

“A sparkling and thoroughly biblical response to the siren voices that tell us to be true to ourselves. Each chapter provides profound gospel insights into our deepest longings for authenticity and acceptance. This warm and often humorous book blends a liberating biblical anthropology with culturally rich insights into our quest for identity. It deserves to be widely circulated.”

RICHARD CUNNINGHAM, Director, UCCF: the Christian Unions

“For many today, the often-unspoken purpose of life is to discover who you are and express that to the world. Matt Fuller explains the meaning of the popular slogan “Be true to yourself” within the larger framework of God’s word and its view of our world. This book is helpful, relevant and full of thought-provoking cultural analysis.”

TREVIN WAX, Author, *This Is Our Time and Gospel Centered Teaching*

“Every teenager and twentysomething is looking for their identity. Our selfie-obsessed culture tells us that to find it, we need to look within, follow our hearts and be true to ourselves. But Matt Fuller offers a better way... because he offers Jesus’ way: deny yourself and follow Christ. This is a book for the times and a book my generation desperately needs as they navigate our culture. I’m so grateful for *Be True to Yourself!*”

JAQUELLE CROWE FERRIS, Author, *This Changes Everything*;
Founder and COO, The Young Writer

“This pithy and culturally incisive book is a must-read for Christians of all ages. Matt Fuller’s theological, biblical and pastoral insights offer a life-giving alternative to a culture that is over-promising and under-delivering.”

STEPHEN McALPINE, City Bible Forum

"I'm grateful for Matt Fuller's timely new book. *Be True to Yourself* is a strong antidote to a mindset—once a cultural vice, now a heroic virtue—that fires our imaginations and ruins our lives. On page after page, Matt unveils a counterintuitive secret: following your heart will enslave you, but following Jesus will free you."

MATT SMETHURST, Managing Editor, The Gospel Coalition;
Author, *Before You Open Your Bible*

"An extraordinarily important book! Matt so helpfully tackles many of the lies of our current society and shines the truth of God's word in a compelling, concise and captivating way. A must-read for people in our church today."

PAUL DALE, Senior Pastor, Church by the Bridge, Kirribilli, Sydney

"Matt Fuller's use of story makes him an engaging writer, and his pastoral experience and compassion are evident on every page. *Be True to Yourself* will help the reader to better understand the different voices being fed to us in our culture, and to gain a deeper love and trust for God's freeing voice instead."

JANE TOOHER, Lecturer, Moore College

"Absolutely brilliant! I loved reading *Be True to Yourself*: it's biblically rich, emotionally intelligent, culturally perceptive and beautifully written. Matt addresses many of the most powerful current challenges to biblical Christianity, including those around sexuality and gender, with deep compassion and impressive clarity."

RICHARD COEKIN, Senior Pastor, Dundonald Church; Executive Director, Co-Mission Network, London

“This brief book by Matt Fuller is a helpful guide through the maze of messages we all receive in our modern age. It’s deep yet approachable, and kept me turning the pages for the solutions offered in the gospel. I recommend this for anyone looking to understand themselves more truthfully.”

ADAM MABRY, Lead Pastor, Aletheia Church, Boston; Author, *The Art of Rest*

“Matt Fuller angles the reader’s gaze away from introspection and toward our loving heavenly Father. This is a timely, smart, practical and important book that helps followers of Jesus focus primarily on Christ’s supremacy and the weight of the gospel.”

SHELBY ABBOTT, Campus Minister, Cru; Author, *Pressure Points: A Guide to Navigating Student Stress*

“Matt Fuller has the ability to tap into our culture and our hearts, and then let the word of God and the grace of God expose, reorient, guide and comfort us with tremendously helpful insights. But you know a book is good when you want to side with Jesus because you’re persuaded again that his way is the best way.”

RAY GALEA, Lead Pastor, Multicultural Bible Ministry

“Matt Fuller is a deft theologian who has his finger on the pulse of the culture. His cultural intelligence, his deep knowledge of the Scriptures, his logical train of argument and his winsome prose have together produced a gracious and engaging answer to the fleeting orthodoxies of the day. *Be True to Yourself* will prove to be a go-to help for all who strive to communicate the gospel—and a lifeline to those adrift amid the evanescent logics of the twenty-first century.”

R. KENT HUGHES, Senior Pastor Emeritus of College Church, Wheaton, Illinois

“Matt Fuller’s book is a wonderful reminder of what matters most—the glory of God (not the glory of me)—and an invitation to look at Jesus, where we find our greatest joy. With clarity and depth of insight, Matt points us to the bigger truths of Scripture that need to capture our hearts. I loved it!”

JENNY SALT, Dean of Students, Sydney Missionary and Bible College, Sydney, Australia

“This book offers a beautiful and hope-filled biblical response to the unbearable pressures our culture has placed upon us. Packed full of insight and loaded with illustrations and commentary on our culture, it helps us understand both where we have been led astray and then how the gospel fully answers our quest for significance and meaning. A must-read for all in the church if we want to understand ourselves and our world better.”

NEIL POWELL, Pastor, City Church Birmingham

“Matt manages to speak honestly about everyday life, to engage genuinely with modern culture and to inspire powerfully with God’s view of who we really are. Read this book and grow into the person you were always meant to be.”

JASON ROACH, Senior Minister, The Bridge: Battersea Community Church, London

“This is such a liberating book. It doesn’t settle for a small definition of who we are. This pushes us to a deeper understanding of who we truly are made to be. I hope it helps many to find the freedom God has in store for us.”

JONTY ALLCOCK, Pastor, The Globe Church, London

MATT FULLER

**BE
TRUE
TO
YOUR
SELF**

The logo features a stylized, curved line above the text "the goodbook".
the goodbook
COMPANY

*For Nathan, Lucy, Rufus, Eliza, Sam and Ollie.
I hope this helps in a confusing time.*

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INTRODUCTION

I am amazing. If you've never met me, don't just take my word for it—others think so too. I went into my favourite local coffee shop the other day, and there was a sign up in the toilet:

**WHO IS AWESOME?
YOU
ARE AWESOME**

(It was definitely more appealing than the previous sign that had been there, which rather aggressively demanded, “Now wash your hands”.)

It was only a sign in a bathroom. Yet it's also a belief that most of us live by. It's a belief that I often live by. But it's not without its complications. And that's why I wrote this book.

Being told that we're wonderful is certainly not a *new* idea—L'Oréal has been selling cosmetics “because you're worth it” for almost 50 years. But it's definitely a very *current* idea. And it's become our motto not just for whether we buy a certain shampoo but for how we do life. If I'm awesome,

then I need to make sure I find myself, be myself, express myself—no matter what other people may think.

In other words, you need to “be true to yourself”. That’s the way to be happy. It’s an idea that is posted on social media, expressed in ads, celebrated in songs, taught in schools and quietly believed in churches.

And it’s right. Sort of. Being true to yourself really is the most satisfying way to live. It really can make you happy. It’s a philosophy you really can live by. But only if you know who you really are. It means listening to the voice of your Creator and living out his design for your life.

Otherwise, we may simply be self-deceived. I was struck by how contemporary these words sounded despite being written 140 years ago by the Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky in *The Brothers Karamazov*:

“Above all, don’t lie to yourself. The man who lies to himself and listens to his own lie comes to such a pass that he cannot distinguish the truth within him, or around him, and so loses all respect for himself and for others. And having no respect, he ceases to love.”

Could it be that in our culture, where we turn within to find truth, we no longer know what is really, objectively true at all?

Yes, be true to yourself—but that means be true to who God says you are. Listen to the voice of your Creator and live out his design for your life. That’s the route to real happiness.

1. TO THINE OWN SELF BE TRUE

“This above all: to thine own self be true.”

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

Just a few days before the start of the 1998 Tour de France, a large haul of performance-enhancing drugs was found in the support car for Team Festina. It was a discovery that led to the exposure of a widescale doping programme within the team.

As the scandal unfolded, it emerged that *every* member of Team Festina had been using drugs. Except, that is, for one: Christophe Bassons.

Despite coming under pressure from the management and his teammates, he did not cheat. Although he received no share of their winning bonuses, he did not cheat. He was publicly humiliated by Lance Armstrong, the dominant rider at the time, but he did not cheat. He was threatened with being dropped from the team, but he did not cheat (and so he was indeed dropped).

Later, it became apparent that Bassons was in the right, and the rest of the team and many other cyclists had been guilty of taking illegal steroids. When asked how he had resisted the enormous pressure to join in with the cheating, he observed, “I don’t think I was courageous not to take drugs. I’d had a balanced upbringing, lots of love in my life, no void which made me want to dope” (Matthew Syed, *The Greatest*, p 130).

In other words: *I wanted to be true to myself.*

If you’re anything like me, when you read a story like that, you want to give Bassons a little cheer. “Good for you!” we think. “If only everyone behaved like that, then the world would be a better place.”

As we come to think about what it means to “be true to yourself”, it’s clear that the phrase can mean some very positive things.

But it can also mean, well... a lot of different things.

Let me give you five overlapping ways that I think people use that phrase. Why not put a mental (or real) tick next to the ones you agree with?

1. Integrity

This is what we’ve seen with Bassons: he was “true to himself” in the sense that he resisted doping and the associated pressure to fit in, stuck to his principles, and acted with integrity. That’s what playwright William

Shakespeare meant 450 years ago when he had a character in *Hamlet* advise:

*“This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.”*

In this sense, being honest is obviously a good and noble thing. We might wish of a politician, “Don’t pander to the powerful just to advance your career; do the right thing”. We celebrate when people are true to their conscience and act with integrity.

2. Express the Real You

This is the idea that to be true to yourself you need to strip away all the layers of conformity that you have had imposed upon you by society over the years, and find the real you deep inside. You have to look inside to discover who you truly are.

What is most valuable to you? What values do you cherish? Which people do you identify with? When you have worked out who you are, then live that way—no matter what others say. Haters gonna hate. Just ignore them.

In our culture, conformity is seen as a negative thing, but trusting our own internal instincts and ideas is seen as a positive thing. So I read a fairly typical magazine article by one twenty-something journalist who said of her peers, “We don’t feel the need to stay in one relationship, *just because society dictates it*” (Hannah Rogers, *The Sunday*

Times Magazine 05 Aug 17, p 14, my italics). We are told, “Ignore the voices outside and follow the real you inside”. (Although of course, there’s a certain irony in the way that “Be true to yourself” is itself a worldview imposed on us by loud voices in our culture!)

3. I Feel; Therefore I Am

Not only is who we are inside something to be expressed, but our feelings inside are something to be followed. In 21st-century Western culture, we increasingly make decisions based on what feels right. In this sense, being true to ourselves is a maxim by which to navigate life—and the way we know who we are is by what we feel.

Does something make me feel happy, or free, or radical? Then I assume it’s good. If, on the other hand, something feels like hard work, or makes me feel constrained or feels traditional... then I assume it’s bad. A couple of decades ago, I could come out with a statement, and someone who disagreed with me might say, “Is that true?” Now they’re more likely to say, “That doesn’t resonate with me”.

This way of making decisions has become prominent in politics too. During an interview in the lead-up to the Brexit referendum, the UK’s then Justice Secretary, Michael Gove, didn’t trouble to engage with the economic predictions of what would happen if the nation voted to leave. Instead, he dismissed the argument with “People in this country have had enough of experts”.