



Follow your heart. You do you. You are enough.

We take these slogans for granted, but what if this path to personal happiness leads to a dead-end? In “Rethink Your Self,” Trevin Wax encourages you to rethink some of our society’s most common assumptions about identity and the road to happiness.

Most people define their identity and purpose by first *looking in* (to their desires), then *looking around* (to express their uniqueness), and finally—maybe—*looking up* (to add a spiritual dimension to life). “Rethink Your Self” proposes a counter-intuitive approach: looking up before looking in.

It's only when we look up to learn who we were created to be that we discover our true purpose and become our truest selves.

Book information

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About Trevin

Trevin Wax is senior vice president of Theology and Communications at LifeWay Christian Resources and a visiting professor at Wheaton College. A former missionary to Romania, Trevin hosts a blog at The Gospel Coalition and regularly contributes to “The Washington Post,” Religion News Service, World and “Christianity Today,” which named him one of thirty-three millennials shaping the next generation of evangelicals. As former director of Bible Publishing at LifeWay, he led the launch of the Christian

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Standard Bible (CSB) and served as general editor of the CSB Worldview Study Bible. Currently he is the general editor of The Gospel Project, and an author of many books, including “This Is Our Time,” “Eschatological Discipleship,” “Gospel Centered Teaching” and “Rethink Your Self.” He and his wife Corina have three children and live outside of Nashville, Tenn.

Why Trevin?

- According to “Psychology Today,” “From a mental health perspective, the rising individualism reported in the journal ‘Psychological Science’ is disturbing. The amassed mental health research indicates that social support, social ties and community integration acts to buffer mental illness and improve mental health. Contrariwise, intense individualism can lead to more isolation, more loneliness and more alienation.” “Rethink Your Self” helps readers abandon the prevalent, damaging, unbiblical mindset of expressive individualism and instead turn to God for their purpose.
- According to a 2018 survey conducted by Cigna, nearly half of Americans always or sometimes feel alone (46 percent) or left out (47 percent), proving that loneliness is an epidemic. “Rethink Your Self” helps readers discover their truest purpose, identity and acceptance.
- Trevin writes regularly with The Gospel Coalition and he has blogged multiple times about the topic of this book, of which have been read by more than 75,000 people. He reaches daily a growing social media audience of over 60,000.
- Trevin is a regular speaker at events and conferences such as The Gospel Coalition National Conference and the For the Church conference. He is also regularly featured in video and podcast content from platforms such as LifeWay Voices, The ERLC and The Gospel Coalition.
- Trevin regularly contributes to “The Washington Post,” Religion News Service, World and “Christianity Today,” which named him one of thirty-three millennials shaping the next generation of evangelicals.
- Trevin has also authored “This is Our Time” (B&H, 2017), which The Gospel Coalition named “Christian Living Book of the Year” in 2017 and “Christianity Today” named as one of its award of merit books of the year in 2018.

Q&A with Trevin

Why did you write this book? What inspired you to write it?

I love asking questions about why people think the way they think and do the things they do. What are the hidden assumptions that people don’t question? In looking at what passes for “common sense” in our society, you can see one overarching message in music, TV shows, books and movies: the purpose of life is to look inside and discover yourself and then express yourself to the world. I wanted to peel back the layers of some of our best-loved slogans like “Be true to yourself” or “Follow your heart” and interrogate them. Does this way of life work? Does it deliver what it promises? Why do other societies reject this way of thinking? Then, I wanted to

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bring the ancient wisdom of the Bible to bear on this way of life, so that people would see just how countercultural Jesus is, in how he views the meaning and purpose of life.

For whom did you write this book?

I had three people in mind as I wrote:

1. the twenty-something college student at the start of their life and preparing for their career, who has some big life decisions ahead and doesn't want to mess up,
2. the thirty-something Christian who wants to grow as a follower of Jesus, who wonders if they're following the common sense of our society more than the countercultural way that Jesus lays out and
3. the person who's a little older and has experienced setbacks and disappointment in life, who wonders if all the talk about “chasing your dreams” and taking charge of your destiny is good advice after all and who is ready to rethink their assumptions.

Why is this an important topic right now?

We're more formed by our society than we realize. We assume things to be true of the world simply because that's what everyone else seems to think. We swim in cultural waters that are always flowing toward this “be true to yourself” perspective. We need to be more aware of how easy it is to go with the flow, and then be challenged to rethink ourselves and to have the courage to swim upstream as we seek to follow Jesus.

Talk about the role of social media in how we define ourselves. Where do you see our culture headed in terms of identity and fulfillment, especially as we are so heavily influenced by social media?

If the purpose of life is to discover who you are and then express your unique self to the world, then social media makes it easier than ever to put yourself “on display,” so to speak. Social media makes it easier for us to define and redefine ourselves and to craft the image we want others to see. It makes “identity” more permeable, subject to change and easily reinvented. The problem, of course, is that this display so often feels phony, and the acclamation we get online rings hollow, because we feel like we're putting on a mask through our social media presence. Even worse, sometimes we can get lost in the social media vision of our identity, to the point we don't even know who we truly are anymore. Social media exacerbates the problem we have of feeling like our identities aren't centered or stable.

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Describe the three ways of defining self from the book. What does it mean to “Look In, Look Around, and Look Up”?

These three approaches to life are determined by what gets priority. How do you determine who you are and what your purpose in life is?

The “Look In” approach says to start with yourself. You do the hard work of looking in, to discover who you are and what you want to do with your life. You then look around for friends and colleagues who will support the version of yourself you choose. And then, if you feel like you need a spiritual dimension to your life, you may look up to God or a higher power in order to have something more transcendent to add to your life. This is the dominant way of thinking in our society today.

The “Look Around” approach says to start with the people around you. You look around to your community to tell you who you are and what your purpose of life is. Then, you look up to the sacred order that connects you to the people around you and the ancestors who have gone before you. Finally, you look inside as you come to terms with the person you are, in relation to the community you belong to. This is the dominant way of thinking in other parts of the world and has been dominant for most people throughout history.

The “Look Up” approach says to start with God. You look up first in order to see what God says about you and to better understand his divine design. Looking up prioritizes the transcendent. God is the one who defines you and your purpose, not you and not your community. Next, you look around to the community of faith that is called to cheer you on, to correct you, to love you as part of the family that looks up as its starting point, not ending point. Finally, you look inside and see how God loves you just as you are, while still planning to make you the best possible version of who you are, as he conforms you into the image of his Son. This is the biblical way of seeing life—God first, others second, yourself third.

What should people do who want to rethink themselves from a biblical perspective? Give two or three practical steps to getting away from the “Look In” and Look Around” approach and embracing the “Look Up” approach.

You won’t get a biblical perspective without the Bible. The reason one of the later chapters in this book is focused on spiritual disciplines like Bible reading and prayer and churchgoing is because we will not be able to counter the “Look In” approach unless we are constantly bringing ourselves back in line with the “Look Up” approach. The problem is, even these spiritual disciplines can drift toward the “Look In” approach; you read the Bible merely for inspiration in your quest to define yourself, or you pray to God as just a helper when you need him or you go



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to church to be affirmed by others in whatever life you decide to pursue for yourself. What we need are disciplines that are intentionally directed toward keeping our primary focus and priority on God at the center of all things.

What do you hope readers take away from this book?

I hope they will begin to recognize the “be true to yourself” message in all sorts of media and entertainment and politics whenever they see it. I also hope they will better understand how the Bible challenges this perspective with something so much better and more soul-satisfying. I hope readers will see Jesus for who he is, come to love him for being so much better than what the world has to offer and follow him with increasing passion and devotion.

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