Knowing Me, Knowing You: Introvert & Extrovert - 19th June 2022 Matt Wallace

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Preacher: Matt Wallace

[0:00] Morning. Good to see you today as we're continuing this Knowing Me, Knowing You. Oh, you're still on it. I like it. I like it. This Knowing Me, Knowing You Sunday series.

It's a series we've been doing now for a few weeks. Doing our best, really, to unpack how we might grow in our awareness of God and of ourselves and of each other. A kind of knowledge and understanding of what makes us and what makes others tick, including looking at the person of Jesus, so that we might better appreciate the fullness, if you like, of God's love in our lives.
And this knowing stuff, this awareness. I mean, in terms of knowing ourselves, you'll be as aware as me. There's counseling therapy, self-help galore, and so on. It's pretty popular these days with so many folks, because we want to know why we think and act in the ways we do. Yet this desire to know ourselves is anything but a modern thing. So, for example, for the history dudes among you, the now ruined temple of Apollo in Delphi in ancient Greece, it's reckoned there was inscribed in the forecourt there, this call to know thyself. Now, no one knows who coined this pithy little phrase, first off.
Could have been Socrates, could have been Sophocles, could have been Hippocrates, could have been Alicia Keys. We just don't know, but there is. Oh, you're listening. That's good. There is real value in knowing who we are, not in a selfish way, but in a way that helps us to work out how we might best relate to others and ultimately to God. Indeed, this self-knowledge, this wisdom, it's a gift from God, I'd say, given to us to enable us to thrive. As I say, it's not selfish, it's not self-absorbed, it's not navel-gazing, you know, picking out the blue fluff or whatever you've got in your life. I don't know. It's wisdom, though. Wisdom. That's the kind of self-awareness that we're talking about, a huge part of our life. It seems with ourselves and God and each other, it's all about wisdom. Indeed, as it says in Proverbs, it says, for the Lord gives wisdom, this idea of it being a gift, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. Then you will understand what is right and just and fair every good path. For wisdom will enter your heart and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. Direction will protect you and understanding will guard you. Like the way it says there, knowledge is pleasant for the soul. So it's going to be good, hopefully today, to explore an aspect of this self-knowledge. I want to look particularly at the ideas of introversion and extroversion, the extent to which we're introverts or extroverts. And I want us to explore that because I'd say knowing how we're wired, and that's what we're talking about today, will ultimately help us, as we say, to better connect with each other and with God. So to start from the top, and I don't want to teach you to suck eggs if this is all sort of pretty clear to you already. But it's worth saying, what does it mean if we say an introvert or an extrovert? Well, I guess a lot of people would say introverts. They're generally quiet people, perhaps, maybe shy, can be people who come across as a bit distant or antisocial at times, maybe even a bit miserable to some. Extroverts, though, they probably say, well, they're a bit more loud and outgoing, perhaps, sometimes even a bit in your face bubbly. We might say if the introverts are miserable, the extroverts are a bit annoying sometimes. It's that kind of idea. Introverts and extroverts, quiet versus loud, reclusive versus outgoing, maybe. That seems to be a lot of the sort of common perceptions of what we mean when we talk about introverts and extroverts. And yet, whilst there may be little grains of truth in some of that stuff, those characteristics are not actually what being introvert or extrovert is all about. Rather, these terms are descriptions for the different ways that we tend to respond to the world around us. More specifically, it's about how we respond to external stimulation, which determines whether we are an introvert or an extrovert. So what is this external stimulation? It's everything around us, everything that's going on all the time. You've got the helicopter in the sky, you can hear. That's an external stimulation. It's

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the conversations we have, the food we eat, the smells we encounter. It's the buzz of the fridge behind Sharon there,
I'm sure. It's the lights in your face here. All of that is, one way or another, externally stimulating us. All our senses are being stimulated in one way or another. And yet everything that you or I see, hear, touch, taste or smell will be processed by our brains slightly differently depending on how we're wired. And what's fascinating, or I find it fascinating at least, is that a bit like whether we're wired to be left-handed or right-handed, scientists have worked out that the brains of introverts and extroverts are wired slightly differently. And they're drawn perhaps to slightly different kinds of stimulation. So for example, if you're an extrovert, your brain will tell you to seek out more external stimulation than someone who's an introvert. It's a bit like a kind of mental caffeine fix. You know, you know you need it perhaps. You want to feel that buzz of something going on around you. So extroverts, not always, but often feel particularly alive at social gatherings, at places like amusement parks, big gigs and so on. Often it's the more the merrier in their eyes, makes sense. It's the range of stimulation which energizes them.
[6:31] That means extroverts will generally enjoy meeting lots of new people. They'll often thrive in a busy working environment, open plan office, that kind of stuff or whatever. There may be multitasking masters. Indeed, without enough external stimulation, extroverts can get a bit bored and feel a bit restless. Introverts, on the other hand, whilst they're not averse to parties and social gatherings and so on, they're not antisocial. Rather, their brains need less external stimulation than extroverts to feel content. And indeed, introverts can get a bit overwhelmed if there's too much going on around them. Introverts are prone sometimes to over-thinking things. They've got busy brains.

And that means if there's too much external stimulation at once, that can leave introverts feeling not energized, like extroverts would be, but pretty exhausted if there's too much going on.
On the flip side though, introverts tend to prefer internal rather than external stimulation. Their brains, if you like, will tell them to seek that out in order to feel content. So an introvert for that internal stimulation might go for a quiet walk maybe with just one other person or even better perhaps on their own. They'll feel energized by that because it's not as much in your face stimulation, more of a chance to be stimulated by their ideas, by a conversation perhaps, by time to reflect and so on. So you think extroverts is more like caffeine. Introverts crave that kind of herbal tea fix, if you like, to be calmed. And so whereas extroverts often like to think things through with others, introverts can prefer to think things through on their own, meaning they prefer quieter, more focused work environments often to keep them feeling fulfilled and on the ball.
So extroverts energized by external stimulation, introverts energized by more internal stimulation. There's no rights and wrongs with this. Introverts and extroverts are of equal value.
It doesn't mean extroverts don't sometimes like peace and quiet and curling up with a good book and so on, or the introverts don't enjoy hanging out with friends and being social and so on. No, but rather on balance. It's what energizes us and enables us to stay refreshed. So the extrovert, as I say, might say the more the merrier. The introvert might say the less, the better.
[9:16] And I say on balance because this introvert-extrovert thing is not necessarily an either-or, black or white kind of thing. Rather, there's a spectrum. There's a continuum between the two extremes.

And whilst pretty much everyone has a tendency to be slightly or a lot introvert or extrovert, some people will only be marginal on one side, like slightly extrovert or introvert, while others will be more extreme in how they feel. So as we talk about this, and I appreciate that's a fair bit of information, I wonder what resonates with you on this introvert-extrovert stuff. You might have thought about this before, you might not have. What energizes you, would you say? Is it lots of external stimulation? Or is it that more quiet internal stimulation? Extrovert or introvert?
And to help us answer that question this morning for ourselves, and perhaps just as importantly, to see how others answer that question. I want to use a little exercise this morning, which I hope is a balance between introvert and extrovert stuff. It's been put together by a writer called Holly Girth, who knows a lot about this stuff. And she has put this little sheet together to roughly help us work out, it's a bit crude, but it's short and it's doable, to work out how introvert or extrovert we are. So at a moment, I'm going to give out a little sheet. It's got 10 statements on it. Statements which I'd like each of us to say on a scale of one to 10, how true they are for us.

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So we'll give out the sheets now and then you'll clock hopefully what I'm talking about. That's why we've got pens on the chairs this morning. Everyone got one? Yes. Lovely. So hopefully it's fairly straightforward, but you'll see on a scale of one to 10, how true each of these statements for us. One being not true of me at all, 10 being very true of me. So if you enjoy spending time in solitude, if that really is the case, you can put an eight, a nine or a 10. If it really isn't your thing, if you just can't stand being on your own, put a one or a two or a three, depending on how strongly you feel that. Give you a couple of minutes to do that. And a bit of adding up, if you can add up your total score. And if you're on YouTube, you can press pause on the TV at this stage and do it yourself at home, I'm sure. But I'll give you a couple of minutes to do that.
[11:51] So once you've got your total score in the box, you'll notice that the lower the score is more extrovert. The higher the score is more introvert. The arrow down the bottom tells us out of 0 to 100, how extrovert or introvert we might be. You might want to put a little cross roughly on that 0 to 100 to sort of work out roughly where you sit on that. All pretty much there? Yeah, great.

So that was the introvert bit in a way. Now comes the extrovert bit, because the key night among you, you want to know, is we set the chairs out slightly differently this morning. So we've got a gangway down here. And what I'd really love us to do this morning is to place ourselves in rough numerical order, if we can, depending on how extrovert or introvert we might be. So let's say the hall of fire doors, that's a 0, okay? So the most extrovert people will be going towards that end. We'll put the windows by the band here. That'll be 100 proper extreme introvert time. Partition will be about, if you score about 50, so it'll be like 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, 100. Don't worry too much if you're not quite in exact order, but I'll give you another two minutes. If you can move to a line in the middle where your number is, that would be great. Interesting stuff. Okay, okay. Now, as was pointed out, this survey was put together by this lady called Holly Girth, and she's an introvert. So it is slightly biased, the way that the questions were worded, because we could have done it the opposite way and done it by extroverts. And it may have been that we get slightly different results in that way. But what do you notice? You can say on the mic if you wish, or you can just shout out, what's the first things that strike you about this spread, this line of people? There are more over here, yes. Many more self-declared introverts than extroverts over here. Anything else you notice about the way things are spread? Who's up that end? Who's up this end? Male and female. Which way around do you think? Okay, more female at that end? Yeah, I think that's probably true actually.
Yeah? Slightly more male, extrovert than more female, introvert, yes. Any other things you notice? More people in the middle? Yeah, there's quite a clutch in the middle. The bands down there, the musicians, the stage people, yeah, they're down there. Quite a clutch in the middle. Apart from James, yes. Bass players are largely introverts, I think, anyway, yes. Anyone? Who's the top score? Who's over here? What we got over here? 84. 94. Any higher than 94? 96. Excellent. And what's the lowest score down here? Mark's a 31. Anyone lower than 31? So Mark is the most extrovert person in the room, which may not surprise us, but yeah, no judgment on that. All right, my score was 92. Okay, so I'm I'm way up this end as a pretty extreme introvert. Now, the national average is that 50.7 people, so just under 51% of our country, and certainly countries in the west, it seems, from other surveys they've done, are introverts. So we are heavily skewed here, as opposed to the rest of society, towards a much more introvert community of people, which is interesting. And we'll have some more observations on this as we go. So do take your seats again. It was just, that was very helpful. Thank you. Thank you. So, hopefully an interesting exercise, certainly for me to see the makeup of our 10 o'clock congregation, at least. What might we learn from that, then? We touched on a few little things there, but a few observations, perhaps, and then we'll tie in with Jesus as well.
[16:11] I mean, firstly, I think it's interesting to consider the extent to which our gathered life as a church reflects how we are, how energized or refreshed we feel with external or internal stimulation, whether we're extroverts or introverts. So if you think about this, where we are now, this 10 o'clock service, I guess there are various aspects to it which might be more energizing for extroverts. So, fairly large number of people. We've got the ability to circulate and talk to a lot of people in a very short space of time. There's quite busy external stimulation, particularly with the music, which is quite loud and unavoidable in that sense. There's visuals, there's screens, which are changing often. There's lots of people we're sideways on as well, the way we do it often. So we can often, this side especially, can see people the whole time. The refreshments, that's a pretty socially active time

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as well. Sunday stars, they're fairly outgoing kind of experiences and groups for the younger ones. Indeed, I'm sure, and I feel this sometimes, and I'm sure other 80 and 90 introverts up here will feel it sometimes. It can be quite overwhelming to walk in, especially if you're here sort of bang on 10 or just after. There's a buzz here, and that can almost feel like there's too much external stimulation at once, especially if we do that kind of forced interaction exercise as well. It can feel a bit overwhelming for the more extreme introverts, because there is a lot of extrovert stuff going on here. And yet, alongside that extrovert stuff, there are times of more internal stimulation in this service as well. We do have times of quieter, prayerful reflection. You know,

Marie's led us through that. We'll have some quieter worship songs in a bit. The talks, other than the interactive stuff, they offer space and time to internally reflect on things. It's interesting with communion, which we did last week. I wonder how you felt if you were here, if you've experienced it here, whether you would say that's an extrovert activity or an introvert activity. And there's lots of visual stuff going on. There's taste from what we receive in the bread and wine. There's music going on. But there's also introvert aspects to it as well, because it's quite a personal, internal time of reflection as we come forward and receive as well. It seems to me this 10 o'clock service has, we hope, a balance of things that suit introverts and extroverts. But I appreciate, looking at the range we've got, most people are introvert to one degree or another. And yet, a lot of our service is more extrovert designed. And that's worth me and others thinking about. So I know this service won't energise everyone in that sense. Comparatively though, the Monday 10am service, if you've been to that, and we sometimes get between 30 and 40 coming to that, that's a far more reflective, less interactive, probably more introvert friendly time together. And that appeals to a lot of people who come. But then it's balanced by the drop-in, which is an opportunity to be more extrovert, should you wish, as well, and engage with lots of people. So the mix of things on a Monday may be more suited than actually what we do on a Sunday, 10am for some people. You can think about house groups, or pub club, whatever it is we're into, F&F;, or, you know, they may be more energising for extroverts, students. Whereas, one-to-one prayer times, or having a walk and a talk with someone, may suit an introvert more. Equally church, but done in a different way. So in some ways, it's forces for courses. But what's interesting is that scientists reckon that people tend to get more introverted the older they get. And there were some younger ones down that end, I'm not being disparaging, because there was a right mix up here, but there was a disproportionate number of those on the younger end of the scale in the extrovert end than the introvert end. And that may well explain why churches with older congregations tend to have more introvert-friendly services, because they're catering to those who come. That's okay. But it does risk alienating those who are more extrovert, which proportionately will be more likely to be those on the younger end of things. So it's a self-perpetuating kind of congregation, perhaps. The other things to think about, introverts are usually good at having deeper meaningful conversations. But their tendency to overthink means that they're not always brilliant at small talk and knowing what to just chit-chat about. So if you've got a very introvert-heavy church, as it seems we are, perhaps, that will make welcoming new people in the church life quite a challenge sometimes, as you need to be able to do the small talk when you first meet someone before you get too deep too quickly. And I'd say, from my perspective, I think, I hope we're a welcoming church, but I appreciate small talk is not everyone's cup of tea. And moving from small talk to more deeper friendship-building conversations. I know historically that's been a difficult transition for folks to think, okay, we've done the small talk, how do we get to the deeper stuff, which I really want to get to, without being able to do the small talk as naturally. Does that kind of resonate and make sense? But it seems to me that since church life, since the body of Christ model needs all sorts, it needs both introverts and extroverts to thrive, I'd suggest that our church life probably needs to have times either in each service or certainly across the week, which meet the energising needs of both introverts and extroverts. And maybe that's a key lesson from this, of the need for us to look beyond our own sheet, our own number, to work out what other people are at and where they're at, to empathise and be aware, and perhaps above all to be patient with those who have a different preference to our own, but whose needs and gifts are essential for us as a church if we're to flourish. Looking at this, we could do with more extroverts at St.
John's, and I wonder how we might cater for the more extrovert types, because they're just as valuable as the introvert types as well. That's one observation, perhaps. What else? Well, I think with that exercise in mind, I wonder where Jesus would be on a scale of 0 to 100. Would he be an

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introvert or an extrovert?
What's your gut say? Would you say Jesus was, hands up if you think Jesus was an introvert? Whoa. Okay. Hands up if you think Jesus was an extrovert.
[23:28] Hands up if you're still internally processing it and not quite sure. Yeah, yeah. So no one, by gut reaction it seems, said Jesus was an introvert, which is interesting. Because when I first thought, well, I wonder which he was, my first thoughts went to the introvert side of things that Jesus seems to embrace. So for example, we know that he seemed energised by spending time alone in prayer, whether that was on a mountainside or behind closed doors, as he recommended us to do.

We see him engaging in deep conversation, in one-on-ones with people, whether that's people like the woman at the well or with Mary, Martha's sister. We're told, and this was kind of classic introvert behaviour, we're told that he fell asleep on a boat in the middle of the storm.
That's proper sort of cave territory where you sort of want to be, just ignore everything that's externally stimulating you around you and stuff. Proper peopled out, it seems, at that point.
We're told on occasions that he tried to get away from the crowds. And again, introverts will recognise those kind of feelings. And yet when you think about it on the flip side, Jesus deliberately did some extrovert things, sought out a sizable group of people to spend time with, 12 disciples plus all sorts of others, including some key women. He seemed energised by engaging with and having a teaching to and fro with large crowds, even up to four, five thousand people. That's like your stadium gig, if you like, for Jesus. He often went to the temple courts to debate and mix with folks, meet strangers, went to the big festivals there. He evidently enjoyed parties. You know, the first thing he does is turn water into wine as an adult, it seems. He enjoys meeting new people. His parables show how stimulated he was by his surroundings. All classic responses of someone who's more of an extrovert.
So which was Jesus? I wonder how he'd fill in that survey. It's hard to tell. And I don't think there's any conclusive answer. You can have your own guess and make up your own mind on that if you wish.
[25:37] But I still think we can learn from that because I'd say regardless of whether Jesus was more introvert or extrovert, regardless of whether we are more introvert or extrovert, I think Jesus offers a model for how we might live this full life which he promises us. You see, if, for example, Jesus was an introvert, he clearly understood his need to take time out in solo prayer and reflection in order to feel energised. But his introversion didn't stop him from embracing more extrovert, essential activities, social groups, parties, festivals, and so on. Equally, though, if Jesus was an extrovert, he clearly understood his need to surround himself with people and stimulation in order to feel energised.

But his extroversion didn't stop him from embracing more introvert, essential activities, time alone walking, time in prayer, gentle but profound conversations, and so on. And I point this out because this openness of Jesus to engage with both introvert and extrovert activities, I wonder if that's how we might grow in our faith and deepen our understanding of God, embracing that shadow side, if you like.
So I know for me, I said I was way up in the 90s. I'm a pretty extreme introvert. But as anyone who knows me of any length of time will tell, I get peopled out quite quickly, which is a bit of a bummer if you're a vicar, really, so surrounded by people the whole time.
So it would be very appealing for me to be pretty reclusive. Desert Island stuff, I can see the draw in that, you know, to spend more time in my inner world. Something about that which is attractive for me. But as I've said before, I know that disengaging from people to that extent wouldn't do me any favours. It'd be detrimental to me, detrimental to others, detrimental to my own emotional and spiritual health and wellbeing. Because as exhausting as I sometimes find being with people, and it's not personal, I find those I love most dearly can be exhausting.
An insular life, for me, even as an extreme introvert, is not the answer. Rather, it seems, following Jesus' lead, in order for me to give and receive within a community, which is God's call, I believe, for all of us, I'm realising I simply need to carve out just enough introvert time so that I'm energised sufficiently to do the extrovert stuff as well. Extrovert stuff, which is an essential part of what church and community life is about. So for me, my introvert time from having the Gemma and the kids at home is the 10-minute walk that I have through the park on the way here on a Sunday morning. That's my little cave, if you like. That energises me enough to face 100 whatever plus people on a

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Sunday morning, but I need that. If I went straight from out my door into the church and it was all buzzing, I'd be overwhelmed and that wouldn't do me any favours.
[28:59] So if I carve out enough introvert time, that gives me the fuel, if you like, to do it. And yet, for those who are perhaps more extrovert types, if you're a pretty big extrovert, like the opposite to me, I imagine that having a steady stream of meals and socials, meeting new people, embracing whatever external stimulation is on offer will appeal. But Jesus' model to the extrovert types seems also to say, look, if that's you, great. You're brilliant at that stuff. But don't neglect or write off how beneficial embracing stillness and solitude and reflection will be for your soul. And so for extroverts, carving out just enough extrovert time so that you're energized sufficiently to do the introvert stuff, I'd say that would enable you to both give and receive in a more rounded way to church and community life. It's not about denying who we are, but embracing the reality of what we need without disengaging from the opposite stuff.

And I'll finish with this, because introverts need extroverts and extroverts need introverts. It seems to me that through understanding how we're wired and through following the example of Jesus, who embraced whichever shadow side he had, God gives each of us ways to be energized enough in order that we might offer ourselves more fully to God and to each other.
So my prayer for me, my prayer for you, is that we would know the energizing, affirming, enriching blessing of God in our lives this week, so that we in turn may be an energizing, affirming, enriching blessing to others. Amen. Amen.

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