

# FAKER

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How to live for real when you're  
tempted to fake it

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# Introduction



Have you ever felt like a *faker*?

I have.

I've felt like no one in the world knew who I was. I've felt like I had to be someone I'm not. I've felt like, no matter who I was, no one would care.

I've felt alone. I've felt like I was living with a mask. And I've seen others wearing masks, too. Maybe you've looked around your work or school and thought: "What are we all doing? Why are we all trying to impress each other? Why can't anyone accept me for who I am?"

If you feel that way, you're not alone. This book is, in a lot of ways, about my time through high-school and college. It's about feeling like I was living on a roller coaster, panicking about everyone's opinion of me, all the time. It's about feeling like I had to live a double—no, triple—life just to keep up.

If you've ever felt any of those things, I'm with you. I want to talk with you. I want to introduce you to the journey I took that changed my life forever.

And I want to show you through a simple story Jesus told, 2,000 years ago.

If that sounds like something you want, read on.



*To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'*

*"But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'*

*"I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."*

*Luke 18 v 9-14*







## Chapter One:

# The problem with being a wallflower

"I'm Tony Stark. I build neat stuff, got a great girl, occasionally save the world. So why can't I sleep?"

Tony Stark, *Iron Man 3*

I only made one good impression during my first year of school in Toledo, and that was in Ronny B's gut. He called me a name, so I punched him. After that, my family moved three hours north to a magical land called Michigan. There, I hoped to make a name for myself. In fact, I had a name in mind: "Crazy Nick", as in: "Who, him? Oh yeah, that's Nick McDonald, but we call him CRAZY Nick."

So before Scott, my new Michigan neighbor, arrived on the doorstep, I threw myself upside-down in a toy-box. It was my simple way of saying: "I'm crazy. See?"

But after an hour, the plastic Ninja Turtle sword prodding my forehead felt like it was leaving a permanent mark. So I stood up, and Scott walked in, staring at me like I was the purple-faced



mop-headed Muppet I was. I did look crazy—the kind of crazy that makes people say: “I wonder if he takes his meds—let’s lock our front doors.”

A year later, I decided to quit the “Crazy Nick” campaign for a nickname. I went with “Butterball,” not knowing it was a term for “well-fed” fellows like me... I just knew it was my favorite brand of turkey.

The kids on the playground laughed. A few years later, I got the joke.

From my first years in school, I had instinctively known the truth about life: **If I wanted to get ahead, I had to be a faker.** The only difference was, back then, I wasn’t good at it.

## The ease of faking it

In our social-media-saturated world, it’s easy to be fake. We hand-select what we want people to know about us. For example, I have yet to post *Facebook* photos of me blowing my nose, sitting on the toilet, or glaring at *YouTube* videos of cat birthday parties.

In fact, I’ve never posted a status about what I’m actually doing: looking at *Facebook*. What would I even say? “Totes staring at other people’s lives right now. SUPER jelly. Spending the weekend alone. LOL.” Here are things I’d rather have posted about me:

- Great jokes I made
- Profound quotes I found
- Fun times with besties

It’s the same with *Instagram*, *Twitter*, *Tumblr*, etc. I’ve never instagrammed a “C” on a math test. As far as I remember, I’ve never tweeted: “I just told a joke. No one laughed.” Looking at my life through



social-media lenses, you'd think I had it all. And that's exactly what I want you to think.

But sometimes I wonder: **"What would people think if they really knew me?"**

## The pressure of faking it

I grew up in the church, which is what you might call a faker breeding ground. There, I learned to slick my hair to the side and regurgitate answers to Bible questions. It's easier than you might think:

"Kids, what has four wheels, drives down the highway, and blares a siren during emergencies?"

"JESUS!"

"No, but YOUNG MAN, YOU HAVE A HEART FOR THE LORD."

The music director at my church dubbed me "Smiling Nick," because that's all I ever did. I showed up. I smiled. I left.

My friends called me "Frank Rizzo." It was the name I used to make prank calls. Frank made sex jokes, racial jokes, cussing jokes, smoking jokes, drinking jokes, and religion jokes. I thought it was okay to be "Frank Rizzo," because he was imaginary. Sort of.

But halfway through high school, I realized Frank Rizzo was getting more attention than I was. I was jealous. So, I started asking: "What would Frank do?" I snuck into movies, looked at raunchy pictures,



bought expensive clothes, and pulled pranks on kids who weren't like me.

Life was going swimmingly for Frank Rizzo. But it seemed like life wasn't going well for me.

At night, I'd lay on my bed, wondering: What if I couldn't be funny anymore? Or worse, what if I had to go on being funny forever? Or what if, by some freak accident, the world of Frank Nick and Smiling Nick collided and formed a black hole in my perfectly crafted universe, thus swallowing me whole along with the rest of humankind as we know it, plummeting us into an eternal abyss of confusion and mass chaos from which there was no recovery? What THEN, I ask you?

Maybe you feel the same way. Maybe you wonder to yourself:

"What if I stop getting straight A's?"

"What if, with two minutes left in the game, I flop?"

"What if they see me without my makeup?"

"What if the people at church find out?"

Maybe you feel like giving up. Maybe you just feel tired.

## The confusion of faking it

In my last two years of high-school, the pressure of being "Frank" overwhelmed me. I couldn't keep track of the stories I made up. My punch-lines got old. Before seeing friends, I felt like puking.

So, I quit.

I stopped making jokes. I became a wallflower. People asked me what was wrong with me, and I thought: "What's wrong with me? I don't know who I am." **I had been a human chameleon so long, I forgot what color I was.**

I didn't want to be a faker, but I didn't know what else to be. I was confused. I was alone.

So, I went back to my roots: I got religion.

## Coping with faking it

Religion, as I've said, is a pretty easy gig. I knew how to work the system. I went on mission trips. I served at camps. I read books. I bought Christian T-shirts. I listened to Christian music. I could've gone pro, if that was a thing. Sure, Jesus loved everybody. But he actually *liked* me!

Church people applauded me. My unchurched friends respected me. Home-school moms swooned. My pastor called me "Saint Nick." I thought I'd finally hit my stride—maybe this Jesus thing wasn't so bad after all.

But as time wore on, I began to feel something was missing. I didn't understand: I was doing all the right things. I was following all the rules. So why did I still feel so... fake? Why did I still go home and ask the same questions: "What if people really knew me? What would they think? What if people at church find out about my flaws?"

And then it hit me. The reason I felt fake being religious Nick was simple: I *wasn't* religious Nick.

Religion, for me, was a springboard to what I really wanted: applause, attractiveness, attention... for me. You might even say **religious Nick was Frank Nick with plastic surgery**. The only difference was, now people thought I loved Jesus.

I didn't. I didn't love anyone else, either. Maybe I should say it this way: I *couldn't*. It's pretty tough to love God or anyone when you're afraid they won't approve of you. And at the time, I was terrified.



## The fear that leads to faking it

I like the way Tony Stark put it at the beginning of the chapter, don't you? "I'm Tony Stark. I build neat stuff, got a great girl, occasionally save the world. So why can't I sleep?" On the surface, Stark is successful—he has everything. But he's haunted.

Throughout the movie, when things get tough, Stark turns to the one thing he can control: his mask, the Iron Man suit. And while it provides temporary comfort, slowly it begins to take over and destroy everything around him. He can't function without his mask.

I wonder if that's not so different from what you and I do, every day; we constantly pull away from who we are, because we're riddled with fear and personal guilt. We turn, again and again, to whatever "mask" we've created for ourselves—the Joker, the Smart Kid, the Athlete, the Fashionista. Even being a social outcast can become a mask—we start doing everything to "not be like the sell-outs," and so we stop being ourselves.

And we do it all because, deep down, we're afraid. What if the mask comes off? What if people knew what I know about me? What if the people who hate me are right, and the people who love me are wrong? What then?

And so **we interact with the world at a distance**; we're in a conversation with friends, but we keep slipping back to our iPhone. Why? We're afraid.

We've accumulated a massive list of friends and followers, but few have had dinner at our house. Why? We're afraid.

We'd rather calculate our words through text than talk



face to face. Why? Because you, me, all of us—we're terrified that people will see us.

And so life is an endless game of peekaboo.

But what if I told you there was a way out?



## A story for fakers

In AD 30, on the barren outskirts of Jerusalem, a man named Jesus told a story.

Some people were angry about this story, because it was part of Jesus' campaign to strip us—all of us—of our masks. Those people killed him.

Other people heard, and their hearts burned within them. That fire extended outward, charring away their masks, and spreading into an explosive, authentic community that turned the world upside down (Acts 17 v 6).

I am praying for you, as I write. I am praying you would be free from your mask. I am praying you would find that community.

I am praying you would **turn the world upside down**.