

What If I Don't Like People?

Baxter T. Exum (#1724)
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Good morning, and welcome to the Four Lakes congregation! If you are visiting this morning or joining us online or on the phone, we are glad to have you with us. We'd like to ask that you fill out a visitor card online if you can, or you can use one of the cards from the pew in front of you. Whatever works for you, we would love to hear from you, and we invite you to pass along any questions or prayer concerns. Earlier today, one of our three "Tech Silases" let me know that today's service will be the 500th video uploaded to our YouTube channel! That is quite a milestone, and we are especially thankful for those of you who are joining us online.

It is so good to be back this morning, and I am very thankful to John and Caleb for preaching over the past two weeks. I had a good trip to the Freed-Hardeman University Bible lectures, where we studied the book of Revelation. And as I said on my way out a few weeks ago, I got to see our daughter down in Manchester, Tennessee, and got to be with my father-in-law in Ohio on my way north. And then I took a week of vacation, taking the scenic way home through Detroit and then camping my way across Michigan's Upper Peninsula, before heading for the Canadian border north of Duluth and working my way back from there.

My goal in Detroit was to visit a good friend who's been preaching there for several years, Brian Sherrell. Brian and his family have helped us at camp for a number of years, and his dad served as an elder over there until he passed away several months ago, which dissolved the eldership. I mentioned this after my visit last year, but their building was built to seat 700-800 people, but their attendance has only been around 50 or so (at the most) lately. I just want us to imagine how discouraging this must be for a preacher (and really, for everybody). Right as worship was starting, I took a picture over my shoulder, and everybody was so spread out. It was just a weird feeling. Unfortunately, Brian has resigned, and after today is giving up on preaching altogether. We need more gospel preachers, not less; so, if you could be praying for Brian and his family, I would appreciate it.

Last Sunday, on the other hand, was a completely different experience! I worshiped at the congregation up in Spencer, Wisconsin, about 15 minutes north of Marshfield. This is the church that took on the leadership of Beaver Creek Bible Camp last year, and they did a great job with it. They have a solid eldership, and this place was jam-packed! The Bible class was crowded, and when I got up to get a drink between class and worship, I came back, and my seat was gone. I got one of the last seats available, a metal folding chair on the back row! The first two rows were literally crammed with teens. Their teens were sitting on the front row! And last

Sunday (even without having any kind of special event), they broke a record with 105 people in attendance. They were having a meeting last Sunday evening to discuss plans to expand their building, and they are ready to go. They have the funds and the plans, and they will probably get started in a month or two. But I left last Sunday encouraged.

Now, I know that we can get a little crowded here at Four Lakes sometimes (we've had visiting families forced to split up when they come in due to a lack of seating), but I can tell you: I would much rather have a small building with standing room only than to have a building that seats 800 with the same number of people in it. We continue to look for a larger facility, but in the meantime, I am so thankful for all of you who assemble here for worship each week, even if it gets a little crowded sometimes.

In terms of our schedule today, I hope that all of you can join us for our annual Soup, Slurp, and Sing at Patsy's place up in Sun Prairie. I am looking forward to it, and Patsy's address is on the bulletin board in the entryway.

We are here this morning to preach the love of God who sent his Son to save us. He died in our place, he was buried, but he was raised up on the first day of the week. This is the gospel, and we obey the gospel by believing it, by turning away from sin, by confessing our faith in Jesus as being the Son of God, and by obeying the Lord's command to be buried with him in baptism (an immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins). And as a part of our invitation to you, we've been sharing examples of what this looks like. And today, we have several to share, starting with an update from Kule Rabison, who preaches in Uganda, who posted several days ago and says, "Thousands witnessing 14 souls getting baptized at Isule." Good news from Uganda!

This next one comes to us from David Willis, who preaches in American Samoa at the Lupelele Church of Christ. We happened to meet David when we were in Honolulu visiting family several years ago, and David had a layover for a day or two and gave an update to the Honolulu congregation on a Wednesday evening. But David posted several days ago and says that "We celebrated the baptism of Iosefo Yagomate after church today. We gathered at the Pala Lagoon to witness Iosefo's baptism. This certainly was a day of rejoicing." As a preacher, I'm just noticing that Iosefo is big dude, and David is not, but they got it done, and we now have a new brother in the Lord.

This last one comes from Jake Sutton, a friend and former cop who now preaches the gospel down in Marietta, Georgia. He posted a few days ago and says, "Praising God for giving the increase. The providence of God is alive and well. Wet sleeves and pure hearts! Welcome Connie and Dennis to the brotherhood!" But the best part of this comes on his personal page as he has this to say about his son Stone (pictured in the background up here), "There are sad days and sad moments and bad feelings and numbness that I have in my life just like you do yours. But then there are times that breakthrough our emotional state and the goodness of God shows up. Last night we had two respond to the gospel, and while we were getting ready in front of the whole church, Stone [his son] says to me 'Daddy, I want to hold their towels.' To hear his little voice, and to see his little hands and to watch his little eyes as salvation is had in front of him, is the best gift that daddy could be given. He wanted to be apart of it. He wanted to help. He's like every 7 year old and he has his bouts of shyness. But not last night. He wanted to see the goodness of God. Jesus, come quickly." And if you have not yet done what these people have done, we invite you to get in touch. Pull me aside after worship this morning, or give me a call, send a text, or send an email using the contact information in our bulletin or on the website, and we would love to study together.

This morning, I'd like to study one of the most interesting and honest questions that I've ever encountered in taking sermon requests over the past 30 years or so. But several months ago, one of our members asked the question, "What if I don't like people?" Now, I don't know exactly what was on this person's mind, but I think

that I might understand, at least a little bit. It's not that we're necessarily going around hating people, but there is definitely a sense in which people are hard. Sometimes, people are difficult. And it's not even that other people are always difficult, but sometimes it's difficult for some of us to interact with people, especially a lot of people, and especially a lot of people all at once. And that is pretty much what church is. The word "church," by the way, goes back to a word that refers to those who have been "called out." In a sense, we have been "called out" from the world, but there is another sense in which we have been called out from the world to come together (to assemble) as a congregation, all together, in one place. This word, in fact, is sometimes translated as "assembly," and the word is found with reference to the riot in the theater in Ephesus in Acts 19:32, where Luke says, *"So then, some were shouting one thing and some another, for the ASSEMBLY was in confusion and the majority did not know for what reason they had come together."* You may not know this, but back when my dad was a high school speech and English teacher, he was once the union representative for his school, and I remember him saying that he had been to some school board meetings like this! But this is the word that is sometimes translated "church." It refers to a group that has come together. And sometimes, being together in a group can be mentally exhausting. And knowing something about the one who asked this question, I think that this might be part of it. And as I started thinking about this and doing the research, I started coming across references to how difficult it is for "introverts" be involved in the church. Well, the word "introvert" is not in the Bible, so as we try to answer this good and honest question, I'd like to do something completely different this morning. Instead of focusing on one passage of scripture (as we normally do), I want us to jump around a bit. I want us to start by defining some terms, we'll move on by just briefly noting several introverts in the Bible, and then we'll close this morning with some practical observations and some encouragement for those of us who may fall on the introvert side of things.

I. But let's start this morning by DEFINING SOME TERMS.

In terms of interacting with the world around us, most of us fall somewhere on the spectrum between INTROVERT and EXTROVERT, with AMBIVERT being in the middle, and we may fall at various points on this scale, depending on the circumstances. Very few are purely introverted or extroverted. And to be clear, these terms are not in the Bible, so we need to be careful here. But, in general, introverts are those who find themselves drained by large crowds, and they recover from that by being alone. On the other hand, extroverts are those who find themselves energized by being with large groups. As a result, introverts are not necessarily "shy" (that's a different thing altogether), but they may prefer either doing things alone, or they may appreciate doing things with a larger group, but afterwards they will need some alone time to recover from that. Extroverts, on the other hand, generally thrive in large groups. They are energized by crowds and social gatherings. And I've put some characteristics and preferred activities up here (we don't have time to go into this in great detail), but the key takeaway here is that introverts gain energy by being alone while extroverts gain energy by being with larger groups. So, let's just note: This is not a matter of good or bad; this is just how we deal with life; this is how we interact with the world.

But I hope we notice up here: "Church" or being in an "assembly" like we are in this morning may mean different things for different people. As you might have guessed, I lean toward the introvert side of things up here. And as I interacted with people over the past two weeks, I found myself explaining, "I love people, but people wear me out!" I'm putting a picture of the Freed-Hardeman Lectures on the wall up here. And I can tell you, from the perspective of an introvert, a gathering like this can be an absolute nightmare! Here we have an auditorium that seats up to 3000 people, and when I go to an event like that, I appreciate it, there's a value to it, but it wipes me out. Do you see the balcony seats on the right up here? When this place is crowded, there's a seat I go looking for. I call this the "introvert section." These are the nosebleed seats, and there's this one section with three seats all on their own. I love it up there! But this is one of my coping strategies. And this is also one reason why I camp on these trips. When I interact with 3-5000 of my closest friends all day, I need to

disappear into the woods at night! The crowds have to be balanced out with some time all alone. This is why I sleep in a tent at our Bible camp. The same is true here in this room. I love you guys, but being together like this can be exhausting. The extrovert side of this spectrum has “church” written all over it, doesn’t it? Church is a group, worship is something we do together, meeting people before and after worship is just made for extroverts, but it can be exhausting for somebody on the introvert side of things. And then today we transition almost immediately today to something like the Soup, Slurp, and Sing. Good stuff, but exhausting! If you’re on the introvert side of the spectrum, church can be just another place to feel uncomfortable. Sometimes I will half jokingly post online on Monday, “T.G.I.M,” “Thank God It’s Monday.” Monday is my Friday night. Monday is when I try to regroup and recover from whatever happens today.

And I also think that leaning toward the introvert side of the spectrum may explain some of my athletic choices. I’ve told you several times that I have a genetic disposition to abhor anything remotely athletic. And that’s true to an extent, but I think about what I’m involved in, and it’s stuff I can do alone: Walking, and hiking, and running, and biking, and swimming, and so on. For the most part, these are not group activities. And again, it’s not that I hate people (not at all), but people wear me out, and I need to plan for that and find a way to deal with it.

II. Well, with these definitions and descriptions in mind, ARE THERE ANY BIBLE CHARACTERS WHO HAD INTROVERTED PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS?

And I’m not suggesting that these people are true introverts through and through in every sense of the word, but are there people in the Bible with some introverted tendencies? Personally, I have to start with Moses. Moses is one of the greatest leaders of all time. He’s described in Numbers 12:3 as being ***“very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth.”*** And don’t we remember how it all started? He’s rescued from the Nile, raised in Pharaoh’s household, murders a guy and goes on the run at the age of 40, shepherds sheep in the wilderness for the next 40 years, and at the age of 80 he’s called by God to lead God’s people out of slavery in Egypt. And don’t we remember Moses’ response? “No way! Anybody but me!” We have a list of those excuses in Exodus 3-4. Moses, then, is clearly not comfortable with being in the spotlight. And that is clearly a characteristic of an introvert. Thankfully, though, God answers those objections, and Moses presses forward, even though uncomfortable. We add to that the 40 years of solitude in the wilderness. And we add to that what happens in Exodus 18: As he’s in the wilderness, he’s overwhelmed to the point of exhaustion (surrounded by the people from sunup to sundown), and his father-in-law Jethro has to step in to suggest a way to delegate. And then we have several times when Moses (even though he’s a leader) has to get away from the people. Moses, then, has several characteristics of an introvert.

Secondly, I would also suggest that David had some introverted tendencies. Like Moses, David was also a powerful leader, but David also spent a whole lot of time alone – out there with the sheep in the wilderness, composing music, writing poetry. David was a great leader, but he also valued having time alone.

In the New Testament, I might suggest Mary. Here is this humble servant, the mother of Jesus, and twice in Luke 2 (at Jesus’ conception and 12 years later when Jesus was lost in the temple) we read that Mary took it all in and ***“treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart”*** (Luke 2:19,51). Throughout her life, Mary was the quiet observer, thoughtfully soaking in her role in God’s plan.

Among the apostles, we might think of Andrew. He’s never out there in the forefront, but every time we see Andrew in scripture, he’s working behind the scenes, bringing people to Jesus, starting with his own brother Peter (who is obviously over in the extrovert column). Andrew may not be flashy, but he gets it done.

Or, we might even think of the apostle Paul. In 2 Corinthians 10:10, Paul was quoting his critics, ***“For they say, ‘His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible.’”*** I love that. Some have suggested that Paul was the kind of guy who would study for weeks and then get up and read his sermon to the congregation. I don’t know, but it does fit in with what we’ve just read. His written words were powerful; his presentation, not so much. We think of Paul as a dynamic and powerful leader, but it seems that Paul was more of a scholar than a presenter. As he says regarding his preaching in 1 Corinthians 2:3, ***“I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.”*** Paul, then, was apparently uncomfortable interacting with large groups.

And I would then end with Jesus himself. Certainly, Jesus interacted with thousands upon thousands of people, often at the same time. But we also know that after doing this, Jesus was in the habit of escaping and getting off by himself to be away for a while. In Luke 5:15-16, for example, Luke says, ***“But the news about Him was spreading even farther, and large crowds were gathering to hear Him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray.”*** This was Jesus’ habit, this was his pattern: Preach to thousands and then sneak off into the wilderness to pray. He did this ***“often,”*** Luke says. Or in Luke 6:12, after he’s dealt with crowds in the synagogue all day, Luke says, ***“It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God.”*** We see something similar in Matthew 14:22-23, ***“Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He sent the crowds away. After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone.”*** One of my favorite references comes in Luke 8, when the woman who’d been bleeding for 12 years straight comes up and touches the edge of Jesus’ robe, and Jesus says, ***“Who is the one who touched Me?”*** And while they were all denying it, Peter says, ***“Master, the people are crowding and pressing in on You.”*** But Jesus said, ***“Someone did touch Me, for I was aware that power had gone out of Me.”*** I laughed out loud when I read this this week: When some people touch me, I also feel my power leave me! Totally kidding there, but I am suggesting that after dealing with people, Jesus had to get away to recover from that.

III. As we come to the end of our study, we come to the SO WHAT? part of it: What does all of this actually mean for us?

A. First of all, based on what we’ve learned up to this point, I would just emphasize that the Christian faith is something we do TOGETHER.

I know we might talk about being introverted, and how some of us may prefer doing things alone, but in that discussion, we cannot dismiss the importance of fellowship; we cannot dismiss the importance of mutual encouragement. Several months ago, we looked at Hebrews 10:24-25, where the preacher said, ***“...and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”*** As God’s people, we have to come together. You might say, “But I’ve got the Rona!” That’s the exception. The rule is: Come together! Some might say, “But I can be encouraged at home.” Yes, but command in Hebrews 10 is not to “be encouraged,” but the command is to “encourage one another.” We have to come together to do that, and sometimes coming together is hard, especially for introverts. Sometimes coming together wears us out, and that’s okay. I just want us to be aware of the danger here. As an introvert, it might be very easy for me to think to myself: Getting together wears me out; therefore, I think I’m just going to home church myself. That’s not okay. The Christian faith is something we do TOGETHER. We need each other. I need to both give and receive encouragement, and correction, and guidance. We get that as a group. It may be awkward, but I need somebody to put their arm on my shoulder and to tell me to hang in there, or thank you, or that you’re

gonna be okay. We need the right hand of fellowship, the holy kiss, and the hugs that Paul got on the beach in Acts 20. We need each other.

B. The second practical application this morning is that there are some BENEFITS TO BEING INTROVERTED.

Think about that list we looked at earlier: Introverts like to think things through before saying anything, they love working quietly and behind the scenes, they prefer listening to speaking, and on and on. According to scripture, those are some pretty good qualities! According to King Solomon in Proverbs 17:27, *“He who restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding.”* Or we might think of what Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 5:2, *“Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your words be few.”* Amen, Solomon! Or under the New Covenant, we might think of what Jesus says in Matthew 6:1-5. We won’t read it due to time constraints, but I’ll put it on the wall up here. Basically, do your giving and praying and your other good works in secret. As an introvert, sounds good to me! And we could go on and on with the value of reading and meditating on the word of God, and listening to others, and so on, but the point is: There are some spiritual benefits to being introverted.

C. The third practical application we need to consider this morning is that ALL OF US NEED TO BE SENSITIVE TO EACH OTHERS’ PERSONALITIES; there needs to be some mutual understanding and even grace extended.

Before we get to some suggestions, I would share just a few nightmare scenarios that I’ve personally encountered at various churches. I remember visiting a congregation in Washington, DC, several years ago, and the at the beginning of class, the teacher took off his wireless microphone, put it in his hand, and started going around the room. He walked up to the first person and asked, “So, what did you learn in your personal Bible study this week?” And they answered. He did it again, and they answered. And as he got closer to the back of the room where we were sitting, I nearly panicked! I was collecting my belongings and looking for an exit. Thankfully, he shifted right at the last moment, but as an introvert, that was a close call! Or maybe you’ve been to a church where they still have announcements, and then they ask all of their visitors to stand. Not cool! I’ll tell you right now: I will never do that! It’s called the “Golden Rule.” I will not do to others what I would not like to have done for me. On our website, I think we still have a brief explanation of what we do in worship, inviting guest to participate, but emphasizing that you also have the right to simply sit quietly and observe without any pressure or criticism from us. And I don’t know whether you’ve noticed this, but in the past 24 years, I don’t think I’ve ever asked for a show of hands, “Raise your hand if this or that is true.” I’m not condemning it if somebody else chooses to do that, but I personally just don’t like doing it. If you’re an introvert, raise your hand. That’s the exact thing that an introvert would NOT want to do, “Hey, look at me!” So also, in Bible class, I will never call on people directly. I may ask for comments or volunteers to read, but I will never call on somebody by name, for this reason. The other thing I can’t stand? “We’re going to pause our worship for five minutes, and I want you to greet everybody around you.” Not gonna happen (at least if it’s up to me)! Obviously, much of this is in the realm of opinion, but the Bible does say (even in the realm of opinion) that, *“Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification”* (Romans 15:2).

With that in mind, we may need to look for some ways to make sure we are edifying our neighbors, especially if the stuff we do in big groups has a way of wearing them out. I’ll tell you some things I’ve enjoyed through the years. I’ve enjoyed getting together in small groups – for a spur of the moment meeting of several men at Pizza Ranch, or maybe several getting together to go to the gun range together, or even hiking. Years ago, Hans, and Amanda, and myself got together to hike – I think at Indian Lake County Park, and maybe also at

Governor Dodge State Park. And this obviously isn't something the whole church can (or should) do together as a group, but there is a value to it, especially for those who get stressed out by the big stuff.

If you are here in this building as an introvert and have had enough, I might suggest escaping to the back room, but the introverts back there are probably saying, "Nope, we're full back here!" But, that may be a possibility. We also have a monitor set up downstairs. Just turn the TV on down there, and the livestream should be available, if you need a break from being together in this room.

There's something else I would also suggest, and that is: If possible, let's try to allow a bit more time for the Lord's Supper. I appreciate the cleanliness of the elements for communion as we do it now. I appreciate the fact that we all partake together in a way we never did before (now we do it, literally, at the exact same moment, which is pretty cool). But one thing I miss is the quiet, the pause that was built into the service as we passed the trays and as everybody took their turn. It takes me a moment to calm down after preaching, and sometimes, by the time the prayer is over and I rip off that plastic, it's almost time for the next prayer and the next song. This isn't a criticism; just an observation, that it's okay to be quiet and to pause for a bit as we think about what the Lord has done for us. And this goes especially for those who need that time to process.

D. One final application this morning, and that is: LOOK OUT FOR THE INTERESTS OF OTHERS.

In Philippians 2, Paul says that we are to, ***"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others."*** And then he goes on to give the example of Jesus, who gave up heaven to pour himself out into human form, and became a servant, even to the point of death on a cross. And so the point is: When we truly love each other, we do the things we need to do, even if those things are difficult. So, as introverts, we take the focus off of ourselves, and we get to work. We interact with our Christian family, even if they wear us out, even if it's stressful. Perhaps make a goal of connecting with one person every week. If you're an introvert, focus on listening. Listening is an incredibly important skill. Listening is hard work. If you can truly listen to another person after worship this morning, that is a huge gift to that person. Counselors get paid for this! Listen, and then pray about it, and then follow up with a text or a call later this week, and ask how that situation is going. That communicates: You matter to me; you are important to me.

Or maybe we could take on some project, some new way of serving behind the scenes; something that needs to be done that we've never done before. So, we don't run and hide, but we take what we may be good at, and we jump in. I've told you before about Aaron moving here and me asking what he'd be willing to do in worship, and he said, "I will dig you a baptistery in the back yard with my bare hands before I lead the singing." And that's okay. But it's important that we do something to look out for the interests of others. As introverts, it's tempting to disappear, but we need to serve, even when it's hard. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:24, ***"Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor."*** That's hard sometimes. And it may involve getting out of our comfort zone. It may wear us out. Several months ago, some of us had the privilege of attending a wedding together, and it was awesome! I do, though, remember feeling a bit out of place, and in that moment I remember thinking that Jesus apparently loved going to weddings and banquets, because he went to so many! Maybe those parties wiped him out (I don't know), but I remember thinking: I need to be more like Jesus. I cannot let my personality or my discomfort keep me from caring for my Christian family. We are not primarily concerned with our own well-being, but we look out for the interests of others.

Conclusion:

So, what if we don't like people? I, personally, am not too comfortable in large groups. However, I do love all of you. I am very thankful for the good question, and I hope that I have handled it appropriately.

In just a moment, Josh will lead us in a song, but before we sing, let's go to God in prayer.

Our Father in Heaven,

Thank you for making us a part of your family. As we sang earlier this morning, sometimes we laugh together, sometimes we cry, sometimes we share together heartaches and sighs, and sometimes we dream together of how it will be. And we are looking forward to that day when we can all be together with those who've gone on before us.

We love you, Father, and we come to you today through Jesus. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com