

*“The process of prayer – of offering God all that we are as we drink deeply at that never-ending well – is pivotal for every Christian. Yet I have never yet met anyone who found it easy. With immense self-awareness and pastoral wisdom, Mark Tanner offers profound insight here for particular people – introverts – whose concerns and contributions are seldom identified yet widely experienced. The whole Church has much to learn here as it seeks to be conformed to Christ.”*

**Justin Welby**, Archbishop of Canterbury

*“Mark Tanner is an insightful and thoughtful man with a great deal of experience both in theological training and growing churches. This book encapsulates his wisdom.”*

**Nicky Gumbel**

*“As an extrovert I have found this book incredibly insightful and brilliantly challenging. I will be recommending it to students and younger leaders as a must-read so that we can grow and shape a much more self-aware and generous church family. We need both introverts and extroverts to bring their lives into the communal space we share and we will be a healthier family for it.*

*“This book has challenged me to the core. It has made me reassess how I lead and how I love others. Even now I can think of ways my own church community can be a much more inclusive and releasing space for both introverts, extroverts and indeed every mixture of our God-given humanity. This is an important work and I am grateful to have read it at the start of my leadership journey.”*

**Miriam Swaffield**, Student Mission Developer, Fusion

*“The wonderful message of Pentecost is the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on all people, whatever their gender, age or ethnic background. In this important book, Mark Tanner shows how the personality that we are created to be is included in that universal pouring out. It is a book which demonstrates the maturity of the Charismatic Movement from one of its wisest and most influential leaders.”*

**David Wilkinson**, Principal, St John’s College, Durham University

*“A really helpful book that raises important issues, concerns and questions. Drawn from real life experiences, deep reflection and thoughtful consideration, readers, be they extrovert or introvert, will glean many insights, help and encouragement in their own lives and in understanding and relating to others. A good, accessible read and valuable resource for all personality types and not just those who find themselves in charismatic circles.”*

**Roy Searle**, leader, Northumbria Community and former President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain

# The Introvert Charismatic

The gift of introversion in a noisy church

Mark Tanner

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This book is dedicated to you...

... to the many precious “you”s without whom I would never have found the freedom to do the being behind the thinking behind the writing: most particularly my beloved Lindsay, Jonathan and Pippa

... to you who will read this and through it explore the gift of freedom

... and most of all to You in whom all of this is merely chatter around the edge of the glorious liberty You invite us into in Your Son and by Your Spirit.



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## Foreword

The charismatic movement is perhaps the most significant movement in the history of the church in the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century. The charismatic revival in the mainstream churches, the development of house churches which led into a variety of different charismatic streams, the rediscovery of signs and wonders, and the worldwide amazing growth of Pentecostalism has shaped worship, theology, ecumenism, discipleship, and mission. It has shaken the foundations of and renewed the main denominations and opened up the space for new churches and networks.

Yet all new movements carry with them implicit caricatures which are used by opponents to attack, and by adherents to give identity. The early Methodist revival was criticized for its emphasis on enthusiasm which was seen as dangerous to the social order. To claim that someone is a charismatic has a similar caricature: that of an extrovert enthusiast.

A few years ago during a Methodist Communion service I approached a woman and held out my hand to share the peace with her. She responded, “No, thank you. I don’t do that sort of thing.” And then she added, “I hope you aren’t one of that happy-

clappy tongue-speaking lot.” For her, extrovert Christianity was coupled with a certain type of music, worship, strangeness in behaviour, and personality.

Such caricatures do a disservice to a movement which has always had diversity but has increasingly matured and become self-reflective in recent decades. Perhaps more importantly, it presents the danger that people from outside the movement will hide behind the caricature and people within the movement will feel squeezed into a mould that denies who God wants them to be.

As someone who has grown up as a Christian within charismatic circles, I am therefore enormously grateful for this book by my friend and colleague Mark Tanner. From rich and diverse experience at the heart of the charismatic movement, embedded in leadership of a local parish church, national networks, and theological education, he explores the real enthusiasm of the introvert charismatic. With honesty and humour he gives us the biblically grounded resources by which all people can grow maturity in Christ and live in the power of the Spirit.

This is significant for a number of reasons. First, it is an encouragement and challenge to those who are introverts, to value their personality in growing in holiness. Second, it is an encouragement and challenge to the already diverse charismatic movement to value and create structures which learn from and work for all. Third, the book is a key demonstration of the humility, confidence, and strength of today’s charismatic leaders which enables difficult but ultimately fruitful questions.

The truth is that I have some sympathy for the woman who would not rather share the peace with me. She in fact greeted me generously after the service and we got to know each other reasonably well. She needed permission to be different and the

space not to conform in a way that denied who she really was. It is only in recognizing true difference that we can grow together in the unity of the Lord Jesus Christ. As a young Christian I hated those moments when we were instructed to hold hands and sing “Bind us together”! I just wish I had had the resources of this book for moments like that.

**Revd Professor David Wilkinson**

Principal, St John’s College, Durham University

# Preface

There is nothing more profoundly fulfilling than experiencing the Lord moving by His Spirit and touching people's lives in great grace and remarkable power. This is, quite literally, what we were made for. In the fullness of God's work is the fullness of life for which we were created. I believe that His kingdom is coming and that we are invited into the adventure of participating in that break-in as God reclaims, redeems, and recreates. This is the stuff of grace: God's grace in action. His "*charis*", to use the original New Testament word for "grace", is at work and this "charis-matic" experience is very good.

The trouble, at least for me, is that the UK church, of which I am part, has largely bought into the myth that to be "charismatic" you must be extrovert in your character and action. Much teaching has been adopted unreflectively and uncritically from the United States, home in generalized terms to a precious but far more outgoing culture than our more reserved British one. We accept it gladly because we are hungry for the goodness of God to be more clearly evident among us and we see something of what we want in confident US preaching and large churches. In our ravenous haste, however, we appear to assume that we need to shout to make God move in power.

For many of us, especially those who are more introvert in

personality, this means that we are in an uncomfortable place where charismatic culture can seem shallow, loud, driven, and insensitive, but where we love the stuff that God is doing. What is going on? Is introversion a sin to be forgiven, an illness to be healed, or some kind of oppression to be defeated?

I have come to believe that introversion is none of those things. It is a creation gift. It is part of the image of God. Just as man is not woman and woman is not man, but relating together they reflect the fullest expression of the image of God, so it is with introvert and extrovert. Neither is more right (or more wrong) than the other. Each needs the other, and only together can a full expression of the kingdom be explored. God created us to live in covenant community with each other and with Him, and chose to do so by creating us each as unique creations, different to each other but belonging to each other. This difference, when lived in love, releases life, joy, and creativity, as we reflect in our shared human identity something of the diversity of the creator. However, we are fallen as well as created, and difference intended to reflect the creator is so easily distorted by sin into oppression and control.<sup>1</sup>

The question, though, is “How?” How do we live this? How do we share this? How do we not use the difficulties that difference throws up as excuses to wimp out of the challenges with which God would face us? “Hey, don’t look at me – I’m an introvert!” is not a “get out of jail free” card that can be played just because we are uncomfortable. How, conversely, do we release the gifts that introverts bring and share them with a hungry church and a dying world? It is these questions that this book sets out to address.

This work arises out of a person, a life, a walk with the Lord, and a pair of eyes that are at least occasionally and partially open. It is not a particularly academic work. It is not a defence

of one way of being a Christian or an attack on others. It is not a magic way to be a better disciple or an analysis of previous failure. It is a reflection on the road that I have been created to walk with the Lord arising from the dawning realization that I was not made by mistake.

My hope in writing is fourfold:

I write, firstly, because I want to inhabit the glorious liberty of the children of God in and through the person that God has made me. Why do I put it like that? For the simple reason that if I can't explore something as I am then I can't ever really know it: I will never be anyone else. It's an old saying, but nevertheless true, that "If you're not yourself then you're nobody." This must be taken with a big theological caveat: I am a sinner, albeit a redeemed sinner, and I am being sanctified daily by the work of God in me. I am a new creation in Christ; the old has gone and the new has come. I know this, but my point here is otherwise. I have been created and that creation bears certain hallmarks. I have two feet, I am male, and I am an introvert. I need to use my all that I am for the Lord. My maleness needs to be in the service of Christ, my feet should serve the kingdom (I'm not joking: "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who brings good news", Isaiah 52:7), and I also need to learn to worship and serve as an introvert. Conversion to Christ didn't give me an extra foot, or turn me into a girl, and it does not make me an extrovert.

My hope, secondly, is that this will be helpful for others who find themselves in a similar position to me, apparently facing a choice between walking with the Lord as themselves or following Him as He does remarkable things in the here and now. As I put this in black and white the nonsense of that dichotomy is plainly apparent, but for many of us, much of the time this is the choice which we feel we face. This need not be,

and I pray that this book might be the start of something new for many; the start of a journey of authenticity and freedom which brings life to many, for when the sons and daughters of God find life in who they are called and created to be then the kingdom of God has come a step closer.

Thirdly, I hope that in writing this we might gain a fuller and clearer picture of the kingdom. If I am right in my assertion that the introvert/extrovert tension is a blessed part of the created order then it is logical that we only find fullness in the living of that tension. Introverts, though, are not always brilliant at being in dialogue, particularly in high-energy verbose settings such as the world of the renewed churches. We process things internally rather than in the “cut and thrust” of debate and we don’t usually push our ideas forward, not least because we don’t need to. This struck me forcefully on one occasion when I was in a senior leaders’ meeting and was surprised at someone bemoaning the fact that some people would not put themselves forward for “up front” things, which meant that those in leadership needed telepathic gifts to discern who would like to do what. I understood what was meant, but it clashed with numerous assumptions that I realized I made. Firstly, I tend to locate some types of discernment in more private, reflective conversations rather than group discussion. Secondly, I tend to think that people need time to ponder before volunteering. Thirdly, in my roles as pastor in different contexts, I have often observed that when you volunteer you make yourself vulnerable to rejection, which causes pain. I realized I had assumed people would prefer to do that quietly. So, in one comment in a long meeting the lid was taken off two quite conflicting approaches to leadership. One might resemble the bustle of a marketplace, the other the networked interaction of a monastery: one gave people the chance to “have a go”; the other encouraged people

to develop through reflective engagement. Is either inherently better? I don't think so... but the models do clash. We need both in healthy operation, and we must be alert to the resulting tension in order that it might be creative and life-giving.

Finally, I hope that this work might give some of our extrovert siblings something of an insight into the other half<sup>2</sup> of the world. I believe that introverts are a blessing to the world and to the church, but unless we learn to express this we will not be able to offer the gifts that we bring. I am most definitely not saying that introverts are better than extroverts, and if you ever think I am implying that then please forgive me and discard that thought, but we do have much to offer. In this, and in a number of the strands of my thinking here I am indebted to Adam McHugh for his excellent book *Introverts in the Church*. This work differs from his in that it expresses questions in the specific context of the renewed part of the British church, as indeed his work does in the wider context of American evangelicalism. I contend that this is vital because it is about the authenticity of what those of us who have been shaped by the UK church have to offer. Together we are, by and large, a more reserved people, particularly when compared with our US cousins. That is not a weakness and neither does it make us superior, however we may feel when we face a classic stereotype like an apparently over-confident or unnecessarily cheery American. It is simply a part of who we are. The question is how we inhabit our own identity and offer praise to God, and together we can learn from the experience of the introvert among us.

I offer this reflection, then, as a gift to the people of God. May it be a sacrifice of praise, an expression of worship as we explore more of the wonderfully diverse creation of our amazing God. May it be a gift of freedom and a revelation of community. May it be a blessing.

## An Introduction

It was a Thursday evening in the summer of 2010 and a group of friends were sitting around in comfortable chairs in the middle of what looked like a building site. In two days the New Wine Summer Conference<sup>1</sup> would begin and we were the team with oversight and responsibility for the event. We had run these weeks together before, the planning was done, we knew each other well, and the mood was relaxed and excited as the conversation flowed.

One of the team leaned back in her chair and out of nowhere came out with an off-the-cuff observation which opened up something I had often sensed but never fully explored: “I do feel sorry for introverts at times like this...”

My response was unprocessed and instantaneous, and I’m not sure which caused more shock – the comment or my response, “Not half as sorry as we feel for extroverts!”, whereupon a number of things were evident.

Roughly half the group were sitting forward in friendly animation in response to the first comment. In an atmosphere of trusting, warm, but nonetheless serious banter people were saying things like:

“You can’t say that!!”

“I’m an introvert and I love this week!”

At the same time, though, my friend who had made the original comment was sitting with her mouth wide open and a look of utter astonishment on her face. I can’t remember the exact words, but the question was how I could possibly feel sorry for an extrovert. The conversation was animated and impossible to reproduce exactly, but I attempt to give the sense of it below. Around half the group would self-identify as introvert, and half as extrovert, although I suspect that many of us would be what Susan Cain might call “ambivert”.<sup>2</sup> We talked at length, with different people representing the “camps” at any one time, and the conversation felt something like this:

Extrovert: But this week is heaven for extroverts, and must be a nightmare if you need space! There are thousands of people camping together, with large meetings, enthusiastic worship, and loads of people to talk to all the time.

Introvert: You’re right that it is tiring for those of us who are introvert, but we still need and want the stuff that this week offers. We need friends, and teaching, and encouragement, and prayer, and all that this week offers. We look forward to all that we get from events like this.

Extrovert: But isn’t it oppressive to be with people all the time if you are introvert?

Introvert: That is the world we live in all the time. We learn to deal with it. We need space to recharge our batteries. Time alone or in intimate

conversation is rich and precious to us and you can make that anywhere; even here.

Extrovert: And how can you get space in a week like this? I am on the go all the time.

Introvert: You're "on the go" because you are extrovert. In reality being in a crowd can be one of the best places to be alone. Have you noticed how, when we are together in the main meeting, it will sometimes take me a while to catch on if we are all told to do something? It might look like I am not listening, but to me it's like everyone else is being looked after so I can just focus on God. Once I learned that I didn't have to do what everyone else was doing it became like it's just me and Jesus in the room.

Extrovert: I can see that...

Introvert: And while you are in the middle of a crowd of new folk all talking energetically, I will often be in a quiet conversation with someone. It might be an old friend or someone new...

Extrovert: ... actually you are really good at that. You notice when there is someone who is not comfortable, or who is hanging back, and you are the one who can get alongside them.

Introvert: Sometimes... although it doesn't always feel like that.

Extrovert: No – you’re good with people. In fact I’m not sure that you are really an introvert at all. You lead big meetings, you run a big church, you speak in public all the time – people like you!

Introvert: None of those things make you extrovert, though. It’s easy to lead or speak “up front” if you are good at it, and some of those leaders will be introvert, others extrovert. Introversion is about where you get energy... so I really envy the way you can effortlessly come up with conversation and banter and keep up with people. You make it look so easy whereas I always have to work at it.

Extrovert: I guess it’s easier if you’re an extrovert and so you’re not shy...

Someone: ... but none of us in this room is exactly shy.

Extrovert: How can you say you are introvert if you are not shy?

The group: No, no, no... being an introvert and being shy is not the same thing. Introverts get energy from being alone or being with few others; extroverts get energy from being with others.

Introvert: I don’t often feel shy, but I do find that after a while I just feel exhausted of being with people and just want to find some space.

Extrovert: But how can you say that you feel sorry for extroverts?

Introvert: Aha! Because we all need time with other Christians and we all need time alone with God. Both are vital if we are going to be healthy Christians. If we are always with others we will never face deep truths about ourselves or spend time just focusing on the Lord. If we are always by ourselves we develop faith that is in danger of being entirely self-referential and in our own image, as well as growing stagnant and detached from reality.

Extrovert: So why does that make you sorry for us?

Introvert: Because introverts are pretty much forced to spend time with others and in weeks like this we get loads of great input, but something inside always draws us back to the quiet place. My favourite time of the day is the very early morning when no one else is up and I can be alone with a cup of tea, the Bible, and Jesus.

Extroverts need time alone with God just as much, except they are not drawn to it by something inside themselves in the same way, and no one else is going to take them by the hand and drag them there.

Extrovert: But I love this week – it is one of the most important weeks of my year.

Introvert: And so do I... but I recognize that while you can take me with you to the riches you naturally gain from a conference like this, actually I can't easily take you to the precious quiet place that

is so essential to spiritual health. You won't be able to help yourself dragging me with you... and nine times out of ten that is wonderful, but I can only find my natural habitat by withdrawing sometimes, and I can't really do that for you.

Extrovert: I can see that... but I am still glad to be extrovert!

Introvert: And I am glad you are too... but I still feel a little sorry for you!

We will return to what we really mean by the words “introvert” and “extrovert”, where these terms come from, and why they are useful. This is something that affects each of us deeply, and yet we rarely discuss it. This is beginning to change, not least with the work of Susan Cain and Adam McHugh, but I still find that I am introducing people to the area every time I teach about it. As we talk it is as if people are being given permission to be themselves, and this is vital if we are truly to be the people God created us to be.

There is much unseen bunkum around in the Christian world that arises from our tendency to take culture and cultural assumptions on board along with the truths that really are universal about Christ and the good news of the kingdom. We hear and accept the gospel and unconsciously adopt the characteristics of those who brought it to us. We feel that to “worship properly” we need to dress a certain way, talk with certain words, behave in a particular fashion, and do particular things with our bodies. We can mock this where we see it, but all of us know the pressure to raise our hands, or kneel at a certain point, or clap, or not clap, or cross ourselves or definitely

not to scratch our nose in case people think we are crossing ourselves... or to behave in an extrovert way.

It is hard to examine deeply inbuilt cultural assumptions, such as “the extrovert ideal” that Cain describes as fundamental to evangelical Christianity, despite extroversion being entirely inessential to the basic message of Christ. As I have talked with numerous people about this over the last few years it is both astonishing and delightful to see people grasp the simple truth that introversion is a deeply precious gift which they, we, are invited to inhabit fully, freely, and generously.

I think of the first seminar I offered on this subject, after which I had a queue of people waiting to talk with me. I reflected later that I had never been mobbed so quietly by so many people. Person after person took my hand, looked me in the eye, and simply said “thank you”. One man told me that the session felt to him like I had installed a camera in his house and spoken about what I had seen over the last few years.

The seminar simply shared some basic insights about being an introvert, drawn from widely available material we shall look at later, and then shared some reflections on being an introvert Christian. There is no rocket science here, but there is huge value in discovering the freedom to be who we were made to be.

Conversely, I recall a young lady who was speaking in a large meeting. She had been to a session exploring this area, and when describing it she observed with great excitement that she was an extrovert but there were introvert Christians too. She told us that “they” are the kind of people you see sitting by themselves reading, maybe in the café or the bar. Then she said, and I quote, “I never realized they were introvert; I thought they just had no friends.”

The main thing I have noticed, though, is that this area

unlocks a lot of quiet guilt and even a sense of fear. As I talk with groups and individuals one clearly recurring theme is that people worry that they are missing out because they are the type of person that they are. Later I will make the case that God has deliberately made us different and needing each other in order to open to us the blessing of genuine fellowship and cooperation. Male needs female, left needs right, introvert needs extrovert, and vice versa. Not all of these are mutually exclusive categories, either: this is not about pigeonholing or limiting people. It is about interdependence, valuing the other, and learning to be the body of Christ within which none of us has everything. We all bring something. God's people belong together and need each other. However, despite knowing this in theory, we tend towards functional blindness to this truth, and so many of us yearn for self-sufficiency.

So as we talk about being introvert and yet being a lively Christian engaged in ministry and mission, many extroverts, who feel the need to process verbally what has been said, will describe feelings of guilt that they are not better at prayer or contemplation. They will often speak of frustration that they "cannot do silence", and confess that they get bored reading the Bible or trying to pray.

Conversely, I have been party to many quiet conversations with introvert Christians who value space but feel that they are missing out on the more enthusiastic side of faith. There is longing expressed to be able to "join in enthusiastically", and yet an inner integrity knows that this is not an authentic expression of the encounter that they are having in that moment with God. Others seem to be drawn to the place of exuberance, and that is lovely, but for them there is a reserve that is precious but leaves questions of whether they have missed out, whether they could have "tried" harder or responded differently.

I comment on this carefully because these conversations are deeply precious. There is something holy about glimpsing God at work in conversation with His children. God does invite people into fuller engagement with Him, but this invitation comes to the people we are, not to the people we would like to be. It is important to note these feelings of guilt or failure but also to grasp that this is a place from which we are invited to journey: it is the start, not the end, of a process. Clearly we are called to engage with God in ways that go beyond our preferences, but the extrovert should not feel guilty that they find silence hard. The question is how they learn to do intimacy and solitude with God as an extrovert, not whether they are “faulty” in some way. Similarly, and we shall come to some resources for this later, how do we introverts best engage with the body of Christ, fully and completely, but still authentically? What God holds out in Christ is invitation rather than condemnation, the conviction that we can move forward with Him, not imprisonment in our failure.

Please notice this as we journey together around this subject. Conviction is good! Condemnation is bad! Conviction occurs when the Spirit of God whispers in your ear that you are not where you should be before God and holds a hand of grace out in order that you might move, change, repent, or grow, and live in line with His good and perfect will. Conviction leads to hope and freedom. It may not be comfortable, but has good fruit. You may well be convicted as you read this, and such conviction should be heeded.

Condemnation, on the other hand, comes from elsewhere. It can, at first, sound like conviction, except that it tends to leave us feeling empty. Whereas conviction is an invitation, condemnation is an accusation that drives us away from hope. Such condemnation does not belong to those who are in Christ.

Its fruit is despair and hopelessness, denial and self-loathing. It is a whispering voice that tells us that we are no good and we will always fail to live up to what Christ invites us to. Our personality type does not condemn us; God is bigger than we can imagine and character is a gift.

Meanwhile, back with the New Wine team: we have returned to this question of introversion within an explicitly charismatic movement in conversation and seminars. The opportunity arose for a new team to lead a new quiet prayer venue at one of the summer conferences. I was encouraged to convene a group and ask what we could provide which would nurture, encourage, and bless delegates of a more introvert personality type. Roger Preece, an Anglican vicar and friend of mine, has taken the lead as we have worked with a team of ordinands from Cranmer Hall and created something remarkable...

An oasis of gentle, rhythmic quiet spaciousness in the middle of a wonderfully boisterous and enthusiastic gathering of Christians who don't always explicitly exude the charism (or spiritual gift) of calm or peace. Despite being in a cowshed and able to hear the bustle of the young people's venues, delegates step through the door, remove their shoes, and inhabit a beautiful and calm space which the team create in which they can engage with God. Some lie on the floor; others write. Some paint; others sit and read the Scriptures. Many gather for simple, quiet, liturgical prayer slots throughout the day in which it is easy to understand what was expected.

In the evenings this venue has sometimes been open as an alternative to the main meeting, with the talk being relayed by radio link from the large gathering, but set in the context of reflective worship. Paradoxically we have found that this "spacious venue" became overcrowded in the evenings as people

looked for teaching set in the context of peace and rhythm.

I talked with the leaders and asked what kind of things people were saying about the venue having experienced it. These are some of the comments:

“This is a place of balance.”

“I can withdraw here.”

“I feel able to recharge and reconnect with God.”

“Peace” is a word that was connected a lot to the sense of encounter people had in Sanctuary.

“[Here] there is more space.”

The appetite for this kind of provision is great, but what is it that we are looking to encourage and nurture? What is it to be introvert? What is it to be an introvert evangelical or, even more difficult to comprehend, an introvert charismatic?

It’s time that we thought more carefully about the concept of introversion, and then we will consider what we mean by charismatic and how we might engage as introverts in an extrovert church. A couple of notes will help you understand the shape of this book and how you might use it. The numbered chapters develop the flow of the work from beginning to end. They are “interrupted” by short pieces entitled “meet *someone*” which introduce you to various other people with whom I have conducted structured conversation about this area. This is not a theoretical book, nor one which is trying to pigeonhole people. It is a description of part of the real world with wild and glorious difference and some helpful insights. In meeting other introvert charismatics I hope that we can limit the danger of stereotyping

or building lazy conformity. We have so much to learn from our introvert charismatic siblings (which is a word I use meaning “brothers and sisters” to try to be inclusive).

You will also find two letters written to introverts and charismatics. This is a different way of exploring the personal dynamic of this subject. We are talking about real lives of real people. What we are exploring rises from our common experience as we live in the complex and glorious image of God.

So let's explore!