

“The Blessings of Solitude”  
Mark 1:29-39

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*"In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed" (Mark 1:35).*

I am an introvert. I have probably been an introvert all of my life, but it wasn't until I was an adult that I began to understand that introversion was not a personality flaw, but simply a personality characteristic.

What are some of the major characteristics of introverts?

- Being Around Lots of People Drains Their Energy
- Introverts Enjoy Solitude
- Introverts Have a Small Group of Close Friends
- People Often Describe Introverts as Difficult to Get to Know
- Too Much Stimulation Leaves Introverts Feeling Unfocused

As I look at myself as an introvert, I can see how these characteristics do describe me somewhat.

Being Around Lots of People Drains Their Energy

Yes, being around lots of people for an extended period of time does drain my energy. Here is an example. At my previous church, while I would usually spend my Friday evenings and Saturdays by myself working on my sermon, one particular weekend was exceptionally busy. On Friday evening, there was a rehearsal for a wedding. On Saturday morning there was an ordination and installation of two deacons at a nursing facility, where one of the new deacons lived. Immediately after that was a Deacon's meeting. A few hours later there was the wedding ceremony, followed by the reception. I thoroughly enjoyed all of those activities, but by the end of the evening I was drained. I slipped out of the reception early so I could finish my sermon for Sunday. Many people asked what had happened to me. I told them that I had to finish my sermon—which was true—but I also needed some time alone to recharge.

Introverts Enjoy Solitude

If I have a choice between solitude and crowds, I will always pick solitude. Being here in Tennessee without my wife can be lonely, but spending time alone reading or listening to music or praying or just staring at the clouds can be incredibly energizing to me.

Introverts Have a Small Group of Close Friends

I can count the number of people to whom I am very close on one hand—my wife, my daughter, my son, and my best friend, John. That doesn't mean I don't have friends, colleagues and acquaintances. It simply means that I only have a few people with whom I feel very close.

People Often Describe Introverts as Difficult to Get to Know

I have heard people say that I am difficult to get to know; that I am aloof or stand-offish. I hope

you realize now that that isn't true. I love being your pastor, and I hope that you know that I am here for all of you. However, you may have noticed that during the fellowship time after worship, I often stand by myself off to the side of the room. If I need to speak to someone, or if I hear an interesting conversation going on, I might join a table, but for the most part, I just enjoy watching you fellowship with one another. After a worship service I am pretty well drained.

### Too Much Stimulation Leaves Introverts Feeling Unfocused

I have been commended for my ability to keep most session meeting under 2 hours. I must admit that I do it more for selfish reasons than anything else. I firmly believe that after two hours of intense discussions, any further discussion will be unproductive. Why do I feel that way? Because after two hours I begin to lose focus. I cannot be at my best when I am emotionally and mentally drained.

Now, there are many people who believe that introverts do not make good leaders—especially good church leaders. This perception is understandable. After all, who wants a pastor that is left drained after spending time around other people?

Now, you may be wondering what all this is leading up to, and why I haven't mentioned Jesus for a while. Well, the Scripture reading for today, along with several other Gospel verses, helped me to overcome my anxiety of being an introvert and helped me to make the decision to go into ministry. If we look carefully at the life and ministry of Jesus, we can see that Jesus was probably an introvert, or that Jesus exhibited introversion tendencies as he went about his ministry.

As in today's reading, we find that, after Jesus healed and cast out demons, he needed a quiet time of prayer. This behavior occurs several times throughout the Gospels. After an encounter with the crowds seeking his teaching or his touch or a miracle, Jesus would seek out a deserted place, a quiet place, a place of solitude, for prayer and recharging. Sometimes he would even send his disciples on ahead of him so he could be alone without interruption.

Jesus also had a small group of very close friends upon whom he relied. We know that there were crowds that followed him, and called themselves his disciples, but as he approached his crucifixion, most of those had fled. The 12 (or the 11), Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, perhaps a few more; they were the ones on whom he depended. They were the ones that were with him to the end—or almost to the end.

There is also some evidence that the disciples had a difficult time really getting to know Jesus, and what his mission was all about. The disciples were often confused by his teachings, or were disturbed by the types of people with whom he associated. They never even really understood the reason for his death—until after he had risen, and all was revealed to them.

About the only time we ever see Jesus losing his focus is after the Last Supper as he is praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. *"Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, 'Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.'* Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. In his anguish he

*prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground."* After that one moment of weakness or distraction, he regained his strength and was able to complete his mission.

God calls us all into some form of ministry. It doesn't matter if we are introverts or extroverts. It doesn't matter if we are male or female. It doesn't matter if we are old or young. All that matters is our desire to serve God—using Jesus Christ as our example of dedication, faithfulness, and obedience. AMEN