

Leading as an Introvert



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Going with the Grain

What does it mean for me to be authentic in my ministry role?

By Craig Brian Larson

At times I have felt as though who I really am did not match what I was doing. At one time I worked my way through a phone directory, teeth clenched, telemarketing for unchurched people—enduring something that was the last thing in the world I wanted to do. Such experiences always leave me with a hollow feeling and the sense that I cannot sustain this kind of activity for very long.

In a TV interview I did, I noticed that the bookshelf in the background, like most of the set, was only for show. The "books" were spines with nice-looking titles but no printed pages inside. Sometimes I have felt as though I was propping up a similar pastoral facade. I was doing what I thought had to be done, but I was not acting authentically from the core of my being. My outside actions and inside motivations were in conflict.

Sunday night services are an example of what once commonly gave me this feeling. After pouring my heart out on a Sunday morning, I would go home and have lunch and a short nap. By four o'clock I felt lower than any other time of the week. The last thing I wanted to do was stand in front of a crowd, try to smile and be enthusiastic, and get my heart into another sermon. My throat hurt; my legs were tired. I can honestly say that on most Sunday nights for several years, I raised at least one person from the dead! I am basically an introvert, and I felt I had been with people enough for one day.

Of course, most occupations require that people do *some* things they do not feel like doing. Fulfilling such responsibilities doesn't make you a fake; you are simply dealing with the real world. Nevertheless, at times I have had to wonder, *Is God in this? Are my feelings a signal that I should be doing something different? Am I trying to fight Goliath wearing Saul's armor?*

Equally important, such times have made me wonder how long I could sustain what I was doing. To work from something other than the core of who I am draws a tremendous amount of energy, like a locomotive pulling a long freight train up a hill. Consequently, when authenticity is lacking, I perform poorly and often feel like quitting.

The pursuit of authentic ministry is therefore of vital importance. How do I fulfill the demands of my role without losing the sense of who I am as a person? Is it possible in ministry to always feel a true match between who I am and what I do? Can I step outside my comfort zone for Christ and yet feel as though I am working from my core being?

Genuine Authenticity

When I think about authenticity, I have to be sure I am working from a biblical concept, not a distorted notion from pop-psychology. I have grown up hearing my culture tell me about the need to find myself, know myself, be true to myself. While valid in many respects, these ideas can slip into error when they leave God out of the picture. God is the ultimate standard of what makes me authentic, not my DNA helix.

I cannot find *authenticity*, though a good word, in any of my Bible versions; rather, Scripture addresses the concept of personal genuineness with words like *sincerity*, *truth*, *hypocrisy*, *faithfulness*. Authenticity suffers a humanistic distortion when the sentiment becomes "I've gotta be me." Although the concept is not necessarily false, the Bible shows little concern with the notion of whether I am true to myself and endless concern with whether I am true to God's will.

What I find unambiguously clear in Scripture is that my authenticity as a minister stands like a table on four legs:

1. My spiritual gifts. God calls me to recognize the spiritual gifts he has given me and to manage them faithfully as my primary responsibility. When I feel hollow, the problem may be that I am minoring in the areas of my spiritual gifts.

2. God's leading. God expects me to obey his call whether or not I feel qualified. When God tells me to do something that lies outside my sense of competence, it means one of two things: (a) I may be qualified and not know it. (b) God can make me qualified when the need arises. He told a reluctant Moses, "Who made your mouth?"

One criterion for authenticity is to recognize what God's direction and purpose is for my life, not what I feel natural doing. The point is less *Who am I?* and more *How is God working through me?*

3. Christian character. The ultimate standard to which I am to be true is not some subjective notion of my identity but the person of Christ as reflected in the objective teachings of Scripture. For example: Is shyness a part of my personality, or is it a lack of love for others? Am I introverted, or self-centered? The difference between personality and character can be gray, at best. My ultimate authenticity is based not on the personality formed by my genes and experiences but rather the character of Christ imparted to me by the Holy Spirit.

4. Wholehearted obedience. God calls me to follow his bidding willingly, not reluctantly. If I halfheartedly obey, I will feel—and be—inauthentic. In such moments my lack of genuineness has more to do with my chief desires and less to do with how I am wired. God shows his concern with authentic obedience in 2 Corinthians 9:7: "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

If I feel hollow, it may be that I am more excited about other things than I am about the will of God.

Ring-true Ministry

After two years in my current position, I regularly marvel at how well this church fits me—and how satisfying such a match is. For the first time, I feel I am working largely from my core being. I love what I do and look forward to office days and Sundays. I feel I could pastor this church for a millennium and beg for more. My responsibilities, however, differ little from those in my previous churches. (We do have Sunday night meetings!) What has changed?

1. I now minister in a manner truer to my personality. Generally my temperament is not that of a high-energy cheerleader. Nevertheless, in my early ministry I usually tried to be very enthusiastic. While enthusiasm helps in many ways, mine was sometimes forced.

In the current stage of my life, I am more enthusiastic when emotion flows naturally from some cause; but as a general rule I am not wired for enthusiasm. In terms of the classic four categories of personality, I lean toward the melancholy and choleric rather than the sanguine or phlegmatic. Even when I feel deeply anointed by the Holy Spirit, I am more apt to be quiet than loud. When I force enthusiasm, I sense in others the discomfort of being subjected to what is emotionally contrived, a discomfort similar to what one feels in the presence of a man wearing a cheap toupee.

I forced my enthusiasm in the past partly because I thought others expected it. Last week, for instance, one man who has attended our church for a year told me that on a business trip he visited a church that was having revival services. He described how much he appreciated those meetings. "They were really on fire," he said. He told me he didn't intend his comment as a slam on me or our church, but the implication was clear.

If my spirituality is lacking, I need the challenge of such a comment, but now I am secure enough to express my zeal for God in a manner that is genuine for me (which I would describe as animated rather than loud). I trust love, sincerity, faith, the Holy Spirit, and God's truth to carry the day.

2. I have a greater sense of freedom. In my previous settings I felt much more constrained about how we did church. For example, our services had to have a certain level of formality; we needed to have certain programs.

My feeling of obligation arose from several sources. Wisdom had something to do with it, I trust, for change is always risky, especially for an inexperienced pastor. Temperament played a part too. I think as well that I had a commendable desire to lay aside my own preferences for what I thought was the good of others.

It is likely, however, that my sense of constraint did not always benefit me or the church. Although I must not be, nor do I want to be, a self-indulgent leader, I recognize now that what suits me may very well be of the Lord. As one called and filled with the Spirit, I must assume that God inspires many of my passions and sensibilities about how

to do church. Therefore, as I die to self in order to serve others, I still may often order ministry in a way that goes with the grain of who I am. I believe God works through the design he has given me.

This freedom to go with my own grain is crucial to authenticity. If I persist in a manner of ministry that feels alien, and probably lacks the Lord's blessing, I will feel hollow.

In my present church I feel an exhilarating sense of freedom to experiment—within the boundaries of wisdom and self-giving love. As never before, I feel I have options. If I prepare people properly, we can try different ideas to see whether God is in them. I am doing a higher proportion of things that I feel passionate about, that I truly believe in, and that I have confidence will be fruitful. The point of this freedom is not to please myself but to find a style of ministry that God works through and that suits me and the church.

For example, we have tried several different ways of praying for people at the end of our church services. I often give traditional "altar calls." I have sometimes broken the congregation into small groups in order that people may pray for one another. I have invited people to come forward for prayer after the service is dismissed. I have asked people to pray silently where they are. We have even tried holding a mini-prayer meeting at the end of the Sunday morning service, inviting everyone to spend ten minutes in prayer. Although I have not yet found an expression for prayer that works ideally in our church, I intend to keep experimenting.

Of course, many things still do not match me perfectly. I wear a suit on Sunday mornings, even though I am the only one to do so in our church and I feel out of place. I suggest that others call me "Pastor" or "Pastor Brian," even though I would be more comfortable without the title. I freely choose to deny myself these preferences, though, for the sake of what I feel is best for others.

3. *I focus on how everything can serve my highest goals.* I feel as though my ministry has a solid core when my activities align with my purposes and goals—even if those ministry activities fall outside my strengths. If I feel hollow about my work, I may have missed the connection between how it can or already does serve the goals that deeply motivate me.

For instance, administrative paperwork, in itself, leaves me cold. In the past, I completed my monthly financial report to my denominational superiors with a sense of frustration. Now I remind myself that my paperwork fulfills a purpose I feel strongly about: the oversight of my church's corporate health. Our finances are obviously of one cloth with that. We must have financial integrity and we must make wise, vision-based expenditures over the long run if we are to accomplish our mission. To do that, I must be involved. When I think in these terms, I am working from the core of my soul.

To work from my core, I need to know my highest purposes and then see how what I do serves those purposes. If a particular task does not do this, I must find a way to give that work to someone else whenever possible.

Pushing the Envelope

In Scripture, the Lord often called people to serve in ways outside their comfort zone, whether it was washing feet or walking on water. When the Lord calls me to do this, I need to be able to expand the envelope of my service with a sense of authenticity in order to persevere. This works if I attend to three things.

1. *Discover the genuineness of God's grace in me.* The familiar passage in 2 Corinthians 12, in which Paul says God's power is expressed most fully in our weaknesses, teaches me a critical lesson: God's grace is one authenticating element in my life. Who am I and what is genuine to me? The answer includes not only my personality but also whatever God adds to me by his Spirit. His power in me is also who I am.

No matter what I do, as I rely upon his grace, I experience a deep reality to my ministry, for I fellowship with my Creator, who is the Truth. As I serve with a greater dependence on the Holy Spirit, my experience deepens with the One in whom I live and move and have my being. What could be more authentic than that? My genuineness at this point is not necessarily a combination of my ministry and my core self but that of my ministry and the Core of the Universe—in me!

For example, while cold-contact outreach has at times sapped my resources because "sales" would be my last choice for an occupation, at other times outreach has exhilarated and satisfied me immensely. I think this is true because I have had to pray much and rely completely on God's help at these times, and I have seen him work through me.

2. *Wholeheartedly seek God's will as my highest purpose.* My core self comprises not merely my personality and my abilities but also my values and purpose. In other words, my core being includes whatever makes me tick: all my motivations. Thus an integrating sense of genuineness comes from my decision to serve God in any way he desires—not merely in a preferred role such as preaching. My main goal in life is not to preach but to serve God. Preaching is a legitimate subsidiary purpose.

When I left pastoral ministry for three years to work full time with an editorial staff, it was a hard decision because I had not lost my love of pastoral ministry and, frankly, I disliked the prospect of sitting in front of a computer every day. I made the move, however, because I felt God had clearly led me to do so, and that was what mattered most to me. My life purpose gave authenticity to a task that was not my first order of calling. Sometimes other pastors would ask if it was hard "to leave the ministry." If I had truly left the ministry, I would have been heartbroken, but I had not. I simply ministered in a different capacity, one in which God wanted me to serve, and that is what I want above all else in my life.

3. *Honestly acknowledge my personal inability and fallenness without God.* Deluding myself about my abilities or character is the quickest way to become a fake. Facing hard reality puts me on genuine ground.

For instance, I have faced the fact that I will never build a church through leadership charisma. I just don't have it. If I took that approach, I would feel every day like the king

who had no clothes. Further, I have confessed character weaknesses such as my inclination toward despair. As a result, when I step outside my comfort zone, I may battle despair and I may struggle with the limitations of my personality, but I do not feel like a hypocrite or a phony because I know God intends to use me in spite of these encumbrances.

I am not pulling anything over on myself or others. I acknowledge that I am genuinely unable to minister without God's help. As Paul said: "Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God" (2 Cor. 3:5).

Authentic ministry resembles a good jump-shot in basketball. Sports announcers occasionally comment on the excellent technique of a good shooter. The player does not merely flip the ball toward the basket or shoot across his body in a contorted fashion. Instead, he squares his shoulders to the basket, jumps well, and with each shot has an identical stroke. All his motions integrate to support the shot, meaning that his whole body shoots, not only his hands.

When I minister genuinely, everything within me supports the effort. When I minister from my core self, I do so with strength and greater effectiveness. When I am authentic, I can stand and stay with a sense of stability and integrity. I become a person of truth through whom the God of truth can flow.

Only when I am authentic can I persevere with spiritual vitality—strong to the finish.

—CRAIG BRIAN LARSON

Adapted from *Pastoral Grit: The Strength to Stand and to Stay*, © 1998 by Christianity Today International and published by Bethany House.

Discuss:

1. What is the best way to think about being authentic? What are some bad ways?
2. How do you distinguish between personality and character (e.g., introverted versus self-centered)?
3. How do you discern when God is calling you away from your natural gifting or comfort zone?

Where You Are At

Decide how well Larson's principles for authentic ministry describe you.

	This describes me well	This used to describe me	This has never described me well
I minister in a manner true to my personality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have a great sense of freedom	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I focus on how every aspect of my work can serve my highest goals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I strive to discover the genuineness of God's grace in me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I strive to wholeheartedly seek God's will as my highest purpose	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I strive to honestly acknowledge my personal inability and fallenness without God	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Introverts in the *Imago Dei*?

Our churches often confuse sociability for spirituality.

By Richard Beck

In Lectures 6-7 of [*The Varieties of Religious Experience*](#), William James moves from his discussion of the healthy-minded believer to speak of the sick soul. Again, the sick souls are those who tend to be the more pessimistic believers among us, those of us preoccupied with the problems of existence. In my own research, I've labeled this type the Winter Christian and the Existential Believer, so I won't write more about them here.

What I do want to write about starts with James' sick soul type but goes in a different direction. Specifically, I want to write about the place of introverts at church.

Most people are aware of Jung's typology of introverts and extroverts. What you may not be aware of is that trait affectivity is highly correlated with these types. Specifically, positive affectivity is significantly associated with extroversion and negative affectivity is associated with introversion. That is, extroverts tend to be energetic and enthusiastic while introverts tend to be mellow or even melancholic.

The point here is that James' sick soul type is very often going to be an introvert and the healthy-minded type is very often going to be an extrovert. It is this connection that I want to discuss.

Here's the question I want to ask you: *Do introverts fit in at church?*

The answer, obviously, is that it depends upon what kind of church we are talking about. In liturgical churches I expect introverts and extroverts fare about the same. But in non-liturgical churches they may fare differently.

Specifically, non-liturgical churches tend to be more sociable churches. So, let's call them that. That is, there are **liturgical churches** and there are **sociable churches**. Sociable churches tend to emphasize relationality among its members. For example, a large part of the sociable church experience involves lengthy greetings (being greeted and greeting others), adult Bible classes that are conversational and oriented around fellowship (e.g., in my church we sit at tables drinking coffee, eating donuts, and chatting), and the in-depth sharing of personal prayer requests.

This is not to say that liturgical churches aren't sociable or don't have sociable facets to them. It's just the simple recognition that going to a Catholic mass (the prototypical liturgical experience) differs greatly from my day at church at the Highland Church of Christ in Abilene, Texas. My experience is heavy on the "visiting," as they say here in Texas.

In these highly sociable churches there is an implicit theological theme that marries sociability with spirituality. That is, being sociable—visiting intensively and being willing

to "get into each other's lives"—is highly prized. To a point, this is understandable. A sociable church is going to rely on extroverts to make the whole vibe work.

But introverts fare poorly in these sociable churches. The demand to visit, mix, and share with strangers taxes them. Worse, given that these social activities are declared to be "spiritual," introverts feel morally judged and spiritually marginalized. As if their very personality was spiritually diseased.

Consequently, the "issue of the introvert" is one of the big overlooked problems in these sociable churches. For example, church leaders often want to make church more "meaningful." What they mean by this is that they want to create an atmosphere where deep human contact can be made. This is a fine goal, a worthy goal. However, to pull this off in an ordinary church setting demands a degree of sociability that introverts just don't have. Take a typical church service, communion service, small group service, or Bible class. Let's say, to make it more "meaningful," you ask the participants to find someone sitting close to them to have a spiritually oriented conversation with—a time of sharing. Well, the introverts are just going to HATE this activity. They may hate it so much that they just might stop coming to your services. In fact, I know introverts at my church who purposely come in late to avoid the perfunctory meet-and-greet that occurs right at the start of our services ("Find someone close to you and say hello!").

Now, you may say that these introverts just aren't relational people. But you would be wrong. Introverts are very, very relational. They just aren't *sociable*. And to confuse the two is a grave theological and ecclesial mistake.

But many churches fail to make this distinction. They tacitly set up the following equation for church life:

$$\text{Spirituality} = \text{Sociability}$$

For example, I was once visiting with a church leader at my church who was making a recommendation that, to make our adult classes more "meaningful," we would need to share more of our lives in these classes. I stated that such a recommendation would drive the introverts crazy. The response was, "God is about relationships and church is about relationships. Thus, if these people aren't going to be involved in relationships they will just have to change."

The problems with this formulation are obvious:

1. From a psychological perspective, introverts don't change into extroverts (or visa versa). To expect this is ridiculous.
2. From a moral perspective, you are moralizing aspects of personality: Extrovert = Good and Introvert = Bad.
3. From a pastoral perspective, you are confusing relationality with sociability. That is, your pastoral intervention, although well intentioned, demands a kind of personality to work well. It is true that deeper relationships are needed at church,

but the route isn't always best achieved by throwing strangers together into forced conversation.

4. From a theological perspective, you are insinuating that introverts are not created in the *Imago Dei*, in the Image of God. (In fact, the etymology of the word "enthusiasm," that trait of the extrovert, means "filled with or by God." The association, then, is that introverts are NOT filled with or by God.)

This last is the most worrisome. For years, sociable churches have ignored the introverts in their midst. Worse, they have sent a consistent message that they were less spiritual than their extroverted brothers and sisters. That to be like God was to be extroverted.

In my opinion, the damage this subtle message has caused has been enormous.

— *RICHARD BECK is associate professor and experimental psychologist at Abilene Christian University.*

Adapted from the blog [Experimental Theology](#), © 2007 by Richard Beck. Used by permission.

Discuss:

1. Do you agree with Beck's classification of liturgical and sociable churches? Which category would your church fit into?
2. Give some examples of times you've seen churches equate sociability with spirituality.
3. To what extent is it appropriate for churches to pull introverts out of their relational comfort zones? How might churches need to pull extroverts out of *their* comfort zones?

Leading as Ourselves

Church leadership is not for everyone, but it's for everyone who is called.

By Adam S. McHugh

But Moses said to the LORD, “O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.” Then the LORD said to him, “Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak.” But he said, “O my Lord, please send someone else.”

—Exodus 4:10–13

It is the archetypal story of a reluctant leader. Moses’ protests to the unyielding call of God resound every time God’s voice summons an unprepared person to an impossible task. Though leaders of all personality types have balked at God’s calling, Moses’ personality and life exhibit the telltale signs of introversion. In the Hebrew, Exodus 4:10 literally reads “I am not a man of words ... but I am heavy-tongued and heavy-mouthed.” Most introverts can relate to the feeling of our tongues sticking to the floors of mouths, our lips straining to move. We have hesitated and stuttered, not out of torpor but out of the need to think before speaking. Our measured words may come out slowly and deliberately. We have hoped, along with Moses, that God will excuse us from the harrowing task of leadership because of our fears of failure and rejection, because of our nightmare of ineloquence on a public stage.

From the beginning of Moses’ story, the narrative theme that stands out is that of *hiding*. Under the cover of two fierce midwives, Moses’ mother looked into the eyes of her newborn son and knew she must *hide* him from the bloodthirsty Egyptians. After he became too big to conceal, she made an ark for him and *hid* him among the overgrowth of reeds along the riverbank. Discovered, he was raised in the home of the Pharaoh’s daughter until, one day, he came across a fellow Hebrew being beaten by an Egyptian. So Moses killed the Egyptian and then *hid* his body in the sand. After Pharaoh heard of this, he aimed to kill Moses, who fled and *hid* in a foreign land. Then, as a shepherd in Midian, Moses drove his flock “beyond the wilderness” (Ex. 3:1).

I get the sense that Moses was escaping as far away as he possibly could, a warrior turned shepherd, a leader turned alien, an introvert turned refugee. Even when the Lord appeared to him in a blaze of fire, with a voice declaring the transcendent Name, Moses *hid* behind his fears, and then behind the elocution and charisma of his brother, Aaron. Moses went before the Hebrew people and into Pharaoh’s throne room clutching his brother’s coattails.

As I look at my own leadership experiences and as I talk with introverted pastors, seminarians and those considering leadership in some capacity in the church, I see a

similar theme of hiding. We may hide in the shelter of our studies and in the warm embrace of our books, behind our lofty theologies and nuanced understandings of vocation and spirituality. We may conceal our true personalities behind extroverted personas, out of fear of not meeting the expectations of others—or of ourselves. Sometimes we play “the introvert card” in order to avoid taking a risk or doing something uncomfortable.

In my darker moments, I have asked myself whether introverted leaders are capable of surviving the ebb and flow of ministry, with its intensity, risk-taking, relational requirements, and its inevitable moments of weariness, conflict and failure. I have wondered if depression and burnout are unavoidable conditions for those of us who lose energy through interaction. Indeed, Bo, an introverted Korean American woman who had recently left college-campus ministry put this poignant question to me: “Why is it that the thing I love more than anything in the world, being with people, is the very thing that drains me the most?” As much as I cringe when I hear it, there is a reason why some leadership experts call church ministry an extroverted profession. It is draining to meet the social demands of ministry and to constantly battle the expectations of others.

Church leadership is not for every introvert (nor for every extrovert). If you are unwilling to stretch the borders of your personality and your relationships, if you find even one intense social situation to be tiring, or if you are reluctant to speak in most settings, then leadership is likely not for you. As one introverted pastor said to me: “There is no escaping that pastoral ministry is a people business. So pastors must work with people, teach people, counsel people, connect with people. If an introvert cannot or will not step out of his or her internal world in order to be with people, then he or she should probably find another line of work.”

Calling, not Personality Type

However, in more than a decade of Christian leadership I have come to see the significant contributions introverts make to others and have learned effective introverted models of leadership. So we must distinguish between our energy level for a task and our gifting for that same task. Just because we lose energy doing something does not necessarily indicate we are not a good fit for it. I am convinced that calling, not personality type, is the determinative factor in the formation and longevity of a leader. It was no coincidence that God met Moses in the very place that he tried to flee, nor was it accidental that Moses would later drive another flock, the people of Israel, into that same wilderness to the mountain of God. God’s call sheds light on our darkest hiding places.

What stands out to me about my conversations with introverted pastors is their firm conviction that they labor in the power of God. They did not necessarily choose church ministry because they found a perfect match for their gifts or personality type. My friend Chris said, in spite of the fact he was operating out of weaknesses much of the time, “I still believe God has called me to pastoral ministry. I have had to conclude that God may call some people into work for which they are not perfectly suited, for his greater glory.” Another pastor said, “I’m not a very charismatic person, but I refuse to use that as an excuse not to do something. The power of the Holy Spirit gives us the ability to do things

we couldn't do otherwise. If I absolutely need to be a charismatic leader for two hours to accomplish something, I think God has the ability to do that.”

When Moses objected to God at the burning bush, saying that he was a clumsy speaker, God did not disagree with him. The Lord did not say, “Not true, Moses, I've heard you speak and you inspired me! You're going places as a preacher!” He said “I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak” (Ex. 4:12).

I will be with you. I will give you the words. These are the bedrock reassurances that God offers to those he calls to lead. Our leadership credentials are the wisdom and the Spirit of the Lord. God doesn't promise that leadership will be easy or always natural. God promises that his presence will go with those he calls, and in his presence is a power that transcends all human abilities. More than a millennium after Moses, God put it to the apostle Paul this way: “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9). Paul would then be able to say, “It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). It is out of God's power, not self-power, that leaders minister to others.

Amidst ravaging supernatural plagues and pyrotechnics of burning bushes and smoldering mountains, I think the most dramatic moment in the story of Moses centers around a shift in pronouns. Throughout the story of Moses' call, the Exodus, and the handing down of the law, Moses persisted in referring to the Hebrews as “your people,” God's possession. He was distancing himself from his kinsfolk.

But in Exodus 34, God showed Moses his glory, passing by him in an unprecedented theophany while Moses hid in a crevice of the mountain, his eyes sheltered from the fullness of God's majestic holiness. Moses then prayed to the Lord: “If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, I pray, let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance” (Ex. 34:9). Go with *us*. Pardon *our* iniquity and *our* sin, and take *us* for your inheritance. Moses finally came out of hiding; he claimed his people, his true heritage and identity.

Moses' transformation demonstrates that having a deep, intimate relationship with God does not exclude us from having a profound love for people. Indeed, when we behold the glory of the Lord, we claim his people as our own.

— ADAM S. MCHUGH is an ordained Presbyterian minister, a spiritual director, and an introvert.

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Discuss:

1. Have you ever wondered if your personality is incompatible with your ministry role? If so, what do you say to these doubts?
2. Should your personality type be a factor in discerning your call to ministry? If so, how do you weigh it against everything else?
3. What are the spiritual benefits for an introvert who takes on a leadership role?

Claiming God's Promises

McHugh points to two of God's promises in Scripture that enabled two leaders—Moses and Paul—to have the faith they needed. These promises refuted certain lies that these men were tempted to believe, both about God and themselves. Write out below what lies are refuted by each of those promises. Then think of lies you are tempted to believe, write in two of God's promises in Scripture that correct these, and explain how they do so.

“I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak” (Ex. 4:12).

“My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9).

Verse(s): _____

Verse(s): _____

Silence Is to Dwell In

An hour of quiet is a rare gift, hard to come by in an ordinary week, even for those who seek it.

By Marilyn Chandler McEntyre

Somewhere on the dusty shelf of books I read to my children when they were young is a little volume called *A Hole Is to Dig*. Each charmingly illustrated page declares the purpose of something: "A pile of leaves is to jump in." "A mud puddle is to slide in and go 'Oodlee-oodlee-oo!'" And so on. The reasoning is sound, if you're a child. The world is made for our general entertainment; it gives us things to do and pleasures to revel in.

There's something rather poignant about reading the book as an adult, having developed a much more pragmatic sense of the purposes of things like holes (to fill in before someone trips and sues you) or piles of leaves (to put into plastic bags before the Thursday pickup) or mud (to be scraped off boots before stepping on the carpet). The same pragmatism that turns a tired and jaundiced eye toward holes and mud seems to inform the liturgical sensibility reflected in churches I've attended of late, on the purpose of silence. Silence, it seems, is to be filled.

I suppose we inherit this sense of silence as "dead air time" from radio and TV, where every second of time not pulsing with a voice or image is "lost" or "dead." Silence, like prime time and airwaves, has become a commodity to be bought, sold, filled, framed, and obliterated: a "nothing" that must be made into a "something." Our church bulletin, preserving some vestige of antique decorum, still reminds us in italics just above the "Words of Welcome" that we may use the minutes before the service to "gather ourselves for worship in silence."

Oddly, though, this kindly invitation seems to be the one printed rubric that is routinely ignored. Not only is that time of "silence" filled with music (and I would be the first to attest that the right sort of music can in fact create or enhance an awareness of silence), it also seems to have given way by tacit consent to community check-in rituals. The buzz of greetings, appraisals of visiting in-laws, brunch invitations, and admonitions to restless children may be a form of community-building, but for the odd introvert who craves a moment to open and air out interior space for the Word to inhabit, it has the same effect as screen snow: there's no program to enjoy, no way to turn off the TV, and no silence to dwell in.

We are people of the Word, in the best sense. The Word of God proclaimed in worship is a healing word, and hearing, a means of salvation. But we are also a people who have filled aural and visual space with endless chatter. Few of us, who do not spend our days in monasteries or live in rural retreats, can imagine the silences our grandparents lived with. We have normalized the white noise of refrigerators and idling motors, the beat of the neighbor's boom box, the hyperbolic jangle of commercials and the indecorous whispers of pewmates who have learned by incessant, insidious conditioning that silence is to fill. Our occasional efforts to reclaim a few minutes of silence in the midst of the ambient noise we regard as normal demand strenuous deliberation. (A few hearing-aid companies are quietly capitalizing on this minority

market by building better earplugs.) And so the spoken Word must constantly compete for our diffused attention.

Perhaps it would help us to hear more regularly the story of Elijah on Mount Horeb, waiting for the Lord to pass by. The Lord, you remember, was not in the great wind, or the earthquake, or the fire, but, as the NRSV translates it, in the "sound of sheer silence." The church's long history of contemplative practice seems to suggest that there is some knowledge of God that can come only in stillness—silence large and long and intentional enough to open a sacred space for the Holy One to enter. To fill up that silence—even with what seems harmless, hospitable chatter or with the preoccupations of perpetual responsibility—forecloses some possibility of intimate encounter with the Word who speaks in "sheer silence."

One of the strongest arguments for dialogue among U.S. denominations is that, having so differently developed forms of worship, we may remind one another of what we may have allowed to atrophy. "High-" and "low-church" worshipers have something to teach one another about liturgy and fellowship. And "mainline" congregations might do well to consider what gifts of the Spirit are being preserved among more "marginal" communities like the Quakers.

These sturdy nonconformists, the Society of Friends, have something both countercultural and revitalizing to teach us about how to create, inhabit, and listen in corporate silence. To sit with several dozen people in the deep, consensual silence of meditation and prayer can be a powerful experience of invitation and consent. Even before the words of prayer form in the mind, we are made aware of the Real Presence that is promised wherever two or three are gathered in his name. What is spoken in those meetings falls into a pool of silence and spreads like ripples that move and inscribe but do not disturb the deep stillness.

An hour of such silence is a rare gift, hard to come by in an ordinary week, even for those who seek it. Several years ago, I was told by an amused friend who worked for a large corporation about a coworker's effort to still one bit of unnecessary noise. Having received several complaints about the invasive Muzak that filled the ears of the hapless folk on hold, the in-house phone managers replaced the tunes with this message: "Your call has been received and a representative will be with you as soon as possible. In the meantime, silence will be provided." I think something so rare should be reckoned a significant charitable gift to the public. I would like, at any rate, to offer the anecdote as a challenge to churches: it's not our job to compete with the corporate world, but we might find a ready market if we became places where silence could be provided.

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Discuss:

1. Do you think that you or others around you—introverts or extroverts—are unknowingly starved for silence?
2. How do you personally tend to fill spaces of silence?
3. How does your church tend to fill spaces of silence?

An Introverted Rule of Life

Establish rhythms to fit your unique makeup.

By Adam S. McHugh

A rule of life is an ancient practice; it is a way of structuring life in order to bring every aspect under God's gracious authority and to increase our awareness that all of life is permeated by God's presence. The rule can be communal, as in the case of St. Benedict's honored rule, or personal. It involves repeated activities and relationships that are tailored toward an individual's unique makeup and rhythms. A proper rule of life applies not only to the spiritual or devotional life, but also to work, relationships, physical habits, and other facets of life. The rule of life counters our tendency to partition off the spiritual dimension from the rest of our lives.

I want to propose an introverted rule of life. While a rule is helpful for people of all personality types, the order and discipline it offers can help introverts in particular. Given the frenetic speed and activity of our world, we need to order our lives in such a way to maximize our social energy and to carve out places for solitude. The rule of life works with the internal and external rhythms we find as we come to embrace who we are. This is not simply a schedule or a calendar; a rule of life opens us to the awareness of God's presence, not only in our moments of quiet but in all aspects of our lives.

My variation on the standard rule of life revolves around our rhythms of energy and aims at finding a structure that enables us to receive God's power. I propose the following questions for helping other introverts discover their own rules of life:

1. What are the times of the day when I feel the most energized?
2. When do I feel the most tired?
3. How much sleep do I need?
4. What are the physical habits that energize me? Drain me?
5. When do I most feel the need for solitude?
6. How do I find soul rest?
7. What are the spiritual disciplines where I feel most restored by God?
8. What are the relationships in which I feel the most refreshed? Most drained?

With these questions, introverts can begin to establish the rhythms that bring harmony to their minds, souls, bodies, and relationships. We can establish disciplines and patterns that we practice daily, as well as those that we practice weekly, monthly, or yearly. By way of example, when I am in full-time ministry, an average weekday for me involves these disciplines:

- Morning devotions and writing
- Several short breaks of solitude throughout the workday
- Afternoon reading and silence
- Time with my wife or friends in the evening
- Late evening walk and practice of the examen
- Seven or eight hours of sleep

These are the daily rhythms that accord with my own unique makeup. I have found that structuring my day in this way enables me to maximize my relational energy, which fades during the day. Given the social and spiritual demands of ministry, I require two or three spaces for extended solitude as well as niches of solitude throughout the day. This is both for my own emotional health and for the benefit of those I pastor. After work I take a time of solitude, in order to bracket my workday and to be present to my wife for her extroverted processing when she comes home. My evening walk brings closure to my day and to the larger pattern of solitude-action-solitude that my days assume. The seven or eight hours of sleep a night, as well as regular exercise, ensure that I feel restored in the morning. I also practice broader rhythms, such as a weekly Sabbath, monthly meetings with my spiritual director, and two annual personal retreats.

Other introverts, perhaps those who do not have such social requirements in their jobs, may not require as much solitude on a regular basis, though others may require more. For some, solitude needs to come in one large chunk of time; for others, solitude is best scattered throughout the day. Each person's rule will be unique. The rule of life, if practiced properly, should be liberating, not constricting. We will have to balance order with flexibility—acknowledging that life, and God, cannot be simply categorized or controlled.

The reality is *not* that we lack structure in our lives and we need to install it; rather, we *already have* rules of life, whether acknowledged or not. We navigate our days in certain ways, with habitual practices and disciplines. The conscious practice of a rule of life enables us to institute healthy and dependable rhythms that enable us to love God and others as ourselves. Following are more suggestions for disciplines to incorporate into your rule of life.

Intercession: For centuries, monasteries have been centers of ongoing intercession for the world. Monks do not cloister themselves off with the intent of escaping the world, but rather they consider their communities to be places where they can engage the world through their shared vocation. As they sing the Psalms throughout the liturgical hours, they sing on behalf of victims of poverty, injustice, and oppression and they sing for peace and reconciliation between the nations. Likewise, introverts in solitude can engage the world through interceding on behalf of others. If we practice solitude properly, we grow in compassion and love for others. As we are present to God, we are present to God's world. Intercession is a vehicle for ushering his kingdom and its righteousness into a world mired in darkness. If we practice solitude properly, we grow in compassion and love for others. As we are present to God, we are present to God's world.

Study and reflective reading: By virtue of our need for privacy, introverts tend to read more than extroverts. Study, therefore, is a natural discipline for us. What we read will be tailored to our particular interests. Theological study can be done in a way that is not merely academic. Slow, contemplative readings of longer portions of Scripture enable us to hear larger themes, both in Scripture and in our own lives. One friend said that she found the Gospel of John to be particularly appealing to her introverted side, as John moves slower than the other Gospels and probes deeply into ideas and the

relationship between Father and Son. We can also practice private or communal (echo divina (“divine reading”), in which we savor each word and listen for God’s direct speech to us.

Journaling and writing: Journaling has been an important discipline for me because it puts concrete form to my internal conversation. Even though I process internally, recording my thoughts on paper brings further clarity and coherence. Occasionally, I will even write out my prayers—not only to ensure that I remain focused but also so I can review them and further appreciate God’s answers. There is a mysterious, spiritual component to writing. We may start writing our words but then find that our words are being written for us. We may find we are in the midst of an encounter with God, writing things we did not intend, discovering things we did not see.

Silence and centering prayer: There are certain times when we need to quiet the internal conversations in order to fully attend to the movement of the Spirit in our lives. At times the conversations in our very active minds become deafening, and we’re unable to sort one from another. Worse, we’re unable to discern the voice of God. In periods of silence, which can be any length of time, we seek to clear out the noise that clutters our mind. The goal of silence is not necessarily to hear the profound word from God, but simply to spend time with our Father—in which God may or may not speak.

Centering prayer is a prayer style in which we still our minds, allowing any conscious thoughts to dissolve away. We allow ourselves to be caught up in the holy, as someone sitting at the shore is swept up in the immensity of the ocean. Sometimes it helps to repeat a word or short phrase in order to focus our minds, such as the Jesus prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

Sabbath: Patterned after God’s resting as the consummation of the creation week, the Sabbath is not only a time of cessation from work but it is a time reserved for intentional reflection oriented toward God. Introverts will benefit if they regularly set apart longer periods to gather up the fragments of their lives and thoughts, and to present them to God through prayer or journaling. To rest and reflect are countercultural activities in our world, and they enable us to step out of the hurried, relentless activity of our culture and to observe the larger direction of and patterns in our lives.

— ADAM S. MCHUGH is an ordained Presbyterian minister, a spiritual director, and an introvert.

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Discuss:

1. What disciplines or practices do you already follow because they help you rest or calm your soul?
2. What habits or rhythms of yours do you think you need to re-evaluate?
3. Which of McHugh’s suggested disciplines would you consider incorporating into your own regular routine?

Discovering Your Own Rules of Life

McHugh offers eight questions that can help introverts develop their own disciplines and habits for healthy living. Start to answer each of these as best you can.

1. What are the times of the day when I feel the most energized?

2. When do I feel the most tired?

3. How much sleep do I need?

4. What are the physical habits that energize me? Drain me?

5. When do I most feel the need for solitude?

6. How do I find soul rest?

7. What are the spiritual disciplines where I feel most restored by God?

8. What are the relationships in which I feel the most refreshed? Most drained?

Sabbath Keeping for Introverts

Understand and embrace your need to rest.

By Lynne M. Baab

Jim is an introvert, and he loves his Monday Sabbaths. He goes for a long, leisurely run first thing in the morning. He spends much of the day reading. Then he enjoys a casual dinner with friends. The time alone, coupled with a relaxing time with friends who don't expect him to lead or serve them, gives him the refreshment he needs to start the week with energy.

Like Jim, many leaders and ministers are introverts and so, like Jim, they enjoy significant blocks of time alone on the Sabbath day. But it's trickier for these men and women to establish healthy, life-giving Sabbath practices when a spouse and children are a part of the picture. Their work week may hold so many interactions with people that, even when they deeply desire to spend time with family members, it's hard to enjoy being with them on the Sabbath.

My husband is an extrovert and I am an introvert. When we had young children, our different Sabbath needs were very visible. I craved time alone, and we found that if at some point I could get out for a one-hour walk by myself, then for the rest of the day I could relax in the midst of family activities and enjoy our kids.

The Hebrew word "Sabbath" comes from a root that means cease, pause, rest, desist, or stop. To figure out what Sabbath practices will be healthy and life giving for us, we must first reflect on what forms of work we should abstain from on a day of rest. Do I need to stop talking? Multitasking? Trying to shape other people's lives? Using technology?

Ron, the minister of a small, aging congregation, decided he would stop several things on Sundays, which he considers to be his Sabbath. He stops racing around the church building. He walks slower on Sundays, and he finds it makes a world of difference, putting him in a reflective and worshipful place. He has stopped conducting church business at coffee hour. Instead, he simply tries to enjoy his parishioners. During the afternoon and evening, he doesn't try to correct his two young daughters or teach them anything. Instead, he tries to enjoy them for who they are, rejoicing in their unique gifts. And he tries to serve his wife as much as he can, doing dishes and helping with meals, so that she can have a restful day too.

Because of the size of his congregation, Ron spends a lot of time alone during the week. He doesn't need to stop talking or interacting with people on Sundays, but he does need to set aside the administrative tasks of church leadership, as well as the teaching and shaping tasks of parenthood. His slower pace and focus on enjoyment of the uniqueness of each individual gives him rest and restoration to start another week.

When we had young children, my husband and I made a Sabbath commitment to enjoy family life without doing the work of taking care of a family. No home repairs, no housework or laundry, and no shopping. That gave us freedom from the multitasking that so often filled our week, trying to care for our children while getting something else done. Multitasking can be stressful for anyone, but because of their ability to concentrate so deeply, introverts may find it especially taxing. A day with conversations and family activities can still be restful if it free from multitasking.

Technology is another source of stress that some people try to avoid on the Sabbath. One of my friends, an introvert with a contemplative outlook on life, does not check her email, voicemail, or text messages on her Sabbath. That practice frees her to concentrate on her family with undivided attention.

Most ministers who serve congregations find it most helpful to have a Sabbath day other than Sunday. Eugene Peterson has often described the way he practiced Sabbath when he was a pastor. He and his wife would set out every Monday morning for a hike. They would walk in silence for the first half of the hike, then stop for lunch, and chat on the way back. The hike built intimacy between them and gave them time for silent reflection. I don't know if Peterson would describe himself as an introvert, but his Sabbath pattern seems very attractive to me as an introvert—a simple pattern of time with a spouse, time to reflect, and the opportunity to experience God's creation. No complicated plans or structures, just a weekly practice that involved stopping weekday activities and replacing them with some silence and intimacy.

Sarah and Tim, who share a position in campus ministry, have come up with a creative plan that honors their own needs and the needs of their children. Whenever they don't have a student conference on a weekend, they observe a two-day Sabbath. On Sunday, they spend time together with their two young children, trying to create the kind of day that will stay in the children's memory. Church, then some Bible stories and prayer as a family, then something fun together. On Mondays they split up. One of them stays with the children in the morning, while the other gets a four-hour block of time for silence, journaling, and reflection. In the afternoon, they switch roles. Sarah and Tim's pattern may be attractive to introverts who desire to balance time with family and time for reflection.

Learning to Rely on God

Over time, the Sabbath impresses on our hearts that God runs the universe and we don't. Over time, the Sabbath helps us learn at a deep level that every breath we take depends on the abundant provision of a generous God. Over time, the Sabbath clarifies our vision of what exactly God has called us to do. We learn those truths primarily by stopping our productivity and allowing ourselves time to rest.

When interviewing people for my book *Sabbath Keeping*, I found that getting out into God's creation was the most common Sabbath activity that brought rest and restoration: hiking, walking, gardening, playing Frisbee with a dog on the beach. One very busy minister said that working out at a gym on the Sabbath connected him to God's creation

of his own body. Journaling was mentioned by some Sabbath keepers as a helpful way to reflect, clarify thoughts, and hear God's voice.

Some books and articles imply that we will receive the gifts of the Sabbath most profoundly by focusing on spiritual activities, such as contemplative prayer, journaling or Bible-centered activities with children. Laying on the burden of more activities, no matter how spiritual they are, is not at the heart of the Sabbath. The long-term Sabbath keepers I interviewed reported that the joy of the Sabbath comes primarily from the discipline of stopping work, productivity, multitasking, technology, and so forth, leaving space for low-key reflection and relaxed enjoyment of God's good gifts.

In the Jewish tradition, intercessory prayers are too much work for the Sabbath; instead, prayers of thankfulness are viewed as appropriate and restorative. Stopping weekday activities creates the space to notice God's good gifts, and a thankful, receptive spirit brings Sabbath joy.

— LYNNE M. BAAB is author of [Sabbath Keeping](#) and the Bible study guide [Sabbath](#). She is a Presbyterian minister who teaches pastoral theology in New Zealand, and the author of numerous other books and Bible study guides. More of her articles about the Sabbath as well as information about her books are available at www.lynnebaab.com.

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Discuss:

1. Do you take a Sabbath, formally or informally? If not, why not?
2. If you're married, do you have a good strategy for making sure both you and your spouse have opportunities to recharge?
3. During the course of a week, what kinds of activities do you most need to take a Sabbath from?

Directing People toward God

Consider several areas in which introverts are gifted to minister to others.

By Adam S. McHugh

These are several of the ways in which the introverted church leader can point people toward God: preaching, sharing your life, leading out loud, spiritual direction, and the ministry of presence.

Preaching

Those who are only aware of the stereotypes of introverted behavior—shy, awkward, reticent, timid—might assume that introverts will be public speaking disasters. When I was a seminary student, I interned at a Presbyterian church where I shared an office with a cantankerous Irish woman. After hearing that I would be preaching on a Sunday morning, she remarked in her thick brogue to the receptionist: “How could Adam possibly preach in church? He never talks!” Yet the exhilaration of preaching that Sunday morning, along with the encouragement of the congregation, set me on a path of preaching and teaching that I intend to follow for the rest of my life.

One of the most unexpected findings of my research was that introverted pastors felt very comfortable preaching, irrespective of congregation size. Many of them actually considered it their biggest strength and favorite part of the job. They found that their natural tendencies toward study, scholarship, and writing translated into effective preaching and teaching. My colleague Cynthia said that, for her, preaching is the *easiest* part of ministry. Some introverted pastors find preaching less challenging than the unstructured nature of the fellowship hour after the service, where the sturdiest Styrofoam cups can't hide their rapidly depleting energy. A member of a 1,500-member congregation remarked that his introverted pastor was “bipolar”: energetic and affable in the pulpit, wilting and awkward afterward.

Introverts often feel confident when preaching because it is in a controlled setting. Preaching moves in a unilateral direction, from speaker to listener. The person up front sets the goal and the tone, and has the luxury of speaking without interruption. Uninterrupted speaking is generally more comfortable for introverts than dialogue, because the give and take of the latter requires us to think on our feet. Introverts prefer to prepare thoroughly in advance, and settings like debates or question-and-answer sessions can devolve into rambling presentations, or what my friend Mark calls a “Festival of Umm.”

We need to take into account our personality preferences and strengths when we consider our strategies for sermon preparation and delivery. For example, I find Marti Olsen Laney's claim that introverts have a slower mechanism for “word retrieval” to be true when I am speaking in public. My diction is simply not of the same quality and fluidity when I have not written my sermons out in advance. Because I love to craft words and sentences and I appreciate the impact that language can have on people, I

often enjoy the writing and preparation components of preaching more than I do the act of preaching.

The challenge for me, and others who pen full sermons, is translating the written manuscript into an engaging interaction in the pulpit. Some of us empathize with the apostle Paul, whose accusers contended that “his letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible” (2 Cor. 10:10). We write with a flourish, but we speak with a thud. If we, as many of the introverted pastors I spoke with do, bring a full text (or a thorough outline) with us to the pulpit, we may become bound to the world of our manuscripts, preaching at people rather than communicating with them. Our sermons may seem overly rhetorical because they are unintentionally written for people to read rather than to hear. When this happens, we neglect the primary relational component in preaching, as preaching is a relationship-building opportunity.

Whereas some extroverted preachers may struggle with repetitiveness and superficiality, some introverted preachers may err on the side of erudition or ambiguity. Our ideas may be profound but they may not settle in the actual, tangible lives of our listeners. With all of these potential hazards, I emphasize the following things when I mentor young introverted preachers:

1. *Preach as an introvert, not an extrovert.* Use thoughtful pauses and silence as a way to add gravity and contemplativeness to your sermons.
2. *Modulate your voice.* People hear the tone of your voice before they hear your words. You will hold their attention better by changing the pitch and tone of your voice, and a significant component of persuasion is the conviction with which you share your ideas.
3. *Break up your lofty ideas and biblical exposition with stories, examples, and illustrations.* They help put flesh on your ideas and makes them tangible to people.
4. *Preach to inspire, not merely inform.* (Suggestions three and four are particularly important for introverts who score high in the thinking category of the [Myers-Briggs assessment](#).)
5. *Be present.* Introverts are prone to get caught up in their sermon notes and their presentation, giving the impression that they are not fully present to the congregation.
6. *Don't show your homework.* Be thorough in your study and preparation, but in the actual sermon, keep your research and thinking process in the background.
7. *Don't be intimidated by mistakes.* If you stumble over your words or lose your place, people may actually feel more connected with you and listen more carefully.
8. *Use preaching as an opportunity for self-revelation.*

This last point has been somewhat controversial, but for me, there has been no better arena to share more of myself and to connect with others. In other settings, I listen more than I talk and am disinclined toward talking about myself. I think introverted preachers

should take advantage of a preaching opportunity to introduce deeper layers of themselves to others. Some contend that preaching should only be about biblical exposition, but even in that, we are giving people our perspective on Scripture and the world. If we are offering our worldviews to people, then why not also present them with other aspects of ourselves—our hearts, our weaknesses, our questions?

A groundbreaking and somewhat unsettling discovery for me was that congregations evaluate the quality of preaching not by the profundity of a person's ideas but by their level of trust in the preacher as a person. A recent study on preaching found that the credibility of a preacher is first a function of the *relationships* they have with their listeners. This study found that “where that relationship was positive and when laity perceived that the preacher had genuine concern for them (i.e., displaying openness and warmth, exercising and dealing kindly and seriously with their opinions), hearers assumed the Word of God was being preached.” The relational packaging overshadows, though also confirms, the content.

Thus even the most insightful biblical interpretation and robust theological reflections can fall flat if people do not trust the speaker. This explains why sometimes, when I have preached to unfamiliar congregations, I have felt like the court jester performing for an audience that just pushed away from Thanksgiving dinner. But other times, when preaching to people whose homes I have been in, I've felt like I could read the phone book and people would melt into tears and speak in tongues.

We introverts, so often captivated by ideas, need to take seriously that Marshall McLuhan's immortal line, “the medium is the message,” goes beyond the field of advertising. For preaching, *we* are the medium. The message resides in us as persons. The most pivotal preaching event in the Bible was not Moses and the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai, or Peter on Pentecost, or even the Sermon on the Mount; the most pivotal preaching moment was the incarnation, the moment the eternal Word of God, the wisdom with which the whole universe hangs together, became human. God's supreme revelatory medium was not words piped in or scrolls dropped from the heavens, but a living, breathing human being who walked and taught and ate and wept and loved among us.

I have come to realize that, though I have gifts rooted in words (in quality, not quantity), I simply cannot be an effective communicator unless I build others' trust. The way that I develop others' trust is to lead by example and to invest personally in others' lives, which means I need to come down from my ivory tower and involve myself in the details of their everyday existence. As an introverted pastor, I feel that I am skilled in the “big” communication events—preaching and teaching, casting vision, leading meetings—but I struggle with “small” communication—small talk, saying the little things that make people feel known and appreciated, expressing interest in the details of people's lives, or even returning phone calls promptly.

Yet if we are to preach that God is not only involved in the big matters of salvation, redemption and justice, but is also in the routine circumstances of daily life, then we

leaders need to show an interest in the ordinary events of people's lives. People will watch what we do before they listen to what we say.

Sharing Your Life

The biblical passage that has become foundational for both my leadership and my preaching is Paul's tender word to the believers in Thessalonica: "So deeply do we care for you that we were determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us" (1 Thess. 2:8). What stands out to me here is, first, the deep affection that Paul had for the Thessalonian believers. His motivation for communicating the gospel, as emphasized twice in one short verse, is his care and love for them.

But it's even more striking that Paul was committed to not only sharing the gospel, the content of the faith, but also his own life. He loved them so much that he shared more than the message of Jesus; he shared himself. The nature of the gospel is such that it can only be fully imparted through shared life and authentic personal relationships.

Christian leaders, even introverted ones, are called to enter into the worlds of others and allow others to enter ours. We let others see our strengths and our triumphs, as well as our weaknesses and failures and doubts, even our struggles as introverts (using discretion, of course). The greatest gift that we have to offer others is ourselves, because it's in our fragile and vulnerable humanness that people see the unconditional love and redeeming power of God most clearly. A leader who shows vulnerability about his or her personal life creates empathy with the pain and struggles of others and, thus, often has a greater impact than countless numbers of the most powerful biblical exhortations. I've found this to be especially true when I tell unresolved personal stories, meaning that the story hasn't ended in victory and personal heroism; this presents me as a fellow traveler in the way of the cross.

Leading Out Loud

Even though introverts are bent toward listening and reflection, introverts called into positions of leadership in Christian communities, especially in evangelical communities, will do much of our leading by speaking or writing. What this requires is a deliberate effort on our part to translate our reflections and inner processes into words. If we are convinced that introverts can be effective leaders, and that we bring different gifts to the table than extroverts, we will benefit others by verbalizing and modeling the strengths we have.

We know that introspection is valuable for leaders, not only for personal growth but also for bringing transformation to the organizations they lead. With that said, I would argue that our culture is becoming increasingly deaf to the internal voices that indicate to us that something is wrong. We have become alarmingly dependent on the external voices—advertising, mass appeal, technology—as the basis for our choices and actions. When I was a pastor in a church in Southern California, I was troubled by how few people reflected on the ways they spent their day-to-day lives and how few of them considered what their choices communicate about their priorities. In fact, to many of them, it seemed like the element of "choice" was absent. It was as though there were

inexorable external forces that constrained them to lead the lives they did, as if they were mere victims of cultural drivenness, the hectic ambition of suburban life. I wondered why people were afraid to slow down and what they would discover if they took the time to listen to their internal voices.

People in our culture need models of self-reflection, leaders who will teach them how to look inward and evaluate their motivations and choices. Introverted leaders should look to model that in pastoral interactions, in meetings, in preaching, in newsletters, and e-mails—even casually or humorously. As Henri Nouwen said, “Our task is the opposite of distraction. Our task is to help people concentrate on the real but often hidden event of God’s active presence in their lives. Hence the question that must guide all organizing activity in a parish is not how to keep people busy but how to keep them from being so busy that they can no longer hear the voice of God who speaks into the silence.”

Spiritual Direction

Spiritual direction is an ancient practice in which people collaborate to practice listening to God. Ordinarily, it involves a one-on-one interaction between a spiritual director and a spiritual directee, though it can also involve larger groups. The practice of spiritual direction is founded on the notion that we are never the ones who initiate the conversation; God is already speaking and moving among us, as the Spirit hovered over the waters in Genesis 1, and our role is to discern and respond. A spiritual director helps the directee attend to the voice of the Spirit.

Jeannette Bakke explains that “present-day directors do not give answers or tell directees what to do in their relationship with God or when making life choices. Instead, they listen with directees for how the Spirit of God is present and active. Directors support and encourage directees as they listen and respond to God.”

As I have participated in spiritual direction, both from the standpoint of a director and directee, I have become convinced that this ministry is tailor-made for introverts. The majority of my classmates in my spiritual-direction-training program were introverts. For introverted leaders who constantly feel like they are operating out of their weaknesses, one-on-one spiritual direction plays to our strengths:

1. The one-on-one setting is perhaps the most comfortable introverted context.
2. The relationship is ongoing, sometimes enduring over years, and involves mutual commitment. This fosters depth of relationship and enables people to thoroughly explore the spiritual life. Introverts are much better over time.
3. The primary role of the spiritual director is listening, not speaking. Good spiritual directors are comfortable with silence and know how to ask probing questions. They also understand that excessive advice and instruction can short-circuit the path to wisdom and maturity for another person.
4. Spiritual directors must be able to detect nuance and listen for what’s unsaid. They are listening to three separate frequencies simultaneously: the wavelength of the

Spirit, the experiences and thoughts of the directee, and the movements in themselves.

5. Directors are a kind of spiritual observer, who remove themselves enough to “watch” what God is doing in the life of another person and then report on what they see.

I wish to commend not only the particular niche of spiritual direction to introverted leaders but also the general habits exercised in spiritual direction, which I think can be applied fruitfully in all pastoral settings. My friend Scott, an introverted pastor who works with a missionary organization, says that he thinks of himself as a “contemplative presence.” In whatever setting he is in, he tries not only to listen to the overtones of what people are saying but also to listen to the undercurrents. He asks himself questions: *What are the emotions and the assumptions behind what people are saying? What is the Holy Spirit saying? What is happening inside of me?* If he “hears” something that seems significant, he will speak up in an appropriate moment. This is a discipline he particularly tries to apply in planning meetings, because he knows the tendency in spiritual communities to lapse into business agendas while neglecting to listen.

In my interactions with pastors over the past decade, I have been confounded by how few of them were adept in the discipline of listening. What should be an absolute prerequisite for entering ministry has been subordinated to the all-important evangelical qualities of speech—teaching, persuasion, correction—or relegated to specific “side” ministries. Our seminaries subject hopeful pastors to rigorous communication and preaching classes, but I have never seen a class or seminar offered on listening.

Jesus had a piercing listening ability. He practiced the sort of listening that could undress people, exposing their motivations, weaknesses, longings, and hopes. In John 4, in his famously scandalous conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob, Jesus not only paid attention to the words in their conversation, but he listened for the echoes of her deepest fears and longings underneath her words. She talked about wells and water, but he perceived the cavernous well in her soul that she tried to fill with unsatisfying relationships. He listened for what was unsaid. And then, with one devastating request, that she go and return with her “husband,” Jesus shattered her walls and opened her up to the soul-quenching water of life.

Many people speak about suffering and pain in a circumspect manner. Out of self-protection, they may speak of emotions such as “hurt” or “despair” in a rational way. Or they may spiritualize their circumstances and feelings, framing their pain as a theological issue or question. It’s often very ineffective to respond to people according to these methods of expression because the true issues are often unspoken. Many introverts, who are versed in the workings of the inner world, are naturally equipped for the art of listening to what’s unsaid.

The Ministry of Presence

Another gift that introverted leaders exercise is the ministry of presence. Too often people think that if someone is in pain, they need to solve that person’s problems, to “fix

it.” They think they need to lift him or her out of anguish, and wish they could handle the situation like an ER doctor: sweep in, diagnose the problem, defibrillate, start the IV, move on. But I’m convinced that a person who is suffering does not, primarily, need answers or a well-timed statement that sheds light on the situation. Because when people try to impart their “wisdom” into a person’s struggle, it can have a polarizing effect: they reveal how little they know the situation, and the person feels even more isolated. Few things intensify a person’s pain as much as glib answers or nervous chatter from people who are uncomfortable with silence.

What a person in pain needs, on the deepest human level, is to not feel alone. This person needs people who will simply be there and help carry the burden without always trying to fix the situation. The best thing Job’s “comforters” ever did was sit with him on the ground in silence for seven days. I’m sure he wished that on the eighth day they had just returned home, without ever opening their mouths. Words can trivialize, but silence is sacred.

— ADAM S. MCHUGH is an ordained Presbyterian minister, a spiritual director, and an introvert.

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Discuss:

1. Did any of these ministry possibilities surprise you?
2. Have you noticed other church leaders whose introverted tendencies gave them a distinct gift for ministries like these?
3. Could your church empower more introverts to step up into these modes of ministry? How so?

A Ministry Action Plan

For each of these modes of ministry that are available to you, describe one way in which you could practice or develop that ministry within your own context.

Preaching

Sharing Your Life

Leading Out Loud

Spiritual Direction

The Ministry of Presence

What Introverted Leadership Looks Like

Know how to lead others according to your strengths.

By Adam S. McHugh

One of the things I've accepted is that I will impact fewer people than extroverted pastors. At times I have compared myself negatively with my extroverted counterparts who have more widespread influence. But I have come to see this "limitation" as an opportunity to have a deeper impact on the people I do influence.

Extroverts can err on the side of scattering themselves too widely and only impacting people superficially. As an introvert, I find it far more satisfying to invest in a few people, and I trust that my intentional efforts will result in mature disciples and leaders who will go on to further impact the church and the world.

Biblical scholars have observed that, though Jesus scattered gospel seeds far and wide, he devoted the bulk of his ministry, especially in the Gospel of Mark, to cultivating the spiritual lives and the understanding of the 12 disciples. He narrowed this focus even further in the development of the three: Peter, James, and John. These were the ones he gave nicknames, and they were the only disciples privileged to see his transfiguration (Mark 9:2–4), the resurrection of Jairus's daughter (Mark 5:22–24, 35–43), and his anguish in the garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:32–41). Jesus, as he consciously moved toward his fate, established successors who would anchor his kingdom mission to the ends of the earth. He taught them, corrected them, modeled both faith and struggle for them, and exposed them to unsettling and stretching experiences.

Even though introverted leaders have learned, out of a mixture of necessity and guilt, how to cater to the masses, we innately desire to invest in "the few." Intimate, ongoing relationships—in which we enter deeply into the lives of others and impart wisdom—are our modus operandi. My greatest ministry satisfaction has come through the relationships I've been involved in via spiritual direction, mentoring, or ongoing counseling relationships. In these ministries, I am able to help people discover their gifts and discern God's direction for their lives; I can utilize my natural capacities for listening and understanding nuance. These relationships are energizing and full of joy, and they are strategic in passing on what I have learned to people who will then do the same for others.

I have seen the strategy of concentrating on "the few" applied very effectively in youth ministry, a sector of church ministry where extroverted leadership has been especially idealized. In my research, I came across myriads of youth-minister job descriptions that echoed this one: "The ideal candidate will have a dynamic personality and be energized by people, as well as the ability to invest in relationships outside of the office." Translation: Only extroverted applications accepted. Popular thinking is that youth are attracted to "the show," a glitzy program with high production value and a zany, uber-charismatic youth pastor.

But I would argue that, though the cult of personality woos, personal attention is what truly impacts. Due to the state of the American family, youth workers often function as surrogate parents. Given the choice, would you want a parent who is up front entertaining all your friends or a parent who will remember your birthday?

When I was a college pastor, the students who came onto campus with the greatest maturity, spiritual depth, and understanding of the gospel were invariably those who'd had a youth pastor or other mentor from their communities of faith take a special, personal interest in them. Moreover, many of those students had been the beneficiaries of a movement toward contemplative youth ministry, in which the primary role of youth pastors is less about creating entertaining programs and more about helping students cultivate an awareness of God's presence. Contemplative youth ministry is a promising new direction both for introverted youth workers and for the introverted students they lead.

Equipping

When Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, ventured into the desert to discover what the Lord had done among the people of Israel, he was troubled to find Moses at the center of a maelstrom of people seeking instruction and mediation. Jethro shrewdly advises Moses to equip other men to sit as judges for the minor cases, leaving Moses only to bear the burden of the most important ones. "If you do this, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people will go to their home in peace" (Ex. 18:23).

The introverted pastors I interviewed were insistent that their roles are not to be the ministry providers, with everyone else positioned as ministry recipients, but their roles are to equip others to do the ministry of the church. Most of them pointed to Ephesians 4:11-13 as the basis of their self-understanding:

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

These three verses are packed with insight about leadership. We see that God creates different sorts of leaders and that they, therefore, lead out of who they are and the gifts they have been given. We also learn that the main responsibility of leaders, with their manifold gifts and functions, is to equip others for ministry and pave the way for their maturity. In order for pastors to be faithful to their biblical calling, and survive in ministry, they must empower and release others to also do the ministry of the church.

My friend Chris, an introverted Presbyterian pastor in the northeastern United States, has been wrestling with the implications of the biblical emphasis on equipping: "As a solo pastor, I must find the right people and then give them the power to do those other functions. That does not mean *helping me* to do those functions. It means that *they* do those tasks, and I contribute how I can. It also means developing and educating

a congregation that allows laypeople to lead in ways previously reserved for and expected of the pastor.”

Chris concedes that he, like many introverts, is not naturally a team builder. George Barna lists team building as one of the four leadership aptitudes that comprise the “ideal” leadership team. The most challenging part of team building for introverts is not making the necessary personal connections with others, but it’s facilitating the connections that must take place *between* other people in the community. This facilitation requires someone who is capable of gathering people into social situations that will form cohesive communities, and the truth is that this usually requires a socially tireless extrovert who thrives in group situations. However, the refreshing news is that, when you have a team-leadership model, an introverted pastor does not have to play that role. The introverted pastor can, instead, encourage and equip others to assume the team-building functions, and he or she can focus on other critical areas that contribute to the vitality and reach of the community.

Team Leadership

The prophet Micah reviews God’s favor to Israel at the time of the Exodus: “For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of slavery; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam” (Micah 6:4). Even Moses, the most celebrated Old Testament leader, led in the context of a team of people. Aaron was the spokesman, Moses’ mouthpiece, and Miriam was the worship leader, the one who led the Hebrews in triumphant verse after their liberation. Together the three oversaw the transition from an enslaved people ruled by an oppressor to an independent nation governed by the gracious law of the Lord.

From the trio of leaders in the Exodus, to the tribal heads of the burgeoning nation of Israel, to the apostolic community appointed by Jesus to continue his kingdom mission, to Paul’s intimate partnerships in his Gentile ministry, team leadership is a mainstay in biblical tradition. It’s not the only form of biblical leadership—note the rugged isolation of the Old Testament prophets—but it is the one that I most recommend to introverted leaders. The lonely-at-the-top model of leadership, which may be a temptation for many introverted leaders, is increasingly irrelevant in a postmodern culture; it is spiritually dangerous for leaders and a less effective use of our resources and energy.

Postmodernity has precipitated shifts in our leadership paradigms. In modernity, a hierarchical model of leadership was normative, and people separated themselves from others through expertise and position. Postmodern culture facilitates more egalitarian and collaborative forms of leadership and ministry. A successful postmodern leader will motivate others through relational skills and persuasion, not position and decree. Leadership in postmodern culture is not appointed by the Powers-That-Be; true leadership is *given* by a community to those people who have earned their trust and respect. Thus, in this culture, introverts must battle our tendency to lead from a position above others, simply giving commands and directions from a distance because it requires less social energy.

Team leadership reduces the pressure placed on the individual leader and helps ameliorate the sense of loneliness “at the top,” which especially afflicts introverts. Though corporate CEOs and megachurch pastors often seemed resigned to this fate, I am convinced that this isolation does not have to be, and should not be, the case. There have been far too many scandals in the evangelical world for us to continue to place leaders in situations of considerable pressure and limited accountability. Even in stained-glassed cathedrals, power corrupts. Leading in teams helps reduce the glare of the spotlight on one person and distributes responsibility.

The team-leadership model recognizes that the traditional model of leadership, in which, as George Barna puts it, “pastors lead everyone and must have direct, unfettered oversight of the masses,” asks pastors to be superhuman, meeting the needs of everyone in the community, in all their diversity. In a team setting, leadership is shared by a community of people, which counters the tendency for pastors to form congregations in their own images. Barna describes the shift to leading in a team setting: “In a team environment, the leadership role of the pastor shifts from that of leading the entire congregation to being a leader of leaders. . . . This team-leadership model reduces the stress on the pastor from having to be all things to all people and essentially becoming nothing to everyone. The pastor may instead pour whatever he or she has into the relative handful of fellow leaders, who in turn provide the breadth and the depth of leadership that the church requires.”

Team leadership enables introverted leaders to focus and to devote more time to their passions and giftings, which is life-giving. Though our primary source of energy will come through solitude, introverts can also find energy in a job that fits our spiritual gifts and interests. Nothing taxes introverts’ energy faster than job requirements that do not match who we are. Though I gained a great deal from my years as a hospice chaplain, spending the bulk of my time with people in crisis and then thoroughly documenting those visits was not where I wanted to be. I longed to be a teacher and spiritual director and writer, and it’s in those pursuits that I have found life and energy.

Partnerships between introverts and extroverts. I consider a partnership between introverted and extroverted leaders—both professional and lay—to be imperative in leading the church. Their complementary strengths bring vitality and wholeness to ministry, and they model faithfulness for both introverts and extroverts in the community. I cannot overstate how validating and transformative it is for individuals in a community to see people who share their personality type leading out of who they are.

My most effective partnership with an extrovert developed in college campus ministry. I say “developed” because it did not come easily or naturally. Jonny was the team leader, with the experience and expertise in college ministry, and I was the new staff member, equipped with a seminary education and a background in preaching and hospital chaplaincy. Jonny was the most extroverted person I had ever met, one of those people who can carry on a conversation with anyone, about anything. He has gifts in evangelism and community building, and people would flock to him like paparazzi to an A-list celebrity. If I didn’t know it to be physiologically impossible, I would have thought

Jonny could have forgone sleep to have his REM cycles powered by social interaction. I, on the other hand, am highly introverted, a deep thinker, with gifts in teaching and pastoring. He thought I spent too little time with people and too much time in study and preparation, and I was constantly consoling people who wondered why he was always spending time with *other* people in the community.

We spent several months trying to understand each other, having to forgive each other and endure the requisite growing pains of two very different people trying to lead the same community. Yet after a while, we developed a synergy that transcended our own individual contributions. I created a cohesive vision for the direction of the community, and he, with his finger on the pulse of the community, fostered camaraderie and enthusiasm. I mentored introverted leaders that he might have overlooked, and he disciplined extroverted leaders who were drawn to his energy. Likewise our preaching styles balanced each other as well: a graduate later told me that when Jonny preached, it felt like he preached to the whole community, and when I preached, it felt like I preached to each individual in the community. I gave them probing ideas to chew on, and he communicated a passion for relationships.

Finding your place. In that partnership, in which I was not the principal leader, I learned that I prefer a leadership position that is a step removed from the center of a community. Though I am a competent administrator and team leader, I find that I enjoy being a shade away from the limelight, as I have greater freedom to determine my own schedule. When I have been the head of a community, I found that I was too often at the whims and schedules of others, and I spent more time reacting than I did initiating. When I'm on the side, I am able to devote more time to what I love, like writing, studying, and teaching, and I am able to move at a more leisurely pace.

My friend Charles agrees that, while he enjoys making contributions to teams, he does not like the role of central leader. He interprets his ministry in light of the biblical character Barnabas, who came alongside others and raised them up to be leaders, while he remained in the background. Barnabas, who earned the honorific title "son of encouragement," was given the harrowing task of mentoring fire-breathing-Saul after his conversion on the Damascus road. The first stories in which we see the two of them together, they are listed as "Barnabas and Saul," but then in Acts 13:42 the order is reversed to "Paul and Barnabas," a pattern that endures throughout the book. In Greek narrative, the person listed first is the most prominent person. Barnabas had done his role of preparing Paul to be the head of the mission to the Gentiles, and had, without jealousy or resentment, taken second place behind him.

Other introverted leaders, however, find the opposite to be true. My friend Karen has worked as a solo pastor at a small church, an associate pastor at a medium-sized church, and is now senior pastor at a 650-member Presbyterian church. The solo pastor position afforded her a great deal of solitude, as she was often the only person in the office during the week. But she reports that her associate position was more suited for an extrovert, because it was program driven and required her to be constantly out among people, especially in the never-ending work of recruiting volunteers. That was why, when her

current church recently called an associate pastor, Karen suggested that they find an extrovert to partner with her. Out of all these positions, Karen prefers the senior-pastor position because people expect her, as the weekly preacher, to spend a good deal of time studying and writing. As the chief administrator and supervisor, she is often removed from the center of the action and is able to invest in the development of other staff members and elders.

I was surprised to discover that many senior pastors of large churches are introverts. I had assumed that the more people in a church, the more extroverted the pastors needed to be. In fact, introverts can thrive in these positions because, in large churches, people do not expect their senior pastor to be as accessible, and the model of leadership tends toward training and coaching rather than the more traditional roles of pastoring and counseling. Head pastors of large churches, instead of spreading themselves thinly and superficially among the throngs of the community, can devote themselves to the development of other leaders who can then distribute themselves among the constituency of the church.

Leading Extroverts

It's easy to forget, as we as introverts are learning to relish the depths of our own temperament, that there are extroverts out there who find us utterly alien. The authors of [Type Talk at Work](#) observe: "As is the case with all introverts, an introverted leader has a lot brewing under the surface, but only lets out or shares a small piece of it." This can be deeply mysterious to extroverts, and they can view this internalizing tendency with suspicion. When we take a moment for quiet, they may think we're withholding from them. Or they may interpret our silence in a brainstorming conversation as either rejection of or assent to their ideas. They may even mistake our natural reflectiveness for apathy or indecisiveness.

With that in mind, perhaps the most significant aspect of successful leadership is communication, as we cannot lead others or compel them to follow a vision if we cannot communicate with them. This is especially true when working with people who do not speak the language of "introvert." A consistent critique of my ministry has been a lack of communication. What people sometimes consider to be my flaws betrays their extroverted expectations for communication. For extroverts, it is natural to regularly talk over ideas with people, to check in often and to seek feedback, but for introverts, these things require conscious, consistent effort. Introverts are prone to thinking and acting very independently. Our temptation is toward isolation from others, but Christian leadership and life is always characterized by interdependence. So introverts need to discipline themselves to depend on others and to seek their input.

Over-communication. An indispensable instrument in the toolbox of an introverted leader is "over-communication." The "over" in this strategy will only be perceived by introverts; to extroverts this is just "communication." Aware of our proclivity for enigmatic silence, introverted leaders act in love and understanding toward extroverts when we practice communication that is unnatural to us: we give more feedback and affirmation than we think is necessary; we repeat ourselves, even several times when

making an important point; we contort our faces and gesticulate; and we sometimes give expression to incomplete thoughts to let extroverts know that we're engaged in the conversation.

Education. As an introverted leader, I have to do more work educating people about my personality type than do extroverted leaders. I've done this in a variety of settings—in the pulpit, in leadership meetings, in pastoral interactions, and in casual conversations. I've found that even a little explanation about what life is like as an introvert goes a long way in dispelling myths and establishing understanding. This is helpful both for extroverts to begin to understand introverts, and also for introverts who will find their experience normalized by interacting with leaders who are like them.

I've been encouraged that the communities I have been a part of have been eager to embrace the different ways God has created us, and they value, both intrinsically and practically, that diversity. When I have explained to these communities the nature of introversion—why I need time to myself, what I enjoy, what I struggle with, and what my silence does and does not indicate—they have been appreciative and empathic. The most gratifying Christian community experience I have had was when, after modeling confidence in my introversion and leading extensive conversations about different personality types, introverts came to be celebrated as equally as extroverts.

Leading Introverts

Though leading introverts should come more naturally to us, sometimes we spend so much time in the world and language of extroverts that we neglect the introverts among us! One of the most important things I have learned about leading my fellow introverts is that I need to give them the space to speak. Part of my role as a leader of a community is to carve out speaking room for those who do not normally do the talking but who have incredible insight to offer. My ministry colleague Mark, who has done a lot of work in group dynamics, observed that most meetings are dominated by a few assertive, usually extroverted, speakers. An entire meeting can pass with only two or three voices being heard. Most introverts, and less assertive extroverts, will not try to compete with or interrupt a steady flow of words. Mark is particularly troubled that meetings are the places where decisions are made and that the verdicts are largely determined by the outspoken minority.

What can we do to encourage introverts to speak, without putting them on the spot or imposing undue pressure on them? One simple thing we can do is give people a meeting agenda several days before a meeting, so that those who need to think before they speak will have the opportunity for prior consideration. In the meeting itself, we should establish ground rules for group discussion. We need to be clear that we are not only here to give our opinions but also to listen to one another, so it's bad form to interrupt one another.

The most fruitful strategy that I have employed has been inserting personal reflection time into a meeting. When an important decision needs to be made, I have given people time to step outside of the room and consider their individual opinions. When introverts have had time to process internally, they will be more likely to share their thoughts in the

group. When a group is on the verge of a highly significant, ministry-shaping decision, Mark will separate the meeting into two days, so that people will have time to reflect in between meetings.

When I lead Bible studies, I will give everyone time to work through the text and consider their questions privately before opening it up to group discussion. I will usually go from person to person and have them list their individual questions so that everyone has a chance to contribute. In the middle of a discussion, I might call on someone who has not previously spoken. This strategy requires caution and, usually, a relationship with that person and a knowledge of his or her comfort level in group interaction. It is also critical that a leader not call on people until sufficient discussion has taken place, so that introverts will have had time to entertain their opinions and formulate their thoughts. It involves some tact on the part of the leader so that people interpret your requests as an invitation, not as a demand.

— ADAM S. MCHUGH is an ordained Presbyterian minister, a spiritual director, and an introvert.

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Discuss:

1. As an introvert, which aspect of church leadership is most challenging for you? How do you or could you address that?
2. Are the leaders in your church sensitive to the range of personality types? How so, or not so?
3. How could you improve the way you lead extroverts? The way you lead introverts?

The Way I Lead

For each of these statements, answer “true” or “false,” and consider what you might need to work on or delegate.

	True	False
I am good at facilitating connections between other people.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am more comfortable giving orders than I am collaborating.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I seek out partnerships with extroverted leaders to balance myself.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I’ve found a place in the leadership structure where I can thrive.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I over-communicate, rather than under-communicate, to the people around me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I explain to fellow leaders the inclinations of my personality.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I give introverts around me enough space to think and contribute ideas.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Bridging the Pastor-Board Gap

Cultivate stronger relationships between those inclined to introversion.

By Charles R. Swindoll

Pastors and board members often clash because they approach situations from different perspectives. Pastors typically possess a theological or biblical perspective, a problem-solving method that they probably picked up in seminary. Board members tend to solve problems more pragmatically, using a tried-and-true method they learned in the business world. It's the idealism/realism rub.

In-depth, Risky Discipling

People with different perspectives often have trouble seeing the other's point of view. Perhaps Jesus' periodic struggles with his *board* of 12 were intensified because of this. Yet he described to them a different perspective—that of the kingdom of God.

Jesus committed himself deeply to those men. Robert Coleman, in *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, sums up the idea well: "Frequently he would take them with him in a retreat to some mountainous area of the country. ... He actually spent more time with his disciples than with everybody else in the world put together."

Two problems make us question the possibility of in-depth discipling. First, it's difficult to be candid, available, and confidential. Psychological studies reveal that we ministers tend to be more studious and introverted than the average leader, and we may attract board members with similar personality bents. A roomful of introverts doesn't make for an easy, breezy, let's-become-better-friends kind of group. Second, the task is risky. Really getting to know each other means phony images must crumble and distance-making formalities must be set aside. We need to encourage a first-name basis and an unguarded, give-and-take style.

Practical Suggestions

How can pastors and boards cultivate better interpersonal relationships? Here are four suggestions:

- **Schedule time together between official meetings.** This can be one-on-one or with a few. It can be in the pastor's or a member's home for an evening (with spouses), or over lunch. Sometimes the gathering may simply be for social purposes. You will probably have to plan these times in advance, or they will not happen.
- **Get away for overnight retreats.** One of the best decisions we made at one of my churches was to have pastor/elder retreats at least twice a year. These were great times for getting beneath the surface of one another's lives as well as evaluating our ministry. We ate together, enjoyed some needed laughter, and had extended times of prayer with each other. Sharing rooms together overnight also helped us break down relational barriers. We always emerged closer and in

better harmony with one another.

Leaders should start doing this perhaps on a yearly basis, shortly after the annual election of new board members. It's good to make sure every member can attend.

- **Translate attitudes into actions.** You love your spouse, but it will mean a lot to him or her for you to say so. You know you enjoy your kids, but a warm embrace communicates your attitude to them. Pastors and board members need to tell each other how grateful they are for their time, energy, and commitment. Written notes are appreciated. A sincere, firm handshake and an eyeball-to-eyeball look never fail to encourage. A phone call is another way of translating our attitudes into action.
- **Support each team member.** We all have enough enemies; each of us wrestles with sufficient self-depreciating thoughts. Leaders need to be loyal in support of one another, especially in each other's absence. When we have areas of disagreement, and we will, it's best to work them out face to face, courteously and confidentially. As pastors, we shouldn't use the pulpit as a hammer to settle arguments. Board members need to seal their lips when damage could be done to the ministry by an uncontrolled tongue.

— *CHARLES R. SWINDOLL is pastor of Stonebriar Community Church in Frisco, Texas, and a prolific author.*

Taken from *Leadership Handbooks of Practical Theology, Vol. 3: Leadership and Administration*, © 1995 by Christianity Today International and published by Baker.

Discuss:

1. Is your church leadership generally more introverted or extroverted? How does this affect the way you relate to one another?
2. Is your team already practicing some of Swindoll's suggestions? Which would be helpful to begin practicing?
3. What other ways can the leadership in a church foster greater trust and unity?

Further Resources

Books and resources for the introverted leaders in your church

BuildingChurchLeaders.com: Leadership training resources from Christianity Today International.

- “Leadership Styles” Assessment Pack
- “Secrets of Effective Communication” Practical Ministry Skills
- “Spiritual Disciplines for Busy Church Leaders” Practical Ministry Skills
- “How to Prevent Ministry Burnout” Survival Guide
- “Overcoming a Reluctance to Lead” Survival Guide
- “Building a Team” Training Theme
- “Leadership Styles” Training Theme
- “Leading from Your Strengths” Training Theme

LeadershipJournal.net: Practical advice and articles for church leaders from our sister publication.

“**Caring for Your Introvert**”: A classic piece from *The Atlantic* on introversion.

Introverted Church: The blog of Adam McHugh, author of *Introverts in the Church*.

Introverts in the Church by Adam S. McHugh. The author, an introvert himself, addresses the problems created by our culture’s preference for extroversion, and how introverts in the church can build on the strengths and deal with the challenges of their personality type. (IVP Books, 2009; ISBN 978-0830837021)

Invitation to Solitude and Silence by Ruth Haley Barton. This book offers guidance for discovering God more fully in the midst of the demands and noise of daily life. (IVP Books, 2004; ISBN 978-0830823864)

Mad Church Disease: Overcoming the Burnout Epidemic by Anne Jackson. Take a holistic view of the physical, emotional, and spiritual causes of stress so that you can treat burnout before you get burned out. (Zondervan, 2009; ISBN 978-0310287551)

Sabbath Keeping: Finding Freedom in the Rhythms of Rest by Lynne M. Baab. This book collects insights from Christian history and Sabbath keepers of all ages and backgrounds to help us learn to slow down and enjoy God more. (IVP Books, 2005; ISBN 978-0830832583)

The Way of the Heart by Henri Nouwen. This book fleshes out the disciplines of solitude, silence, and prayer. (HarperOne, 1991; ISBN 978-0060663308)