

'E' word

AN INTROVERT'S PERSPECTIVE

By TJ Benning

I used to be scared of the 'E' word. They'd talk about it at church, small groups and camps, and try to motivate us for it from the pulpit. And every time they did, a knot would grow in my stomach. A knot of guilt.

What I'm referring to is Evangelism. I always felt like I was never doing enough, not talking to enough strangers, not smiling enough when I shared my faith, not inviting enough people to church, never doing it right. I felt guilty about having too many Christian friends and spending too much time enjoying my unbelieving friends instead of witnessing to them.

It took me a long time to figure out why I struggled so much with this Christian commission. It wasn't that I was afraid of sharing what I believed, it wasn't even that I didn't know how to share it, it was purely this... I was introverted.

I still am introverted. I love people, I like parties and I have a flourishing social life but I need to recharge by being alone and I need a lot of time for quiet contemplation. To be honest, the thought of a quiet Saturday night home, alone in front of the fire with a good book sounds like a dream.

Did God make me this way? Did He knit my introversion together in my mother's womb? I believe He did. So why did I have so much trouble with the concept of evangelism?

Somewhere along the line, growing up in church, I got my wires crossed. Calling people to stand up or go down the front during an altar call made me cringe, inviting an unbelieving friend to a church event made my mouth dry up. And approaching a stranger with the specific purpose of saving their soul made me feel false. Somehow I ended up believing that evangelism was geared towards extroverts. They found it easier and they were better at it. They got the results. I thought I had to become more outgoing to do it properly. It didn't work. People are smart. They could see straight through it and knew I was faking it, which was not helpful to anyone. So I gave up.

Instead of evangelising the way the church told me to, I decided to start loving people in my own way – an introvert's way. After all, if God calls us all to share the Good News, surely He meant introverts as well?

I let the pretence go and pursued real friendships, deep friendships, with no hidden agenda, purely because I wanted to. Yes, I shared my faith but without selfish ambition – I was just being honest and open about my personal life.

I found ways to love people that came naturally for me - meeting one or two friends for coffee, remembering important dates, being a good listener... I did this for years and then things started happening... friends of mine, yes, mine, became Christians!

I was evangelising without even trying. I was evangelising accidentally. And it wasn't hard. In fact it was very natural and humbling.

I watched an encouraging TEDTalk titled 'The Power of Introverts' where Susan Cain describes some of the challenges introverts face. We live in a culture that is primarily geared to an extroverted style, from the way our school systems are set up, to workplace layouts and collaboration techniques. We are living in an age that historians call "the culture of personality", where, "People are moving from small towns to the cities. And instead of working alongside people they've known all their lives, now they are having to prove themselves in a crowd of strangers. So, quite understandably, qualities like magnetism and charisma suddenly come to seem really important."

Has the extrovert-focused culture we inhabit gradually crept into the way we do church and evangelism? Have we inadvertently isolated introverts from reaching their full potential?



It would be a shame if that was the case, as while investigating the Scriptures, I've discovered that all types of people have a powerful part to play in the Kingdom of God as evangelists! Let me highlight three stories from the New Testament.

Firstly, Peter preached to a crowd about Jesus' true identity and calls his listeners to repentance. "Those who believed what Peter said were baptised and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all."¹

Secondly, Philip was in the right place and the right time to encounter a man who was openly searching for the truth. "Philip told him the Good News about Jesus. As they rode along, they came to some water, and the man said, 'Look! There's some water! Why can't I be baptised?' He ordered the carriage to stop, and they went down into the water, and Philip baptised him."²

And third, Jesus invites himself over to dinner at the house of the thieving tax collector Zacchaeus. Something wonderful happened. Zacchaeus was so touched by Jesus' friendship and kindness that he declared "I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!" Jesus responded, "Salvation has come to this home today."³

The thought of sharing God's love the way Peter did, preaching in front of thousands, scares me a little. OK, it scares me a lot.

Did you know... a whopping 60% of Global Interaction's cross-cultural workers identify themselves as introverted! Does that surprise you? The most common context for mission is one-on-one, friendship evangelism. In homes, cafés, marketplaces, fields and villages, Global Interaction's extroverts and introverts are talking, listening, inviting, retreating and simply 'being' examples of Jesus.

What Philip did was courageous and those kind of Spirit-led encounters excite me, however, approaching total strangers requires a boldness that doesn't come easily. What Jesus did with Zacchaeus touches my introverted heart the most. Jesus made friends with one person and they hung out and ate together and talked one-on-one as friends. We are not told that Jesus ever asked anything of Zacchaeus, He just loved him. Zacchaeus was touched by God and repented all on his own.

Evangelism is about loving others and always being prepared to share the hope that we have.⁴ There are many ways to do this, extroverted ways and introverted ways. Neither is better than the other; we are all one body working together.⁵

I no longer feel guilt that I am not extroverted enough to evangelise effectively. There is power in my introverted style. God created us introverts for deep connection and in that space we can have an incredibly strong impact when we share the Gospel. I can be myself, be a friend, be open and honest, deep and thoughtful, reserved and quiet... and powerfully touch lives, one person at a time.



¹ Acts 2:41

² Acts 8:35-38

³ Luke 19:1-9

⁴ 1 Peter 3:15

⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:12-26