

“Rod Tucker is asking us to be honest—honest about things like sexuality and poverty, but most of all about ourselves. In American evangelicalism we’ve been schooled in disguise and learned how to hide. *Uncovered* dares us to view Christian discipleship as a journey into honesty—an honesty where healing can happen. I very much appreciate Tucker’s vision for a more honest church.”

Brian Zahnd, author of *Beauty Will Save the World* and
lead pastor of Word of Life Church, St. Joseph, Missouri

“In *Uncovered*, Rod Tucker describes why discipleship is about learning not to lie. Drawing on personal experience and illuminating readings of Scripture, Tucker invites the reader on a journey ‘into the light,’ where being in the light is about persistent honesty rather than sinless perfection. This book is written with a pastor’s heart, challenging the many ways in which we distort the church and the gospel in order to protect ourselves from the terrifying, healing light of truth.”

Kent Dunnington, author of *Addiction and Virtue:
Beyond the Models of Disease and Choice*
(Strategic Initiatives in Evangelical Theology)

“Raw. Gritty. Naked. Courageous. Bold. Creative. Refreshing. . . . Although the topics throughout the book are indeed heavy, Rod’s writing style is refreshingly creative and smothered in grace. . . . It is a must-read for all in church leadership. It is a must-read for all seeking more freedom. It is a must-read for all bound by religion. It is a must-read for all who want to know more of Jesus.”

Rob Link, author of *Pulse*, *King of Rascals*, and *Rascals* and
lead pastor of The River Church, Kalamazoo, Michigan

“Rod Tucker has a unique perspective—and the bold confidence to proclaim it: Though the church values honesty, she and her members do a poor job at modeling it. . . . Don’t miss Tucker’s brilliant letter to the church of North America, as the apostle Paul might have written it.”

Peter DeHaan, publisher, author, blogger

Uncovered

The Truth about Honesty and Community

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ROD TUCKER

 Kregel
Publications

Uncovered: The Truth about Honesty and Community

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*To Beautiful Anna Joy.
You are the most amazing bride I could
have ever imagined.*

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Prologue

HOMELESS IN THE PARK

Greg was visiting a fund-raiser for the homeless. It was a brisk fall afternoon at a park in the middle of the city in which he lived, and a large number of churches were participating. The smell of cold weather approaching was prevalent. Each church was raising money and, at the end of the day, would pool their funds with the other churches in an effort to fight homelessness for the winter in Greg's city. Everyone was wearing bright yellow T-shirts to show they were all on the same team, that they were combating homelessness together. That is, everyone except Greg in his denim jacket and black jeans.

As he walked through the crowd Greg could see the busy people scurrying about, encouraging each other in their passionate endeavors to bring change to this fallen world. The people were incredibly focused on what they were doing, fighting homelessness, and very little was able to distract them from the goals of the day. Not even Greg.

As he moved through the sea of people, they spread apart as if he were Moses himself commanding the waves to separate so he might pass. Not one of them looked him in the eye, not one of them said

hello, not one of them noticed Greg's existence as a human being in their midst. A human being made in the image of God. The people were too busy. They only saw themselves. And the irony of it all was that Greg was one of the homeless for whom these people said they were fighting. But as he passed, he went unacknowledged, unaccepted, and unseen.

When I first heard Greg's story from my friends as we were eating dinner in downtown Kalamazoo, Michigan, I laughed. But when Tim and Ellen assured me the story was very real, I was shaken. Tim and Ellen were there and they had witnessed Greg's experience. They were not part of the fund-raising event itself, but as they observed the phenomenon of a homeless man invisibly passing through a church crowd so consumed by its own ministry, they became enraged by the injustice that was occurring. My friends were angry. Greg was hurt.

He did meet eyes with Tim and Ellen for an instant. Greg looked at them and they looked back as if to apologize for all the hurt that others' good intentions had caused him. They were the only people who had noticed him in the crowd. Ellen told me afterward she had the sense that Greg was like Jesus. We talked about the idea that maybe what the people in the crowd that day really missed out on, by not acknowledging Greg, was quite possibly the God who had taken the time to come into their presence, to be with them. But because they were so caught up in themselves, and attempting to be "better Christians" by doing what they felt was ministry, they never noticed Him walking in their midst.

This idea comes from Matthew 25:31–46, where we read that upon Jesus' second return He will separate the nations by showing how

He in fact was the hungry, thirsty, and naked of the world. Some people welcomed Him into their lives and others did not. To those who did, Jesus claims to know them, and to those who did not, He says, "Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me." The reasons to welcome or not welcome Jesus into one's life may vary, but the idea that Jesus is the hurting person in these people's lives is unavoidable.

Isn't that quite the story? The God of the universe comes to our world, walks among us, and we do not even notice He is here. I wonder how this story ends. For now, it is the story of people who have become so caught up in themselves that they cannot see past their own reflection in a mirror. This is the story of people who do not love because they are blind to the broken who pass by without rest, without comfort, and without grace. This is our story.

In the pages that follow, you will find more of the problem of dishonesty and living in the dark, and you will be invited into a deeper conversation as to how we can become communities that engage the kingdom of God authentically through honesty. My hope is that as you read this book, you will be inspired to live a life of honesty . . . and in doing so find the grace and freedom to engage the hurting of this world who go unnoticed.

Before we get going, let me first tell you a failing of mine. Several years ago I noticed, as you probably did too, that people began surgically injecting themselves with plastic-like substances to appear more beautiful. After they had done this they were still the same, but their hope apparently was that people's perception of them might change. Maybe people would see them as more sexually attractive. Maybe others would desire them in more ways than

they had before surgery. The bottom line was that there was a twisting of reality. The fake overwhelmed the real. I watched as this mentality overtook the media and had us all wanting to appear different, wanting to seem better, even if we knew it was fake. This way of thinking had become so much larger than plastic surgery. It had impacted the way we thought about everything, including our own spirituality. When I eventually realized how crazy this is, I wondered why this mentality of faking and pretending to be someone I was not was so easily acceptable to me. Why didn't I fight it? Then the truth hit me. I didn't learn this way of thinking and acting and pretending I was better than I was from the strip in Las Vegas or Amsterdam or Bourbon Street in New Orleans or even MTV. I learned it in church.

The point of this little self-disclosure is that this book is a process. It begins with the topic of honesty as an individual lifestyle and then progresses through its three parts into what this means for Christian community. The end result is hopefully a picture of the body of Christ spending less time and energy focused selfishly on itself, and more time and energy spent paying attention to the Jesuses of this world. The ones who are waiting for us to come to them with grace, peace, hugs, acceptance, cold water, clothing, or food.

This book is meant to be read in its entirety as it introduces, comments upon, and invites others into a dialogue that needs to be had in Christian community. I thank you for picking this book up, and I hope we can both learn to embrace honesty, like a kiss on the lips,² and then together shift away from this plastic mentality of church and toward genuine fellowship.

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Part 1

ME, MYSELF, AND HONESTY

LIKE A KISS ON THE LIPS

But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.

1 John 1:7 NLT

An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips.

Proverbs 24:26

My first kiss was in a car, at night, in the dark. My lips smashed up against my girlfriend's and although I was expecting something more meaningful, all I felt was wet, squishy lips. It was one of the more awkward moments I have ever experienced. Sometime later I met my wife, Anna, and now there are no awkward kisses. Every kiss is given and received with grace. Yes, kissing is still vulnerable, but kissing the one you love is magical. *Honesty is like kissing.* Honesty is an introduction to something much more powerful and intimate: relationships bred by transparency.

When we live in darkness, things cannot be seen. But when we live in the light, everything becomes visible. This verse from 1 John in the Bible points to the fellowship, healing, and forgiveness that can occur when things are out in the open, when we choose to live honestly. This kind of living is what 1 John 1:7 calls “walking in the light.”

At first, walking and living in the light is awkward. Questions such as, “How are people going to receive me?” parade through our thoughts, and many times even keep us from living transparently with others. But once we begin to take those steps—to make honest living a lifestyle—we begin to enjoy the outcome. We feel accepted. Like a first kiss, honest living can feel awkward at first; but if embraced purely, it can eventually lead to an unparalleled wholeness and oneness, both in the individual and among the community.

Honesty can propel us perpetually into a realm of existence where we can begin to know others in deep ways. Ways that allow us to care about others. Maybe even care for others like Jesus cares for us. We are not called to live for ourselves. We are not called to focus on ourselves. We are called to die to ourselves and, through this death, love other people. Second Corinthians 5:15 says, “And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.” If we know anything from the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ, it is this: when we die so others might live, we get resurrected. This is what Jesus did, and we have the opportunity to share in this love through our lives. We experience intimacy, grace, and most of all, an ability to see others in their circumstances instead of only ourselves. We get to experience life as it is truly meant to be lived.¹ This is grace.

With honesty comes grace; and honesty is the doorway to transformation, a catalyst into communal intimacy. Think about Jesus' parable of two men praying in Luke 18:10. One man, a Pharisee, prayed about himself in front of God. He was prideful, fake, and clearly not living in the light. The other man, a tax collector, humbled himself, became transparent, and ultimately received mercy. This parable provides a powerful image of community centered on Jesus. In the same way the tax collector was humble and honest and received God's mercy, we are to humble ourselves before God and each other so that we can be exalted and also exalt each other. Honesty brings grace when there are people willing to extend God's grace after receiving honesty. Galatians 6:2–3 says, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves." Communal intimacy is embraced best when people lay themselves bare before each other and in return are accepted by the transformative grace of Jesus. When we live transparently, everything changes, and that is the point.

Individual Reflection / Group Discussion

How is honesty like kissing?

Have you ever felt the need to hide from others instead of living in the light? Why?