Some introverts are antisocial; so are some extroverts. In general, introverts like people as much as extroverts do. But they enjoy them best a few at a time. As one pastor's wife told me, "It is assumed that I like people and like to be with them a lot. And truth be told, I not only like people, I really love them. I love deep and am ridiculously loyal. Yet I like to love people one-on-one or in a small group."



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Rather than *more* relationships, introverts value *deep* relationships. Introverts are interested in people at a level that makes shallow social relationships awkward and painful, and lots of social contact exhausting. They want to go deep, not wide. When I interact with people, I want to stop and really get to know them. My mind fills with deep questions I can't appropriately ask someone I barely know. So I cast about for something else to say—is it any wonder I stumble over small talk? And is it surprising that many introverted preachers, who can deliver deep and challenging sermons with boldness, suddenly seem awkward when asked to interact with a crowd of hundreds who were touched by their message?

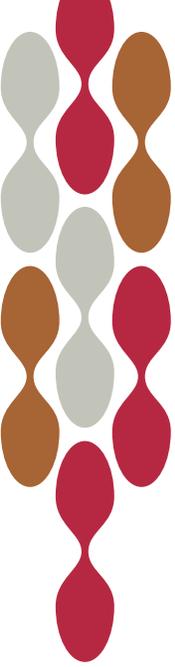
Engaging Introverts

Despite what our extroverted culture values, introverts aren't flawed humans, mutant extroverts, or people in need of correction. Introversion is one of the characteristics that makes the world work, that makes us need each other, and that helps humans, and the church, reflect the image of God. No one should make introverts feel as if they need to reinvent their temperament to find a place in ministry. Instead, let's understand how introverts can bring great gifts to the church.

Here are some of those gifts introverts bring to ministry, and how to tap them:

Deep thoughts—Remember that long, thorough neural path, and give introverts time to think and opportunities to weigh in on strategies and questions of ministry.

Deep relationships—More isn't necessarily better. Encourage introverts to focus on one-on-one or small-group relationships rather than pressure them to minister to as many



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Introverts in Ministry

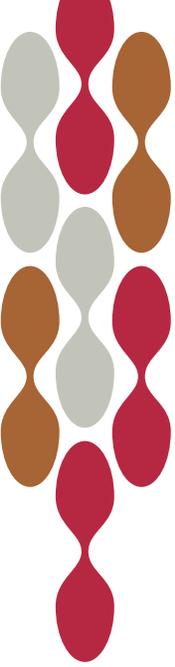
people as possible. Especially if you're an extrovert who loves to interact with a lot of people, you can't give people the relational depth and personal attention some crave. Look for an introvert who is horrified by the thought of doing what you do but dying for the opportunity to interact one-on-one.

Intentionality—In the words of Martin B. Copenhaver, "If an introvert's slogan is 'Look before you leap,' an extrovert likely will prefer Nike's slogan, 'Just do it.' " Introverts prefer to think before they act. Invite introverts to consider and question why your church does what it does—and listen to their feedback.

Active internal life—Many introverted leaders are passionate about spiritual disciplines, prayer ministries, counseling, mentoring, and writing. Ask them to head such ministries.

Behind-the-scenes contentment—One introverted friend told me, "I've probably been asked five times to serve on drama teams by people who know me fairly well—probably the *last* ministry I would feel comfortable and called to. I think because I'm an involved leader, people assume I want to be in front of people." Many introverts are happy to serve behind the scenes, but please engage them in meaningful roles that employ their God-given gifts. Make the missional connection to your church's overall ministry.

Upfront comfort—Don't automatically assume introverts aren't comfortable in highly visible roles; many are. But give them space to energize and let them be themselves. When you do, they will connect with people Tony Robbins wouldn't. One friend told me, "For years, I have led a short-term mission trip for women. Over the years, I have become more comfortable



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being myself as a leader who is also an introvert. For example, this past year I asked the extroverts to lead the devotions and prayer times. I sat in the back of the bus more. I crawled up in my bunk and read more. And when I taught my lesson, I did not preach or entertain; I told a story. It was ministry done from my created-in-God's-image true introvert soul."

Authenticity—Because introverts are very much in touch with their inner lives, they feel uncomfortable when required to externally express something that doesn't reflect their internal experience. They value authenticity—so please lighten up on the forced handshakes, hugs, and over-the-top greetings. Save them for people who appreciate them.

Humble leadership—One research project showed that introverted leaders are more likely to apply their employees' suggestions, less likely to change those suggestions and claim them as their own, more likely to let employees try new things, and more likely to spend time listening to the people they lead. The study also showed that introverted leaders are more effective with proactive employees. Ask them to lead motivated staff or volunteers who need a humble coach to help them move forward.

Slowness to speak—As Sam Rayburn proclaimed, "No one has a finer command of language than the person who keeps his mouth shut." Introverts do this naturally. They aren't always quiet, but they are likely to measure their words. They learn, though, that extroverts don't always have the patience to wait for their ideas, so some just stay quiet. Give them time and space to think, then ask them what they're thinking.



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Honoring God's Design

Susan Cain points out, "Our culture is biased against quiet and reserved people, but introverts are responsible for some of humanity's greatest achievements—from Steve Wozniak's invention of the Apple computer to J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter. And these introverts did what they did not in spite of their temperaments—but because of them."

About a year ago, our children's pastor asked if we could meet for coffee. We got together, got to know one another, and talked about a possible role for me in the children's ministry program. I was skeptical going in—I care about kids, but most children's ministry roles are not right for me. But when she told me she needed someone to minister to adult volunteers, I was hooked. This Sunday, as I do most weeks, I'll spend an hour or so listening, praying, lending a hand, and supporting a handful of dedicated people who are serving our children. I've come a long way since Butt Charades.

All people are fearfully and wonderfully made in God's image, introverts and extroverts alike. Whether you're an introvert or an extrovert, you may need to look at introversion in a new light. If you think only extroverts can do effective ministry, and introverts need to become more like them, remember this is a culturally based preference, not an attitude that honors God's creative design. Besides, we don't need more extroverts. We need more wisdom, more authenticity, more people who are "quick to listen, slow to speak" (**James 1:19**). We need introverts to step into their strengths and lead.

Tips for Approaching Introverts with Ministry Opportunities

- Many introverts are cautious about making commitments—they want to think them through and may be concerned about the required energy level. Rather than ask for commitment, give them a chance to try filling a role on a short-term basis.
- Start with people's inner life, then connect opportunities to what you discover. Take time to ask about their gifts, passions, and personal journey. Watch for what makes their eyes light up. Then suggest roles that will help them express what God is doing internally.
- Emphasize opportunities to engage in one-on-one or small-group relationships.
- Directly connect all roles to the larger mission of the church. If you can't explain how they fit, introverts will have very little passion for the ministry.
- Provide a job description and clear expectations so introverts won't be surprised by a need for quick thinking and undefined social demands. Be specific about not only tasks, but also responsibilities to other people so they know who is counting on them and who they should invest in.
- Give them a pass on camps and so-called "retreats." They require everything introverts can muster and leave them exhausted, crabby, and no good to anyone.
- At social gatherings, give introverts a job to do—something that will enable them to retreat behind the scenes if they want to, minimize awkwardness and small talk, and still connect with other people.



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*Amy Simpson is editor of Christianity Today's **Gifted for Leadership** and the author of **Troubled Minds: Mental Illness and the Church's Mission** (InterVarsity Press, 2013). This article first appeared in LEADERSHIP JOURNAL.*

Reflect

- *What new did you learn about introverts from this article? What really encouraged you?*
- *Which of the ideas for engaging introverts hit home for you? What ones can you implement in your own ministry to make it more effective and less exhausting?*
- *How can you better embrace and celebrate the way God has made you and see that reflected in your ministry?*

Bringing Out the Introvert



What are practical ways to get talkative people to remain quiet and quiet people to talk?

By Randall Neighbour

Interestingly enough, both the over-talker and the under-talker suffer from the same root issue: no one is truly listening to them. One wears out a perfectly good set of lips trying to get their point across, while the other is silently thinking, "No one is listening or will care anyway, so why bother?" I've read numerous tips on how to shut down a talker or open up a quiet person in small groups, but no one examines the other end of the relationship to see if something's awry and contributing to the other person's ungroup-like behavior.

Do the group members and the leader actively listen to what is being shared in meetings? Active listening is characterized by not forming opinions or responses while the other person is speaking. It's very hard to do, but worth the



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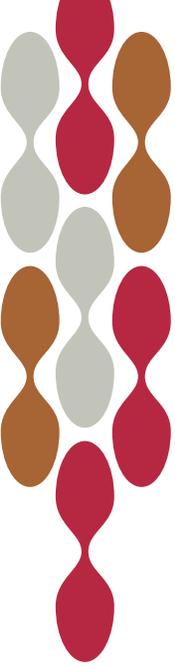
effort when the person speaking truly knows someone is hearing them and not forming judgments or using what they've just shared as a springboard for a response.

Active listening is something that should be discussed openly in group meetings on a regular basis. Asking each group member to reveal a number between 1 and 10 to rate their natural ability to actively listen is a great place to start. Most will give themselves a 1 or 2 on a scale of 10, and this includes the Type A personalities (extroverts) and the Type B personalities (introverts).

After this question is asked, the facilitator can always go back around the room and give everyone two minutes to share why they chose their number and what they know they must do to increase it to show others in the group they have a genuine, sacrificial love for them. After each person has shared, the person on their left or right should tell the group what they heard the person say, and encourage (or edify or build up) the person in some way.

On the practical side of things, I've learned a great deal from my father and Joel Comiskey, both of whom have written excellent books with ways to quiet a noisy person and draw out a quiet person. In *The Shepherd's Guidebook*, a timeless classic for any small-group leader, my father (Ralph Neighbour) wrote that simply sitting next to a noisy person during the meeting so as not to have direct eye contact can quiet them down substantially. Also, a pat on the back or a squeeze of the knee when they launch into another diatribe is easy to do when you're right next to the person. I've actually asked one of my members to sit where I am sitting so I can move and sit next to the talker and try this—and it works!

In Joel's book, *How to Lead a Great Small Group Meeting* (so people want to come back), he explains that all too-quiet people



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are more than willing to share if they feel they will be heard, not interrupted, not judged, and given the time to form their sentences. It may take four or five seconds for them to begin speaking because they don't blurt out the first thing that comes to mind. Never forget that still waters run deep! The quiet people usually have the most profound things to share in my groups, and they have heard the Holy Spirit more consistently than any of the noisy people in the room, including myself (a self-proclaimed over-talker and class clown).

*Randall Neighbour is President of TOUCH Outreach Ministries in Houston, TX, and author of **The Naked Truth About Small Group Ministry**, and he blogs at RandallNeighbour.com. This article first appeared on SMALLGROUPS.COM.*

Reflect

- *Do the group members and the leaders you work with actively listen to what is being shared in meetings? If not, how can you help them do this better?*
- *How might changing the seating in your meetings help both extroverts and introverts?*
- *What can you do to make sure introverts in your ministry are not interrupted, not judged, and given the time to form their sentences?*

Celebrate the Introvert



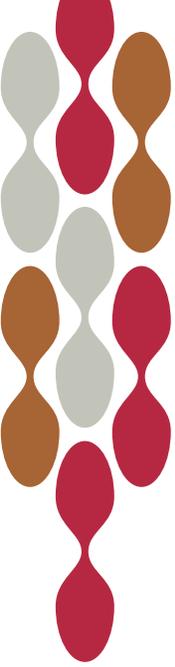
Introverts have strengths that extroverts just don't have.

By Jim Burns

I once had a person tell me the following:

I wish I could be outgoing. I'm kind of introverted, and I get intimidated easily. When I'm around some people, I just don't say anything. When I do speak, I feel like it comes out jumbled up and dumb. Every time I am myself, I feel people are looking at me strangely. I feel like people don't know the real me. I talk a lot at home, but in church I'm not as open. I just wish I could act the same with everyone. When I see outgoing people, I wish I could be outgoing too.

My answer was that most people feel that way at some time. I'm outgoing and just yesterday I was with a group of people who totally intimidated me. I felt like what I was



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saying was all "jumbled up," and I felt "dumb," too. It's so true we're more comfortable at home and in any environment where we feel at ease. There are certain places where an introvert feels more comfortable and certain places where an extrovert is more at ease.

Let me tell you why I like introverts. They are usually much better listeners than extroverts, and listening is the language of love. They are often more sensitive to others' needs. They may not talk as much as extroverts, but when they do, they often have something important to say. They think before they speak; I speak and think at the same time and it sometimes doesn't make sense. Introverts can go to a social gathering or church youth group and have a very good and meaningful conversation with one person. In the same situation, we extroverts will far too often just have a shallow conversation with everyone.

I hope you'll learn to celebrate your personality. Extroverts may seem to have the handle on words and social settings, but a secure introvert who loves God and has a proper self-image is the strongest influence in the world. Instead of worrying too much about being an introvert, acknowledge God's creation of your life and even his part in creating your personality. Celebrate being you:

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well (Psalm 139:13–14).

This article was adapted from one that first appeared on
IGNITEYOURFAITH.COM.



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Celebrate the Introvert

Reflect

- *As an introvert, why is engaging publically with people difficult for you?*
- *How can you create community in your ministry so that everyone is a better listener?*
- *How can you truly embrace the idea that God made you exactly as he wants you to be, even as he has called you to a public ministry?*

Additional Resources

Articles, books, and Bible studies to help you further



Articles

Quiet—*Shhh! Introverts working.* By Todd C. Ream and Katherine E. Loughead, available on BooksandCulture.com

The Introverted Leader—*Even if you struggle to be a "people person," you have much to offer the church.* By Adam McHugh, available on LeadershipJournal.org

Introverts in the 'Imago Dei?'—*Our churches often confuse sociability for spirituality.* By Richard Beck, available on SmallGroups.com

Books

Quiet by Susan Cain (Crown, 2012). Passionately argued, impressively researched, and filled with the indelible stories of real people, *Quiet* shows how dramatically we undervalue introverts, and how much we lose in doing so. Susan Cain charts the rise of "the extrovert ideal" over the 20th century and explores its far-reaching effects—how it helps to determine everything from how parishioners worship to who excels at Harvard Business School. And she draws on cutting-edge research on the biology and psychology of temperament to reveal how introverts can modulate their personalities according to circumstance, how to empower an introverted child, and how companies can harness the natural talents of introverts.

Introverts in the Church: Finding Our Place in an Extroverted Culture by Adam S. McHugh (IVP, 2009). If you, or another leader in your church is introverted, this book is a must read. Undertaken as a personal apologetic, it developed into an explanation of how introverts operate, how they are spiritual, the challenges they face, and the sensitivities they maintain (we all have them).

The Introvert Advantage by Marti Olsen Laney (Workman Publishing). This book combines Dr. Laney's clinical experience, interviews with introverts, research from neuroscience, and related disciplines to piece together the physiological reasons why introverts and extroverts behave differently. This book helps introverts to understand, appreciate, and manage their internal processing systems.

Downloadable Resources

Leading as an Introvert—American culture tends to favor extroverts over introverts. If you are quick to speak, assertive in groups, or energized by being around others, you will usually have a better chance to succeed. The same is often true in our churches. So what does that mean for introverted pastors and church leaders? This 44-page resource offers a wealth of insights into how introverts who lead in the church can understand their own gifting and calling, how they can guard against fatigue and burnout, and how they can lead the people around them, extroverts and introverts alike. Available from **BuildingChurchLeaders.com**.

Hospitality—As a ministry leader, you try to discern God's call on your life and then, as best you know how, obey his specific directions for carrying out this call. Sometimes it's hard to make sense of it all. You need perspective; you need a guide. You need a mentor. Available from **TodaysChristianWoman.com**.

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