

*Man, is not what he thinks he is, he is what he hides*

– André Malraux

In the first chapter I mentioned people wearing masks several times. I suppose I should have explained who they are first. Having reference is a good thing. Yet, I felt it was important to me that you see the word *mask* used in certain circumstances first. I thought that using the word to describe people and situations gives context. Friends wear masks. Enemies wear masks. Actually, I think we all wear masks most of the time. It's not that I despise friendships. I wish I had more. It's more about being disappointed by the ones I've had. I really just hate the masks people wear.

They say that people need at least three months to know someone well. I bet it's a lot more than that. I did an interesting thing with my latest, and hopefully final, marriage. We decided to do courting in the traditional way. I did mention that I love doing things differently in the first chapter. So, the norm is to sleep with your spouse before marriage. Try out the car several hundred times to make sure it's the right model. Funny that nobody ever does that with a real car, yet with relationships we do. We, (on the other hand) decided to not to sleep together before marriage and do it the traditional Christian way. Further to that, we were engaged and married within seven months. Is that just enough time to know someone well? I'm not so sure it was smart but it certainly was different.

This was interesting. My wife and I met briefly twice before we dated. I got her phone number and called her a ton. We talked for a month before we met again. Yes, I know that's weird, but that's me in most things. After divorce, I was a bit shy of being bitten twice. I guess I needed some distance to feel safe again in a relationship. With that said, we talked and talked every day, sometimes for hours. I thought we were communicating well. A month of just talking

is different. It's a long time too. A month of sex would require little talking. We thought we knew each other pretty good. Although it was a different approach it seemed to be working.

The month finally came to a close, and it was time for a real date. It's like we brought two fishbowls to our first date. In these bowls are the lives we want others to see. We also brought the masks we wear. The masks are the (stuff) we want people to see but it equally hides some of the other crud. So, there we were with our masks and fishbowls on hand for our first date. It could have gone well until we went to church. I always took a date to church. It was safe ground. It's safe unless the pastor talks about stuff that stings. All the way home our masks became unglued from our faces and ended up crumpled on the floor. She let me have it on what I believed. I guess church has a way of uncovering people so that they can see each other more clearly.

The fish in my bowl was floating upside down. Relationship dead. Phone conversations dead. Chance of marriage dead or zero. A week later I felt that a month on the phone was productive. I learned a lot on the first date too. What I learned is that both of us hate masks. We were for the most part honest people. That inspired me. I called her and asked if she wanted to go on a roller coaster life with me. I guess she had been thinking about that too, so she said yes. It's been 13 years since then. I think what we have learned is that marriage is wonderful and ugly. Friendships and relationships are awesome and really hard work. Yet, we prefer those without masks.

I find that the masks we wear are very interesting. It's fascinating that the best movies have characters in masks. People are scared to death of the scream mask and the Halloween mask. I find that the Chainsaw Massacre Mask is the worst. Many people hate killer clown

masks. Why do we portray evil people behind masks? I suppose there is a clinical reason as always. I'm the patient so I don't look at it that way. Is it about hiding evil? I'd buy that but evil people do evil in masks. They are not hiding it at all. As a matter of fact, they seem to be embracing the mask.

Some famous characters wore good or evil masks. Darth Vader has a very cool helmet mask. Yes, he wears it because his head is ugly. Yet, he is evil and does evil. I suppose the Scream mask is there to hide the evil person behind it. It's a who done it thing, yet Jason and Michael Meyers would not be recognized even if they took theirs off. I'm not so sure the evil people struggle with their identity. I wonder if the mask completes them.

*"everyone has a part of themselves that they hide, even from the people they love most."*

- Spiderman

I guess Spiderman, Batman, and the Lone Ranger wear good masks. They hide their identity strictly because they would be known. I have found that the good guys also wear masks to hide themselves within a mask. They seem to struggle with the person inside. Is it more about the hero or the struggle within? I find that the hero mask is much more intriguing than the villain one. We seem to think the villain is more complicated. I think deep down the hero has issues. Evil people seem confident, but the good hero tends to doubt his abilities.

The masks worn in the Wizard of Oz might be the best ones. Several of the Oz characters have a mask hiding who they really are inside. In a way, they are hiding their fears just as much as their true selves. The wizard hides behind a holographic mask because he is afraid of the real person behind the mask. I like the witch because she represents the wicked Ms. Gulch. Who is

hiding from who in that one. Yet, Glenda the good witch and Dorothy are displayed as themselves without masks. How cool is that movie.

In church one Sunday, there were masks on several chairs. During the service, the pastor made a point and asked the people to put on their masks. What was interesting was the timing. Some of us forgot who had the masks. We were thinking: who was behind them now? The sermon reflected on what we hide in church. Who we hide in public. The kicker was who where we really talking to behind the mask now? That is certainly true in a church. People hide themselves behind a God mask. Are people real or just made up behind masks?

It did make me think that this is Hollywood in a nut shell. The actors are people who portray make believe people. There is a mixture of acting and realism involved. Certainly, Johnny Depp or Angelina Jolie come out in their characters. However, what is left unseen or unsaid. I think Hollywood magazines are popular and worth millions because we know there is more behind the mask. Sometimes when a famous person falls from grace we all say "I knew there was more to the story." What story? The story of the person behind the characters we know. The story behind their real lives. Why do we want to know people who act in Hollywood? Why do we love gossip magazines? I think it comes back to the mask. Maybe church folk gossip because they are curious about masks too.

Hollywood knows what makes us scared. They know what makes us laugh. The writers are people that heard stories and read adventures just like we did. I know as much as Hollywood does in regards to the mask. They retell amazing stories. I love to retell and dissect the stories that fit my thoughts in a book. The mask theme is a good one. There are two movies it'd like to touch on. There are those that change our perspective by the end of the movie. There are also

movies that surprise us by who has the mask. There is intrigue and mystery behind a Hollywood mask.

The first is the Movie called simply *The Mask* played by Jim Carey. He is an underachieving less than average guy. He finds a mask and becomes something he is not. He lives a humdrum life so he thinks. The mask changes him. Changes him so much that he can finally have the beautiful girl, but he has equally lost himself in the process. Masks in my mind bring out the worst in us. The real person is a great person. You just refuse to believe it. The mask stifles that person and all your left with is a half known and half appreciated shell of a character. It's interesting that Carey spends part of the movie trying to avoid the mask. He even tries to throw it away. Masks seem to have a way of coming back. This movie goes well beyond a man and his mask.

There is another movie re-done several times called *the man in the Iron Mask*. It is the story of a man imprisoned in France in the late 1600's. There is some mystery and truth to the story. It is based on a mysterious masked prisoner during that time period. I suppose there is truth and fiction to this account. Who was this prisoner. Some say the twin of the King at the time. In any sense, it has been used to tell a tale in Hollywood.

What I love about this movie is the intrigue. Who is in the mask? Why is he there? Will he ever escape. The mask is a really fascinating detail in the story. Some of us are willing to don a mask. This fellow is forced. Do we force ourselves to wear a mask at times? Who is captive? The prisoner or those who know the truth. I have seen several stories of hidden lives. Some people run from their lives while others desperately want to find theirs. I think what makes this such a great analogy of the mask is that masks are us. We identify with great stories with all the

hiding and searching in life. The mask is our escape and it's also a sanctuary. Equally, we can become a prisoner in the mask we wear. Masks are interesting, scary, and fun all at the same time.

In a theatre, I think we can rest. We can give our masks a rest too. In 1985, there was great famine in Ethiopia. The most famous American music artists decided to create a song of awareness. During the making of the song *We are the world* there was a sign on the studio door that read *leave your egos at the door*. At the cinema, we grab our popcorn, drink, and pick up our 3D glasses. We leave our masks and fishbowl at the door. You don't need them in a dark movie theatre. There is no talking. Yes, your about 6 inches apart, but your side by side and not staring someone in the face. What you do have is the chance to sit in someone's dream, someone's story. You get to live for about 2 hours in someone else fishbowl wearing their mask. It does not get any better than that.

I have heard many times that Hollywood controls us. They are the media and social identity. You see, I think it's the other way around. This is cool and funky. I think that Hollywood is our societal mask. They know what we like. They know what we want. In a way, they feed off of our trends. In one decade, western movies were cool. Then in another time period it's space or love. Some believe that the community is getting darker. If that were true then why did the 80's movies have sex, smoking, and nudity, yet today's movies rarely go there. Why is today all about bad governments, race injustices and the sexual diversion. It's because they have our pulse. In the 80's it was about sexual awakening, doing what we wanted. Then aids killed that. Today it's freedom from social and sexual oppression. They are inspired by the masks we wear.

The headlines say that the 90's and 2000's were the generation x years. This is the generation that were lost with little identity. Movies in the 90's reflected those times like Goodwill Hunting, The Lion King, and The Matrix. The 2000's brought Brokeback Mountain, Finding Nemo, and Batman searching for his identity in the Dark Knight. It's only a snapshot to prove my thought, but we are still searching, and this generation seems lost. I feel that the social revolution has made the mask popular. We search for identity in the things we socially wear. I call them social tags. They say baby boomers stretched for about 30 years. It's the same with generation x, they are still an unknown people today. This might be the mask generation.

Hollywood is addicted to the reboot. They do it on TV and on the silver screen. Imagination of the mind has become far and few between. The plight of the cause and distain for injustice rules the theatre. Social tags rule too. We are black so black lives matter. I read an article recently that African American youth hate that African tag on them. Yet, black lives matter is popular. Same stuff but different pile. Racism isn't going away but social media thinks it's new or even beatable: think again. Part of the reason were so enamored with social injustice is regurgitation. The reboot is just kicking the same old themes around and around. The media says racism is worse than ever. Tell that to a black kid in the middle of a 1950's KKK rally. There is a saying *beating a dead horse will get you nowhere*. It's time this generation picks an identity and quit beating dead horses.

Socially, we have liberated the gay and lesbian cause. It's the new sexual revolution. Didn't they do that in the 60's and seventies? But now it's the plight of the sexually repressed. Isn't that the 80's? It's funny how the goth craze drove youth to wear black and look doomed. Once they all looked the same it became a fad. Fad's fade. Social tags are invented to shame others into their cause. Shaming and the politically correct wear the freedom badge, but they are

the Gestapo dressed in drag. Didn't they shame in the 1600's, 1700's, and 1800's. Probably people did the same things before those times as well. I'm betting it will happen in the future too. We love our causes. We are the new heroes of social media wearing masks.

People will be offended. You can't talk about my lifestyle or my cause that way. I am offended just thinking about offences. Yet, we are told to don a mask in the name of the lifestyle or cause. No matter what you believe, it's not politically correct to say it. Hence, stock in masks is rising. We're teaching this generation to shut up, be silent, and wear a social mask. If generation x is lost, then this is perfect. Try this mask on to find your identity. It's not the real you, but it's something. I suspect this is a formula for a revolution and trouble. A lost people looking for meaning seems good but usually ends up with a lot of death and mayhem. It's the problem with masks. The real person is a fierce tiger needing to get out of the cage. Like in the mask movies, the captive behind the mask needs to be rescued.

Face book could have been so good. People exposed their lives to others like never before. There was a sense that we could finally shed our masks. There was an article that said social media has been hijacked by anger and frustration. The social storm held so much hope, yet today, Facebook and twitter are silent. We have been reduced to negative posts. Nobody talks about their real lives anymore. A pastor told me a few years ago in regards to social media. "we have two lives, the one you show and the one you lead." The mask is back and this time it's personal.

The Batman movies have given us some great quotes. This one says *no one cared who I was until I put on the mask*. Is that what we are all about? Do we love masks because we hate who we have become? People can be shy and they can be confrontational. I have read that some

frustrated people are loud because they need to be herd. Others are quiet because they want to go un-noticed. Does the kid in the back of the class need to wear a mask? I see them two ways: they either hated the spotlight or demanded the spotlight. Do we use masks to achieve that?

In high school I was not particularly popular or hidden. I suppose I did stand out a little, but only because girls and trouble liked me. I had a teacher in grade 11 math that was trouble. He was in his last year of teaching and wanted to go out with a bang. He was a nasty teacher. I wonder if that was true or was I just a rebel needing to stand out. One day I decided to read the newspaper in his class. He did not appreciate that. The school principal was his best friend and he didn't appreciate it either. It's hard to claim injustice when the authorities are unified. The thing is, I was unified too. My downfall was my unified cause was the cause of one.

What was I creating in that class? Was I spouting a mask. Was I rebelling? Was I misused? Sometimes the guy is in the back of the class because he is bored and sometimes it's because of trouble. Do we need to shout out because we're not being acknowledged? I struggle with that. Is it all about me? Do we need masks to gain attention? Maybe we're just spoiled people who hide ourselves because we can't get what we want. Other times we play the game to get what we want. I do think the mask is real, but life's importance is real too.

The first sentence in this book tells you I have a phobia with certain people. There are those who intimidate me. Why, I don't know. There are others I like to intimidate. When people get angry easily, I love to poke the bear. Who knows why. As a kid, my parents liked to keep us humble by telling us that others were better than us. It worked, I feel less than stellar around most people. I am convinced that people learn to believe certain things about themselves. I also

believe that people avoid others because of how they feel. That goes for the mask too. Do we create them to protect or pretend? I feel in the end, it's to avoid ourselves.

Charles Stanley is a pastor and TV preacher. He is a good one but he also wears masks. I feel he has exposed some of them while trying to hide others. Charles tells the story of his struggle with his church roots. He grew up being told that his job is to please God. His ability to enter heaven is based on how he does here on earth. We can argue the theology but that is what he was led to believe. A staple of his ministry is telling people they are saved by Grace. It's not by the goodness you portray, but by the goodness of God. Yet, in private he struggled with this idea. He believes in grace but good works were engrained into his DNA. He said one day he had a moment where he came to terms with this demon. God helped him see that Christ works on our behalf to make us worthy of heaven. We can rest at ease if we believe that, yet he says his upbringing will always haunt him.

It's funny how some parts of us that are hidden in masks become exposed by people close to us. People inadvertently expose us by what they say and don't say about us. Charles Stanley has a son Andy and he is a famous preacher too. It was revealed some years ago that Charles was separated from his wife. They have since divorced. Charles hid this from the church because some felt you can't be a divorced preacher. His engrained belief in being good before God caused him to hide his troubles before people. He wore a God mask.

It's Andy that really sheds light on his father's mask. Andy is a staunch supporter of family time. He goes home at 4:30 every day. He says he gives his best 45 hours a week but no more. He cancels church at Christmas and demands we spend time with family. Why do you think he promotes family so much? His dad was the church leader and man of God. I bet Charles

was never home for his kids or his wife. I believe Charles avoided his marriage struggles publicly not because he knew it was wrong, but because Charles knew he was wrong. His God mask was getting in the way.

We wear masks to cover up. That is what a mask is. If we don't like ourselves, we create a mask. If we hate the situation, then we create a mask so that we can endure it. I know a woman who is mean. Her mother was a seemingly nice woman, but in reality, I need to admit that she was mean too. The woman has children that make excuses for the meanness in their lives. Sometimes a mask we wear is to avoid the obvious. We cover up crud to make things look ok. The problem is that things are not ok. Pastor Stanley appears to be humble and holy by saying he will be haunted forever by old church teachings. We know the truth but it's the lies that kill us. He was willing to let his other mask kill his marriage in the name of God.

Covering up for someone's mask is a bad thing. I am glad Andy Stanley loves his dad. Yet, his ministry fuel comes from a bad dad. A dad who neglected his home family in favor of his church family. There is a story in the Bible that really fits. It's found in Matthew 15. The Pharisees have come to confront Jesus. He has allowed his disciples to eat grain on Sunday and not wash their hands first. The religious rulers are beside themselves. How dare these men break tradition. Jesus then asks them about their parents. You let your parents starve because you gave money to the temple treasury instead of to your parents. It looks holy and it looks noble. Jesus then asks them why they break the command to honor your mother and father. Why must church lessons always sting the heart?

In some ways, Andy Stanley is wearing a mask. It's to mask the pain from his failed upbringing. He would probably be the first to tell you that he had a great dad and upbringing.

Yet, in that declaration, was he willing to let his mother's heart swing in a noose? My mom was ok, but a bear in the woods probably describes her best. Is it mean? Is it uncalled for? That's the trouble with masks. We wear them to make us look better. We also use them to make others look better. Jesus also gives an analogy from an observance in Matthew 23. He observes that the Pharisee's walks around looking awesome in their long robes and tassels. They pray in public but neglect prayer in private. Oh, the web we weave behind the mask.

I want to come back to the fish bowl. I think it fits us far better than the mask. A mask just means you're not you. A fishbowl on the other hand is only what we want people to see. It would be interesting seeing everyone bringing a fishbowl with them wherever they went. It's a staple of who you want us to think you are. What kind of fish would be in the bowl? Remember we can see everything in the bowl. Do you have a pineapple house like SpongeBob? Is there an anchor or a treasure chest? Is there just a plain guppy? I know Batman would be the guppy. He has a very dark side so he would be a piranha guppy. It looks innocent but he is looking for something to devour. There is nothing like an internally enraged guppy. What would you let us see in that bowl?

I love the scene of my wife and I putting are fishbowls down on the table at the coffee shop on our first date. Let's pretend that the fish do the talking for us. They could be pop-ups from emoji's:

*I love going to church on dates*

*I love coffee*

*I won't sleep with you until were married*

What you won't see is:

*I hate dating*

*I have been hurt*

*I only like Starbucks*

*I hate crowds*

*I only listen to Christian music*

We only get fluffy fish talk in a first date. I'll tell you some stuff but avoid mentioning others. In my marriage, there are things we have discovered about each other. When you get married in 7 months there is a ton of unknown. I have been surprised and delighted by many things. My wife is amazing well beyond my expectations. On the other hand, she said some things behind a mask that were not true, but they sounded good at the time. They are not marriage killers but they might have killed the courting. That goes for me too. I highlighted the good stuff but neglected to mention a few relationship bombs. Bombs I thought were no big deal. When they went off two or three years later in our marriage they certainly were a big deal. Fishbowls and masks are what dating is.

How did I forge this mask? I have experienced interesting books in my life. My mom had weight loss books. My dad had motivational books. I like story books. These titles have influenced me to some degree. I remember one weight watchers book my mom had that had a statement on the back. At the end, it said *what a fool I've been*. I have been motivated and influenced by the books in my life. I try and eat right. I love to dream. It has also influenced the way I think. In a way, I am the sum of all the titles I have read.

Yet, at times I have hidden me from the world. At times, I have only let out what people need to see. I clearly have masks. If I was just being made daily, then why not say somethings? Why hide some of what I watch or look at? The masks protect us from the judgment of others. Yet, somewhere inside I'm screaming *what a fool I've been*. My mask might be the sum of my experiences. It might be the sum of my troubles too.

I believe we all wear masks. If everyone just displayed who they were then it would be comical and chaotic. In this American election, the insights into Hillary and Donald were amazing. Probably less than half were true. I do think that where there is smoke there is fire. What did they let us see? What did all the posts in social media want us to see. Were we seeing behind the mask? I heard the story of Larry Craig, a senator in the US. Congress. He was well known for his approval of anti-gay legislation. Astoundingly he was caught in a gay relationship. Did he use diversion to hide his lifestyle? He had one hell of a mask.

I suppose we have been reduced to masks and fishbowls these days. The African community is enraged by white cop shootings of African kids. This rage might help the relationship between black and white in the long run. On the other hand, it might mask how the African community is doing within itself. On both sides we see the mask of righteousness and indifference. Communities and people have been shocked by what lies behind the mask. They also do crazy things to protect it like Larry Craig's extramarital affair with men. When masks come off it's usually followed by regret, pain, and horrifying revelation.

I hope I pointed out what masks are. I hope I gave direction to how we use them. Dating is a good one because we're selling ourselves as a potential life mate. I find it so funny and interesting that we hide and obscure to gain a mate for life. Then in marriage, we have trouble. Honesty is the best policy but we rarely play that card. Friendships are great if you gain a good one. It's probably a good one only because you're both being honest. It might not be good depending on the masks you wear. I think relationships are hollow when we wear masks.

I have been in pursuit of being honest. The Christian community has rejected me because honesty is not in their DNA. They say it is but that's just the God mask talking. I have lost

friends in the Christian community because we were honest. Honesty is perfect but honesty stings like a bugger. Masks prolong bad relationships. Masks help keep friends we really should be tossing. In a way, my honest pursuit has been liberating. You see the real me in social settings. Yes, I struggle with people being uncomfortable with me. Is honesty worth the cost of averting looks and fake smiles? I honestly think it is.

It's not like I tell everyone what I am thinking. That would-be suicide. I am not going to say your hair looks like it's been combed with a pork chop. I will not tell you your cloths suck. There will be no arguing over your point. It's yours and thank God, it's not mine. I think shedding the mask means shedding being mean. What you will get is integrity. I will pay attention to you alone in a conversation. I will look for ways to build you up. I will be there for you if you need me. I like people because they are different. Your difference is cool and interesting. I am one person who could appreciate what is behind your mask.

In the meantime, I wear a smaller mask. Sure, there are things I will never show. That is human. We do live lonely lives inside our masks. There are parts of us worth sharing but were too embarrassed to show them. Maybe someone bashed you over your uniqueness. Maybe you got embarrassed by what you think? That's a tragedy. Yet, the pursuit of a smaller mask is a good one. How do we get there? It will come from understanding us as people. It will come from finding comfort in the mirror. There will be little steps and plenty of anger. Anger? Yes, anger at the stupid masks. The fake lives of those we know and within ourselves. Masks are scary, but I swear they cannot own you. It's up to you. So, let's turn to the crazy side. To accept you, and shed a mask, is to live with someone calling you crazy.