

Prompt: Are We Truly Ourselves When No One is Watching?

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There's a common conception that we become our truest selves when we are alone. Without the presence of others, free from their judgment and expectation, we are supposed to act "naturally" and reveal the purest expression of who we really are. But is this truly the case? What exactly is the "self," and what is it like in its purest form if such a thing exists? Is our self really who we are when in solitude, a compound mix of influences from which we struggle to define who we truly are, or something greater than that entirely?

When we are alone, it may seem that we are free from outside influence, but the truth is, we are still guided by our inner world—our memories, our thoughts, desires, and struggles. The sense of freedom from outside influences when we are in solitude is an illusion as though others are not physically in our presence, their influences still linger. To cut off physically doesn't equal cutting out mentally. The idea that we are truly ourselves when alone fails to account for the myriad of internal forces and lingering external factors that shape us. We are not simply our own thoughts or emotions; we are a combination of many things that have shaped us over time. There is no single moment or situation can ever completely account for every factor and define what our "self" is.

Take for example the way we behave around others. We act as a different person and provide a different role depending on the group we are with. Each of these roles is a fragment of different aspects of our personality, shaped by the expectations and norms of the environment we are in. But none of these roles by themselves can capture the totality of who we are. When we are alone we may drop the external masks and behave in a way that feels

more genuine or even selfish and sinful, yet this "genuine" version of ourselves is still influenced by our past experiences, the experiences of other people's effect. We can never be fully disconnected from influences. Even so the very identity of "us in solitude" is another role we play that is a fraction of our true self, with or without people around us. Moreover, the notion that we can define our true selves in isolation fails to consider the fact that our identity is not a fixed entity. It is not a singular, unwavering core buried deep within us, rather, it is an ever-changing construct, molded by various factors such as environment, relationships, experiences, and even our own fluctuating emotions. If we are to base the "true self" off of a variant of us where all external influences are cut off, then our self would be a crying newborn baby. Our "true self" is not an isolated phenomenon but a product of our interactions with the world around us, a complex interplay of many forces, both internal and external.

But are we really to stop here? "Our 'true self' is not an isolated phenomenon but a product of our interactions with the world around us." Does that imply that our true self is just who we are in the moment no matter where we are physically and internally? Seems like more of an escape rather than a defined answer. Is it when we are a newborn baby with no person to influence us? No, as at that period we have not developed enough cognitive abilities – our design forces us to focus on survival instead of exploring our own psyche. If so then one's purest form isn't when we were just born because our own conscious hasn't even fully developed yet, what else could it be? Think to why people based the assumption that "we are our purest form" off of when we are alone in the first place. It's because we act differently in front of people and when we are in solitude. As mentioned previously, we can be more

“genuine” but also selfish and *sinful* when we are alone because we are free from outer expectation. If our identity correlates to how we act, then what is the purest form of humanity with “pure” actions and thoughts? One might think that such a thing is impossible to exist in our world, and that would be correct. Our true selves are not of the world we live in, but when we are in Christ.

Scripture teaches us that we are not truly ourselves when we are disconnected from God. In fact, without Christ, we are not living as our true selves at all. We are fractured, broken by sin, and disconnected from the identity we were created to have as sons and daughters of God, as royal and holy priests. The Bible makes it clear that our true identity isn’t defined by the sum of our experiences, our roles, or our relationships alone, but is rooted in our relationship with God. In Ephesians Paul urges us to “put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires,” and “put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:22-24). This new self, the *true* self, is only possible through Christ. The self is not something we simply discover through introspection or isolation, rather, it is something we receive in Christ. Our true identity is not self-defined, but a gift of God’s grace who created us in His image and has now redeemed us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Without this transformation, we are simply living in the remnants of the old, sinful self, the version of us detached from the vision God has for us. As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” In this sense, our true self is found in union with Christ. Our identity is not defined by our inner world, our desires, or our experiences, but by our relationship with God. We are no longer slaves to sin or driven by the expectations of the

world; we are sons and daughters of the Highest, created for a purpose, and redeemed to live in that purpose. As we grow in our relationship with God, we become more fully who we were always meant to be. The fractured, sinful version of ourselves is gradually replaced by the image of Christ. *This* is the true self—the self that was always meant to reflect God’s love, grace, and righteousness.

If we simply base our identity off external influences and internal fluctuations, we are grappling with something that cannot be defined, and the “purest form of self” from that basis is too extreme to be even considered as a “self.” Our ancestors left their purest form of identity when they committed the first sin and was cast out Eden. Our intended identity is fractured by sin, and only in Christ can we find our true place as sons and daughters of God. Only when we are anchored in Christ can we experience the fullness of who we are meant to be. Our true self is not defined by our past, our roles, or our inner world—it is defined by our relationship with God, who created us and is making us new. The very existence of sin is to rid things that are pure, thus when we are cut from Christ and living in sin, we are impure, and therefore we aren’t the most ourselves no matter if we are alone or with others. “The most ourselves” cannot exist in our sinful world; only in Christ can we become the purest version of ourselves.