

people. But we don't talk about them. We even pretend we aren't wearing them.

And so today, we're going to look at three different masks that I think we all tend to put on from time to time, expose how they are wrecking our lives, and explore how we can take them off and live our true identities.

The first mask I see a lot of you carrying around with you is called the "I'm fine" mask. It's all those times throughout the day when someone asks you how you are doing and you say, "I'm fine." It's the moment in small group when your group starts opening up about struggles in their life, and it's your turn, and you lie and say, "I'm fine." It's the moments when you have been hurt, but you are shoving it down inside and telling people, "I'm fine."

This is what I believe God wants to say to you about the "I'm Fine" masks we put on: **hiding doesn't help, but freedom is found in surrender.**

James 5:16 (NLT)

Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.

We have to realize that we are not always fine. We have to embrace vulnerability and admit when we are struggling with hidden sin, broken over relational conflict in our families or friend groups, lonely and depressed from lack of meaningful friendships, or fearful about the future.

If we don't confess these things to each other, we won't be healed from them. If we continue to walk around with this "I'm fine" mask on, we will miss out on this "great power" and these "wonderful results" that God promises in that passage in James. It is only when we surrender to Jesus that we will find freedom.

[Author Note: Tell a story here about a time when you opened up and were honest with another person about your sin struggle, and how it actually helped free you from that sin.]

In middle school and high school, I really struggled with having lustful thoughts about guys. I was extremely secretive about it, and although I felt like lust was brought up often in youth group, it was always portrayed as

only a guy's struggle. As a girl, I felt like I couldn't share that it was my struggle, too.

It wasn't until my freshman year of college that I finally had had enough of hiding it, and I shared with one of my best friends. We had been friends for two years before I felt like I could confess it.

But you know what? She didn't judge me or get grossed out. It was the opposite reaction. She prayed with me, encouraged me, and helped hold me accountable by encouraging me to get into God's Word daily and by asking me about it periodically. I wish I would have told her sooner! I can trace much of my freedom over that struggle back to that moment.

But vulnerability is really scary. You shouldn't just bear your soul to Instagram or just any passerby and expect to get a godly response.

One of the things that is most important to us here at our youth group is godly community. That's the reason we do small groups. We want your small group leader and the people in your group to be your people that you can be vulnerable with. And if it's not a place that you feel safe—come and talk to me and let's see how we can make it safe.

[Author Note: Plug anything specific you want to say here about ways you build community in your church. This is your application for this point.]

The second mask that I think you might be packing in your backpack on the way to school is the "chameleon mask."

How many of you have seen *Monsters Inc.*? Who is your favorite character? How about Roz? She's the lady behind the counter who says, "I'm watching you, Wazowski, always watching." Or Sully? Big, fuzzy Sully?

How many of you love the character Randall? Randall is the villain in this movie, and he is a chameleon-like monster. He is jealous of Mike and Sully's success and hates their desire to not scare kids—and so he uses his chameleon powers to blend in with his surroundings and mess with Mike and Sully.

We don't like Randall, but I think we put on the chameleon mask more than we care to admit. And how do we do that? We change depending on who

we are with. We act like one person at home, another person in math class, and a different person at lunch. We change when we are with our sports teams or drama club, and then we change again when we come to youth group.

And it's probably not always an extreme change—it might be pretending to like certain things even though we don't, to get a girl or guy to like us, or laughing at crude jokes that you know deep down are hurtful or inappropriate, or cussing so you can avoid being called a goody-good.

Or maybe it's more extreme—like being a party animal on the weekends and lying to your parents about where you are ... but then playing in the worship band at church and saying you are a leader in this ministry.

Or maybe you are teacher's pet at school, and then you go home and snap at your parents and give them your worst attitude.

And we all do this to some degree, don't we? We want to be liked. We want people to like us. We want to be popular or for our parents to be proud. We want our youth pastor to see us a certain way. We want to be the funny one. So we change.

Matthew 23:27–28 (NLT)

[Jesus said:] "What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs—beautiful on the outside but filled on the inside with dead people's bones and all sorts of impurity. Outwardly you look like righteous people, but inwardly your hearts are filled with hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Here is the sad truth: we are all hypocrites. Christians get a bad rap because we say one thing and do another—but that's just humans! The best way we can respond to that criticism is by one, owning it and directing people to the fact that this is exactly why we need Jesus, and two, Asking the Holy Spirit to change us from the inside out so that we are living more consistently.

Let me ask you a question: how many of you have ever tried to stop something? Biting your nails, eating as much sugar, cussing, gossiping, thinking lustful thoughts ... all of us, right? And how many of you actually have? What did it take?