

Masks

Well, it's hard to believe, but Halloween is almost here and it's time for our Light the Night festival where we provide an alternative to the ghosts, dark spirits and fear of that night with a celebration of God's love and light. This year our theme is "Heroes of the Bible." I hope you can join us.

Recently I was reviewing some pictures of light the night from years gone by, and noticed all the super heroes-- Spiderman, Superman, princesses, and Transformers. Hundreds of children and their costumes masquerading as someone else, and it got me to thinking about the masks we wear every day.



"Good morning, how are you doing?" is a common greeting every day of our lives at work, at worship, in the store. Our common response is, "Fine. Thanks," when often things are not fine at all. Truth is, rarely is there a time in our lives that we are not struggling or anxious over some issue and yet, more often than not, we hesitate to tell anyone.

We have created a culture that sees sharing our struggles, fears, and frustrations as a sign of weakness. After all I can't tell anyone about my problems. They won't understand because everything in their lives is just fine. Satan just loves it when we think this way because it keeps us all bound up inside and separates us from one another.

Truth is we are all a lot healthier and happier when we have open communications and supportive relationships where we can remove our "just fine masks."

Our need for supportive relationships is in our created nature revealed in Genesis 2:18. The Lord God said: ***"It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."***

Of course we know God created women pointing to God's intention that the marriage relationship be a key example of an intimate and supporting relationship. For those of us who are married hopefully this is what we are experiencing. If not, we really need to make an effort to develop this kind of relationship with our spouse. There are lots of good Christian marriage enrichment tools to do just that, if we are willing to give it a try. Marriage enrichment is not just about broken relationships. It's about the desire to have the deepest intimate and supportive relationship God desires for us.

Of course there are many who are not married or have lost their spouse, and certainly God desires supportive relationships for everyone. Circumstances bring folks in and out of our lives all the time. Children grow up and move away; careers change, and many

others. The point is we must be very intentional about maintaining or replacing our network of supportive relationships. Take just a minute right now and ask yourself, who can I really trust and talk openly with? If the list is short, are there old relationships to restore? And where can I find opportunity to start new ones?

Our churches should be for us a prime source for these supportive relationships. James the brother of Jesus advises the early church:

“Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.” James 5:14-16

John Wesley designed early Methodism around this idea using small support groups called classes that met weekly to support and hold each accountable. Today most support groups, like Alcohol Anonymous, function similarly because it works.

James points out listening (confess to one another) and prayer (pray for one another) are essential to supportive relationships. Obviously prayer adds the restoring, healing, and guiding power of God in the relationship, but it also connects us soul to soul. And listening frees us to remove the masks.

In closing I find myself contemplating: Can deep, supportive God-centered relationships be established as easily as taking the time to really listen to each other and offering a pray together? It seems to have been at the heart of the relationship of a man from Galilee and his twelve friends.

Blessings,

Pastor Duane