

Book Review: Introverts in the Church: Finding Our Place in an Extroverted Culture

by Carrie Cavanaugh



One of the most discouraging interactions that I've ever had with a pastor was over the issue of how my introverted nature should be interpreted in light of what God calls me to. I was hoping to find confirmation that God could use me as I was without requiring that I become someone I'm not, but my pastor essentially told me to "buck up" and get over it. Adam McHugh's book, Introverts in the Church: Finding Our Place in an Extroverted Culture addresses this very issue in a much more encouraging manner. His exploration of the God-ordained place of introverts in the church is one that pastors and those involved in ministry, whether an introvert themselves or not, can gain much from reading.

Adam McHugh is a Presbyterian minister who has served at two churches, as a hospice chaplain, and as campus staff for InterVarsity. He received both his Th.M. and M.Div. from Princeton Theological Seminary. McHugh is also an introvert. And it is this personal experience with the struggles of being an introvert in a church culture that emphasizes the gifts of extroverts that proved most

enlightening to me. For McHugh not only emphasizes the wealth of strengths that introverts can contribute (depth of relationship, listening skills, spiritual discipline, etc.), but also gives a plethora of suggestions on how introverts can live out their faith in ways that are

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both biblical and more suited to their temperament (spiritual retreat, times of reflection, one-on-one discipleship).

The book begins by looking at modern American Church culture's emphasis upon extroverted qualities. For example, when churches seek applicants for a new pastor, they often try to find someone who is outgoing, easily mingling in a crowd and at ease meeting new people. Even for laymen, there is an emphasis upon evangelism and entertainment-style worship—both of which an introvert struggles with. Little things, like having newcomers

stand at the beginning of a service, or not allowing time for personal reflection during prayer all pose struggles for introverts.

McHugh isn't, however, proposing that the church be completely revamped to create an introvert-sensitive service! Rather he suggests creating an environment where it is safe for introverts to be who they are naturally and from there they will organically move outside of their comfort zone to the things that God calls of them regardless of temperament. For example, the church should accept introverts as part of the community even though they may choose not to attend ever social event that the church offers. Also recognizing other types of evangelism that are more about a faithful life-witness and long-term relationships can help introverts obey God's great commission.

Furthermore McHugh suggests that the church could gain a great deal from learning from the spiritual strengths of the introverts in their midst. For example, introverts are adept at loving on those around them by listening. They are also able to stop and reflect in ways that extroverts often neglect.

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McHugh devotes not one, but two chapters to the issue of introverts as leaders. He points out that Jim Collins in his ground-breaking book From Good to Great identified that, “glitzy, dynamic, high-profile CEOs are actually a hindrance to the long-term success of their corporations.” Character, rather than charisma, is what is needed for effective leadership, according to McHugh. Some of the greatest leaders of all time, have in fact been introverts. Within the Christian faith, these include Mother Theresa, Martin Luther King Jr. and Jonathan Edwards. In the Bible we also see God using the least likely leaders to guide his people, such as Moses, who, when called, complained that he was slow of speech and thus unfit to lead. God’s paradigm is often to use us in our weaknesses to reveal His glory.

This book will be a boon of encouragement to any introvert who has wondered how they fit in to God’s covenant community and mission. It will also help those in leadership know how to best draw upon the strengths of their introverted staff. At the least readers will come to a greater appreciation of God’s beautiful

work of creating us all uniquely for His glory.