

the last word

Will the Real You Please Stand Up?

by Jamie Buckingham



The average man lives behind a mask. His smiles, his laughter, his piousness, his confidence are all part of the role he is playing. Seldom, if ever, does he let anyone know who he really is. Only in times of pain, fear, or perhaps when he is drinking does his mask come down and we see him as he really is.

When a man is terrified, he forgets about winning friends and influencing people. Men stride into their businesses each morning with an air of supremacy. They sit at a bar and laugh uproariously. Or, they let sage advice fall from their pseudo-intellectual lips. But they never let anyone know that, behind their wisecracks and supposed indifference, they are lonely, scared and hurting. However, let that man be exposed to pain or fear, and suddenly

he drops his mask and flees—revealing for all the world to see who he really is.

For 35 years I was involved in mask-wearing. Dissatisfied with myself, I was continually imitating someone who seemed successful—never dreaming that he, too, was probably wearing a mask. I dreaded the thought that one day someone might peek behind it, see the real me, and reject me as a person. In fact, one of my recurring nightmares was that one Sunday morning some stranger would walk into our million-dollar sanctuary, come to the front, point his finger at me and scream, “*Fraud!*” And I knew I had no answer.

Then I had a life-changing experience with the Holy Spirit—and everything seemed different. Once afraid of growing bald, I had even considered a mask for the top of my head. Then

came a new freedom to grow bald for the glory of God.

A middle-aged minister stopped by the house one night, his face gray and his eyes dark from fatigue. “Even after 20 years in the ministry,” he said, “I still have times of doubt and depression. I am afraid to expose my true feelings to my congregation. They look up to me, and if they knew I was like any other man they would demand a new minister in the pulpit.”

I understood. I also knew he would be a lot better off confessing his faults than being caught in them. “Has it ever occurred to you,” I said, “that what your congregation wants, most of all, is an honest man in the pulpit—rather than a perfect man? The reason you have to turn to someone outside your parish for solace is you are afraid that your own church members won’t love you unless you wear your mask. I believe they would love you more if you stopped trying to act pious and started acting like a man—a man who, like them, is searching for the truth.”

He was unable to receive what I said. He departed, shaking his head and saying, “You just don’t know my people. They demand perfection.”

I am convinced the Holy Spirit works best through transparent persons. In fact, the only way the world can actually see Jesus Christ within us is when we rip off all the masks of hypocrisy, all the veneer of pride, and expose ourselves for what we are. Then, and only then, can the living Christ be seen in us. Until then all we present is an image—and a distorted one at that.

Our neighbor told my wife that it wasn’t until her husband came home one evening and admitted to her and the children that he was a phony that they began to find happiness in their marriage. You see, they had known all along he was a fraud, but he couldn’t receive their love—or their help—until he admitted his condition.

The best way to disarm a critic is to confess ahead of time. I mean, how can you argue with a man who says he is wrong? Men like this no longer have to wear masks. They are free. ☿