THE POWERFUL PURPOSE OF INTROVERTS

Why the World Needs YOU to BE YOU

HOLLEY GERTH

Wall Street Journal Bestselling Author

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HOLLEY GERTH

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

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INTRODUCTION

How fast can you identify introverts and extroverts? Ready, set, go . . .

Catherine reviews her to-do list as she walks to work. *Lead meeting, plan travel, write speech*. She passes a woman standing alone on a street corner. Catherine smells whiskey and perfume, sees defiance in the crossed arms, senses the ache. The list waits. Years later, the woman from the corner will attend Catherine's funeral as one of fifty thousand mourners.

Alex walks into a crowded conference room, grabs one of the last pieces of birthday cake, and retreats to a corner to check his phone. He's worked here for a decade and still feels like a stranger. His performance reviews are average, the pay sufficient, the benefits fine, but he wrestles with a vague dissatisfaction. He rubs a knot in his shoulder that won't let loose and looks at the clock, thinking, *How long until I go home?*

Lewis sits with a circle of friends at a café. They've met here for over a decade as a mastermind group. Each person brings a project they're working on, and today John wants feedback. The conversation intensifies as the group offers opinions and suggestions, sidetracks into personal updates, and draws the attention of those at other tables with a round of laughter.

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Emma looks up and sees Lewis deep in conversation with his friend John. She asks herself, "When's the last time I really connected with someone?" Loneliness rises in her, but she pushes it away. *I enjoy time alone*, she thinks. *It's better this way*. But sometimes the quiet of her apartment gets loud.

Liz, a senior marketing manager, shakes hands with people at the end of a whirlwind ten-day, multicity event she coordinated. Next to her is a cocoa farmer from Ghana who's also a co-owner of the company. The two of them share a business model that focuses on fair trade, empowerment, and social impact that affects thousands of lives around the world.

Joe's wife asks, "Coming to bed?" He says what he does every night, "Soon." No one knows Joe created computer code that could transform the way people communicate. It's complete, but he keeps reviewing it. He can't let go of perfection, risk rejection. A familiar anxiety surrounds him as he drifts off to sleep.

So, which of these people are introverts?

The answer you might not expect: *all of them*.

The difference between the people in these situations isn't whether they're introverts or extroverts. It's whether they've learned how to overcome their struggles and embrace their God-given strengths. Alex, Emma, and Joe view their introvert tendencies as limiting, while Catherine, Lewis, and Liz experience them as empowering.

I'm not making this up. Catherine is Catherine Booth, cofounder of the Salvation Army, one of the largest nonprofits in the world. Now over 150 years old, it still helps 30 million people annually through 3.5 million volunteers and 7,500 centers of operation.[1]

Lewis is C. S. Lewis, the beloved author of the Chronicles of Narnia. John is J. R. R. Tolkien, who wrote the Lord of the Rings series of books. The two met for decades with a group of fellow writers known as "The Inklings," who not only helped each other professionally but had strong, deep friendships personally.

Liz is Liz Miller, senior marketing manager of Divine Chocolate, a global social enterprise with headquarters in Washington, DC,

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and London, who envisioned and carried out the ten-day event. She says,

> You can be an introvert and a phenomenal leader. I used to think it was only the extroverts who could make good leaders; I was mistaken in thinking that the loudest person was the person making the best decisions. On the contrary, as an introvert I have learned to embrace the qualities that help me succeed—thoughtfulness, consideration, empathy—and use those to my advantage and the advantage of my company. It's possible to thrive *exactly as you are*, not as you think you "need to be."[2]

These stories aren't anomalies.

Would it surprise you to know Abraham Lincoln, Joanna Gaines, Max Lucado, Oprah, Einstein, Brie Larson, Jerry Seinfeld, Bill Gates, Michael Jordan, Mother Teresa, Beethoven, Audrey Hepburn, and Moses are also introverts?

Introversion isn't about how much we like small talk or socializing; it's wired into our brains and nervous systems. I believe we're created as introverts and extroverts, both with incredible gifts and potential. Yet I've heard introverts say . . .

"I don't have what it takes to lead."

"I'm not good at connecting with people."

"I can't speak up, even when it really matters."

The research says otherwise. Professor, author, and leadership strategist Jeff Hyman found that "when stacked against each other in a wide range of roles," introverts perform as well as extroverts.[3]

Fifty-three percent of millionaires identify as introverts.[4] A surprising ten-year leadership study revealed that introvert CEOs are "slightly more likely to surpass the expectations of their boards and investors." Even in sales, a highly social field, an analysis of thirty-five studies encompassing nearly four thousand salespeople determined introverts are just as successful.[5]

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Introverts often have deep social networks based on quality over quantity, including long-term relationships that significantly add to their overall physical and psychological health. And introverts contribute generously and creatively to our culture. So many world-changing causes, works of art, and innovations wouldn't exist without the quiet efforts of introverts.

It doesn't take acting like an extrovert for introverts to find success and be great leaders, friends, or influencers. I've seen the consequences of introverts trying to become someone they're not. I've *lived* the consequences. Insecurity. Exhaustion. Anxiety. Perfectionism. Loneliness. Burnout.

Then I discovered how to thrive as an introvert.

I read hundreds of articles, brain science studies, and books on introversion. Pursued a master's degree in counseling, became a certified life coach, and wrote bestsellers. Collected advice, new and ancient, from introverts all over the world.

You don't have to go through years of awkward moments, hurt, and missed opportunities like I did (anyone else ever hidden in a bathroom?). I'll share how to move away from common introvert struggles and toward introvert strengths, like influence, resilience, and well-being. This journey isn't just for your benefit, though. Our fast-paced, stressed-out culture needs what introverts offer more than ever. The people you love do too.

I believe we're here as introverts for such a time as this, placed in this world for a purpose. Let's take the next step toward that purpose together today.

Holley

P.S. If you're here because you're an extrovert who loves, leads, or shares life with an introvert, *thank you*. I wrote you a note in the back of this book that I hope you'll read before continuing.

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BEING
an
INTROVERT
isn't a
STRUGGLE,
it's your
SUPERPOWER.

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1

WHAT BEING AN INTROVERT *REALLY* MEANS

So you're quiet and you don't always know what to say? On the other side of that "weakness" is a powerful, analytical mind. You get overstimulated more easily than others? In your solitude, you solve problems, think of new ideas, and create. You "umm" and "ahh" when you speak? Your reflective mind processes things deeply. Instead of seeing your introvert qualities as your biggest flaws, consider that they may actually be your biggest strengths.

Jenn Granneman

I'm in a coffee shop this morning that smells of espresso and cinnamon rolls fresh from the oven. Across from me is a family in a corner booth, the littlest girl jumping on her seat like it's a trampoline. On my right three businessmen have papers scattered across their table, debating then marking with red pens. An

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exuberant book club has commandeered the back room and most of the blueberry muffins. A few stray individuals, like me, have a latte and laptop in front of them.

Think of a few times you were with people recently. Maybe at a dinner table, passing mashed potatoes. In a meeting with spreadsheets and tight schedules. At school, church, or a sporting event. Walking through your neighborhood, scrolling through social media.

With your experiences in mind, what percentage of the world population would you guess is made up of introverts?

A) 24.6
B) 37.4
C) 50.7
D) 73

If you answered A or B, then you're in the majority. Myths about introversion, along with introverts feeling pressure to act like someone they're not, contribute to people often overestimating the percentage of extroverts.

If you answered D, then you're likely part of a community where the percentage is especially high. For example, when I created a survey on holleygerth.com, over two thousand people responded in one week and 73 percent were introverts.

If you answered C, then you're in agreement with the Myers & Briggs Foundation. They looked at thirty years of test results from sources such as the Stanford Research Institute and found 50.7 percent of people are introverts.[1] (Interestingly, a recent global leadership sample put the percentage slightly higher at 56.8 percent.)[2]

Think again of the last time you were with people. In whatever situation you pictured, half or more of the people around you were likely introverts—even if it didn't seem like it.

Now imagine with me a world in which 100 percent of people, introverts and extroverts, dare to be who they are. What if we all

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understood how we're wired, intentionally used our strengths to serve the greater good, and thrived for a lifetime? Imagine what it would be like for *you* to live more like that every day. I believe it's possible, and I'm here to help you get there.

The Introvert/Extrovert Continuum

While knowing the percentage of introverts and extroverts can help us understand the bigger picture, actual people are more complex than a number—and all of us are on an introvert/extrovert continuum. We each have a different spot that best fits who we are and empowers us to thrive.

What determines our place on this continuum? For thousands of years, people have tried to answer that question. Greek philosopher and physician Hippocrates (460–370 BC) theorized that variations in bodily fluids affected temperament. Twentieth-century Swiss psychologist Carl Jung said how we preferred to direct our energy, internally or externally, shaped our personalities. But the human mind, and our differences, mostly remained mysteries.

Then John Schenck took a selfie of his brain.

While almost every hospital now uses an MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) machine, in the spring of 1982, such technology didn't exist. Scientists didn't know the effects of using such a strong magnetic force on the human body. Could someone even survive it?

A medical doctor with a PhD in physics, Schenck volunteered to find out. On the day of the experiment, nurses monitored his vital signs, ready to respond to unforeseen emergencies. Schenck emerged unharmed and continued developing MRI technology. A few months later, the first image of his brain changed medical history.[3]

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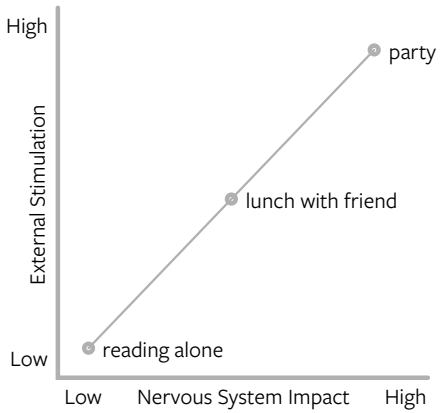
Brain science is still a new field and discoveries continue, but we now know much more about how the ways we're physically wired influence our place on the introvert/extrovert continuum.

Maybe you've heard that personal preferences, how you socialize, or shyness determines introversion. None of these are true. It's how you respond to external stimulation that makes you an introvert or extrovert. (If that sounds strange, I'll soon explain.) Your neurotransmitters, nervous system, and brain pathways all help determine where you land on the introvert/extrovert continuum.

Introvert Nervous Systems

Think of the nervous system as the response network of your body. It includes your brain, nerves, spinal cord, and sense organs (eyes, ears, tongue, skin, and nose). Your nervous system receives information through your senses, processes it, and activates reactions. If you hear a joke, you laugh and your nerves send pleasure signals to your brain. If you hear a loud noise, you instinctively cover your ears because your nerves initiate discomfort signals. Anything, whether emotional or physical, that causes a response in the nervous system is "stimulation." When stimulation comes from outside us, it's called "external stimulation."

External stimulation ranges from low to high.



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Introverts and extroverts differ in their nervous system responses to external stimulation. Three things reveal why: (1) our neurotransmitters, (2) whether we rely more on the sympathetic or parasympathetic nervous system, and (3) our brain pathways.

NEUROTRANSMITTERS

Neurotransmitters are chemical messengers that help shape our responses and behavior. The neurotransmitters dopamine and acetylcholine play a significant role in the differences between introverts and extroverts.

Think of dopamine like caffeine. We each have a level of dopamine that makes us feel our best. Too little and we feel lethargic and bored. Too much and we're overwhelmed and uncomfortable. Dopamine motivates us to seek external stimulation and rewards us when we find it. Introverts need less dopamine than extroverts to feel their best.

My extrovert daughter and I recently got coffee together. I chose a drink with one shot of espresso; hers had four. Research shows introverts are more sensitive to caffeine than extroverts.[4] But if we ordered dopamine, the scenario would remain the same. An extrovert would likely enjoy a noisy, crowded amusement park (quad shot), while an introvert might prefer a walk in an actual park on a beautiful day (single shot). Too much dopamine makes introverts feel anxious, then exhausted.

Jenn Granneman says in *Why Introverts and Extroverts are Different: The Science*, "Dopamine is a chemical released in the brain that provides the motivation to seek external rewards like earning money, climbing the social ladder, attracting a mate, or getting selected for a high-profile project at work. . . . The difference is in the activity of the dopamine reward network. It is more active in the brains of extroverts than in the brains of introverts."[5]

By contrast, acetylcholine, another neurotransmitter, is more active in introverts. It helps us feel our best, and *internal* stimulation

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triggers it. Our introvert brains release feel-good chemicals when we turn inward, focus on ideas, have meaningful conversations, and do work that matters to us. We're motivated by internal rewards, such as the joy of an aha moment, the comfort of a deep connection, and the satisfaction of a job well done. If dopamine is caffeine, then acetylcholine is herbal tea. It's calming and brings us into a more restful, peaceful state.

Well-meaning extroverts may encourage us to "join the fun," not realizing what we love to do *is* fun for us. We're not settling; we're choosing what makes us feel most satisfied. Our introvert brains prefer acetylcholine and reward us for seeking quieter spaces and less intense activities.

SYMPATHETIC VS. PARASYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEMS

Extroverts are wired to spend energy, introverts to conserve it. The autonomic nervous system includes two divisions: sympathetic and parasympathetic. The sympathetic nervous system gets us ready for action and is associated with the fight-or-flight response. The parasympathetic nervous system relaxes and restores us.

While we all use both the sympathetic and the parasympathetic nervous system, Dr. Marti Olsen Laney says, "Extroverts are linked with the dopamine/adrenaline, energy-spending, sympathetic nervous system, introverts are connected with the acetylcholine, energy-conserving, parasympathetic nervous system."[6]

Introverts in high-stimulation situations who are forced to rely on the sympathetic nervous system feel drained. Olsen Laney explains, "For introverts, all that adrenaline and glucose soon leaves them feeling wiped out. It's too stimulating, consumes too much fuel, and leaves them with their fuel tank empty."[7]

I recently went to an evening event with an extrovert friend. The speaker droned on, I had to make small talk during a break, and I felt my energy leaking minute by minute. My parasympathetic nervous system nudged me toward home. I kept checking the time

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on my phone as I imagined my favorite blanket, a good book, and my husband next to me.

My friend looked at her phone for a different reason. Before the event, she'd told me a dozen people were staying with her, only one of whom she'd met before. She'd showed up at this event. Now she was making plans to meet a different group of friends at a restaurant afterward. I saw her growing excitement, her sympathetic nervous system driving her toward more, more, more.

In the past, I would have told myself I needed to emulate my friend—and I do adore her. But now I understand I'm built for quality over quantity. My parasympathetic nervous system empowers me to do what matters most to me, things that challenge my friend. I can sit still and write for hours. Stay fully engaged in listening to one person for a long time. Go on long drives without music just to think. Focus intently on a project. Nap on rainy days and feel bliss. Because of their parasympathetic nervous systems, introverts often find joy in less, less, less.

BRAIN PATHWAYS

When Dr. Debra Johnson scanned the brains of introverts and extroverts, she found the two also use different primary brain pathways. These pathways are not about intelligence but about how we process.

An introvert's primary pathway is longer, more complex, and internally focused. An extrovert's primary pathway is shorter, more straightforward, and externally focused. Extroverts rely on short-term memory, the here and now. Introverts draw more from long-term memory, taking into consideration the past, present, and future.[8] Because of the way we process, we introverts often need longer to respond. We're not slow thinkers; we're deep thinkers.

Dr. Laurie Helgoe says, "Neuroimaging studies measuring cerebral blood flow reveal that among introverts, the activation is centered in the frontal cortex, responsible for remembering,

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planning, decision making, and problem solving—the kinds of activities that require inward focus and attention."[9]

Summary of Introvert/Extrovert Differences

	Introverts	Extroverts
Neurotransmitter	Acetylcholine	Dopamine
Nervous System	Parasympathetic	Sympathetic
Brain Pathway	Longer and More Complex	Shorter and Faster
External Stimulation	Decreases Energy	Increases Energy
Internal Stimulation	Increases Energy	Decreases Energy

Created as Introverts

When I read the science about who we are as introverts, I feel wonder and gratitude. I think of how the psalmist said, "I praise you because you made me in an amazing and wonderful way. What you have done is wonderful. I know this very well."[10] Pastor Adam McHugh writes, "We can say that we are created as introverts. When our Creator knit us together, he shaped our brains in such a way that we would find satisfaction in reflection and comfort in a slower, calmer life."[11]

When we turn inward, we're not withdrawing or holding back; we're choosing to show up in a sacred space of creativity, contemplation, and imagination. Our inner worlds are where insights, innovations, breakthroughs, solutions, and intimate connections with God originate.

A recent survey conducted by Gallup, a global analytics organization, found 87 percent of people believe in God.[12] Spirituality is important to many introverts, and you'll see it woven throughout the pages ahead.

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Where we're going together is about *all* the aspects of who we're created to be as introverts—physical, emotional, social, psychological, practical, and spiritual. Our bodies, hearts, minds, and souls.

What Introversion Is Not

Because introversion is such a big part of who we are, it matters that we also understand what it is *not*. Introversion isn't shyness. Susan Cain, author of *Quiet*, says, "Shyness is the fear of negative judgment, and introversion is a preference for quiet, minimally stimulating environments."[13]

Ninety percent of people describe themselves as shy at some point during their lives.[14] Thirteen percent will be diagnosed with social anxiety. Shyness and social anxiety are about fear; introversion is about how we're wired. An extrovert skipping a party because she's afraid of not fitting in feels shy; an introvert choosing a book as her Friday night companion feels content.

The difference between shyness and introversion especially matters in parenting introvert kids. Well-meaning parents can assume their kids are holding back out of fear when they're playing alone or staying on the edge of a group. If you're the parent of an introvert, you can ask, "Are you scared or taking a break?" While introvert kids may sometimes need encouragement to engage, they need time to recharge too. If you were parented by someone who didn't understand introversion, I hope this book will help you let go of some of the pressure you've likely felt for most of your life.

Introversion is also not antisocial, of course. I've seen news stories like, "Criminal Who Stole Puppies and Hijacked Ice Cream Trucks Captured," with a quote from a nosy neighbor saying, "Well, he always was kind of introverted." Statistically speaking, extreme extroverts are actually "more likely to become involved in criminal or antisocial behaviors and get arrested."[15] (Sorry,

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extroverts, we'd be your one call from jail, but introverts don't answer their phones.) Many introverts actually care so much it overwhelms them, which is the opposite of antisocial behavior, apathy, or aloofness.

Once an Introvert, Always an Introvert?

Several people responded to my survey with something like, "I used to be an extrovert, but as I've gotten older, I've become an introvert" or "I used to be an introvert, but my job made me an extrovert." These statements made me curious: Can we switch from extrovert to introvert or vice versa? Can we be both during a lifetime?

Researchers also asked these questions and discovered a secret for predicting whether a baby matures into an introvert or an extrovert: Winnie the Pooh. In a famous experiment, psychologist and researcher Jerome Kagan evaluated five hundred four-month-old babies.

A video clip from the 1980s introduces two of them, Robbie and Jordan. Kagan dangles a colorful Winnie the Pooh mobile in front of each baby. Robbie stares, makes a few noises, and flexes his body in approval. Jordan thrashes his arms and legs, reacting intensely to the unknown objects. Kagan calls babies like Jordan "high reactive." They're more affected by external stimulation. Kagan followed the progress of the babies into adulthood, and those in the high-reactive group were more likely to become introverts.[16]

Long-term studies like Kagan's indicate our overall temperament, such as whether we're an introvert or extrovert, doesn't change. Our *behavior* changes as we learn, grow, and adapt. Introverts can become skilled at networking. Extroverts can hone their listening abilities. And psychologists have found we all act more introverted as we age. We're "quieter, more self-contained, less in

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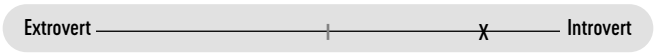
need of excitement . . . more emotionally stable, agreeable, and conscientious."[17]

At eighteen, your introversion might look like this:

But at forty, it looks more like this:



An extrovert's continuum might look like this at eighteen:

But at forty, it might look more like this:

We each have a natural "range" we move within on the introvert/extrovert continuum. But we remain the same type; introverts don't become extroverts or vice versa.

This brings us to the question of *ambiverts*, a term describing people who are hybrids of introversion and extroversion. Can someone be both?

Whether you're an introvert or extrovert is similar to being right- or left-handed. We use both hands, but one is dominant. People may think, *I'm able to use my right and left hand, so I'm ambidextrous.* But only 1 percent of the population is truly ambidextrous. When we accept cultural assumptions about introverts and extroverts, we may say, "I can talk or stay quiet. I can go out or stay home. I must be an ambivert."

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As people gain more understanding, they often discover they're introverts or extroverts, even if they've learned to use "both hands" well. After considering the research and talking with thousands of people about their temperaments, I believe most people aren't ambiverts.

Where's Your Place on the Introvert/Extrovert Continuum?

Rank each of the statements below on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being "not true of me at all" and 10 being "very true of me."

- ☐ I enjoy spending time in solitude.
- ☐ I prefer for someone else to be the center of attention.
- ☐ I prefer spending time one-on-one with others rather than hanging out in a group.
- ☐ I listen and think before I speak.
- ☐ I need time to process before making decisions.
- ☐ I'm drawn to deep conversations and thoughts.
- ☐ I need time alone to recharge and reflect.
- ☐ I'm observant and often notice what others miss.
- ☐ I prefer working in quiet, independent environments.
- ☐ I'm at my best when I fully focus rather than divide my attention.

Add up your answers for a total score: ____

Based on your score, estimate where you may fall on the introvert/extrovert continuum. You can mark your place with an *X* or highlight it.

Score: 0 50 100

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Differences in our neurotransmitters, nervous systems, and brain pathways reveal we're designed as introverts and extroverts *intentionally*. There are many complementary elements in our world—day and night, land and sea, masculine and feminine. We need introverts *and* extroverts. We all have strengths, gifts, and skills to offer.

Where We're Going: From Struggles to Strengths

Embracing who we truly are takes courage and hard work, especially if we've felt pressure to be someone we're not. My counseling and life-coaching clients, especially introverts, often showed up for their first appointment and said, "There's a part of myself I don't like. I want you to help me get rid of it."

Even the apostle Paul begged God several times to take away something he saw as a weakness. The divine answer he received? "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness."[18] Over the years I, like Paul, have come to believe what's most powerful is not elimination but transformation. Who we are comes with potential struggles and strengths. That's true for all of us, whether extroverts or introverts.

For example, because of their highly reactive nervous systems, introverts are more likely to struggle with anxiety.[19] However, those same nervous systems also mean introverts often have a strong sense of empathy.

What if a struggle is just the other end of a strength?

Growth happens not by changing who we are but by learning how to move away from struggles and toward our strengths. Doing so activates our gifts, increases our well-being, and empowers us to make our greatest contributions to the world. This realization has changed my life, and I believe it will change yours.

Holley Gerth, The Powerful Purpose of Introverts
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We'll talk about the common struggles of introverts and the powerful strengths that correspond with each one. I'll share more brain science, stories, and practical steps that will empower you to overcome whatever has been holding you back.

We live in a noisy, chaotic culture. We're all looking for less stress and more peace, less noise and more meaning, less hurry and more rest. I believe introverts can lead the way, and we can all move toward a stronger life today.

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Go to **holleygerth.com/introverts** to order the book from your favorite retailer and find more resources for introverts!

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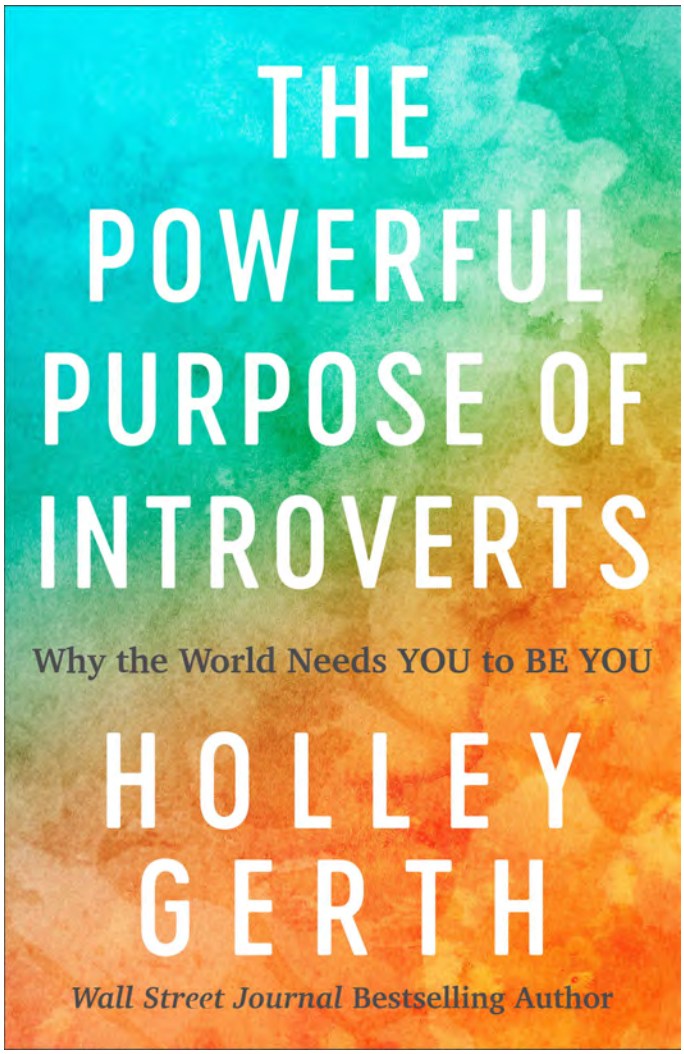
I HOPE YOU'VE ENJOYED THE DEVOTIONAL!



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