

Introverted Evangelism

Is personality type a deciding factor for bold faith?

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Many years ago, I was instructed with a group of Bible school peers to venture out into a university campus for street evangelism. As a Christian, this seemed a good thing to do. Yet as an introvert, it was a nightmare. Here I was, out on the street, expected to engage in strangers' lives—when I didn't really like talking to people that much at all.

My highlights of these outreach efforts would include asking a busboy on his break what he thought about the weather and telling another guy that I liked his shoes. Other than that, my time was spent roaming around feeling nervous and awkward about what I had to do.

Evangelism became my greatest fear. I went over all of the angles as much as I could. Still, I could never come up with anything natural to say, as going out to talk to strangers seemed very unnatural to me.

Initially, I wanted to change. I had people pray for me to be “bold” and to “step out of my comfort zone.” I was going to kill my reclusive personality. After all, the world was perishing. I kept going out every week, but no matter how hard I tried, I could not bring myself to participate in the outreach. I had seen the need in the world, and the world saw my failure to meet that need. I was frustrated and angry with myself for failing so miserably.

This anger wasn't just directed at myself but at the methods we were using to share the Gospel. All of the Bible tracts, street preaching, door-knocking and stranger-talk stuff overwhelmed me. The streets our organization would hit up had become a Gospel-distribution center, where we were trained to be master marketeers. The goal was to get all of the information out there, no matter what it took, and hope that the people would somehow respond to it. It was the kind of system that some people can thrive in, but for me, I felt out of place.

What can one do in the face of this contradiction? Did I need to become a complete opposite version of myself to share the Gospel? I couldn't wrap my mind around it. I was depressed—convinced I was a failure, letting God down with my inaction. After letting the guilt bother me for quite some time, I decided to give up. What good was it for me to feel this way? What help could I possibly offer to others?

The first thing I needed to do was remind myself of who created me, who I was, and what I could be. I was reminded that God had put His signature on me, not on who I could be. I started to denounce the lies and replaced them with the truth: I was made with specific intentions, and God could do great things through me if I would embrace them. I needed to break through the guilt and get on with living.

I had to learn that, in fact, I do like talking to people—I just don't like talking to strangers. I love discussion, especially about faith and theology. If someone wants to discuss beliefs, or hockey, or movies, I could literally talk for hours I just can't force it on them. Believe me, I've tried to start a forced conversation about hockey and people just aren't interested.

Introverts also have the advantage in that listening is a huge part of having a conversation. A lot of people like to hear the sound of their own voice in a world in need of more listeners. Not being great talkers automatically puts introverts in a great position to listen. Everyone has a story to tell, and the Church needs to have open ears to

hear what people are saying. Everything is sacred—there are no irrelevant conversations, and God can use all situations for the purposes of His Kingdom.

Of course, being challenged is a good thing. It can benefit us to step out and go beyond what we thought we could. Yet that risk needs to be more than just trying to do things that you don't want to do. We also need to break out of all of the preconceived ideas of ourselves and who we "should" be in order to embrace the person God made us to be. For most of us, being comfortable in ourselves is a risk in itself.

When we become comfortable with who we are, no matter what our personality type is, or where our interests lie, we can become more honest in our evangelism. If you don't feel natural approaching strangers to talk about the Gospel, try another approach more suited to your personality and gifts. What's your element—that place that fuels you in joyful energy? Find it, and connect with people there. Your joy will make people notice, and perhaps open up opportunities to share Christ's love. The world hates fakers, and the last thing you want to do is present Christ in a way that is perceptibly fake or forced.

If you're shy, then stay that way. Work with it. Accept your unique make-up and learn to laugh at yourself instead of wishing you were different. But whether you're an introvert, extrovert or somewhere in between, continue to cultivate relationships—which are an integral part of obedience in the faith. If you don't think that you can answer the call to evangelism, then perhaps go out and offer to cut your neighbor's lawn, babysit their cat or do some other service that might be helpful to them.

It all comes down to doing what you love to do. God needs us all to do our own unique part in reaching out to the world. There are too many people out there "doing work" for Jesus instead of being joyful for Him. As an anti-social homebody, I say that it's time to embrace the joy. Be yourself, digging inside to find the things in life that you love—and then connect with others from this genuine place. Sometimes the simple things that are on our hearts are the very things that others need to hear about the most.

Maybe you're not the "bold" type, the life of the party or someone who feels comfortable talking out spirituality with strangers. This doesn't mean you're not cut out for Kingdom work. If you're an introvert, you can take pride in the rich Gospel mission Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 9:22: "I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some."