

*Hugging is the only way to hide our face- Doctor Who*

Are we self-made? I'd like to think we are life made. Beginning as a child, little ones seem pretty clean. Nobody has ruined their heart, mind and soul. Then harsh words hit. Abuse creeps in. Abandonment, rejection, and judgment find a way through to a little child's heart. I can see God taking a perfect soul and placing it into the heart of an innocent child. Within weeks, people begin hammering on their self-esteem. Baggage is gained. A mask is forged.

It's easy to say we're the master of our own ship. Would we really let in a stowaway? Did you command the ship's first mate to allow rats on board? Are the seas to remain calm because you're the captain? Self-made? In the NHL, I believe that to win the Stanley Cup it takes more than skill. More than luck and patience. Things have to break right. That means a tough team gets bumped out early. An injury cripples another team. You might need a sweep or two of the early series. You're not good enough to control destiny as you like. Even a captain needs things to break right to cross the ocean.

What is real? When I became a Christian, the mirror confused me. I thought I knew enough. I thought that life worked a certain way. Then I found out God made things. The Spirit moved things. Jesus teaching influenced hearts. I gained a new theme: *nothing is what it seems*. For years I thought I was the captain. If I worked hard, lived honest, and loved my family, then karma would work in my favor. Just like looking at myself in the mirror, life works its own way. There are some hidden things I could not see. Clearly, we are not in as much control as we would think.

My wife had a wandering heart. Did I see that? Some friends were just waiting to date her after my split-up. Did I see that coming? Obviously, I needed to pick better friends and partners. I don't trust like I used to. Some lady at work threw me under the bus for a off the cuff comment. Did I know who? No, but I became silent after that. What was happening to the world around me? It seems that some people were wearing some pretty good masks. They had me fooled.

Even in the mirror I could not recognize the man I saw. Was my whole life a lie? It's taken a while, but I think it hit me about 15 years later. I need to be real. To throw off the mask of fear. There needed to be no more masks hiding who I am. Enough of being in fear of judgement, ridicule, and mockery. I could see others too. Those that bashed me. Hiding behind their masks of jealousy, fear, and pride. I have become an anti-mask guy. No more lies. Like "The Who" *I won't be fooled again.*

Lies are a relationship killer. I know a couple that have lived together for years. One of them has had a hard life. I know it must not have been easy. The other swore they would never be in an abusive relationship of drugs, drinking, and verbal banter. Yet, I sat there in the living room as she rolls a joint. He cracks a beer. At some point a few subtle snide remarks passed by innocently. Oh, nothing is innocent about small, sneaky, snide remarks. What is really going on?

I think there are two types of lies. One is to yourself and another is for people. Earlier I said that we wear masks. The mask can either hide us from the world or from the mirror. Yet, as I said in the mirror chapter "the mirror never lies." In Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, all the mirrors in the castle are smashed. Why? Who can look at the person who caused the mess. So, we lie to ourselves. A mask of lies is placed on our face. The mirror has a way of shedding masks. So, we smash the mirror of truth.

It's someone else's fault. I am a victim. Life is so hard. It's what we say. When I was a teenager, one of my friend's mom said that she is helping her child because life is too hard for young people now. How will they get by if I don't help them? About 15 years later I lost everything and had to start over. I have more now than I ever did in childhood or my first marriage. Life is ugly hard. I get it. Yet, when things go badly, are we done? Do we need our mom to save us? Is that the right thing? Life is full of forks in the road. It's your choice: be the victim; feel sorry you're a victim: or overcome being a victim.

I had a choice in the mirror: live or die. It's that simple. Be a victim or be a story of God's grace. Which will it be? No masks. The couple I mentioned live in a lie. One believes he is a victim. The other does not believe she is more than what has been dealt. One lies to herself and says life is good. The other tries to convince himself that the world owes him. Then they both lash out at each other in spite of the lies they believe. Are we self-made? I suppose it looks that way.

The other side is life-made. A boy is diagnosed with a crippling disease. A parent is abusive. Life goes south. Are we forged by the things that blind side us? Is it just that easy? I mentioned in a previous book about a girl who was thrown into the trash as a baby. She survived and thrived. Three girls in Ohio were held captive for over 10 years in a basement. Are they ruined? Trust is earned. Life needs to give some people a reason to trust. Why? It appears were life made.

What is real? Are we self-made or life-made? Possibly, it's a little of both. Life experiences come by our own hand or the hand of others. Are we the victim or criminal? I said in the last chapter we are all swimming in a swamp of people. We're all gathered together in the

mire of baggage and trust issues. It becomes a masquerade ball. We don masks to hide our hearts. A guy has a fear of girls, so he says boldly *I'm not interested*. A woman fires someone just to make it clear who is in control. Self-esteem issues? It's the mask I see. What is really going on behind the mask? We are affected by people and the choices we make.

What percentage of our mind do we share? It's incredible to me that married people don't tend to share like they should. Why is it that we will hold secrets and then take them to the grave? On Facebook I post my cooking, writing, and other adventures. I will be honest here. There is a good chance I want a hug. A pat on the back. Why? Mostly because I never got that in my childhood. I thought my name was *Suck it up* for the longest time. You can see where I hurt in what I post.

On social media I want to be honest. I am trying to tear off the mask. Certainly, I have lived a life of disappointment and rejection. It's been tough. I want that mask gone. If I expose myself to the world, who cares if they hate me. I need to fight this. Some people suck. They are too honest. My mom did not know any other way. Her honesty was brutal. Yet, don't we want honesty? Didn't Jesus say that the truth shall set you free? It did not work that way for my mom. She lashed out because she hated herself. I believe she held a mask of being brutally honest. I hold a mask of rejection.

It's subjective. A prison of the mind is built on the lies we tell ourselves. I can be a victim if I believe it. We tell lies to others so that they will feel sorry for us. I could be my own worst enemy too. My Ex wanted out. She told a few close women that I was a brutal husband. It's subjective. A did an event with those ladies and each one came up to me in private and

apologized for believing the lie. “I’m not that bad” they all said. I have often felt sad for the Ex. What fears and hurts bound her to lash out at me? Is she in a mind prison too?

I think it was the fear of being real. She claimed the victim mask. If we had to talk, what would have happened? Well never know because we were both hiding in our panic rooms alone. If I share my heart they will leave. Hello, they left because you did not share. We say forever but that had rules we did not divulge. In Christian circles we hear great stories of God’s redemption. It is probably a miracle for a cheating spouse to be forgiven. They probably had to come clean. Be real. My wife asked me the other day what my greatest fear is. I think it’s being real. I hate rejection.

What we don’t hear about is the thousands of broken families that did not heal. Sure, God may have offered reconciliation (big word, fancy word). Yet, in troubled marriages, most people retreat into the panic room. They claim victim status. Masks of pride are worn. I know a guy who believed his Ex was the worst. He has since been divorced again. I feel it’s because he wore a mask of self-righteousness. That mask enticed a second bride. He’s on a third now. Yet...

Come on Patrick, he is a victim of an adulteress. He was unlucky. His first wife’s sin was so great that nobody looked at him. His second wife’s mental state was so great that nobody felt sorry for her. Through it all, we should have been peeling back his mask. Does a wife cheat just because she is a cheater? Do we marry a nut and it’s not our fault at all? All people wear some type of mask. Everyone protects their secrets. What’s in a heart? I am haunted by God saying in 1 Samuel 16:7 that *we look at the appearance but God knows the heart*. I suppose we want to believe the masks we see.

A few years ago, I wanted to see Madonna again. The wife warned me. I repeatedly said that I had seen her before and that Madonna is just fine. My wife warned me again. I eventually won and we went. Half way through the concert we left. I had never done that before. I thought she was ok. My wife knew better. I still can't believe what happened. It was horrible. How badly did I want to believe in the good mask of Madonna?

I had a picture of an old Madonna in my head that I thought I knew. She was nothing like that picture. I was telling myself a lie. I think we try and invent a life to share. A safe life that will protect our hearts. Protect our character, integrity, and secrets. Sitting here, I wonder if the problem with Donald Trump is, he is too honest. But then I got to thinking. We yearn to be heard. All those years before, is Donald just wanting to be heard? Maybe I'm trying to believe there is more to him than what I see.

Why is there Pride parades? Why is there #metoo campaigns? Victims just wanting to be heard. How many gay people wore masks just to avoid crude remarks? How many gang members wore masks just to be included? They call it group think. People in groups desire to fit in. Most people don't want to be singled out. So, they believe what the masses believe just to belong. Yet, underneath the mask, they are in fear of being real.

Recently, politicians are trying to gain recognition as climate change heroes. These are very rich people telling the poor to pay more tax to save the world. Oh, it's a dirty mask they wear. Yet, the people are confused. We all want to wear the mask of doing the right thing. To save the world. However, were not really drinking the cool-aide. Group think is working in that we all believe pollution is bad. Yet, how to save the planet is subjective. Some young bucks believe that

we should leave the oil in the ground. They love wearing the global warming activist mask. However, they drive to the protest. They heat their homes. What's wrong with that picture?

Underneath, everyone has a price they are willing to pay. People will fight in a group. They will wear your mask if it makes them feel included. I know three ladies that needed each other to divorce their husbands. Misery loves company. I bet each one of them were scared to death of doing it alone. What if they were wrong? Yet, if a group says your justified? People get things in their head all the time. Probably, half the time, they are dead wrong with no proof, but they believe it. You might be surprised the masks you would wear if the price was right. Usually that price is being included.

I know a church who changed their name. They decided to go in a different direction. Some of the congregation are praising the change. Yet, it's the same people. I even heard them report proudly that the attendance has not changed. They beam, it's fresh, new, and exciting. It's the same people, church, and calling. To me it's lipstick on a pig. It's still a pig. It's the look in their eyes that stuns me. They really believe it's big, new, radical, and life changing. I hope there right. To me it's a different mask with the same people underneath.

*The more things change the more they stay the same-* Alphonse Karr

If were going to work well in relationships then we need to take off the masks. It's hard to succeed if were only fooling ourselves. Masks are useful but destructive. How long are you willing to go? One marriage, two, or three? What if you keep picking bad friends? How much is enough? Maybe, a mask of doubt will help? Is it on you or them? The masks we held in my first marriage are still paying dividends in the lives of my children. It's not funny.

We need just a little more time to fix it. Love cures all. It does, but love is not always a practical answer. We can love but if they refuse... We can care but what happens when the politicians don't? A mask can blind us to reality. We wanted it so bad that the mask was the only way. Yet, years later we take it off in the mirror and are stunned by what we see. Stunned at what we have become. Just look at Nazi Germany and Rwanda. Good people turned upside down by a cause. A cause that killed millions. They put on a mask of superiority to kill their neighbors. Really? These days there is a war going on between the politically correct and society. What is real? Being honest, correct, and inclusive feels so good. It looks so right. Yet, the vile hatred on both sides is not that far from killing neighbors.

Like I said, I would love to be in a masquerade ball. All the costumes and masks. A mean boss must take themselves home. Who are we kidding? A mask just hides the truth. It masks potential ridicule, embarrassment, and reality. How could we move forwards and have real authentic relationships wearing masks? The answer is we can't. Part of the pain in my mirror was reality trying to break through. What do you see in the mirror: a mask or you?

I had a lady post on social media that this controversial tax was worth keeping. She reported that it was better than nothing at all. Is a mask hiding fear acceptable? Is putting a mask on a bad relationship good enough? It's better than nothing. I just keep hearing Jesus say the truth shall set you free. How many people say they are free from weight? Free from an abusive marriage. Free to be open about their sexuality. Masks are never free or acceptable.

We put on masks to hide. To keep the 'real' you undiscovered. Imagine burying yourself. Why? So, that nobody can use or abuse the real you. Again, Jesus told a parable about a buried coin. The point was that buried treasure can never be used for good or bad. It's just dead in the



ground. It's "you" were talking about. Aren't you a treasure to be shared, discovered, and used? Yes, used! Used for good and used to inspire. Now, think of false masks as dirt we dump on ourselves and in bad relationships. Hiding the treasure. It's not a pretty picture is it?

We all have masks. I suppose they are the crud of life. We're trying to look clean. We're trying to make a relationship look better than it is. So often we end up looking in the mirror asking what went wrong. What went wrong? Life's trials will gather crud and baggage. Yet, we can choose to live with it. Choose to work on it. It's a far better solution than forging masks and hiding from life. Don't choose masks.

It's time now, I want to enter the last section of this book. This is the good stuff (as if the last 17 weren't). Let's talk about the types of relationships. Yet, I have this nagging feeling that people are in the way of good friendships and marriages. Are we willing to let our masks spoil the party? The truth will set us free. The lies will kill us eventually. Far too many marriages have bit the dust just because they hid in a panic room. We need to shed the masks and start doing relationships better than we ever have before.