

# C.S. Lewis on How to Be Yourself

When faced with a challenge, most of us have received advice to “just be yourself.”

Those offering advice have good intentions. Yet, we might think, “I’m anxious, frightened, and insecure. I don’t want to be myself.”

C.S. Lewis would agree that the self-concept we have created is unreliable. Fortunately, the self we have created is a pitiful parody of our True Self. [Lewis wrote](#):

*The more we let God take us over, the more truly ourselves we become—because He made us. He invented us. He invented all the different people that you and I were intended to be ... It is when I turn to Christ, when I give up myself to His personality, that I first begin to have a real personality of my own.*

In my opinion, you don’t have to be a Christian to experience the truth in Lewis’ observations, but you have to believe there is something greater than the limits of your thinking. [For Lewis](#), Christ represents Divine Love beyond anything that you or I can understand or create. Our intellect can’t understand what is beyond understanding, but the intellect can point us towards our birthright.

In dialogue with philosophy professor Renee Weber, the late quantum physicist David Bohm [echoed the wisdom](#) of C.S. Lewis:

*Individuality is only possible if it unfolds from wholeness. Ego-centeredness is not individuality at all. Ego-centeredness is centered on the self-image which is an illusion and delusion. Therefore it’s nothing at all. True*

*individuality means you have a true being which unfolds from the whole in its particular way for that particular moment.*

By *wholeness* Bohm meant the underlying order and unity of life. Lewis and Bohm are pointing in the same direction, our real individuality, the self we want to be, comes from the Whole, from Divine Love.

In his book, [Mere Christianity](#) Lewis helps us understand the difference between our self-concept and our True Self. First, Lewis advises we must stop looking for our True Self; look instead for God.

*The very first step is to try to forget about the self altogether. Your real, new self (which is Christ's and also yours, and yours just because it is His) will not come as long as you are looking for it. It will come when you are looking for Him.*

Lewis asks, does it “sound strange” to forget the self to find the Self? Lewis explains, this indirect path “runs through all life from top to bottom”:

*Even in social life, you will never make a good impression on other people until you stop thinking about what sort of impression you are making. Even in literature and art, no man who bothers about originality will ever be original: whereas if you simply try to tell the truth (without caring...how often it has been told before) you will, nine times out of ten, become original without ever having noticed it.*

Anticipating our reluctance, Lewis anticipates our questions: *Wouldn't it be boring to be “one” with God? Wouldn't we be all “exactly the same”?* Lewis uses the metaphor of adding salt to food. If you tasted salt for the first time and were told that salt is added to many dishes, you might imagine that all food would have the same salty taste. Lewis points out, “The real

effect of salt is exactly the opposite...[Food does] not show [its] real taste till you have added the salt."

Humans need salt, and they need God's Love. Lewis writes, "The more we get what we now call 'ourselves' out of the way and let Him take us over, the more truly ourselves we become."

Lewis pointedly writes, "It is no good trying to 'be myself' without Him."

Again, Bohm points us in the same direction as Lewis. He told Professor Weber, "People are not realizing their potential for uniqueness because insofar as they follow their predispositions, they're part of the mass."

Lewis and Bohm are pointing toward a direction we are not used to. We might sense, *I know what Lewis is saying is true*, and then observe, *but so often I live my life as though it is not true*.

Honest observation provides a pathway to "give up myself to His personality." As we get as much of not-God out of the way, God will fill the void and the personality of our True Self will come to the forefront.

To get not-God out of the way, become more aware of your stream of thinking throughout the day. Notice your petty grievances and your attachment to your narrative about your troublesome feelings. Notice, too, how your self-concept inflates and deflates as life unfolds.

That ceaseless narrative in your head causes endless problems for you and others when you allow it to direct your experience of life. Lewis advises us to look at the self we have made; when we do, "[we] will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay," coming from our self-concept.

As much as we may like to, we can't skip the step of looking

at how our self-concept miscreates. Are we willing to consider, for example, how often we value a grievance over God? Lewis writes:

*The more I resist Him and try to live on my own, the more I become dominated by my own heredity and upbringing and surroundings and natural desires. In fact, what I so proudly call 'Myself' becomes merely the meeting place for trains of events which I never started and which I cannot stop.*

The next time someone advises, "just be yourself" think of the advice of C.S. Lewis and smile. Use that trite phrase as a call to get the self you have made out of the way so as to remember who you truly are.

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