

BE REAL

BECAUSE FAKE
IS EXHAUSTING

RICK BEZET



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To the New Life Church family.

Thank you for being all in, for faithfully and sacrificially serving the church, for leading others to Jesus, and for continuing to challenge each other to grow both personally and relationally.

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FOREWORD

For a big portion of my life, I tried to be who I thought others wanted me to be. To my teachers, I was the “good student.” To my parents, I was a “good boy.” To my college teammates, I was the “good athlete.” To my party friends, I was a “good time.”

But as hard as I tried to fool others, I wasn’t fooling God, and I wasn’t fooling myself.

Leadership genius John Maxwell defines success as when those who know you best, love and respect you the most. It was a sobering day when I admitted that those who knew me the least, loved and respected me the most. Those who knew me best . . . well, no one knew the real me but me. No one knew me better than I knew myself. And not only did I not love or respect myself—I couldn’t stand myself.

Thankfully, after years of living solely for what others thought, I met the grace of God through Christ in a real and profound way. Instead of trying to live *for* the approval of others, I learned to live *from* the approval of God. And that new life and identity changed everything in my relationships, family, and leadership.

If you haven’t noticed, faking it is exhausting. And sadly, our culture is silently training us to do just that. Our friends’ lives look

more exciting on Instagram and Facebook, so we have to work extra hard to measure up—or at least look like we are.

Recently I read an article that said social media is the newest and biggest driving force of personal discontentment. Everyone else’s life looks more fun, more exciting, more fulfilling. While our friends are at the beach, or party, or mall, or ball game, we are stuck in class, or at work, or at home alone. One person summarized the problem by explaining that we are looking at everyone else’s “highlight reels” and comparing them to our “behind the scenes.” No wonder we feel inadequate. No wonder we put on a show.

Without knowing it, we are becoming consumed with the approval of others. We’re infatuated with what others say about us online. We’re obsessed with what people think about us. The problem? Becoming obsessed with what others think about us is the quickest way to forget what God thinks about us!

It’s time to get real—because being fake is way too exhausting. And that’s where Rick Bezet comes in.

I need to be honest with you before I continue: I’m a massive Rick Bezet fan. I love his ministry. I love his family. And I love him as a friend. Why do I love him so much?

Because Rick is the real deal.

The fact that I have to qualify that Rick is the real deal is sad, but we live in a skeptical culture. When we see someone succeeding, many wonder what they are *really* like. Are they the same person behind closed doors as they are in public? Are they really a jerk? Or selfish? Or arrogant? Our skepticism is really just a reflection of our own flaws. The reason we often wonder if others are real is because we know that we’re often fake.

The good news is, there is a better way to live. And Rick is the best person I know to lead us on a journey toward personal authenticity and transparency. If you ever interact with Rick in person, you will be struck by his confidence. Don’t get me wrong. He isn’t cocky in the least. He is simply assured. He knows who he is and

would never try to be someone he isn't. Rick is who God made him to be.

That's one of the many reasons so many people love to learn from Rick and benefit greatly from his ministry. As a pastor, teacher, and mentor to thousands, Rick has the unique ability to simultaneously instruct and encourage. His teaching is practical. His stories are inspiring. And his personality is just plain fun.

When you read the words in this book, you'll feel like you're listening to a close friend who loves you and wants the best for you. But let me warn you, Rick won't pull any punches. He's straightforward, direct, and challenging when necessary. And I totally believe God will use Rick's words to empower you to stop faking it and become who God says you are.

So get ready for some gut-wrenching self-examination. Rick will help you discover the powerful truth: You can't please everyone—but you can please God! Instead of living for the approval of people, you can live from the approval of God.

It's time to be real—because fake is exhausting.

Craig Groeschel

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Michelle—Thank you for being the kind of wife anybody could be married to. I’m glad I’m the one who is! I couldn’t have learned half of what’s in this book without you!

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Dad, Richard Bezet—Thanks for passing on a great sense of humor! You taught me how to have fun and not take myself too seriously.

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Larry Stockstill—Thanks for being my pastor for so many years. You are such a model to me, and I’ve learned so much from being around you.

INTRODUCTION

It's Time to Get Real

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

1 John 4:18

I'm usually not a big fan of reality TV shows, but my viewing habits changed a few years ago when one of our church's worship leaders became a finalist on *American Idol*. Kris Allen had always impressed me for two reasons: his incredible vocal talent, which was suddenly being showcased in front of millions of viewers, and his amazing humility and genuine faith. Okay, I guess that's three reasons!

Kris is the real deal, but I'll be honest—I didn't think he would win the entire competition. On the other hand, our worship director, Brandon, told me as soon as he heard Kris was auditioning that Kris would win *American Idol*. Now, none of us doubted Kris's amazing voice, but still we wondered if he could survive the intensity of competing against thousands of other hopeful stars and being criticized by Simon Cowell.

We weren't surprised when Kris passed his audition with flying colors and shouted, "I'm going to Hollywood!" Our church immediately began encouraging, supporting, and praying for Kris. As the weeks went by, he sailed through each round of cuts and made it to the top ten. When the top ten became the final three and Kris was still standing, I started to think twice about Brandon's prophetic words!

His fan base sensed something different about him. It wasn't just his great voice and his ability to fuse different musical styles that appealed to viewers. That same humble spirit and authenticity that we'd seen in Kris for years at our church came through every time he performed. People loved his easygoing personality and natural stage presence. They liked how comfortable and confident he seemed without being cocky. He seemed, well, *real*. And that was a breath of fresh air in an industry where everyone is trying to be flashy and the one with the most stage spunk is the one who takes home the bacon.

Finally, it was down to only three. Before the semifinal, Kris came home, with cameras following his every move, and the towns of Little Rock and Conway—really, the whole state of Arkansas—went nuts. He was a hometown boy hitting the big time, and we were all pumped for him. Kris took it all in stride. He was now a star regardless of the outcome, but he hadn't changed a bit.

For the final performance show, Brandon and I and some others from our church flew out to Hollywood. I've never experienced so much hype, excitement, and sheer adrenaline in one place! Kris was up against Adam Lambert, whose theatrical glam rocker style was sort of a cross between Boy George and KISS. At the beginning of the finale, host Ryan Seacrest summed up the differences between the two perfectly: "the acoustic rocker versus the glam rocker, Conway versus California, the guy next door versus the guyliner."

Even though Kris gave an amazing final performance, I still wasn't sure he could win. Maybe I was afraid for him if he did win. Kris had just gotten married, and I didn't know how a new couple could handle the hype that goes with instant fame and celebrity. Kris was a

down-to-earth dude with his feet solidly on the ground—a talented guy with a great voice who just happened to end up competing down to the wire on *American Idol*.

JUST FAKE IT

As you probably know, Kris *did* win! And I couldn't have been happier for him. He handled winning with class and grace, just like he'd handled everything else. And I can testify to the fact that winning hasn't changed Kris one bit. He's still the rock-solid guy who loves his wife, Katy, and proclaims his love for God in the way he lives his life.

It was especially refreshing to see someone as authentic as Kris win and be appreciated for who he is. I think all of us want that kind of acceptance. Maybe not the kind that comes from winning *American Idol*, but the kind of personal confidence that comes from knowing you're fulfilling your destiny, doing exactly what God created you to do. The kind that comes from feeling free to be yourself and not having to worry about what everyone around you thinks. The kind of acceptance that comes from knowing you don't have to be a people pleaser, someone faking it so that others will like you.

Unfortunately, I don't see most people experiencing this kind of freedom to be real—and that ticks me off! Most of us struggle to live up to our full potential and be who God made us to be. We have so many forces pulling us to be what they want us to be instead of who we really are. Our culture today has become jaded and cynical about taking anything, or anyone, at face value.

Politicians are willing to say anything to get a vote. Advertisers will promote anything to maximize profit. Employees will do anything to get ahead, including manipulating data and backstabbing co-workers, and their own bosses may even pressure them to do so. Everywhere we turn we find people wearing masks and faking life to get ahead or just get by.

But being fake not only exhausts us but also takes us even farther away from who we really are and what we truly long for. Despite

Despite whatever appearances we work to maintain, we can't fool God.

whatever appearances we work to maintain, we can't fool God. He knows our hearts better than we know them ourselves, including all our secret thoughts, impure desires, and petty emotions.

And he still loves us! He wants us to be real with him. In fact, he *requires* it if we're going to be in relationship with him.

REAL HONESTY

This may sound crazy to you, but I grew up hearing stories like this, so it's normal to me. My friend Thibodeaux was struggling with being honest about who he was—well, maybe it was about how smart he wasn't. Boudreaux and Thibodeaux once were applying for the same job, and the interviewer said, "I can only hire one of you, and whoever scores highest on this test gets the job." After thirty minutes they handed in the test. The interviewer examined them and replied, "You guys scored the exact same on the test. Boudreaux, you get the job." Thibodeaux was furious and demanded to know why his friend got the job if the scores were exactly the same. The interviewer answered, "Because on question number 11, Boudreaux answered, 'I don't know,' and you wrote, 'Me neither.'"

We all say we want to get real, but you can't be real if you're not willing to be honest—totally honest about your struggles, doubts, and failures. God loves it when we approach him this way. He can handle it! If you don't do this, if you're not honest, you'll continue playing games and worrying about what others think of you, and a year from now you could be in the same place you are today. If your desire is to be real, then this book is for you.

Maybe you have come to believe that disguising your feelings and thoughts is the only way to be safe and accepted. It could be that you have become good at faking it. You might even be convinced that it's essential to your success in your relationships, your career, or even your ministry. You've bought into the lie that no one would like, love, or trust you if they really knew who you are and the mistakes you've made. And this lie is killing you. It's stunting your growth and keeping you away from the people you would like to be close to in the first place.

Only a fool looks into the mirror and forgets what he looks like when he goes away (see James 1:23–25 Message). Yet time after time we intentionally walk away and forget because we don't like what we see. And we certainly don't want others to see it. So we've become good at faking it, at creating a mask to cover up the real person we are. Then again, maybe we haven't become so good at it after all! When you stop and think about how many depressed, unhappy, angry, and discontented people you know, you realize maybe we're not fooling anyone by faking it.

Jesus came to bring us the good news that we don't have to fake it. We can be real. God accepts us exactly where we are but loves us too much to leave us there. Can you imagine what your life would be like if you were totally free to be real—all the time? Can you imagine how free you would feel if you could just be yourself and trust others to choose to accept you for who you are? Can you imagine how rested, relaxed, and contented you would be if you didn't have to worry about faking it all the time?

What would it be like if you could walk through life without faking it every day? Can this be done? Can you imagine that it could?

**God accepts us
exactly where we are
but loves us too much
to leave us there.**

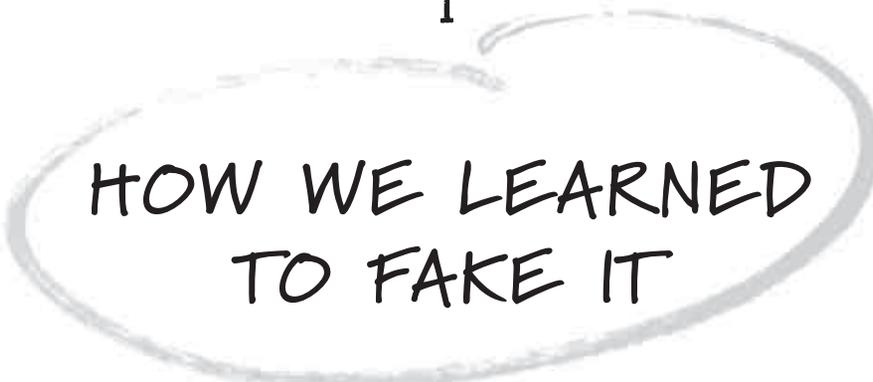
- What if you lived in total honesty with your family?
- What if you had people in your life whom you could tell anything to?
- What if you really believed God loves you no matter what?
- What if you were free to love others like that?
- What if you knew being authentic wouldn't come back to bite you?

This book will give you a map for a better way to live—a more honest and biblical way. The goal is to live a fully integrated life, a life that's stripped of pretense and masks, a life that's uniquely your own and uncommonly real. Not real as our world defines it but real as God, the author of reality, defines it. Living this way doesn't mean that you will be an open book to everyone around you; that would be foolish. But you can learn to live the kind of genuine life that enables you to overcome every fear and false belief and to love others as Christ commands us.

You know there's more to life. It's time to discover the fullness of who you really are and the freedom of living the life God calls you to. If you're tired of settling for less than God's best, then it's time to stop being fake.

If you want to be real, read on.

1



HOW WE LEARNED
TO FAKE IT

Coming Clean with Yourself



I'm living proof that God has a sense of humor. Considering how much I love being a pastor, it's funny to think about how much I used to hate going to church. My childhood church accidentally taught me many lessons about being real—mostly through negative reinforcement. Fakeness was clearly required before walking through the door, and even though as a kid I couldn't quite put my finger on why, I knew how drained I felt at the end of every service. Church was only an hour and a half long, but it seemed to last the entire Sunday.

The fact that my parents actively played along with the church game didn't help. Their marriage was filled with arguments, disagreements, and more tension than you can imagine. At home, it was like wars and rumors of war! However, when we walked into that church building each week, it was as if a silent switch had been flipped. Our parents gave us kids a look that said, "You'd better play along. Smile, put on the mask, and say all the right things. Do not let anyone know the truth about our family."

And we weren't the only ones. I remember a family that always sat in the same seats in front of us. (Actually, *everyone* sat in the same seats every week.) This family had it all together. I would often find myself wishing that our family was genuinely loving and kind like that family. I wished my parents loved each other like they did. I wished I could have sat still and paid attention like their kids did.

Sadly enough, years later I found out that more terrible things were going on in that home than I thought possible in *any* home: molestation, adultery, physical abuse, bankruptcy, and drug addiction. They were delivering Academy Award-winning performances,

because apparently you had to fake it to attend that church. The last thing you ever wanted to do was let anyone know that you were struggling. You had to put on your polite Christian mask, nodding at the right times in the sermon and saying the right things when anyone asked how you were doing.

JOY, JOY, JOY

My Sunday school teacher was no better and seemed to delight in tormenting those of us in her class. As a kid, I hated church and often begged not to go—because of her. I *still* freak out when I think about her! She was the meanest person ever to suck air on the planet and seemed to have it in for me in particular. Even though I was only eight years old, she would tell me, “Bezet, you are going to hell someday.” She talked about hell like she was born and raised in hell. She would ask, “Don’t you want to go to heaven?” And I would say, “Not if you’re going to be there, I don’t.”

One Sunday she was teaching on the Ten Commandments and mentioned never to take the Lord’s name in vain. Without thinking, I blurted out, “Gaw-lee!” She stopped her lesson in midsentence, turned directly to me, and asked very slowly, “What did you just say?” I answered with a quieter “golly” this time. She stared at me with her dark, stone-cold eyes, pointed at me with a knobby finger, and said, “Hell is hot, Bezet! Hell is hot! Hot! HOT!” Can you imagine anyone talking to a child that way and expecting them to discover the joy of the Lord?

In fact, we seemed to sing a lot of songs about joy in that church, but the sour looks on everyone’s faces didn’t match the words they sang. We’d sing, “I’ve got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart!”

And everyone shouted, “Where?”

“Down in my heart,” they answered.

“Where?”

“Down in my heart!”

Asking “Where is our joy?” was the most authentic thing that happened at church. We kept asking but never got a real answer.

THE “GOOD” PASTOR

As a result of my painful church experience growing up, I determined many times that I would never be a fake. As a young adult, I pursued a career as a pro golfer, all the while continuing to search for authentic faith in the one true God. My search was rewarded, and I soon sensed the Lord calling me into full-time—and nonfake—ministry. Some of my youthful enthusiasm and lost hope were restored. That is, until I entered Bible school and discovered that to be a “good pastor,” you had to fake it.

Some of the professors and ministry leaders teaching the classes made it clear, directly and indirectly, that as pastors we must always look strong, happy, and in control. No matter what our circumstances or what we are feeling, pastors should always act as though our marriages are happy, our finances are in order, our prayer lives are strong, and we are full of joy! They told us, “If you let people see what’s going on inside of you, we will all lose our anointing.” Really? Taking their word for it at the time, I bought into a “don’t rock the anointing” kind of faith.

But I found myself just as weary, angry, and frustrated as I’d been as a kid in my mean Sunday school teacher’s class. I remember thinking, “I can’t live this way. I hate living this way! I’m not going to have any friends. I’m going to be lonely and weird, but I will have to fake it and act like I’m *not* lonely and weird for the rest of my life.” I would argue back and forth with some of the teachers about this: “Why can’t we be real? Why can’t we be honest? Why can’t we get close to people?” When I would ask these questions, the other students in the room would cringe and look at me like I’d lost my

mind. Eventually, they'd just roll their eyes as if to say, "There he goes again."

After hearing the same canned response over and over, I began to take their word for it. I stuffed my feelings and assumed that I just expected too much, that I simply hadn't grown strong enough to display faith in fakeness. Soon I married a woman I loved and started my first year of ministry. Maybe this could work out after all.

"JUST SHUT UP"

I quickly realized it was impossible to minister this way while at the same time struggling in my new marriage with Michelle. We fought all the time. The Bible says don't go to bed with anger in your heart (see Eph. 4:26), so I was staying awake for days at a time! (Okay, that may not be what that verse means.) We felt isolated and secluded because we had no one to talk to or support us. In no time, I became the very thing I swore I would never be: a fake Christian. The results were a bad marriage with no one to tell about it and a ministry that I resented.

During this season of our lives, I was invited to preach at a large church nearby. It was a big deal to me because I had never preached to that many people before. The added stress sent me over the top. Michelle and I had the biggest fight we'd had since we'd been married. She ticked me off, and I yelled back at her, "SHUT UP! JUST SHUT UP!"

She simply stared at me and started crying, but I didn't have time to talk with her about it. I had a sermon to prepare. And I certainly didn't have a friend to call. Meanwhile, Michelle was crying louder and louder in the other room. I felt worse and worse, so I went in there to ask for forgiveness. It took a while, but she forgave me and we made up. I even felt proud of myself for fixing the problem. Then

I went back into the other room to finish my sermon, and that's when I heard the Lord speak to me.

Now, before I tell you what the Lord spoke to me, let me say, I don't hear God very well at times. But this time it was crystal clear. And what he said changed my life. He said, "I forgive you, and so does your wife, but I want you to tell the whole church what you said to her." I remember thinking, "God, I can't do that! You don't know how this works. Lord, you need to go to Bible school! They will clear this up for you *immediately*. This is *not* how you do ministry."

Unsettled by God's message, I decided to change the subject of my sermon. I didn't want to go anywhere near forgiveness or anything that would require transparency on my part. But then—you guessed it—I got up there to preach, and it wasn't working out so well! Nothing made sense. Nobody was responding. Nobody was tracking with me. They just stared at me. I couldn't make a point. I couldn't even finish a sentence. In fact, it was so bad that I finally stopped preaching, turned directly to the people, and said, "This sermon isn't going so well, is it?" It seemed to me like they all answered back simultaneously, "No, it's not!"

At that moment, I started getting real. I closed my Bible and took a deep breath. With Michelle in the front row, I said, "The reason this sermon isn't going so well is because I had a bad day." I then told them about my fight with my wife, hearing the Lord's voice—all the details. I looked at Michelle, and in front of all those people, I sincerely asked her to forgive me. She was shocked, but I felt the anointing of God on me.

You must remember, I had first thought that if I talked this way—that if I opened up and became real and honest—I would be finished for good as a pastor. I honestly thought it would be the last time I'd ever speak in public. *Ever*. I was wrong. In a weird way, I was born again that day. I started over. I thank God for that moment still, and I've kept my promise to him to never turn back to faking it again.

THE REAL THING

It's important for you to realize that being real is not just for Rick Bezet and a few select others. No, it is for you as well. God wants all of us to be real. And as we'll see, he would prefer that we be messed-up people with tender hearts rather than perfect fakers who think they don't need him. God never asked anyone to follow him and be anything other than who he made them to be.

Consider who Jesus, the Son of God, chose to be his closest friends and confidants. It was an earthy, working-class group of fishermen and average joes, not the religious leaders and Jewish elite. He wanted people who were willing to be real, not people who appeared to have it all together. He came for the sick, the broken, the desperate, the hungry, and the heartbroken. The people pretending to have their lives together didn't want to hear what Jesus had to say because they didn't want to be real. They couldn't bear the thought of being just like everyone else—sinners dependent on the love and mercy of God for their lives.

Even though Jesus was godly (God is godly!), the ungodly loved to be around him. And even though he was holy (God is holy!), the unholy wanted to hang out with him!

But those who thought they were godly and thought they were holy? They hated him! What's up with that? And did the fishermen and the average joes want to hang out with the ones who only *thought* they were holy? Certainly not.

The early church was known for being a group of people who were real. In Acts 2, Peter preached an extremely bold message, accusing the Jews of being the ones who crucified the Lord. Even where I come from, that's pretty brave! However, something he said caused

God would prefer that we be messed-up people with tender hearts rather than perfect fakers who think they don't need him.

the Jews to realize he was right, and they responded with the most genuine words: “When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’” (Acts 2:37).

That day three thousand people got saved, and the early church was born. It never would have happened if the Jews had kept to their tradition. They got real, and it changed the world! And this was just the beginning. You can see that the life they lived together was genuine as well:

Every day they *continued to meet together* in the temple courts. They broke bread *in their homes* and ate together with *glad and sincere hearts*, praising God and *enjoying the favor of all the people*. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:46–47, emphasis added)

Look at the words that describe this group: *meeting together, in homes, glad, sincere, praising, enjoying, favor with people*. Imagine that—a growing church with new people being drawn in by the love, sincerity, and gratitude of its members! Isn’t this the kind of place where you want to be? It sure is for me, and it’s the kind of church I try to lead. My old childhood church didn’t act like this. Some in my Bible school didn’t teach this. But I made a decision that I wouldn’t settle for anything less. And you shouldn’t either!

KID STUFF

Maybe you grew up in a church similar to mine and knew something wasn’t right. People seemed to be saying and singing one thing and doing and being another. I’m convinced that kids are the very best at recognizing fakeness. They sense when someone is genuine, and even if they can’t articulate it, they know when the adults around them are hypocrites.

Because of my passion for being real and helping others be real before God and each other, I pay special attention to the kids in our church. I want them to learn that they can be real and know God. I want them to see genuine faith in action—not just a bunch of talk and phony-baloney. After a recent Sunday service, I was teasing a kid in the church foyer. He was laughing uncontrollably at everything I said. This went on for several minutes. He started pulling on my thumb, so I teased him a little more. I gave him a hard time and he gave me a hard time. Finally, his father came over to get him, and the boy immediately turned and said, “Dad, I just love this man!”

We all cracked up in the moment, but driving home that day, I was struck by the innocence of his comment. He didn’t stop to think about whether or not he *should* say it. He didn’t think about what he could gain from me by saying it. He didn’t calculate how much I’d appreciate and remember him for saying it. He was just in the moment, and he went for it—“Dad, I just love this man!” This kid is young, he’s innocent, and he’s real!

Being real is natural for kids, and they notice when adults are real and when they’re faking it. When we grow older, however, and especially after we’ve been a Christian for a long time, we tend to begin to cultivate a mask. I’m sorry to say that many people, instead of becoming more welcoming and more concerned for others, drift to a style of Christianity that few could find attractive. Fake becomes their default setting. Real becomes something that seems too scary, too vulnerable, too unnerving. The result may be that we lose our childlike faith.

Maybe at this point you think I’m being too tough on people who fake it. Perhaps you think that Jesus wouldn’t feel this way. If you believe that is true, then I would ask you to reconsider the New Testament, particularly the conversations Jesus had with religious leaders of the day.

Jesus spent a lot of his time pointing out the fakeness of the Pharisees and scholars around him. He repeatedly and consistently used

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harsh language and bold, direct confrontations to get their attention. Check out Matthew 23, an entire chapter of dialogue Jesus directed at the Pharisees and other religious leaders. After you read it, you may actually think I'm too mild in my approach!

Now Jesus turned to address his disciples, along with the crowd that had gathered with them. "The religion scholars and Pharisees are competent teachers in God's Law. You won't go wrong in following their teachings on Moses. But be careful about following them. *They talk a good line, but they don't live it.* They don't take it into their hearts and live it out in their behavior. *It's all spit-and-polish veneer.*" (Matthew 23:1–3 Message, emphasis added)

I suspect many of these same people started out sincere but got caught up in the politics and fakeness that can easily invade our religious culture. They became so concerned with being better than everyone else that they forgot how to be real.

TELL THE TRUTH

How about you—do you feel like you're able to be real about who you are and what you struggle with? Do you feel like you've made many mistakes in life? Big mistakes? Some people who think they are perfect may say, "Not many." Let me just say right here, if you think you're perfect, then most people probably don't like being around you. *You* may not even like being around you. If you don't think you have an issue, that is your issue!

Consider this: it's tough to be married to someone who thinks they're perfect. Or work with them. Or do business with them. Or

be their friend. That's because people who think they're perfect are constantly working to prove that—to themselves and everybody else. But it takes a lot of energy to do that. At the end of the day, they're exhausted, and they don't even know why, because in the process of deceiving everybody else, the person they've most successfully deceived is themselves. Deep down, we all know we're not perfect, but in order to sustain the pretense, we have to master the art of deception.

Let me ask you: Have you ever lied before? A big fat lie? No? How about trying to make an impression on someone that was anything other than the naked truth? Any form of intentional deception is lying! If you're still saying no, there's a good chance you're lying to yourself right now. You might want to stop and think about why you picked up this book in the first place!

Here's another question: Have you ever stolen something? Oh, nothing? Not even an ink pen or supplies from your workplace? Have you ever borrowed something, like a book, meaning to give it back, but you know good and well it's still sitting on your shelf? What about when you were a kid? It all counts!

Have you ever found yourself taking God out of the center of your life and replacing him with money, success, a new boat, a better neighborhood, a promotion at work?

Do you ever procrastinate? (You may need to think about the answer to that one and get back to me sometime.)

Let's stop and think for a moment. You just admitted that you're a liar, a thief, and an idolater, and eventually you may even admit to being a procrastinator. A great way to begin a book on being real, don't you think?

I promise you this—I'm right there beside you. I've made plenty of mistakes in my life and will admit many of them throughout the pages that follow. I'll tell you some of the mistakes I've made in my marriage (besides telling Michelle to shut up!) as well as ways I've failed as a parent. In fact, what my wife and I have learned about

parenting is that even when you have the best of intentions, you still fail.

For instance, when our son was six years old, he was going around telling everyone at church that he was the pastor's son. He did this because, evidently, he was able to get extra cookies in children's church. When my wife found out he was doing this, she told him, "No, son, this is not the way we roll. You don't go around telling people you are the pastor's son in order to get something extra. You just tell people you're Tanner. That's good enough. Do you hear me?" He responded, "Yes ma'am!"

The next Sunday, a lady in the church asked him, "Aren't you the pastor's son?" Tanner thought about his dilemma for a minute, then said, "Well, I *thought* I was, but my mom said I'm *not*." (Tell me that won't stunt the growth of a church!) Talk about context making a difference in how the truth is told! This wasn't exactly a great way to impress visitors.

DRIFTING

Unlike my son, most of us know too well when we're putting a spin on the truth. We deliberately try to arrange the truth, or at least part of it, in a way that will make us look as good as possible. We may start out with good intentions but wind up bending the truth to protect ourselves or to get what we're after. A little white lie here, a little half-truth there, and soon it's a way of life. When we fake our way through life, we start out moving toward God but find ourselves drifting away. It's a subtle shift that carries us farther and farther away from our original intention of being real.

Have you ever drifted on the water on a lazy summer afternoon? There's nothing like it for a relaxing way to soak up the sun. Our family loves going on vacation to the beach. Ever since our kids were young, one of our favorite places to go has been the Florida coast,

especially Destin. One thing we love to do is to get on our rafts, floats, and boogie boards and ride the waves together.

One time many years ago, we were all out there, floating on the water, doing what Bezets do. After about thirty minutes or so, we looked back to the shore to find our chairs and umbrella, but we couldn't see them. Nothing looked the same—not only could I not find our stuff on the beach, but I didn't even see our condo. It was as if we had been plopped down on the shore of some alien planet where everything was sort of familiar but unrecognizable. We had drifted! Without us realizing it, while we were just playing in the water, the current caused us to end up in a place we didn't expect.

Drifting happens to everyone at some point. And without being anchored to the solid foundation of a genuine relationship with God, we'll continue to be tossed around like a piece of driftwood. Even the first couple on the planet had to deal with ending up in a place they didn't plan to be. Adam and Eve started out in the right place, but they drifted too. When they met, Adam was blown away by Eve's beauty, and they fell in love. They had it made! Adam was never late coming home from work. Eve never burnt any dinners. He was the most handsome man in the world, and she was the most beautiful woman. There were no marriage problems and no kids throwing fits. There were also no bills to pay and no shopping malls. Perfect! And there were no in-laws and no clothes either. Like I said, they had it made!

You may know the end of Adam and Eve's story. The Bible says they were full of shame and fear. In Genesis 3:10, Adam says to God, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

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They blew it, and then they did what comes naturally when people know they have sinned: they hid. And after that, they started faking it. They became embarrassed and ashamed, and they tried covering it all up instead of being real with God about what was going on. They went from walking with God in the cool of the evening to hiding and blaming each other. They went from the innocence of being naked and unashamed to crouching behind fig leaves to hide the bare-naked truth of their disobedience against God.

COMING CLEAN

Like our original parents, Adam and Eve, somewhere along the way we lost our ability to be totally real. It may be more complicated and our fig leaves may have designer labels on them, but we're still doing the same basic thing today. We're hiding. We're lying. We're covering up the truth. We're not being real.

But, my friend, we don't have to live this way! Jesus paid a huge price for you to come out of hiding and walk in the cool of the evening with him again. When we cling to behaviors like shame, fakeness, hiding, and blaming others, it's only because we forget what we have in the gift of Christ.

On the one hand, we know that we have him, including all access to the Father and his loving-kindness and mercy. But on the other hand, we act like Adam and Eve, who lost all innocence and were forced out of the Garden. They had no idea of the atonement that would soon be available to them.

But Jesus has reopened the door to intimacy with God. We don't have to stay trapped in our own efforts and shameful cover-ups. Because of Christ, now we're only trapped when we don't allow God access to our lives. Hebrews 10:22 tells us, "Draw near to God with a sincere heart." When we draw near to him—when we get real with God—he draws close to us and holds us as his beloved children.

And guess what? In the process of becoming real, not only does God draw us close to him, but he also pulls friends around us who can be there for us as well. I have a lot of great friends who speak truth into my life at different levels. But two of them—Chris Hodges and my brother, Randy Bezet—I simply can't do without. They check on me and I check on them. We're honest with each other about what's going on in our lives. These two know me so well that when I walk in the room, they know if I am off my game, and they call me out if they have to. I'll talk more about how crucial it is to have friends later in the book, but I want you to know up front how important this is to me.

Maybe you also started out right and then somehow ended up in a place where you are now faking it. My hope is that reading this book can be a turning point for you. That you'll do some honest soul searching. That you won't feel your life is so fragmented by trying to be all things to all people and losing yourself in the process.

As you continue to give God more room in the mix of your life, you'll discover that living in freedom from fear in your relationships is much more fun than being addicted to the approval of others. You'll find courage that you didn't even know you had as you relate to others right where you are (and right where *they* are). You'll break the vicious cycle of hiding, being exposed, then hiding again. God made you to be real and to be free. That's what I'm talking about!