

Unmasked

We live in an addictive culture. The challenge is when we talk about addiction, most people want to think primarily in terms of porn, drugs or alcohol. But, in fact, when our lives are increasingly mastered by anything that doesn't please God—to help us deal with the challenges and even pain of our lives—we've entered into the addiction zone.

Anger. Sports. Spending and buying. The pursuit of free time. The lottery or gambling. Food. Weekends away. The buzz that comes from gossip. Work. Sleep. Extreme adventures. The praise of others. The list can go on and on.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6:12, "...I will not be mastered by anything." He understood that human nature is prone to seek out things in life that sooth the soul, even if that respite is temporary. And that pursuit of soul-soothing gets a lot of us in trouble—whether the trouble is visible or not.

If there's anything we've learned about addiction, it's this: the very culture that feeds us the food, recognition, money, porn, experiences and other addictive substances we crave is the very same culture that will make mincemeat out of you the moment your addiction to those substances is exposed.

Too often, the local churches and Christian organizations that insist on near "sinless perfection" from their leaders and managers behave precisely the same way when someone



Walking In the Light

By Jimmy Ray Lee

struggles with a "besetting sin," "tendency" or life-controlling problem. There just is very little wiggle-room for error. Even less, grace and restoration. So out of fear from the repercussions, Christian leaders and managers take their struggles only one place: underground.

Keeping Up Appearances

Keeping up appearances is the primary way Christian leaders and managers often go underground. They wear their game face, all the while struggling inside. Scripture tells us, "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

On this point, Christians behave much like their unchurched counterparts. Appearances are extremely important in the Christian community. We know instinctively that no one likes to

see a Christian struggling with a besetting sin—especially a leader or manager.

So most of us wear a mask, whether for short periods of time or continually. By wearing a mask, we try to control how other people see us.

We become performers acting out a part, sometimes briefly in specific situations, in other cases for our entire lives. In doing so, we hide harmful emotions and addictions, in the belief that no one will see them behind our masks.

All too often, we try to convince ourselves that whatever issue or addiction

As we become more transparent with God and others, we'll more and more bear a resemblance to Christ, experience greater fellowship with those we care about, and sense the freedom in our spirits that comes from the forgiveness of our sins.

we're struggling with isn't really that bad or isn't really hurting anyone—including ourselves. But the reality is, the issue almost always affects others as well. What's underground in our lives ultimately affects what's going on above ground. Weeds and dandelions that lie dormant all winter eventually sprout. And when the hidden issues in our lives come to the surface, then things get messy.

Can You Pass this Test?

Second Corinthians 3:18 encourages us to live this Christian life with *unveiled faces* (without masks): “*And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*”

What a wonderful and encouraging verse. When we live openly without hiding, we have all the potential to be transformed for the better—the very thing we often crave and use other addicting things to achieve. But there is a catch. To live fully in Christ, unveiled, it's important to do two things:

- Be willing to identify the thing that seeks to control our lives and,
- Address it head-on.

So, how do you know to what extent

You Can't Go It Alone

When we come to a place where we're “in the light” on our own junk, with the masks we've been wearing, or what we've been hiding, we almost always need others around us to help. A useful tool is to think in terms of 3-12-70. These numbers represent the concept of three types of relationships: **mentoring, small group and fellowship.**

• **3 represents MENTORING:** You need two or three godly people in your life to walk with you and serve as mentors. These are individuals you trust enough to confide in. This is important in any Christian walk, but particularly when you're dealing with deep issues.

• **12 represents a SMALL GROUP:** You need the interaction and support you find in a small group of people who are centered around Christ. People need to be able to share their hearts, but you also have to have a platform where people feel safe to talk. You may not share anything about your life-controlling problem here, but you will develop important relationships. A Christian leader I know had a horrific problem with anger. Because of this, his ministry suffered. While in a small group, he realized he was really angry with Jesus because, when he was a child, his newborn brother died. Everyone around him said the baby had gone home to be with Jesus. He took that to mean that Jesus killed his newborn brother. It angered him for years. This realization opened the door to freedom and restoration.

• **70 represents the larger fellowship circle of Christians, your CHURCH.** Although not as intimate as the mentoring relationship and small group, this gathering of believers is vital to your spiritual health. As we dwell in the presence of God by aligning ourselves with his Word and through prayer and face-to-face community, we'll be strengthened in our identity in him, and the glory of the Lord will be seen in our lives.

Finally, don't think twice about getting professional help. When you get to a leadership or management level in some Christian circles, seeing a counselor or therapist is seen as spiritual weakness or failure. Nothing could be more untrue. A qualified Christian counselor who measures truth by the Bible may be just the one to help you find the freedom you've been looking for—and help you walk in the light at home and in the workplace.

something might be mastering you? I encourage people to use the SAFE rule. This was first introduced by Patrick Carnes in his book, *Out of the Shadows*; I've made some minor revisions to the form you see here. Ask yourself:

S - Is it done in **Secrecy**?

A - Is it **Abusive** to yourself or others?

F - Is it done to escape or avoid **Feelings**?

E - Is it **Empty** of commitment to Christ and Christian relationships?

In my experience, **secrecy**, the first letter in the SAFE rule, is one of the most critical and telling indicators. You

or someone in your organization may have a team member who believes the mask will hold up because he or she doesn't expect to ever get caught or be revealed. That person often becomes secretive, which is a clue that something may be going on. When isolation sets in, a person feels no need to be part of a group or be a team player.

Getting Into the Light

There's a strong verse in the Bible that sets up a life-giving equation for all of us: “*But (if) we walk in the light, as he is in the light, (then) we have fellowship with one*

another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7).

So, can you pass this test? I encourage you to remove the mask that hides your true self. Get into the light. As we become more transparent with God and others, we'll more and more bear a resemblance to Christ, experience greater fellowship with those we care about, and sense the freedom in our

spirits that comes from the forgiveness of our sins.

I cannot think of a better management practice.

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