

Introverts in the Church

Exodus 4:10-15

Sermon by Dan Schrock

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But Moses said to the LORD, “Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue.” Then the LORD said to him, “Who has made a person’s mouth? Who makes them mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.”

But Moses said, “Oh my Lord, please send someone else.” Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses and God said, “Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well. Behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth, and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you both what to do.”

I

I recently saw an advertisement for a new pastor. It specified that “the candidate must have an outgoing and energetic personality.” For many churches, the ideal pastor is outgoing, gregarious, loves to meet new people and shake their hands, is quick-witted in social conversations, has lots of energy, and dazzles people with charm and charisma.

In other words, these churches look for extroverted pastors who will bring fire and enthusiasm to congregational life. It’s true that extroverts have many gifts to offer a church, whether or not they’re in a leadership role. About a decade ago here at Berkey, we had two men who were happy extroverts. During the coffee break between worship and Christian education, these two guys would bounce around the fellowship hall with huge smiles on their faces, greeting one person after another, glad-handing everyone they met. You could tell that the fellowship time energized them tremendously. In turn, they helped to energize social interactions between people. The fellowship hall buzzed when they were around. Then at about the same time, both men left us. One died and the other moved on to another congregation elsewhere. If you were paying attention, you noticed the change immediately. A little bit of the pop and sizzle were gone. Neither one of them was a pastor, but they were both key leaders in the social life of our congregation. Churches definitely benefit from extroverts.

II

Moses was not an extrovert. Indeed, Moses displays the characteristics of a classic introvert. There he was, out in the wilderness all by himself, tending his father-in-law's flock of sheep. What glorious silence and solitude he was having out there with nothing but the sheep and the mountains! No jets screaming overhead. No leaf blower blasting away on the neighboring hillside. No extraverted friends chattering about latest Chicago Cubs game. Tending sheep was like being away on retreat all the time.

You know what happens. God gets the man's attention with a small fire that burns away without burning up. One thing leads to another, and pretty soon God is asking Moses to leave those peaceful mountains and head down to the loud and bustling capital city, elbow his way past the crowds and into the palace, and then give the pharaoh a piece of God's mind.

Moses flat out doesn't want to do it. He's happy with his current job, thank you very much, because being alone outside in creation, with lots of time for thinking and reflecting, suits him splendidly. Moses protests. Moses stalls. Moses argues. Eventually, out pops a classic introverted response: "God, I'm not very good at public speaking. My words come slowly. My mind needs time to think about what to say next. My tongue gets tied up in my mouth."

God gets angry, but an interesting detail of the story is that God never disagrees that Moses gets a C- in public speaking. Implicitly, God agrees that Moses is not eloquent, that he is "slow of speech and of tongue" (v. 15). God may be mad at Moses' resistance, but God nevertheless relents. "Ok, then," says God, "Take Aaron with you, your brother. He can do all the talking as long as you give him the content." The story doesn't exactly say so, but apparently Aaron is an extrovert with a fast mouth and a gift for rapidly turning words into beautiful sentences.

For our purposes this morning, let's notice two aspects of this story. First, you don't have to be an extravert to participate in God's mission. God can and does ask introverts to do some really important work in the world. People who've researched this say that some of the most significant Christian leaders in recent memory were introverts.

Mother Teresa, who cared for dying people on the streets of Calcutta? She was an introvert. Martin Luther King, Jr., who was a major leader in the civil rights movement? Also an introvert.¹

Second, magical things can happen when introverts and extroverts work together for God. God may have been ticked off at Moses' foot-dragging, but it seems that foot-dragging helped God to come up with an even better plan. Moses knew he was a third-rate public speaker, and that acknowledgment caused God to change course. I can image God quietly thinking, "You know, Moses is right. He's not very good at talking, but his brother is. So let's make this a team effort." Which is just what happened. The two brothers returned to Egypt in a collaborative effort, each of them drawing on their own peculiar gifts and abilities. As you know, it was a crackerjack success. With the brothers working together, God tweaked pharaoh's nose and the people of Israel escaped slavery.

III

Many observers have noticed that U.S. culture, is, as a whole, highly extroverted. In politics, business, and often in the church, Americans are usually expected to behave in extroverted ways, even if they're introverted. This is not true in all cultures. For example, Japanese and Chinese cultures tend to be more introverted than American culture. However, even though American culture is largely extroverted, at least one study revealed that a slight majority of Americans are introverted, specifically, 50.7% of the population.²

Adam McHugh, a Presbyterian pastor who identifies as evangelical, has written a marvelous book called *Introverts in the Church: Finding Our Place in an Extroverted Culture*. He thinks American evangelicals mostly function in extroverted ways. He tells about visiting one evangelical mega-church with "blaring music, flashing colored lights, floating images, and rolling PowerPoint announcements on numerous screens." When the service began, it was like a rock concert. "The scream of the electric guitar caused everyone to leap out of their chair. For the next thirty minutes people clapped and danced and cheered their way through a frenetic worship set."³

Here at Berkey, I'd guess that slightly more than half the adults are introverted, while the rest of us are either extroverted or ambiverted. (If you're an ambivert, that means you're in the middle between introversion and extroversion.) In any case, our congregational culture probably leans toward the introverted side of things. And that's ok. There's plenty of room in God's world-wide movement for some churches to be mostly extroverted and others to be mostly introverted. God created both extroversion and introversion—and God embraces both.

Introverts have three main characteristics.

First, introverts are energized by solitude or by being with just one or two friends at a time. Introverts tend not to like large, noisy crowds. By contrast, extroverts get energy by being with other people and by going out and doing things. That's what refills their energy tanks.

Second, introverts need more time for internal processing. In Christian education classes, small groups, or congregational meetings, introverts are often quiet because they need the time to think. Extroverts are much more likely to talk easily and quickly. In fact, extroverts often need to talk out loud in order to figure out what they think. Introverts process things inside, while extraverts more often process things by talking.

Third, introverts prefer depth. They like high degrees of intimacy in relationships. They prefer to invest in fewer people and fewer topics than extroverts do. They want to explore what's going on inside of them, while extroverts are usually happier engaging with lots of people and ideas outside of themselves.

The differences between introverts and extroverts seem to be chemical, at least in part. Studies suggest that the brains of introverts rely more on acetylcholine, a neurotransmitter, while the brains of extroverts rely more on dopamine, a different neurotransmitter.⁴ These bio-chemical differences demonstrate some of the great diversity that God has infused into creation.

Whether you are an extrovert or an introvert, I encourage you to embrace the person God has created you to be. If you're an introvert, perhaps you find it more

rewarding not to sing during the songs, but to let the music wash through you. During our fellowship time between worship and Christian education, maybe you'd rather find a quiet corner to have an in-depth conversation with someone, instead of having quick conversations with a dozen different people. Or maybe you really don't like committees, but you love to quietly help someone in need, away from the public spotlight. These are all fine. We don't expect you to be what you aren't.

At Berkey, introverts and extroverts have often found ways of working together collaboratively. It's one reason we're a strong, healthy congregation. Yet ultimately, we're not defined by our introversion or our extroversion. Instead, we are defined by our mutual identity in Christ.

Notes

¹ Adam S. McHugh, *Introverts in the Church: Finding Our Place in an Extroverted Culture*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2009, 2017), 137.

² McHugh, 20.

³ McHugh, 196.

⁴ McHugh, 40-50.