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## Study guide

# Introverted leaders in the church

By Robert C. Blezard

Our culture celebrates leaders past and present who are obviously and notoriously extroverted—those successful people who flaunt the stereotypical extroversion characteristics of being loud, outspoken, quick to speak up/step up, brash, bold, etc. The problem comes when these traits alone are seen as good leadership qualities. In fact, some of the greatest leaders—past and present—have been or are introverts. They bring many strengths and gifts to the table.

### Exercise 1: What's what?

As a study group, discuss what it means to be an introvert, writing down as many descriptive words as members can think of. When done, discuss:

- Which words have positive connotations, and which have negative?
- Do the words really describe all introverts?
- Which might be accurate generalizations?
- Which are unfairly stereotypical or only apply to a few?

Now do the same exercise to explore what it means to be an extrovert. When done, compare the two lists.

- Generally speaking, which group of words is viewed more positively and valued by our culture? Why or why not?
- In what ways are extroverts honored? In what ways do extroverts get a bad rap?
- In what ways are introverts honored? In what ways do introverts get a bad rap?
- How can we bring balance to our own understanding of extroversion and introversion? Why is it important that we try to do so, not only in our own lives but in our churches and communities as well?

### Exercise 2: Which do you *think* you are?

- Do you describe yourself as an introvert or an extrovert? Why?
- What do you see as the advantages of being introverted or extroverted?
- What are the liabilities or disadvantages?



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- How does your extroversion or introversion play out in important areas of your life?
  - Relationships
  - Faith
  - School/job
  - Happiness, contentment, hope for the future?

### Exercise 3: All or nothing?

While a few people may be extreme extroverts or introverts, experts say that most of us fall somewhere in between. Many of us tend toward introversion or extroversion, but in fact may be more flexible depending on the situation.

Psychologists use the term “ambivert” to describe people who tend to fall in between introversion and extroversion.

Do you see yourself as a pure introvert or extrovert? On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being extreme extrovert and 10 being extreme introvert, where would you fall? Why?

### Exercise 4: Where *do* you fall?

Susan Cain, author of *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can't Stop Talking* (Crown Publishing Group, 2012), developed a five-minute quiz to help people get an idea of how they fall on the introvert-ambivert-extrovert scale. Published by *Fortune* magazine, it can be accessed at [fortune.com/2015/06/03/cain-introvert-quiz](http://fortune.com/2015/06/03/cain-introvert-quiz).

Take the quiz and discuss:

- What were your results?
- Did it surprise you?
- What did you learn about yourself?
- How can that information help you better manage your life?

### Exercise 5: Cultural bias?

Does our culture prefer extroverts and discriminate against and oppress introverts as a result? That's the premise of *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can't Stop Talking*. Cain states her case in the introduction. Read and discuss the following passages from page 4.

“We live with a value system that I call the Extrovert Ideal—the omnipresent belief that the ideal self is gregarious, alpha, and comfortable in the spotlight. The archetypical extrovert prefers action to contemplation, risk-taking to heed-taking, certainty to doubt. ... We like to think that we value individuality, but all too often we admire one type of individual—the kind who's comfortable ‘putting himself out there.’ ”

“Introversion—along with its cousins sensitivity, seriousness, and shyness—



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is now a second-class personality trait, somewhere between a disappointment and a pathology. Introverts living under the Extrovert Ideal are like women in a man's world, discounted because of a trait that goes to the core of who they are."

- Do you agree or disagree with her premise? Why or why not?
- Can you think of evidence that our culture values or overvalues extroverts?
- Can you think of evidence that our culture undervalues or devalues introverts?
- What are the consequences of this bias?

### Exercise 6: Leadership

Throughout history, both introverts and extroverts have made great leaders. In an April 2009 interview with *Forbes*, Jennifer Kahnweiler, author of *The Introverted Leader: Building on Your Quiet Strength* (Berrett-Kohler Publishers, 2009), describes these strengths:

"Thoughtful, quiet leaders don't try to dominate the conversation or direction of a team. They are engaged listeners and set the stage for people to step into their own strengths. They also are astute observers and known for synthesizing and summarizing key points in meetings.

"Introverted leaders also thoughtfully prepare for meetings and coaching sessions, which makes for substantial contributions. In addition, they prefer writing to speaking and will clarify their points through carefully thought-out emails. Finally, they build on the preference for one-on-one conversations to be effective coaches and mentors. They use their calm focus and grounded energy to provide reassurance during times of change."

- Describe a time when have you encountered such leaders.
- What kind of occupations or job descriptions would be ideal for these leaders?
- How would they be helpful in working with extroverted leaders?
- In the congregation, how would these strengths be best used?

### Exercise 7: Famous introverts

Some of the world's most important thinkers and leaders are introverts, wrote John Rampton in "23 of the Most Amazingly Successful Introverts in History" for Inc.com. Reflect on some or all of the people included on his list, discussing how being an introvert helped them as thinkers and leaders.

- **Albert Einstein:** Probably the world's best-known thinker in physics and mathematics.
- **Rosa Parks:** In 1955 she helped kick off the civil rights movement in



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## Study guide: **Introverted leaders** *continued*

Alabama when she was arrested for refusing to yield her bus seat for a white man.

- **Bill Gates:** Microsoft founder, billionaire and philanthropist.
- **Steven Spielberg:** One of Hollywood's most successful directors and producers.
- **Sir Isaac Newton:** Ever hear of Newtonian physics? Yep. That's him. He helped usher in the scientific revolution of the 17th century with his discoveries about motion, gravity and other topics.
- **Eleanor Roosevelt:** The longest-serving first lady was an outspoken advocate and champion for human rights and other causes.
- **Mark Zuckerberg:** The founder of Facebook.
- **Al Gore:** Former vice president and U.S. senator, Gore has become an important crusader for climate change.
- **Abraham Lincoln:** A quiet person, he ably commanded the nation in the Civil War and is renowned as one of the best presidents.
- **JK Rowling:** Creator of the Harry Potter books.
- **Warren Buffett:** One of our nation's most successful business leaders, he is also known as a philanthropist.
- **Mohandas Gandhi:** The Indian leader inspired the world (and Martin Luther King Jr.) with his witness of nonviolent resistance.
- **Michael Jordan:** One of the greatest athletes of all time, Jordan led the Chicago Bulls to victory after victory.
- **Elon Musk:** Entrepreneur and businessman, he founded PayPal, Space X and Tesla.
- **Dr. Seuss:** Author of *The Cat in the Hat*, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* and scores of other children's books.
- **Barack Obama:** Who knew? The first African American U.S. president.

# Introverted leaders in the church

Paul and Peter may have been extroverts—but what do we have to learn from introverts like John?

By Kurt Lammi

**WHEN** we think of leaders in the early church, the first two people who come to mind are probably Peter and Paul. Peter was the “blockhead” turned into “the rock.” Paul was the persecutor turned evangelist who arguably wrote around half of the New Testament. But there are plenty of other early leaders who are just as important to church history, even if they aren’t as well known. Today we might think of them as the introverted leaders in the church.

Consider the role of John in Acts 3-4. Throughout these chapters, there are a number of cases where Peter and John are doing various things together. They go to the temple (3:1), where Peter heals a man who couldn’t walk and then the man clings to both of them (3:11). The two men are arrested (4:1-3), and they are both recognized as being bold in faith (4:13).

Peter is the one who does most

of the speaking, but John is right there with him. It appears that Peter is an extrovert and John is an introvert. Both are bold in faith and seen as leaders—John just does it in a quieter way.

Our hymnody even speaks about the importance of introverted leaders. Consider the lyrics to the hymn “There Is a Balm in Gilead”: “Sometimes I feel discouraged and think my work’s in vain, but then the Holy Spirit revives my soul again. . . . If you cannot preach like Peter, if you cannot pray like Paul, you can tell the love of Jesus and say, ‘He died for all’ ” (Evangelical Lutheran Worship, 614).

All of us—introverts and extroverts—are vital members of the body of Christ. When Paul wrote about the body, he said: “The members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable” (1 Corinthians 12:22).

So often introverts are dismissed as shy (implicitly

“weaker”) and therefore apparently unsuited for leadership. But not all introverts are shy, and effective leaders are certainly not exclusively extroverts.

## A strength to their ministry

Adam McHugh, author of *Introverts in the Church: Finding Our Place in an Extroverted Culture* (IVP Books, 2009), estimates that 25 to 40 percent of Protestant pastors are introverted, with an even higher percentage among Roman Catholic priests.

When asked in an interview with **Christianity.com** if introverts can be in church leadership, McHugh replied: “Perhaps the better question then is *how* introverts can lead in a way that is life-giving and natural. I think self-care is absolutely critical for introverted pastors and leaders, because my experience is that introverts in ministry are more prone to burnout than extroverts.”

“My strength as an introvert is that I seldom present anything ... without a great deal of thought.”





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# INTROVERT | EXTROVERT

Alicia Nierman, pastor of First Lutheran Church, Xenia, Ohio, echoed that sentiment. After spending time chatting with people, Nierman said she needs to find time to recharge by herself. "I spend long hours working alone, and I believe the quality of my work is better for it," she said. "My strength as an introvert is that I seldom present anything—sermons, newsletters, class materials and worship services—without a great deal of thought."

Even if introverts get drained being around people for too long, their introverted personality can be a strength to their ministry.

Vanderbloemen Search Group, which helps congregations find the right people to hire for various ministries, publishes resources on church staffing. In a blog post, its chief operating

officer, Ben Homesley, argued that congregations looking to develop leaders may actually be best served by the gifts that introverts offer. "Society has historically done a terrible job of correctly defining leaders by saying they must be outspoken, loud and overly confident," he said. "True leadership would be better defined as poise, experience, discernment, a calming presence and the ability to make decisions during a time of crisis."

Some people, like Peter and Paul, are extroverted leaders in the church and play a very important role. But those who are introverted leaders in the church, like John, play a vital role as well. Whether in early history or in conversations around its future, the church needs both types of people in leadership. 

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