"We've known about the transcendent power of solitude for centuries; it's only recently that we've forgotten it. Our major religions all tell the story of seekers - Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha - who go off alone, to the wilderness, and bring profound revelations back to the community. No wilderness, no revelations."

- Susan Cain

"The best thinking has been done in solitude."

I've noticed that the pastors who talk most enthusiastically about their enjoyment of parish ministry, and of whom I hear the most positive things from their church members and supervisors, are those who love being with people. Social interaction is natural for them. They enjoy being the locus of attention, and seem not to tire of it. They're the ones who will stand to their feet and shout, "Everyone, follow me!" They love getting acquainted with new people. In short, they're extroverts.

Rather late in the game, I came to terms with my not being one of those. I, perhaps like some of you, tend more toward introversion - even though I am in a vocation that demands I be an outgoing leader.

Introverts have gotten some attention lately. Susan Cain's book *Quiet: The power of introverts in a world that can't stop talking* has been on the NYT bestseller list. And pastor Adam McHugh wrote *Introverts in the Church: Finding our place in an Extroverted Culture.*

Cain says that introversion is decided unpopular in modern capitalist culture, regarded as something between a problem and a disability, even though much great literature and many important discoveries can be credited to introverts. This is also true in the church. According to McHugh "the 'ideal' believer has started to act alarmingly extroverted: Participating widely, eagerly assuming leadership, flitting about the social circles of the church, opening your home to new people, wearing your faith on your sleeve. If you display those attributes, you might get called a Christian 'on fire.' And if you're not one of those people, you might be quenching the flames."

The extrovert bias is strong enough that one introverted pastor felt compelled to write an article called *5 Reasons Your Introverted Pastor Does Not Hate You*!
Yet there are more of us in ministry than you might suppose. We were attracted to it by our love for the Lord and our enjoyment of the intricacies of theology. We may have chosen our vocation at a time in life when we didn't realize what our social capacities were, or the level of social pressure ministry would impose. Some introverted pastors I know succeed because of an extroverted spouse.

The expectations of ministry undoubtedly pull us out of ourselves, and we've learned to function in the crowd. We're not anti-social: we just need alone time, and prefer a conversation to a group. Cain says that introverts tend to be deep thinkers. In fact, we do better than extroverts in one-on-one, in-depth conversations, where we can take a deep and genuine interest in others (which may explain why we may enjoy visiting people, in the hospital or at home, once we push past the initial contact.)

At the same time, we struggle to be all that church members expect us to be. If you're an introvert you may have heard, "Mrs. Smith said that you walked right by her and didn't talk to her!" Or, in a meeting, "Pastor, why are you just listening rather than telling us what you think?" In fact, we may be driven to deeper solitude by conflict: we tend to retreat inward when we fear that the group we're in isn't a safe place to be oneself. (I have a theory that introversion may account for the number of pastors who move from church ministry to administration, chaplaincy, or teaching.)

William H. Willimon acknowledges that "Many of my seminarians... [are] introverted people. They like to think about ideas, they like to think about God, and they like to be alone with a book, or in meditation." But, he adds, "I do think that the parish ministry is essentially an extroverted activity. You're in a politically charged situation. You're a public leader. You're up on view. You've got to find a way to work that."

I tend to agree with Willimon. I think introverted pastors have some gifts that the church would be poorer without, but on the whole, you extroverts enjoy a more natural fit with pastoral ministry.

Are you an introvert in ministry? Share your thoughts at our Facebook page.

Ministerial Spouses

Hospitality: What I Didn't Learn from Martha
by Eileen Gemmell

If your house is like ours there are piles of brightly colored magazines like Martha Stewart's Living, Better Homes and Gardens, and This Old House. They tell us how to make our homes more beautiful, food more delicious, and how to impress guests when they come over. Yet I like to imagine what it would be like if Martha were to sit down with some of the Bible writers and debate with them what true hospitality is. I think she would discover a joy that goes beyond entertainment. Many of us are locked into the entertainment model of hospitality and fear freezes us from the joy of serving.

Top Five Fears that keep us from Biblical Hospitality:

#5: We fear what people will think.
#4: We fear it will take a lot of work.
#3: We fear it will take a lot of money.
#2: We fear they'll find out something bad about us.
#1: We fear they'll never leave.

As Biblical hospitality supplants fear induced entertainment the blessings begin to flow freely. In our home we've experienced the gift of watching our family "grow", of using our home as a hub of influence, and a place where our world can expand as we hear other life stories. But the very best thing about opening our old imperfect home is to be able to have 'front-row' seats as people make decisions for God.

Eileen Gemmell is a full time Nurse Practitioner and is married to a pastor. On our Facebook page, Eileen explores in depth the Biblical foundations for hospitality and how they take away the fear factor from hospitality. You can also step into Eileen's home via video and see her brand of hospitality at work.
Best Practices Goes Weekly

Best Practices, the email newsletter from NAD Ministerial, will soon be going weekly according to publisher Ivan Williams. "I'm excited about the expansion of the Best Practices newsletter family to include special editions for ministerial directors, and pastoral evangelists. The expansion will allow us to deliver very specific resources for our different pastoral roles."

Starting in May the new lineup is as follows:
First Week: Best Practices for Ministerial Directors
   Editor: Ivan Williams
Second Week: Best Practices for Adventist Ministry
   Editor: Loren Seibold
Third Week: Best Practices for Adventist Evangelism
   Editor: Shawn Boonstra
Fourth Week: Best Practices for Adventist Ministry
   Editor: Loren Seibold
Fifth Week: Best Practices for Adventist Worship
   Editor: Nick Zork

Reading for Pastors

John Piper thinks multimedia like video clips make preaching weak. Agree or disagree?

No agreement in the church: John Blake asks, would Jesus support health-care reform?

An interesting commentary on Trayvon Martin by a Muslim woman: "My hijab is my hoodie."

Why the church needs to see women in leadership. Quote: "Where are the women leaders? [Women are] asking because they can't be what they can't see. They're asking because they need to see who they could be. There's been so much controversy, so much debate, that at times it's cut deep into their sense of identity and relationship with God."

More about introversion:

- Seven pitfalls of being an introverted pastor, by Ron Edmondson. Quote: "People often think I'm arrogant, aloof, or unfriendly. Now, I may be a lot of negative things, but those are not really the main three. I sometimes have to go back and apologize once I hear someone thinks I avoided them."
- Adam McHugh on his book, Introverts in the Church. Quote: "I firmly believe it's not that introverts are ill-suited to evangelism; rather, many of our common strategies for evangelism are ill-suited for introverts. There are still some prevailing models that are very difficult for many introverts. One of those models is the spiritual salesmanship model... We must be fast talking experts, armed with answers to all the questions, able to persuade others and 'close the deal.' Or another common mode of evangelism is debate - we need to prove that our worldview is superior to that of others. Most introverts will struggle with these methods."
- Podcast interview with author Susan Cain about her book, Quiet. From CBC's Tapestry podcast.

12 ways to make sure your Easter guests don't come back. Quote: "Walk up to someone you haven't seen for a while and say, 'Hey, hey...Look who it is...You don't think just showing up for Easter is going to get you out of the Big Guy's doghouse, do you?'"

Winifred Gallagher explores the neo-agnostics - a type of person you may have in your church, whether you know it or not. Quote: "Gallagher... was not interested in the true believers - whether they be Christian fundamentalists or self-righteous atheists. What interested her was that growing but hard-to-categorize group of highly educated, well-connected and skeptical people who had not quite given up on the idea that might be some kind of metaphysical something-or-other out there."

To the Point

Evangelicalism has taken the Extrovert Ideal to its logical extreme. If you don't love Jesus out loud, then it must not be real love. It's not enough to forge your own spiritual connection to the divine; it must be displayed publicly.
   ~ Susan Cain

Everybody should have his personal sounds to listen for - sounds that will make him exhilarated and alive or quite and calm. One of the greatest sounds of them all - and to me it is a sound - is utter, complete silence.
   ~ Andre Kostelanetz

Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes.
   ~ Carl Jung
The best thinking has been done in solitude.
~ Thomas Alva Edison

The glory of the disposition that stops to consider stimuli rather than rushing to engage with them is its long association with intellectual and artistic achievement. Neither E=mc² nor Paradise Lost was dashed off by a party animal.
~ Winifred Gallagher

Introverts make up a third to a half the population. That's one out of every two or three people you know. Yet our most important institutions - our schools and our workplaces - are designed for extroverts. And we're living with a value system that I call the New Groupthink, where we believe that all creativity and productivity comes from an oddly gregarious place. Picture the typical classroom. When I was a kid, we sat in rows of desks, and we did most of our work autonomously. But nowadays many students sit in "pods" of desks with four or five students facing each other, and they work on countless group projects - even in subjects like math and creative writing. Kids who prefer to work by themselves don't fit, and research by educational psychology professor Charles Meisgeier found that the majority of teachers believe the ideal student is an extrovert - even though introverts tend to get higher grades, according to psychologist Adrian Furnham. The same thing happens at work. Many of us now work in offices without walls, with no respite from the noise and gaze of co-workers. And introverts are routinely passed over for leadership positions, even though the latest research by the management professor Adam Grant at Wharton shows that introverted leaders often deliver better results. They're better at letting proactive employees run with their creative ideas, while extroverts can unwittingly put their own stamp on things and not realize that other people's ideas aren't being heard.
~ Susan Cain

This above all:
To thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.
~ Hamlet, Shakespeare

Dwell as near as possible to the channel in which your life flows.
~ Henry David Thoreau

**News, Ideas & Reminders**

A reminder: You are free to republish pieces from Best Practices in your own newsletter or blog, with attribution to the Best Practices newsletter and the author of the piece.

Interactive Easter programs with Dan Jackson: [check it out at the Hope Channel.](#)

Did you know that Adventist Community Services has its own Facebook page for disaster response? Check, for example, what SDA's are doing post-tornado in the Dallas area .

The AU D.Min. program has a newsletter with all you need to know to start working on your degree.

You may be receiving a copy of this book in the mail, courtesy of ASI. We'll review it in an upcoming issue of Best Practices.

Humor: Meet Greg Samaritan, the last remaining descendant of the Good Samaritan.

A conference that might be worth the investment: "Doing more with less" - outreach ministry for tight economic times in urban settings.

- Previous resource links:
  - The Hope of Survivors, ministry to victims of pastoral sexual abuse
  - IFollow website
  - NAD NewsPoints (formerly Friday Fax): [by email](#), or on a web page,.
  - Adventist Parenting e-newsletter
  - The one Project
  - Facts with Hope, evidence-based health messages for bulletins
  - NAD Volunteer Screening Guidelines and [Screening Form](#)
  - The digital Andrews Study Bible
  - Adventist Family Ministries
  - REACH North American Resources Guide
  - Adventist Meetings Speaker Registry
  - World Life Expectancy website
  - The ONE project, Seattle
  - NAD Calendar of Special Days
  - Facebook page for Adventist songwriters, poets and artists
  - Facebook page for pastors' spouses
  - 2012 NAD Prayer Calendar in a PDF format
  - Child protective resources from Risk Management
  - Prophecy decoded series
New Pathfinder honors in community service
NAD Facebook page
Adventist Recovery Ministries newsletter "Journey to Life"
National Conference on Innovation

Got a tool, resource, site, article, idea or seminar that you like a lot? Share it with us at BestPractices@ameritech.net.

Upcoming NAD Events

Do you have an event you’d like to invite NAD pastors to? Send details to BestPractices@ameritech.net.

Worldwide Day for Prayer and Fasting. Apr 7, 2012, Worldwide. First Sabbath of each quarter has been designated as days of prayer and fasting for the world church. Families and individuals are encouraged to establish the first day of each month and one day a week as normal or partial fast days. Support information and helps are being developed by the Prayer and Fasting Subcommittee.

Religion Communicators Council. Apr 12, 2012 - Apr 14, 2012, Philadelphia Airport Marriott Hotel, 1 Arrivals Road (Terminal B), Philadelphia, PA 19153. Plan now to attend the annual convention for the Religion Communicators Council (RCC) "Interdependence: Religion Communication Today". You will experience interactive workshops, and attend two award banquets. Featured Speaker: Debra L. Mason, Executive Director, Religion Newswriters. For more information, email: rccprc@rcn.com; nm0nn@pensions.org


The ACS Outreach Leadership Conference is sponsored by the Adventist Community Services - Washington, the North Pacific Union Conference and NAD Adventist Community Services. It will be held at the Washington Conference Office in Federal Way, Washington on March 2-4, 2012. Participants will hear challenging speakers and choose from 30 training seminars. For registration and more information: www.washingtonconference.org/ACS.

Nonprofit Leadership Certification Program

- Southeastern Conference: 1701 Robie Ave, Mt. Dora, Florida 32712,
  o Session I, June 3-7, 2012
  o Session II, September 23-27, 201
- ACS Outreach Leadership Conference, Washington Conference Office
  o March 2-4, 2012

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5 Reasons Your Introverted Pastor Does NOT Hate You

Allow me to introduce myself: My name is PC Walker, and I am an introverted pastor.

Conversations frequently come my way with students (my congregants) who feel the tension of a wall, which seems to be up between us. The impression is that I am withdrawn, gruff, insensitive, or even rude in some instances.

As it turns out, many pastors, speakers, and leaders are introverted. Your pastor may very well be such.

Does your pastor seem to:
- think more than talk
- have no backbone regarding conflict
- avoid you
- only share personal information with a select few
- prefer writing over talking
- dislike or even hate you

Allow me to be preemptively forthright: Your pastor does not dislike or hate you.

Here are 5 things which may help you understand your introverted pastor and trust that he does not hate you.

1. IT'S NOT YOU, ITS HIM.
This is a part of his personality. The disconnection is not because of you. This is not an excuse; it is a simple statement of reality. The quiet reservedness is part of the way he is wired. It is not a reflection of how he thinks of you.

2. HE IS NOT A BOUNCER (prone to DEPTH; not frequency)
Your introverted pastor is not going to be the type to bounce around from conversation to conversation on a Sunday (or whenever your main gathering is). Outgoing introverts have to work at it in large groups, but the depth of a face-to-face conversation with an introvert may be one of the deepest and most intentional conversations you've had.
3. THERE IS ALWAYS A “WHY” (processes)
An introvert, especially an introverted leader, is ALWAYS internally processing things. When an introverted leader enacts a change, which makes no sense to you, you can be assured that he has been over and over and over that decision in his mind for days, weeks, or months. Introverted pastors make no flippant changes. Ask for the “why”, and he will likely have a well-thought out answer for you.

4. HE IS AWARE OF MORE THAN YOU THINK (he observes and reads people…constantly)
Never assume your pastor knows nothing about you. A part of the internal processing mentioned above also applies to people watching. Your introverted pastor observes and reads people…constantly. Introverts have an uncanny ability to read people below the surface. He may not expose what he perceives verbally, but rest assured he knows you exist and...

5. HE LOVES YOU DEARLY…BUT HE IS DRAINED BY YOU
Introverted ≠ shy. Extroverted ≠ outgoing. The two words are references to how the person is energized. Extroverted people are energized by people, and are bored to tears when alone for too long. Introverted people are energized by time alone and are drained by extended exposure to large groups of people. Your introverted pastor is likely an outgoing introvert, but ‘outgoing’ is a mode he has to put himself into. It drains his energy level. It is NOT a reflection of you…it is the way he is wired.

[BONUS]: He IS aware of the disconnection…and he hates it
The downside of the internal processing is that your introverted pastor internalizes EVERYTHING, which includes the negative things. He very much desires to be connected to everyone at the appropriate depths a pastor SHOULD, but the very personality that makes him who he is makes it difficult to attain and sustain frequent connection.

He constantly thinks about the disconnection you feel, but he takes every bit of it personally. What seems like an oddity to an extrovert is a thorn in the flesh of an introvert.

Be mindful of these things next time you feel your introverted pastor dislikes you or intentionally distances himself from you.
5 Reasons Your Introverted Pastor Does NOT Hate You | PC Walker

This entry was posted in Uncategorized and tagged introvert leader, pastors who are introverts, postaday2011, your introverted pastor, your pastor does not hate you by PC. Bookmark the permalink.

19 THOUGHTS ON “5 REASONS YOUR INTROVERTED PASTOR DOES NOT HATE YOU”

Genevieve
on March 17, 2011 at 3:28 pm said:

PC, I love reading your blog. I always learn something or have something new to think on every time I read one of your post. And also, I think you captured the introverted mind set well. I know I struggle with being introverted., so its nice to know I’m not alone : )

PC
on March 17, 2011 at 3:53 pm said:

Nobody “struggles” with being introverted. Its not a disorder.

Genevieve

Follow
Ah. I guess because of the way our society teaches it I've learned to label it as such. I'm still working on getting comfortable in my skin. It's hard for me to truly embrace my introversion and balance it with being what is considered social. But I think I'm starting to learn how to do it without giving up how God made me. It's a process like anything else includes a lot of prayer and long-suffering as Pastor Ted would say on my end.

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Jessica

on March 17, 2011 at 5:27 pm said:

Good insight PC. You are right, being introverted is not a disorder, however, I think a lot of those who are feel that something might be wrong with being that way. Possibly because of our culture. I think I'm both, but lean more toward the introvert than the extrovert. As a Christian, I often feel I should be more outgoing, friendly, or an extrovert. I don't know, like God would want me to be because then I'd be more welcoming and better represent Him...

---

PC

on March 17, 2011 at 5:49 pm said:

Thank you Jessica. I'm not sure which "Jessica" you are, or if I even know you at all.

I think we live in a culture which expects you to be an extrovert. Our culture's idea of success does not exactly lend itself well to the introverted personality. There are a few books and resources coming out recently, though, which highlight the incredible value that the introverted person brings to a work and leadership environment...(things like thinking before you talk. ha...little jab there).
Malisa
on March 17, 2011 at 5:55 pm said:

One of the benefits of having an introverted personality is the ability to eloquently write and explain what is going on inside your brain. I think this post was thoughtful, meaningful, and helps explain some of the differences between the two main personality types. Having had pastors that are both types, I personally prefer the introverted one. In my experience the introverted personality actually cares about you and talks to you because they want to, not because they have to. Thanks for your honesty, PC!

PC
on March 17, 2011 at 6:01 pm said:

Thank YOU Malisa!

sarahspezia
on March 17, 2011 at 5:56 pm said:

I am introverted as well. I have found that I have grown most in times when I am challenged to be more than I am, when I put aside the “that’s just not my personality” comment. If I didn’t do things because it wasn’t my first inclination to do so, I would never grow. I don’t know what prompted you to write this, but I do know that is my experience.

sarahspezia
on March 17, 2011 at 6:02 pm said:

I am NOT saying you are not taking any action steps. I am also NOT discounting everything you said. But my question is… what are you going to do about it? In the last bit, you mentioned internalizing everything and that you desire to be connected… but that it is hard to do so as an introvert. I still think there are ways to move forward, as an introvert. NOT try to be an extrovert. But work with your introverted-ness to get to the place of deeper connection, if that is what you desire. I struggled with this when I worked with the youth group.
because I quickly got burnt out from being around them all the time... But pursuing the one-on-ones, and continually communicating openly with them made that connect I wasn’t able to do in large groups for very long.

I’ve had this post in my drafts for about a month coming off of a few articles I had read BY extroverts ABOUT introverts. (strange, right?) I also had been talking to a few different friends of mine in ministry who are also introverts, and the feedback I was receiving from them was addressing more of THE IMPRESSION people have of them. This post was more of a response to that impression people have of their introverted leaders or pastors.

Good to know. While I don’t think impressions are 100% correct, I do think there’s something to say about those who are doing the impressing… It’s a combination of contributions from both sides.

You know who I am PC, but I wouldn’t say you know me. 😞 The one and only Jessica Kessler. Well, not really, but…
oh yes! Of course I know you. I just didn’t know which “Jessica” this is. I have other Jessica friends.

Chase

on March 25, 2011 at 1:10 am said:

I read this in my email but should’ve come over sooner to comment.

I am not a leader per se or a pastor but this really resonated with me. It helped me to sort out an experience I had which really put that characteristic of mine at the forefront in a rather uncomfortable way. I was part of a team most of whom were extroverted or believed that mode was preferrable. My mode was seen as something of a disability and I spent some time afterward feeling like I had failed in some way.

Thanks a lot.

PC

on March 25, 2011 at 6:23 pm said:

Thank you for stopping by my friend. Yes, I am continually surprised by how much people can take a personality trait and say, “you should not be this.” I guess that is the problem with being an introvert in a predominately extroverted culture.

Cassandra

on June 17, 2011 at 3:40 am said:

I’m an extrovert with a very introverted pastor, and I don’t like it. He’s not well liked or well respected…..his personality is unsuited for the ministry. Introverted pastors are ok as long as their friendly, but he’s standoffish and arrogant. He’s in it for the power. I will pray for him.
Lesley on January 1, 2012 at 12:14 am said:

Such a great post! Our current pastor is an introvert, and Jonathan’s dad (also a pastor) is an introvert. This is a great reminder for me.

David on April 6, 2012 at 10:04 pm said:

As an introvert pastor of 25 years in pastoral ministry I found the example of Jesus the best approach. (not saying Jesus was an introvert) He spent time on the mountain top, then ministry with people. While being with people drains me, The “mimi retreat” times recharge for the next ministry I need to do.

At seminary we were given a personality test based on the test of 100 pastors considered to be very successful. We were told that if we scored in a particular way we should consider not going into pastoral ministry. Well, I scored far and away from the 100 successful. I never doubted though because my call was from God and now I know it was the right thing for me to do. With God my churches have grown very well.

Thank you for your thoughtful article.

PC on April 7, 2012 at 1:59 am said:

Thank you for stopping by and commenting. I really do appreciate it.
The following is an edited transcript of the audio.

What are your thoughts on drama, movie clips, and the like in a church service?

I'll start with the freedom that we have in Christ, and then I'll move to the position that I operate in.

The New Testament isn't explicit on forbidding using a screen to put the lyrics up, or to put the scene of a waterfall behind it, or to make the waterfall actually move behind it, or to show a picture of your fishing trip to illustrate the big fish that you caught and how your people should now go out and be "fishers of men." The Bible doesn't forbid it.

I'll be gone in a few years and you can do whatever you want to do, but I believe profoundly in the power and the till-Jesus-comes-validity of preaching. And by that I mean the spirit-anointed exposition of the Scripture through clear explanations and applications of what's there. There's something God-appointed about that.

I think the use of video and drama largely is a token of unbelief in the power of preaching. And I think that, to the degree that pastors begin to supplement their preaching with this entertaining spice to help people stay with them and be moved and get helped, it's going to backfire. It's going to backfire.

It's going to communicate that preaching is weak, preaching doesn't save, preaching doesn't hold, but entertainment does. And we'll just go further and further. So we don't do video clips during the sermon. We don't do skits.

I went to a drama at our church four days ago. I believe in drama. I believe in the power of drama. But let drama be drama! And let preaching be preaching! Let's have the arts in our churches, but don't try to squash it all into Sunday morning. So I get worked up about these things.

That's where I am on that. Free. Nobody is going to go to hell because of this, in the short run.

John Piper
Would Jesus support health care reform?

By John Blake, CNN

(CNN) – He was a healer, a provider of universal health care, a man of compassion who treated those with preexisting medical conditions.

We don’t know what Jesus thought about the individual mandate or buying broccoli. But we do know how the New Testament describes him. The Gospels are filled with stories of Jesus physically healing the most vulnerable and despised people in his society.

References to Jesus, of course, didn’t make into the recent U.S. Supreme Court’s hearings on the constitutionality of President Barack Obama’s Affordable Care Act. Yet there is a moral dimension to this epic legal debate:

How should the nation help its “least of these,” an estimated 50 million Americans who can’t afford health insurance, as well as those who could go broke or die because they can’t afford medical care?

Christians are as divided about this question as others. Many cite Jesus, but come up with completely different conclusions.
Trust God or government?

Tom Prichard, a Lutheran and president of the Minnesota Family Council, said it’s ultimately about faith. Who do we trust – God or government?

He opposes “Obamacare” because he has more faith in the market and people, than government.

CNN’s Belief Blog: The faith angles behind the biggest stories

“Here Jesus’ words come to mind about not worrying and trusting God to meet our basic needs,” Prichard wrote in an online post warning about the dangers of “government run health care.” “Or if we believe it all depends on us, we’ll look to government.”

When reached at his Minnesota office, Prichard elaborated: He said the nation should empower families and individuals to make health-care decisions. If families can’t afford health insurance, private and public entities like churches and nonprofits should step in, he said.

“We all have the same goal,” Prichard said. “We want all people to have health care, even people who can’t afford it. I would argue that having the government be the primary vehicle for providing it is not going to get us to that goal. It’s going to make the situation worse.”

Carl Raschke, a religious studies professor at the University of Denver, evoked Jesus’ words about Rome and taxation.

Raschke cited the New Testament passage when Jesus, after being asked if Jews should pay taxes to Rome, said that people should ”Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's.”

Jesus was against strictly political or economic solutions because he thought they were too easy when it comes to the real challenges of human life, Raschke said.

“Writing checks won’t solve social problems,” Raschke said. “One has to get involved. If we see someone in need, we just don’t throw a dollar at him or her. You get to know them, you offer yourself, and ask what you can do for them.”

Helping the Good Samaritans of our day

There are some Christians, though, who say that charity isn’t enough to solve the nation’s health care problems.

An estimated 32 million Americans could lose health insurance if “Obamacare” is struck down, including children who can stay on their parents’ insurance until they are 26 and seniors who get help paying for their drug prescriptions. Most observers say health care costs would continue to rise.

Follow the CNN Belief Blog on Twitter
Some people believe the health care situation in America would be scandalous to Jesus because he was a prophet concerned about social justice.

Steven Kraftchick, a religious scholar, said Jesus comes out of the tradition of Jewish prophets who preached that the health of a society could be measured by how well they took care of “its widows and orphans,” those who had the least power.

Kraftchick said there’s a famous story in the Gospel of Mark in which Jesus heals such a person. He was the man who called himself Legion. He might have been called homeless and mentally ill. The man roamed a graveyard, so tormented that even chains could not hold him and everyone feared him, Mark wrote.

Jesus healed the man not only physically, but socially as well, according to Mark. The man returned to his community with a sense of dignity, said Kraftchick, a professor at Emory University’s Candler School of Theology in Atlanta.

“A move toward universal health care would be fitting with the prophetic traditions,” Kraftchick said. “When you read the New Testament and look at the signs of the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God, it’s always connected to being physically healed.”

Yet Marcia Pally, an authority on evangelicals, said many evangelicals are wary of government doing the healing. Their reasons go back centuries.

Many are the descendants of people who fled Europe because of religious persecution from countries and state churches. They fought a revolution against a government in England. And they settled a frontier, where the virtue of self-reliance was critical, said Pally, author of “The New Evangelicals: Expanding the Vision of the Common Good.”

Suspicion of government is part of their historical and religious experience, said Pally, a professor at Fordham University and New York University.

Those attitudes, though, may be changing. Pally said she spent six years traveling across America to interview evangelicals. She discovered that a new generation of evangelists now believes that certain issues are too big and complex to be addressed by charity alone.

“Some note that charity is very good at the moment of emergency relief but it doesn’t change the underlying problem unless structures that keep people poor, sick or deny their access to health insurance are changed,” she said.

No matter what the Supreme Court decides, the legal debate will continue. If more Americans go broke or die because they do not have health insurance, more Americans may ask, what would Jesus do?

But don’t expect any easy answers from the Bible, said Raschke, the religious studies professor at the University of Denver.
“People are always looking for support from the Bible for American political positions,” Rashke said. “Would Jesus be against abortion, or would he support a woman’s right to choose? It’s almost become a standard joke in the theological world that you quote Jesus in American politics to support your political views.

“The teachings of Jesus do not fit into the views of any political party.”

John Blake - CNN Writer
My Take: My hijab is my hoodie

Editor’s note: Linda Sarsour is national advocacy director of the National Network for Arab American Communities and director of the Arab American Association of New York. Follow her on Twitter.

By Linda Sarsour, Special to CNN

(CNN) - I’ve been among the millions mourning the killing of Trayvon Martin, but I’m also mourning the fact that another recent killing has gotten little national attention.

Last week, a 32-year old Iraqi Muslim mother named Shaima Alawadi was found brutally beaten with a tire iron in her El Cajon, California, home and died three days later. A note reportedly left beside her said, “Go Back to your country, you terrorist.”
As an Arab-American Muslim mother of three, I instantly thought about myself and my family.

Alawadi’s death put a mirror up to my face. I am 32, I wear a headscarf, like Alawadi did, and I live during one of the most hostile moments that the Muslim American community has ever experienced, especially in the decade since 9/11.

Blacks in America continue to face racism on a daily basis, from the workplace to interactions with law enforcement. And yet racism against African-Americans is publicly acknowledged as unacceptable.

**CNN’s Belief Blog: The faith angles behind the biggest stories**

No one in power dares use the N-word publicly, fearing the wrath that will be bestowed upon them.

Unfortunately, that’s not the case for Muslims in America. Bigotry against Muslims is quite acceptable. From media pundits to elected officials to presidential hopefuls, spewing misinformation and hatred about Muslims and Islam has been normalized.

In America, terrorism has become synonymous with Arabs and Muslims. We see that clearly stated in the note left next to Alawadi.

Law enforcement is investigating Alawadi’s case and says it will not rule out the possibility of a hate crime but also called the killing “an isolated incident.”


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Last year saw the coldblooded killing of two Sikh elders who apparently “looked” Muslim. The year before saw the stabbing of a Muslim cabdriver who told a white passenger he was Muslim.

Isolated incidents? I don’t think so.

Given mosque vandalism and opposition, proposed anti-Sharia laws and congressional hearings on American Islam, the rash of anti-Muslim hate crimes is not so surprising. As appears to be the case with Trayvon Martin, what’s dangerous is when ordinary citizens act on bigotry, born of misinformation and fear of the unknown.

While there has been some effort to connect Martin and Alawadi by focusing on their attire – a hoodie for the African-American teen and a hijab for the young mother – there has been a deafening silence and reluctance to take Alawadi’s case to the forefront of public debate by some in the Muslim community.
Major Muslim organizations and activists have been treading carefully, warning community members not to “jump to conclusions.”

I for one have been disheartened and feel disempowered by this response. As in Martin’s case, there is still an ongoing investigation into Alawadi’s death.

But with only initial evidence – a dead black teenager, an iced tea, a pack of Skittles, a neighborhood watchman – many of us have presumed the Martin killing is an unfortunate result of racism in America.

Some have even gone so far as to compare Martin's death to that of Emmett Till.

Why not the same for Alawadi?

Is an Arab Muslim woman drowning in her blood with a note deeming her a terrorist and telling her to go back to her “country” not explicit enough?

Instead of looking at Alawadi’s death in light of the anti-Muslim environment we live in, Muslims allow our internalized oppression to lead us to believe the stereotypes perpetuated against our community.

I have seen tweets and comments from Muslims suggesting the possibility Alawadi’s killing might be an act of domestic violence or, worse, an honor killing.

In the United States, we need to come to terms with anti-Muslim bigotry, stand up to it and unequivocally deem it unacceptable. An injustice toward any one person or community is an injustice to us all.

I am Trayvon Martin. I am Shaima Alawadi, too.

*The opinions expressed in this commentary are solely those of Linda Sarsour.*

The Editors - CNN Belief Blog
Why We Don't Need "Women's" Ministry

Christianity Is Not a Boys' Club (Or Is It?)

Don't Miss

Why We Don't Need "Women's" Ministry

Christianity Is Not a Boys' Club (Or Is It?)

Perhaps on one level, our definition of leadership and influence has been too narrow, too one-dimensional. These stories are different from the ones we often hear; maybe they seem a little ordinary. But in the hands of an extraordinary God, these women do amazing things. Their stories in all their glorious diversity should be told and heard, seen and valued. They help us see what we can be. They must be invested in and equipped in order to realize their potential in the place God’s already placed them.

Still there is another group of women, different ages, life stages, colors, and cultures. Same conversation.

"Where are the women leaders?"

"I wish there were more out there..."

"I just wish there were more coming through, but there don’t seem to be any anywhere."

"What’s happening?"

Ever been part of a conversation like this? It’s a conversation that I’ve had with men and women across the U.S., around Europe, across the generations. It happens over coffee, online, on a conference call, in a hangout and in print. Sometimes, the conversation is tinged with angst and longing, sometimes hurt, something incredulity, like something simply doesn’t add up.

It’s not that women in the church have disappeared (at least not yet!). In reality, women are shaping and influencing their world in a broad range of ways. They’re engaging with the imbalances and injustices of the world, advocating, fundraising, adopting, fostering, making dresses for children who go without, knitting quilts for women in shelters, writing letters to troops, and sponsoring children. Some are investing their gifts and talents as they establish their homes and raise their children. Their gifts are predominantly expressed at the school gate, on the PTA, with girl scouts and sports teams, in the local neighborhood. It’s a high calling, being salt and light in the local community – world changing, in fact. Some women are leading and loving it in the workplace; they’ve been equipped, empowered, and their leadership gifts have come alive. It’s an incredible opportunity. Like Esther, they’re called for such a time as this; like Joseph and Daniel, this is where their ministry unfolds. Other women are realizing their potential as they support others – their bosses, their spouses, their friends, their teams. It's not a subjugation thing nor a lack of confidence. These women know who they are and where they are called to be, and they thrive.

Perhaps on one level, our definition of leadership and influence has been too narrow, too one-dimensional. These stories are different from the ones we often hear; maybe they seem a little ordinary. But in the hands of an extraordinary God, these women do amazing things. Their stories in all their glorious diversity should be told and heard, seen and valued. They help us see what we can be. They must be invested in and equipped in order to realize their potential in the place God’s already placed them.

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"Where are the women leaders?"

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"What’s happening?"
Like their sisters, they feel called to serve but as leaders within the church. To lead churches, to exegete the Scriptures, to lead teams, to preach, to lead worship, to train leaders, to lead prayer movements, to share strategic insights, to pioneer ministries, plant churches, to pursue missional frontiers. Sometimes, it’s like a quiet persistent hum in the background; sometimes, it’s like a raging fire in their bones. There’s a conviction, a passion, a calling. They’re just not sure what this calling looks like beyond their passions and their dreams…

"Where are the women leaders?"

They’re asking because they can’t be what they can’t see. They’re asking because they need to see who they could be. There’s been so much controversy, so much debate, that at times it’s cut deep into their sense of identity and relationship with God. They’ve questioned repeatedly whether they are just too proud, just ambitious, not feminine enough. They’ve prayed, wept, and walked away, only to find that the restless nagging sense of call won’t leave them alone. Oh, they’ve tried to not be called, because that would be so much easier, far less costly. But they’ve flown away on the wings of the morning, settled on the far side of the sea, dug themselves into the dark shadows - and He was there. Loving, affirming, but still commissioning. Calling. And when they’ve dared to respond, dared to whisper yes…they felt alive.

Seeing helps. Seeing the lives of the women of the Scriptures – Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, Junia, Priscilla, Lydia, Mary, Phoebe, Elizabeth. Hearing their names, understanding their lives helps. Seeing Christian women through the ages helps. The martyrs of the early churches like Perpetua and Felicity. Leaders in the Celtic Church like Hilda of Whitby. The women through the ages: Susanna Wesley, Phoebe Palmer, Catherine Booth, Sojourner Truth, Mother Theresa, Jackie Pullinger. As mentioned in a previous post, you cannot underestimate the power of what you can’t see. What we see (or don’t see) speaks incredibly loudly about what is possible. Seeing inspires from afar; seeing ignites possibility. But I believe that to equip and empower women who sense a call to leadership, they’ll need some things that are much, much closer.

They need leaders who can show them how to explore and engage with their call to leadership. Leaders who will assuage and reassure them it’s OK to be called, that its more than OK, and though it may be difficult at times, it is possible. They need leaders who can show them through the illustration of their lives, through their testimonies, and their presence out there.

They need leaders who can tell them their stories, their whole stories, their successes and failures, their devotional lives. They need leaders who can open their time and hearts and help them understand what it means for God to work on your character. Who can share their stories of stress, suffering, and struggle, and also faith, hope, and love.

They need to experience leaders who will train them. Who will sharpen their skills, cultivate their gifts, and give them regular tangible opportunities, walking them through success but also failure. These women need people who will apprentice them. They need leaders who are secure enough to open doors for them to go through, willing to launch these women into a future that might be even greater than their own...Now obviously, male leaders can and have trained female leaders. My hope and prayer is that more would, because we need to see healthy teams of men and women who’ve worked out before God how to work alongside one another. We’ve got to commit to the vehicles that help that process.

They also need to be in community. They need to have an extended family. Because we’re not one-dimensional beings whose lives have to revolve around a job or a task. We are also friends, sisters, daughters, mothers, aunts, wives. So we need people to do life with, because when you’re immersed in a community, it’s easier to be grounded. It’s easier to be normal and not take ourselves too seriously. It’s easier to find support and encouragement to keep going. It’s easier to cultivate relationships with people we can confide in or trust to ask the difficult questions.

Can a fresh generation of female leaders come through without it? Are they?

In truth, they are – but it’s more difficult, it’s lonelier, and women are not realizing their potential.
That’s a challenging enough thought in itself. But let’s think beyond these leaders and think of the places where God’s sending them. Think about the communities and cities, the people groups yet to be transformed by the love of Jesus Christ, yet to see the Light of the Gospel. What potential lies unrealized there because we’ve not raised up the next generation?

This is not a clarion call for every woman to be a leader, though I hope that every Christian man and woman would have a vision for being salt and light wherever they are and for leading someone to Christ. We’ve all been called to make disciples, all been called to play our role in the Great Commission. But it is a call to those of us who do feel called to leadership, who have wrestled and agonized, who have run away from God’s call or toned things down to be more acceptable – to re-engage with the call of God on our lives.

**What do you need to see to be all that God’s called you to be?**

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**Jo Saxton is a leader within 3DM a movement training churches and leaders to do discipleship and mission in an increasingly post-Christian world. Originally from the UK, Jo was college pastor at St. Thomas Church, Sheffield, England, planting missional congregations amongst college students and young adults. Since moving to the US 8 years ago, Jo has served on church teams discipling young leaders and planting missional communities in areas ranging from the suburbs to the inner city. Jo is also the author of More than Enchanting (released Spring 2012) exploring the subject of women in leadership. Jo loves running, good music, reading books, blogs and magazines and laughing loudly with family and friends over a great meal. Jo is married to Chris, a pastor and they have two amazing daughters, Tia and Zoe. They live in Southern California.**

More from Jo Saxton or visit Jo at [www.josaxton.com](http://www.josaxton.com/)
"I am an introvert. With all my public appearances on Sunday mornings, this surprises many people. But in my private life and with those closest to me, there is no questioning that fact."

I am an introvert. With all my public appearances on Sunday mornings, this surprises many people. But in my private life and with those closest to me, there is no questioning that fact. If anything, the larger our church has grown, the more introverted I have become. I wish I were otherwise, but this is how I am wired.

Here are 7 pitfalls of being an introverted pastor:

1. People often think I’m arrogant, aloof, or unfriendly. Now, I may be a lot of negative things, but those are not really the main three. I sometimes have to go back and apologize once I hear someone thinks I avoided them. This happens especially with extremely extroverted people.

2. I sometimes hesitate to make the connections I should and miss opportunities to build my network.

3. I’m worn out after a long day of talking and need time alone to rejuvenate, which can impact my family time if I’m not careful. It also leads to people at the end of the day telling me I look tired…guess what? I am!

4. Crowded rooms, which I love in terms of reaching people for Christ, are actually intimidating to me as a person.

5. I’m not as quick-witted when in crowds, and when I try to be, I sometimes appear awkward on first impressions.

6. I realize the need to talk with people…it’s what I do, but wrestling through the introverted tendencies actually adds even more stress to my life.

7. If I’m not careful, and thankfully I’m fairly disciplined here, I will close out people from really knowing me, which subjects me to all kinds of temptations, anxiety and even depression.

How’s that for transparency?

Are you an introvert? Do you see how it impacts your work?
Why did you decide to write a resource for introverts?

It started as a personal quest. I knew that I was (1) Called to be a leader in the church. I had gifts of teaching and pastoring and I relished opportunities to help people listen to the voice of God in their lives. But it was also clear that (2) I was an introvert. While I enjoyed people and the various aspects of church leadership, I found them draining and I longed for times of solitude, study, and quiet reflection. I experienced a lot of tension between these two realities, especially in an active, gregarious evangelical environment, and the research I did was a way of trying to make sense of my call in light of my introverted temperament and vice versa.

But then I started talking with other introverts about my experiences, and I realized how prevalent, and even sometimes how crippling, the struggles are for introverts in the church. I even talked with a number of introverts who have left their churches - or even church in general - because of this issue. So what began as a study of introverts in Christian leadership expanded into an exploration of central aspects of the Christian life, like community, spirituality, evangelism, and worship, from an introverted perspective. My deep hope is that the book will help introverts to find peace in their God-given personality preferences and to discover their places in their Christian communities, which so badly need their gifts and strengths.

What are the qualities of an introvert that may be overlooked?

Put bluntly, I think most qualities of an introvert are prone to be overlooked! In our extroverted society, we value aggressive, action-oriented, gregarious people, and I think this extroverted bias has bled over into some of our churches, where often the "ideals" of faithfulness are strikingly
extroverted. We praise people who are social and expressive, eager to participate in a wide variety of activities, have an overt enthusiasm, share their faith with strangers easily, assume leadership positions quickly. But introverts do not usually fit this profile, and our lives of faith may be a little slower, a little quieter, a little more solitary. We are often calm, thoughtful, reflective types who may be invisible to others if they are not looking or listening.

Yet I think that introverts have tremendous gifts to bring to others. In the book I start with our listening abilities. Because introverts process internally, we can offer people a non-judgmental presence that helps others open up to us. There is also something about being intimately connected to our inner worlds that produces a great deal of creativity. Many introverts are gifted writers, artists, musicians, and even actors. I also think that having a rich inner life lends itself towards a deep compassion for others, something I have seen in many introverted pastors and chaplains I have worked with. Further, we are capable of an insight that is borne of self-awareness and listening, a peacefulness that spreads to others, and a servant mindset which is often expressed in behind-the-scenes service.

Can introverts be in church leadership?

Absolutely. The reality is that introverts are in church leadership—I've seen studies that estimate anywhere from 25 to 40 percent of Protestant pastors are introverted, with an even higher percentage among Catholic priests. Interestingly, it seems that the larger churches are, the higher is the percentage of introverts leading them. A recent survey reports that 45% of megachurches are led by introverted pastors. Erwin McManus, Dan Kimball, and Mark Driscoll, among many others, are self-confessed introverts.

Perhaps the better question then is how introverts can lead in a way that is life-giving and natural. I think self-care is absolutely critical for introverted pastors and leaders, because my experience is that introverts in ministry are more prone to burnout than extroverts. We need to discover and embrace our rhythms of expending and restoring energy and to care for ourselves—souls, minds, bodies and intimate relationships—so that we can find joy and vitality in ministry and life.

How has being an introvert helped your ministry?

That's a question I haven't been asked much! Too often we define introversion by what's it's not, rather than what it is. I would really like to start defining it by its assets, not its liabilities. I have worked in a number of different ministry settings—in the church, in college campus ministry, and in hospital and hospice chaplaincy—and being an introvert has helped me in all of those roles. My listening abilities as an introvert are probably the greatest gift that I have to offer people. In our culture people so rarely have the experience of being truly listened to- having their words, feelings, and experiences taken seriously. I have developed the skill of listening to what's unsaid - the doubts, questions, and feelings that lie underneath what someone is saying. It's amazing how transformative it can be for a person to simply be listened to, even when no problems are solved or no advice is dispensed.

Some people are surprised when I tell them that my introversion has also aided me in preaching and teaching. My natural bent toward study, thoughtful reflection and writing—all things that come to introverts pretty easily—have all helped me develop as a preacher. I love going deep into the nuances and applications of the biblical text, and I also think that my tendency to observe helps
me to speak into the life of the community and the culture. Even though I enjoy writing sermons more than I do preaching, I am very comfortable in the pulpit, as long as I have had ample time to prepare. The fellowship hour after the service is another story though!

**How can introverts be evangelists?**

As I was exploring this topic, I had someone ask me whether an "introverted evangelist" is an oxymoron. But I firmly believe it's not that introverts are ill-suited to evangelism; rather, many of our common strategies for evangelism are ill-suited for introverts. Even though teaching on evangelism is (thankfully) changing, there are still some prevailing models that are very difficult for many introverts. One of those models is the spiritual salesmanship model, to borrow an image from evangelism professor Rick Richardson. We must be fast talking experts, armed with answers to all the questions, able to persuade others and "close the deal." Or another common mode of evangelism is debate - we need to prove that our worldview is superior to that of others. Most introverts will struggle with these methods, since we're not naturally aggressive or chatty and our internal processing slows us down in situations of conflict or debate.

I think there are different methods and images for evangelism that are more suited for introverts. One of the things I suggest is that introverts, instead of radically stretching themselves to initiate with strangers in uncomfortable situations, should start with the people who are already in their lives and ask how God is already at work in them. Evangelism is always a response to what God is already doing in people, as he works on people's hearts in ways that transcend even the most profound words we can muster. We can come alongside of our friends and partner with God in teaching and embodying the gospel of Jesus. And we can use our gifts as introverts - especially listening and compassion - to demonstrate the love and the presence of God. By listening to people, and really giving them space to express their questions and doubts, we ensure that when we do speak we are addressing the real needs and concerns of a person.

**Despite the prevailing opinions of most church planter evaluation committees, do you think an introvert could make a good church planter? How so? What advice would you give?**

Sometimes I wonder whether any committee would choose someone like Moses or Timothy to plant a church. Moses claimed he was inarticulate and uncomfortable in the spotlight; Timothy was young and struggled with timidity. There is a disturbingly consistent trend in the scriptures that God chooses unlikely people to carry out his mission and lead his people. And it is clear that God's call is not contingent on personality type. If those responsible for planting churches do not allow that God will call introverts to plant churches, they are disregarding biblical patterns and missing out on many gifted and inspired leaders.

I know several introverts who are currently involved in planting churches, and they are tremendously gifted people who are seeing much fruit in their ministry. They are finding that their introversion, in many ways, is helping them. They are building relationships one at a time, asking the questions that are enabling them to understand the culture and the people they are trying to reach. They are eager learners, and through listening and observation and theological reflection, they have developed a compelling vision for their communities. They are investing deeply in the leaders God has brought to them. They are people of deep prayer and spiritual discipline, which restores them and gives them God's eyes for people.
It's important to stress that introverts can be wonderful communicators and have social skill and confidence; we're not necessarily shy or standoffish. The difference is that social interaction and life in the outside world drains us. So I think the key to church planting, and any leadership position in the church, is caring for your soul. My friend Chris, an introvert planting a church in Pittsburgh, says that Sabbath, maintaining his intellectual life, carefully balancing his schedule, and finding some sort of role that helps him to meet new people (for him it's serving as a tent-making barista at a local coffee shop), are critical to his success.

Don't extroverts suffer more when communal life fails to live up to expectations?

I don't find the discussion about whether introverts or extroverts suffer more in community to be a helpful one. It only promotes competition and victimization, two things that destroy community. One thing that's absolutely essential for the reader to know is that I wrote my book for introverts. Of course I want extroverts to read it but they must understand that they're listening in on a quiet conversation between introverts. If someone reads what I say about introverts and infers that I'm thereby saying the opposite thing about extroverts (e.g. Community can be hard for introverts, so therefore it's easy for extroverts), then they're not going to have a good reading experience. I tried to make that clear in the book. I wasn't saying that introverts are the only ones who experience misunderstanding or who struggle in community. Introverts certainly don't have a corner on suffering! My hope is that extroverts who read the book will develop understanding and compassion for the introverts in their lives and will help shape their churches into places that honor the gifts and rhythms of introverts.

What is the gospel and how can it specifically be applied to the main issues you raise in the book?

This isn't a comprehensive definition, but I would start by saying that the gospel is the reality that in the person of Jesus Christ - in his life, death, and resurrection - God has reclaimed the world as his own and has broken the powers and strongholds that ensnare and divide people. In Christ we have been adopted as God's beloved children - our new foundational identity - and God is rescuing us from the false identities we have constructed and freeing us to be the people he created us to be. The body of Christ is comprised of unique, diverse members who have different gifts and strengths, and we are intended to work together, bringing all that we have, for the glory of God. We are of different cultures, genders, social status, and temperaments. My book explores in depth the introverted temperament, and how the church doesn't always value what introverts bring to the table. People who fall on the introverted side of the personality spectrum can love God and love others authentically, bringing their God-given gifts to bear on their communities.

If you could add a chapter or two to your book, what issues would you address (or expand further)?

To be honest, I don't have chapters I want to add at this point. I wanted to specifically address introversion in the contexts of the Christian life and Christian community, and I explored the major aspects of that life. No one had written the book before. There are already great books for helping introverts and extroverts relate to one another, that look at the role of temperament in marriage, in parenting, and at work. I would like to see someone else write Extroverts in the Church,
however!

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Find this article at: [http://www.christianity.com/pastors](http://www.christianity.com/pastors)
This Sunday is Easter, and when you look around your church, you’re going to get that uncomfortable feeling that comes from being around all kinds of people you haven’t seen in a while or perhaps never before. You know, the slackers who only show up at church twice a year, the backsliders who haven’t been to church in 5 years, and the heathens who wouldn’t know the Pentateuch from a pentagram.

They’re going to take your favorite pew, sit and stand at the wrong times during the service, and double your wait in the coffee line after the service. You don’t want to have to put up with those distractions and inconveniences week in and week out, so here are 12 ways to ensure those people don’t come back the week after Easter.

1. Keep to yourself. Avoid eye contact. And by all means, don’t welcome anyone you don’t know.

2. Walk up to someone you haven’t seen for a while and say, “Hey, hey…Look who it is…You don’t think just showing up for Easter is going to get you out of the Big Guy’s doghouse, do you?”

3. Make sure all the greeters, ushers, singers, speakers, and everyone involved in leading the service are all of the same ethnic background so that if anyone of a different ethnicity shows up, they know they are considered second-class citizens.

4. Take down all your signs so only the regulars know if a door leads to the pastor’s office, the ladies' room, or a broom closet.

5. During the service, have the pastor pray, “Lord, please forgive all those sinners who have failed to remember the Sabbath to keep it holy.”

6. Invite the worst singer in the choir to do a solo.

7. Find a way to tie the Easter message into a soliloquy on the Iraq War and make it clear that everyone who disagrees with the pastor’s position is on the devil’s side.

8. During the service, ask all the visitors to stand and then introduce themselves to the entire congregation.

9. Announce that next week the pastor will begin a 12-week series on hell.
10. Put a sign up in the children’s ministry area that indicates you have a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy when it comes to volunteers with criminal records.

11. Just assume that everyone understands what communion is all about. Then when people start coming forward to receive communion, have the ushers quietly walk up to the “really big sinners” and ask them to return to their seats.

12. Announce that visitors must fill out a form with their contact information and should expect an elder-evangelist tag team waiting in their driveway when they get home.

Of course, if you actually care about guests and irregular church attendees because you believe they matter to God, you might consider doing just the opposite.

Share this:

Paul Steinbrueck is co-founder and CEO of OurChurch.com, elder of CypressMeadows.org, and a husband, father of 3, and a prolific blogger.

More from Paul Steinbrueck or visit Paul at blog.ourchurch.com/

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The New Agnostics
Winifred Gallagher grew up, became a science writer and thought she had left the religion of her youth behind. In her new book, she traces her rediscovery of her generation's complex relationship with faith.

Don Lattin, Chronicle Religion Writer
Sunday, April 4, 1999

Religion was something Winifred Gallagher thought she'd freed herself from in 1964, a heavy piece of Irish Catholic baggage dumped on the doorstep of her college dorm. Religion was 12 years of Catholic school, church every Sunday, and this idea that Christianity was about judgment, sin and guilt.

During her freshman year, she came home for Thanksgiving, took a deep breath, and told her parents she'd become an atheist.

Asian religion was OK. Alan Watts was on public television talking about Zen. That was cool. Christianity was not cool. Been there. Worshiped that.

It was the '60s. She lived on a farm, became an artist, got married twice, made babies, joined the environmental movement and wound up in New York City.

Through her art background, she got a job working for a new magazine, called Discover. To her surprise, she started writing stories and wound up as a specialist covering the behavioral sciences. That led to two successful books: "Just the Way You Are: How Heredity and Experience Create the Individual" and "The Power of Place: How Our Surroundings Shape Our Thoughts, Emotions and Actions."

Gallagher had become a hip and successful New York author and journalist. Religion still held no meaning for her, her secular Jewish husband or 95 percent of their Manhattan friends.

But there was this one thing, this side door that would lead her back to the church. "I've always wanted to know why things are the way they are. I'm interested in ultimacy, whether it is behavioral, philosophical or spiritual," she said. "But even the smartest behavioral scientists can't tell you what your life means. They can tell you how you got to be the way you are, and perhaps how you can change, but they can't tell you the point of your life. Religion addresses that question."

Gallagher, a journalist with a keen eye for what's hot and what's not, was not interested in the true believers -- whether they be Christian fundamentalists or self-righteous atheists. What interested her was that growing but hard-to-categorize group of highly educated, well-connected and skeptical people who had not quite given up on the idea that might be some kind of metaphysical something-or-other out there.
After a bit of research and reporting, she dubbed these folks "neo-agnostics," and realized she was one of them.

"They're caught between a rock and a hard place," she said. "They can't quite get into religion because they believe that religion is belief in the unbelievable, that you have to check your brains at the door. They see religion and the mind like water and oil, two things they can't harmonize.

"On the other hand, they have religious experience, longings and impulses that point to some sacred something. They're not classical atheists or agnostics, because they haven't quite given up on the whole thing. Sometimes they think there may be a God, or they wish there was a God. They say they are spiritual, but not religious."

Gallagher's three-year journey across America's eclectic spiritual landscape began as a book deal, but ended up a personal pilgrimage. She didn't originally plan to put herself in the book at all, but her reporting led to personal spiritual experiences she decided were too powerful to ignore.

While researching American Buddhism, she began sitting in Zen meditation. Interviews with leading rabbis and Jewish mystics led her to a new understanding of the Jesus she thought she knew and had rejected back in college.

Her new work, published last month by Random House, is entitled "Working on God." While the book is done, her spiritual journey remains a work in progress.

"What I found were: Buddhists have the best practice, Jews have the best study, and Christians have Jesus," she said during an interview last week in San Francisco, her fourth stop on a 10-day book tour.

"I'm still not sure about the nature of Jesus. I know Jesus was extremely special. How special, I don't know. But I realized I was a Christian when I saw that I started to experience Jesus in a way I can't possibly describe. I admire Gandhi. I admire Martin Luther King. I admire Leonardo da Vinci. But I don't experience them. Jesus is somehow present to me in a way he wasn't present before. It's a strange thing, but a true thing for me."

Gallagher's bi-coastal spiritual search took her from a Redemptorist convent in upstate New York to the hot springs of Esalen Institute at Big Sur, the birthplace of the human potential movement. She enrolled in classes at an Anglican seminary in Manhattan and went on a Buddhist meditation retreat at the Sonoma Mountain Zen Center near Glen Ellen in Sonoma County.

"What is the point of sitting here in this uncomfortable position at a hellish hour in the morning, staring at a wall plug?" she asked herself, before she began to appreciate the value of meditation. "Why does Zen seem so smart and simple when you read about it, and so dumb and hard when you do it?"

She dabbled in the New Age movement in the Bay Area and got a taste of Islam at an African American mosque in Harlem. She studied Hebrew scripture with Rabbi Burton Visotzky at a Conservative synagogue in New York, and pondered the perennial philosophy running through all major world religions at the Berkeley home of interfaith scholar Huston Smith.
``A man trying to understand God is like a dog contemplating man,'' Smith says. ``He knows something about the other, but not everything."

Gallagher traveled the land talking to the experts on all the cutting edge issues on the neo-agnostic agenda, such as the blending of psychology and spirituality and the latest attempts to reconcile the worlds of science and religion. She stopped by the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences at Berkeley's Graduate Theological Union, where theologians in tweed jackets and researchers in lab coats push religion without dogma and science without certainty.

They both deal with things none of us can see and concepts few of us understand, but it all sounds great.

``Both physics and religion are riddled with essential paradox and point to the numinous that goes beyond language,'' explains Robert John Russell, director of the Berkeley center. ``Each relies on analogies to illuminate a phenomenon that they also must, in the end, leave shrouded in its inherent mystery.''

But Gallagher's real breakthrough came not on some Zen mountaintop, not from the Talmud or the New Testament, not while pondering the mysteries of quantum physics. Halfway through her research for the book, her oldest child called home from college on a Friday morning. He had cancer -- aggressive cancer -- and needed immediate surgery.

Not far from Gallagher's home on the Upper West Side is the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. On the day before her son's operation, she slipped into a side chapel.

``As naturally as breathing, I silently poured out my heart amid all the familiar religious symbols, sounds and smells of my childhood,'' she writes. ``Finally backed against the wall, I responded from instinct, looked homeward and found wholeheartedness. I gave no thought to whether I 'believed' in God, or just who that might be, or whether I was really a Christian. I was pleading for my child, of course, but there was something more. I was groping toward a different reality, in which life is not an accident and dark threads are part of a bright fabric. Whatever happened, I would trust in a benignity and design vast beyond my imagining that could somehow give meaning to -- redeem -- what seemed like chaos.''

Her son recovered from the surgery and cancer treatments. Gallagher joined the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, and has continued practicing Zen meditation.

Like millions of other baby boomers, Gallagher has no problem mixing and matching spiritual practices, staking out a middle ground between Christianity and Buddhism.

``In churches and synagogues, there are usually too many words for my liking. They often feel more like distractions, not prayers,'' she writes. ``Yet in Zen, ultimately there's Nothing -- and I'm tuned for Something. For me, Judaism and Christianity can feel like too much, and Zen, not enough.''

During her stop in San Francisco, Gallagher wandered up to Grace Cathedral with a Chronicle photographer. It seemed like an appropriate backdrop for a picture. Like St. John the Divine in New York, this neo-Gothic jewel atop Nob Hill is a place that actively courts neo-agnostics, a place that welcomes skeptical seekers with Big Questions.
Gallagher still has her doubts about things like the virgin birth and the Resurrection, but they don't bother her as much as they once did.

Up at Grace Cathedral, the Rev. Alan Jones, dean of the Episcopal cathedral, is not surprised to hear about Gallagher's continuing struggle with the Nicene Creed, all that tricky stuff about Jesus rising from the dead on the third day.

``Good heaven, who doesn't have trouble with creeds!'' Jones says. ``People think in order to say the creed they have to be a fundamentalist. For a thousand years, our most common way of interpreting the Bible was allegorically. I look at creeds as chapter headings for a love story. Our creed is the first word, not the last word. It helps us into mystery.''

Jones says ``Working on God'' sounds like an interesting book -- and nothing new.

``That's all part of our Christian tradition,'' he said. ``We've struggled with all of this for centuries. My highest and holiest teacher, a professor of theology and the Dean of York, liked to say that we're called to be reverent agnostics. It sounds like Gallagher's recovering our tradition of the deep heart and questioning mind.''

This morning, Gallagher will take her deep heart and questioning mind into the Cathedral of St. John the Divine for Easter Sunday services.

``I'll go to church, smell the lilies and think, wow, rising from the dead. What can that mean? Eternal life. Hmmm. I don't quite know what that means, but I'm for it. It's good in some way I can't possibly understand."

She points to the bunny pin on her dark suit, smiles, and says, ``I guess I've taken the hop of faith.''

Gallagher's book is the latest in a series of memoirs written by once-secular baby boomers who've rediscovered religion, including best-sellers by Anne Lamott (``Traveling Mercies'') and Kathleen Norris (``The Cloister Walk,' 'Amazing Grace').

Sociologists of religion have filled bookshelves with studies documenting the eclectic spiritual journey of the postwar generation, most notably Wade Clark Roof (``A Generation of Seekers'') and Robert Wuthnow (``After Heaven, Growing Up Religious'').

Roof found that nearly half of middle-aged Americans now consider all faiths equally good and true -- a key tenet of neo-agnosticism.

Studies show that about 95 percent of Americans say they believe in God. But Roof reports that about a third of the baby boomers ``admit to uncertainty in their belief," entertain ``individualistic meaning systems'' and remain "highly secularized in their conceptions of the forces governing life."

Wuthnow's model of the three stages of postwar American spirituality also fits Gallagher's story like a glove. His 1998 book, ``After Heaven, Spirituality in America since the 1950s," charts how the emphasis on church attendance in the 1950s, dubbed the "the spirituality of dwelling," gave way to the "spirituality of seeking" in the 1960s and 1970s, maturing into "spirituality of practice" in the 1980s and...
1990s, with more serious practices like Zen meditation or Christian spiritual disciplines.

Gallagher's three-year quest and newfound church has shown her how wrong she was about "those religious people" she used to stereotype.

"I used to think of religion as puritanical, of giving things up, becoming narrow. But I haven't given anything up, except for a lot of bullshit, like nihilism and negativism," she says.

"What religion has done for me is I feel a lot lighter. There's a buoyancy. Don't get me wrong. I have five kids, and there's always some crisis. But I don't seem to stay stuck in the bad now. I treat people better than I used to, and when I don't, I notice it a little faster than I once did."


http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/1999/04/04/SC92978.DTL
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