

Key Takeaways

1. God's question, "Where are you?", is not an accusation but a tender invitation from a God who misses us and wants us close.
2. Masks of performance, polish, or possessions are fun for a minute and exhausting over time, and the One we most need to connect with is never fooled by them.
3. Honest, simple prayer, like the tax collector's seven words, is where mercy meets us. We do not have to clean ourselves up first.
4. Jesus loves us even when we are clutching our masks, and He names what we are holding so that we can open our hands instead of walking away sad.
5. Only God can cover our shame. He made garments of skin in the garden, and through the cross He clothes us in Christ's righteousness.
6. Because of the cross, we can approach God's throne with confidence, and we can take our masks off before one trusted person at a time.
7. Church should be a place where "I'm not okay" is met with "Me too. Let's pray."

Additional Notes

- Background: In Jesus' day, Pharisees were respected for strict devotion to the law, while tax collectors were despised for working for Rome and overcharging their neighbors. Jesus' listeners would have expected the Pharisee to be the one accepted by God.
- Background: Beating the breast, as the tax collector did, was a cultural gesture of deep grief and repentance.
- Background: The rich ruler's story appears in Matthew 19, Mark 10, and Luke 18. Mark alone records that Jesus "looked at him and loved him."
- This week's challenges: (1) Pray one unpolished prayer. (2) Tell God the truth in a quiet moment. (3) Ask Jesus, "What am I clutching that is keeping me from You?" Then take your mask off before one trusted person.

Where Are You? Taking Off the Masks We Wear

Scripture References: Genesis 3:8-10, Luke 18:9-14, Luke 18:18, 23, Mark 10:21, Genesis 3:21, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Hebrews 4:16

The Mask That Won't Come Off

1. God asks the question: "Where are _____?"
2. God is _____.
3. The question isn't about _____. It's about _____.

The Pharisee: The Mask of Performance

4. The Pharisee was confident of his own _____.
5. He looked down on _____ else.
6. You can't receive _____ if you've convinced yourself you don't need any.

The Tax Collector: The Mask Removed

7. The tax collector heard God's _____ and stepped out of hiding.
8. The tax collector didn't have to _____ up first.
9. God is saying, "The _____ is the reason I'm here."

The Rich Young Ruler: The Mask He Couldn't Let Go Of

10. The rich young ruler's specific mask was _____.
11. His security was found in what he _____.
12. Jesus loved him, but love doesn't _____ a person to take off his mask.

The Cross: Why We Can Finally Take the Mask Off

13. God covered Adam and Eve with garments of _____.
14. Something had to _____.
15. God Himself covers the _____ of His children.
16. God does the covering, and it costs _____.
17. "God made him who had no sin to be sin for _____..."
18. Jesus took our _____.
19. We can approach God's throne of _____ with confidence.
20. We approach God's throne with confidence because of what _____ did.

Three Challenges to Take Off the Mask

21. Challenge #1: Stop _____.
22. Pray a prayer with no _____.
23. Challenge #2: Come _____.
24. Tell God the _____.
25. Challenge #3: Let go of what you're _____.
26. Ask Jesus, "What am I clutching that is keeping me from _____?"
27. When He puts His finger on it, open your _____.

Discussion Questions

1. Think back to a childhood Halloween mask. Where do you see the same "hot, foggy, can't breathe" feeling in the masks adults wear at church?
2. God asked Adam, "Where are you?" even though He already knew. What does it mean to you that God's question is about relationship rather than location? How might God be asking you that question right now?
3. The Pharisee's words were probably true, yet Jesus said he did not go home justified. How can good behavior become a costume instead of a response to God's grace?
4. What is the modern-day version of the Pharisee's résumé in your life (what you say in the lobby, post online, or rehearse in small group)? What are you protecting by keeping it up?
5. The tax collector prayed only seven words: "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." Why do you think such a short, unpolished prayer carried so much weight? What makes honest prayer difficult for you?
6. Mark 10:21 says Jesus looked at the rich ruler and loved him before He named the one thing he lacked. How does that change the way you hear Jesus' hard words to him?
7. Masks can be made of behavior, possessions, busyness, career, family image, or spiritual vocabulary. Which of these is most tempting for you, and are you holding it tighter than you are holding on to Jesus?
8. How does the contrast between fig leaves (what Adam and Eve made) and garments of skin (what God made) shape your understanding of the cross and 2 Corinthians 5:21?
9. Whom is one trusted person you could tell, "I've been wearing a mask, and I'm tired of it"? What would help you take that step this week?
10. What would it look like for our church to be "a hospital for people who finally admitted they don't have it together"? What is one practical way each of us can help make it safe to be real?

Answer Key: 1. You, 2. omniscient, 3. Location, relationship, 4. righteousness, 5. Everyone, 6. Mercy, 7. Presence, 8. Clean, 9. mess, 10. Money, 11. Owned, 12. Force, 13. Skin, 14. Die, 15. shame, 16. Him, 17. Us, 18. Costume, 19. Grace, 20. Jesus, 21. performing, 22. Polish, 23. Honest, 24. Truth, 25. holding, 26. You, 27. hand