

Dear Class Member,

For this installment of *The Wired Word*, we are responding to an article that considers how differently introverts and extraverts will re-engage in social opportunities once Covid-19 restrictions are lifted. The article gives us a chance to think about how Christ is served through our differing personalities.

The in-person and Zoom *Wired Word* continue to be for use in your homes, with your friends/family/co-workers or fellow Abide Group members.

The Present Word adult class and youth Sunday school classes resume in-person following our Sunday school COVID-19 Safety Guidelines: (http://www.sprucc.org/docs/Worship/ReOpenPlan_SundaySchool_201013.pdf) on Sundays at 9:00am on May 9, 16, & 23.

We continue to have 9:00am Tuesday morning Zoom Bible studies with Zion UCC:
<http://www.sprucc.org/classes/adultstudy-groups.html#ZionUCCBibleStudy>.

Sunday evenings there is a six week series book discussion with Zion UCC of *The Post-Quarantine Church: Six Urgent Challenges & Opportunities That Will Determine the Future of Your Congregation* by Zoom from 6:30-7:30pm on April 18 & 25; May 2 & 9 (no class on May 16); and 6:30-8:00pm on May 23. Info at: <http://www.sprucc.org/news-a-events/recent-aupcomingevents.html#PostQuarantine>.



As Social Distancing Ends, Will Personality Type Affect How We Re-engage?

The Wired Word for the Week of May 9, 2021

In the News

"When the social floodgates open, not everyone will want to use their newfound freedom in the same way."

That's the subtitle of an April 27 article in *The Atlantic*. It projects that as vaccination rates go up and social-distance and shelter-in-place restrictions are finally withdrawn, people will use their freedom differently, depending on where they are on the introversion-extraversion* spectrum.

The article is not so much a detailed explanation of how those two personality types interact with the world as it is a dialog between an interviewer and one woman, Katherine Wu, who is an introvert, and another woman, Amanda Mull, who is an extravert. Prompted by questions from the interviewer, the two explain how they personally will respond when social restrictions are removed.

Mull states that she lives in New York City, and we surmise from their discussion that Wu lives in a similar environment, where a densely packed population has necessitated strictly observed social distancing during the pandemic. Apparently both women were used to having easy access to the big-city social scene prior to the arrival of Covid-19.

Extraversion and introversion, terms coined by psychiatrist Carl Jung, are not synonyms for, respectively, "boldness" and "shyness." Rather they refer to opposite ways of recharging one's emotional batteries. In general, extraverts get recharged by being with people. Introverts find renewal by spending time alone or with one or two intimate friends. Introverts, no less than extraverts, may have many good friends. Unlike extraverts, however, introverts prefer to be with their friends singly or just a few at a time; they don't want them all together at once.

Introverts tend to be most comfortable with work that involves ideas. They like activity that takes place in their inner world. It is significant that among tournament chess champs, playing a game that requires carefully plotted mental strategies, introverts outnumber extraverts by three to one.

Extraverts prefer active work with people and things; they favor the outer world. Extraverts have an introverted side, but favor extraversion in much the same way that right-handed people prefer to use their right hand; it seems more natural to do so. Likewise, introverts have an extraverted mode, but it is a recessive function. Both can use the recessive side, but it requires a greater expenditure of energy.

Introversion and extraversion are not absolute personality settings. Very few people are 100 percent one or the other. Rather, introversion and extraversion exist on a spectrum (or more likely, a bell curve). There is also a middle position on that spectrum where a person could be an ambivert, one whose personality has a balance of extraverted and introverted features.

While psychologists say everyone falls somewhere on that spectrum, the introversion-extraversion sliding scale is but one of four different scales used by the most well-known personality-type questionnaire, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), to sort for personality differences. By the measurements of the MBTI, individuals can fall into one of 16 different personality types, but even within any one of those 16 types, one individual's personality can differ from another's by degrees of intensity.

In the *Atlantic* article, the interviewer proposed an imaginary scale with extreme introvert being negative 10, extreme extravert being positive 10 and zero being true neutral (ambivert), and asked the two women where they would place themselves along the scale.

Mull, the extravert, put herself at a positive seven.

Wu, the introvert, estimated that she is a negative six, though she objected to the negative connotation.

When asked why she saw herself as a positive seven, Mull said, "The difference between being energized or drained by being around other people and being energized or drained by being by yourself seems like the most reasonable way to think about that. I just really like being around other people. I like being in a crowded bar. I like being on a subway train and just looking at everybody. I like people-watching. I like the energy of a situation in which there are a lot of people talking and being together. I find myself recharged by those situations. And it doesn't mean that I dislike being by myself at home. There are definitely times for that."

Wu responded, "Amanda, when you were rattling off all those things that give you energy, I felt my heart rate go up, which was a big flag for me that I have identified my correct allegiance. I see myself as an introvert not because I'm a complete agoraphobe or don't like people, but because I don't derive any energy from being around other people. It drains me. I recuperate and gain energy from being alone. I appreciate the presence of other people. But I think what I desperately need in my life is the ability to control when I am around them. ... I like being able to set aside alone time and know that for these next three hours I don't have to deal with anyone else. I think small talk is the tax that God exacted for the privilege of human speech."

At the end of the interview, both women agreed they want the pandemic to end and to be able to see their friends -- both those who are extraverts and those who are introverts -- which made us at *The Wired Word* think that the *Atlantic* article headline, "The Coming Conflict Between Introverts and Extroverts," was misleading. It didn't sound like either Wu or Mull expected their personality differences to result in conflict, but simply in differences each could respect in the other regarding the pace at which they return to social freedom.

* We are using the spelling "extravert" and "extraversion" rather than the "extrovert" and "extroversion" that *The Atlantic* employs because the spellings with the "a" are the preferred forms in the field of psychology and because they make more sense etymologically. For more, see [this explanation](#).

More on this story can be found at these links:

[The Coming Conflict Between Introverts and Extroverts. *The Atlantic*](#)

[What Percentage of the Total Population Are Introverts? *Quora*](#)

[MBTI Personality Types. *The Myers-Briggs Company*](#)

Applying the News Story

Since *The Wired Word* is intended to facilitate discussion in *church* groups, it's fair to ask what personality type has to do with matters of Christian faith. We believe the answer to that question comes from the apostle Paul, who wrote, "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Corinthians 12:4-7).

Our personality differences, we believe, are among the spiritual gifts, and through our personalities, we can each, uniquely, serve the Lord.

The Big Questions

1. Bearing in mind that introversion and extraversion refer to what things drain your energy and what things recharge your energy (and *not* to your degree of shyness or boldness), where would you put yourself on the imaginary sliding scale proposed in the *Atlantic* article:
(introvert) -10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 (0=ambivert) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (extravert)?
2. In what church-oriented and spiritual endeavors do you think your personality type hinders you? In what church-oriented and spiritual endeavors do you think your personality type helps you?
3. In what sorts of situations, if any, do you think God would want you to step beyond the boundaries of your personality type, and why?
4. How does understanding yourself aid you in your human relationships? Is a deep level of self-understanding likely to make you more or less judgmental about others? Explain your answer.
5. Might the outcome of learning more about how you function in social situations be something you didn't want to know? Might the outcome of praying for self-knowledge be something you didn't want to know? Explain your answers.
6. What social activities are you planning to do as soon as it is judged safe (or reasonably low-risk) to do? Why? Or are you already doing them?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Exodus 4:10-13

But Moses said to the LORD, "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." Then the LORD said to him, "Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak." But he said, "O my Lord, please send someone else." (For context, read 3:1--4:20.)

We can never be certain about the personality type of a historical person simply from the things written about them, but the long dialog between God and Moses -- one of the longest recorded conversations in the Old Testament -- when God was calling Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt gives us a fair amount of evidence that Moses was an introvert. He offers excuse after excuse why God should call somebody else. His one quoted above is at least the fourth reason Moses offered to convince the Lord why he should call somebody else.

Moses' protestations suggest that he really did have a good amount of self-understanding. He knew how he functioned best and understood that the job to which God was summoning him would be a monumental task. Frankly, Moses thought he was not up to it. But in the end, God wouldn't take "no" for an answer, and Moses obeyed, and did the job well.

Numbers 12:3 says, "Now the man Moses was very humble, more so than anyone else on the face of the earth." "Humble" is the NRSV's rendering of the Hebrew word *ânâv*. Some Bible versions render this verse to say "Moses was very meek ..." But at least [one commentator](#) says that a better meaning of *ânâv* is "introverted." We do note that Moses chose to be a shepherd, a solitary profession, during the period between his flight from and his return to Egypt.

Questions: How much dread do you suppose Moses felt each time he had to confront Pharaoh about letting the Israelites leave Egypt? How do you think the work of leading the recalcitrant Israelites out of Egypt left Moses feeling each day?

If Moses were a member of your church, for what committee would you recruit him? Why?

Luke 15:8-9

Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost." (For context, read 15:8-10.)

Well, this woman was obviously an extravert. There she was, having spent the day cleaning her house in search of a lost coin, and when she finds it, does she sit down for a quiet rest? She does not. Instead, she calls her friends and neighbors together for a party. "Come rejoice with me!" she says. She needed the company of others to help her recharge.

Question: Do you think all of this woman's friends and neighbors were eager to come to her party? Why or why not?

If this woman were a member of your church, for what committee would you recruit her? Why?

Matthew 26:33-35

Peter said to him, "Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you." Jesus said to him, "Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." Peter said to him, "Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you." And so said all the disciples. (For context, read 26:31-35.)

John 6:8-9

One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to [Jesus], "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" (For context, read 6:1-14.)

Two of Jesus' disciples, Peter and Andrew, were brothers, and from the New Testament record, there are some incidents that suggest Peter was an extravert and Andrew was an introvert.

In the Matthew verses above, Peter comes off as someone who hasn't spent a lot of time inventorying his inner life, but instead gives a poorly thought-out response to Jesus' assertion that Peter will soon deny him.

In the John verses, Andrew, who clearly from the gospels was the quieter of the two brothers, shows evidence that he's been thinking about the difficulties of the no-food-for-the-crowd situation, and even that he's taken time to have a one-on-one interaction with a child in the crowd.

Of course, neither disciple has taken the Myers-Briggs test, but it appears that both were productive followers of Jesus Christ, serving him through the differing strengths of their individual personalities.

Questions: If Peter and Andrew were members of your church, would you put them on the same committee? Why or why not?

Lamentations 3:40

Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the LORD. (For context, read 3:40-42.)

After the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in 586 B.C., the leading citizens of Judah were forced into exile in Babylonia. The contents of the book of Lamentations are dirges composed to commemorate that dire event, to try to understand why God had allowed it and to consider what they needed to do. The verse above is an instruction about what to do next. The first part of that verse is clearly inward-looking -- a "know yourself" sort of instruction -- but the second part tells the purpose of that look: *so that they can turn back toward God.*

Some people think that the phrases "Know thyself" and "To thine own self be true" are from the Bible, but in fact, they are not. The "Know thyself" precept actually comes from ancient Greek culture. It was the phrase inscribed over the portico of the temple of Apollo at Delphi. And "To thine own self be true" is a line from Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*.

Still, as the verse above suggests, self-understanding is something the Bible encourages. However, as the second half of this verse reveals, by self-understanding the Bible means something different from knowing ourselves in a psychological sense. When psychologists talk about self-understanding, they mean the capacity to observe and interpret our motivations, personality and behavior. When the Bible speaks of self-understanding, it means measuring ourselves against God's standards.

To say it differently, when the Bible urges us to look inward, it is usually for the purpose of taking a moral inventory rather than a psychological one. The Bible is more interested in helping us understand what makes us sin than what makes us tick.

That doesn't mean, however, that a psychological inventory is a wasted effort for the Christian journey, for our personality has a significant bearing on how we process our inner life and how we are enabled to hear God's call.

Questions: What role did self-understanding play in your journey toward God? What have you discovered about yourself regarding your comfort level being around people during times when they are in sorrow, going through trials and/or feeling pressure?

For Further Discussion

1. What effect do you think personality type has on who seems most willing to connect with your church's online worship services? Will some perhaps worship permanently on your church's YouTube (or Facebook, or Zoom) platform? Is that okay? Why or why not?

2. TWW team member John Coulson comments, "As an introvert, I have always felt that it was a shortcoming and wished that I could be more outgoing. I feel that the world is optimized for extroverts ... For an introvert, the 'Passing the Peace' [a church practice where worshipers leave their seats and greet one another, often with handshakes or hugs and say, "The peace of God be with you" or something similar] is awkward and there might be some people who avoid church because we don't acknowledge that there might be some that would prefer to not take part."

Presumably, most churches that are now meeting for live worship are not currently passing the peace because social distancing is still being observed. But once social distancing is no longer necessary, should that particular worship practice be permanently dropped? Why or why not?

3. Respond to this, also from John Coulson: "Comfort is good, but sometimes I feel that the Lord calls us to move outside of our comfort zone. I'm generally an introvert but as a leader in my church, I feel that my role requires me to step out of my comfort zone and make an effort to be more of an extrovert even if I would prefer to be more of the quiet type."

TWW team member Malia Miller responded, saying, "John's comments remind me that getting out of our comfort zone -- whether we are the extrovert that needs to 'be still' or the introvert that needs to push to interact and communicate when it is uncomfortable -- is part of God's calling. I have often struggled with my introversion as a

Christian. Because evangelism is such a core value of our faith, it was easy to feel like I was failing in this area because of my reluctance to speak openly to anyone about my faith. As I have grown through my walk with Christ, I have come to realize that my definition of evangelism was naive and narrow, and that there are many ways to evangelize that do not require me to be less than my authentic self."

4. React to this, from TWW team member Bill Tammeus: "I think of the introvert-extrovert matter sort of like I think about the reality that people have different Myers-Briggs personality test scores and are at different places on the [spectrum]. Which is to say that the capacity for understanding each other and, thus, living in peace can change for the better when we recognize the uniqueness of each individual. No one needs to think like me or solve problems the way I do because no one is constructed mentally or spiritually quite the way I am.

"With that understanding we can give each other a wide berth, focusing on results, not techniques for achieving those results. And it should make us more loving of people who prefer a worship style different from the one we prefer, for example."

5. Comment on this, from TWW team member Frank Ramirez: "I liked the fact that the interviewer created a spectrum - positive 10 to negative 10. Just as we now talk about a spectrum when we speak about abilities and disabilities, recognizing that we are not outsiders looking down on people with learning disorders, autism, developmental disability, but participants in humanity who are on the spectrum with everyone else, sharing some of those qualities in greater or lesser measure."

6. Consider this, also from Frank Ramirez: "The biblical Isaac might have some elements of introversion. He doesn't go out to seek a spouse. His parents have to do all the arranging, and he then, having created a space he shares with her in his tent, tries to create a world of safety and security within that. He shares the hunter mentality I observed when I pastored in Pennsylvania, where hunters enjoyed going out in safe groups, one or two people they knew, with whom they could sit silently for hours out in nature, as compared to those who had to go out in large groups to drink beer. Esau and Isaac were not social butterflies. As Isaac's world shrank further with his inability to see very well, he depended on Esau to create a safe world.

"However his spouse and the other son, Jacob, created their own world in which they were willing to engage in intrigue and deception to achieve their aims in a wider world -- and Jacob was able to flee into that wider world when he pushed the boundaries too far, create new relationships with Laban and his spouses, and so on. Isaac is victimized as an introvert, more acted upon than acting. He seems to want safe and secure boundaries that are tightly drawn around himself."

7. Respond to this from TWW team member Joanna Loucky-Ramsey: "I've been at different places on an introvert-extravert spectrum, if such a [possibility] exists. In some earlier life stages and situations, I have tended toward introversion; in others I've been more outgoing. Some might say that moving toward extraversion might be a form of overcompensation for an introvert. It probably has been for me. But in my experience, there have also been times when I've discovered that not everyone finds it easy to be around extraverted people. I've learned (because introverts have been bold enough to tell me) that some are not comfortable with 'in your face' interactions, animated conversations or more demonstrative, close physical greetings like hugs, pecks on the cheek or even handshakes. An important point when considering what kind of people should join a church greeting team or ushers ministry. Extraverts have their place, but can sometimes scare people off. Extraverts need to recognize the value introverts add to the church, and make space for them to fully function in their ministry. Whatever our personalities or giftedness, we need to make room for people who are not like us."

8. TWW team member Mary Sells says, "I think each person has a personal preference for relating to the world and others, yet is able to flex depending upon the matter at hand, or their passion. A Christian person who tends to be meek could be very outspoken on matters of Bible and church. Likewise, one who is typically outspoken could become reticent or hesitant if circumstances made them feel marginalized or fearful."

How do Mary's comments illustrate the right hand/left hand analogy from "In the News" above?

Responding to the News

You might be interested in taking this quick introversion-extraversion survey. Bear in mind that the results are an indication at best, not a definitive conclusion.

Answer True or False:

1. When I am at a party I tend to talk to one or two friends at a time, rather than being the center of attention.
2. When I need to introduce myself to someone new, I have no trouble and do not hesitate.
3. After talking to people or interacting with the world in some way, I feel drained of energy.
4. I feel a little on edge and don't know quite what to do with myself when I am alone.
5. When planning a project with someone, I have the best ideas if they have given me time to think about something ahead of time.
6. Talking out loud to someone helps me to have the best ideas about a project.
7. When I talk, I have already done a lot of thinking about what I say before I say it.
8. I usually share a lot of personal information about myself, my family, and my problems with someone I am just getting to know.
9. I feel energized by being alone and having time to read, think and reflect.
10. Many times I am surprised by some of the things that I say.
11. I may think about something so long and so hard that I forget to share the conclusions with the person with whom I began the thoughts.
12. I can share my private thoughts and feelings easily.

Scoring:

Step One: Go back over the quiz and change all of the even numbered questions to the opposite of what you answered. (Change every T to F and every F to T)

Step Two: Now count the number of True answers you have for all of the questions (counting only the changed answers for the even numbered questions).

Interpretation: If you had ...

- 0-5, chances are you are not an introvert.
- 6-9, you have some introverted tendencies.
- 10-12, you are likely to be an introvert.

Survey is from "How an Introverted Pastor Survives," by TWW team member Stan Purdum and pastoral counselor Mark Bishop. Published in *The Circuit Rider*.

Prayer

Thank you, Lord, for the personality preferences you have given me. Help me to override those traits that serve selfish goals that harm others, and help me to employ my personality strengths fully in your service. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Copyright 2021 Communication Resources