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Stepping Out of My Masks By Deb Burma

I have a secret stash of masks that I keep handy for all those times when, for a variety of reasons that you will soon know, I am feeling particularly prideful. My assortment of masks does a nice job of concealing the truth that lies beneath them. So I slap them on as needed.

When life decisions, large or small, need to be made, pride would have me say, "It's my decision. It's my life. I'll live it however I want to." That's when I slap on my In-Charge Mask. Sporting this mask, I try to convince myself and others that I can take the driver's seat, make all my own decisions, and operate under my own power regarding everything from relationships to finances, from my career plans to my moral and ethical choices. Oh, and by the way, when I am wearing this mask, pride has me believe that I am never wrong. After all, a go-to gal like me, in charge of her own life, could never make a mistake. Right?

On other occasions, when a loved one or a trusted friend asks, "How have you been, Deb?," instead of revealing the truth (which might sound something like, "I've been struggling lately"), I slap on my I'm-Fine Mask. You know, the one that gives the impression that everything is just great. "Couldn't be better." Why? The difficult truth stares me in the face (under that mask, of course): Pride. Again. Oh, sure, I can justify my answer: "Oh, I don't want to bother them. They have enough worries of their own." The truth is, though, that I don't want them to see me in my weakness. Yep, that is a pride issue. To admit that I am struggling with something — anything — is to admit weakness, dependency on others, or the need for help. And I don't need help. Right? I can do it all on my own.

In similar situations, I want to have all the answers — at church, at school, at home. As an example, when attending a Bible study, I want to give the right answers, should someone ask. So I slap on the Answer Mask, the one that lets everyone think that I am super knowledgeable,

that they need only look to me for a quick answer. Ouch. Does pride keep me from learning from and listening to others? And does it inhibit others from answering or sharing? Could it even keep me from attending Bible study or another learning opportunity because I don't want to reveal my lack of understanding or inability to answer? Maybe.

What mask should I wear for those times when I drive by another car and think proudly, "Look at that old jalopy; mine is nicer than theirs"? Or when I stare at someone's lack of fashion sense or poor hygiene, their addictive habits or embarrassing behaviors, and say smugly under my breath, "Well, at least I'm not that bad"? For these proud moments, there is the ever-popular Better-Than-You Mask. Because I am just a bit better. Aren't I? Every mask attempts to conceal some important truths — and they are more than a bit humbling:

- I am not in charge of my own life, and I do make mistakes.
- I am weak, and I could use some help.
- I don't have all the answers.
- I am no better than the next person.

Jesus Steps In

The truth is that God is the Lord of our lives, and we are not. In our sinful pride, we fail to follow His leading. We put our trust in ourselves instead of in Him. We think we know better than He does. On our own, we are stuck in our selfish sins. It is only by the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts that we can confess our sins of pride and ask Him to show us where and when we are too full of ourselves. With repentant hearts, we surrender our pride, yield our lives to

His lordship, and humble ourselves before our God. In His limitless mercy, He washes us clean in Christ, covering these countless sins with His pure and perfect forgiveness. Because Jesus steps in, it is possible for us to step out of our pride, to lay aside the masks that caused us to try to conceal the truth from ourselves.

Humility begins as He enables me to recognize my proper place in relation to my Maker. No longer do I trust in my ways and my desires, but in His. Humility does not selfishly ask, "What do I want to do today?" but "Lord, what would You have me do today?" and then seeks His Word and follows His lead. Humility is putting God in His proper place as Lord of my life, and me in my proper place at His feet. Good-bye, In-Charge Mask! *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts* (Isaiah 55:8–9).

As the Lord enables me to recognize my helplessness and accept my weaknesses, I learn reliance on His power and on others' help. It is humbly freeing to admit to another Christian, "I am struggling and would like your prayers." Farewell, I'm-Fine Mask! But He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me (2 Corinthians 12:9).

My Savior helps me to accept a position of humility, where I listen and learn from others. He gives me an appropriate perspective in which I can say things such as, "I don't have it all together, but I trust the One who does." And, "I don't know the answer to that, but I will try to find out from someone who does know, and then I will get back to you." Adios, Answer Mask! *To make an*

apt answer is a joy to a man, and a word in season, how good it is! (Proverbs 15:23)

God gives me eyes to see His other children as He sees them: loved and valuable and — just like me — in need of a Savior. He enables me to stop judging them in my pride and start loving them by His grace. Bye, bye, Better-Than-You Mask! *For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned* (Romans 12:3).

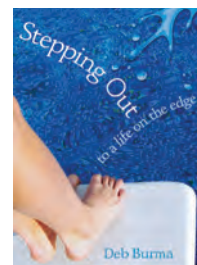
Make no mistake, the only reason we can lay aside our masks of pride and clothe ourselves with humility is because Jesus has stepped into our lives with His grace and forgiveness, filling us with faith. Jesus showed us the greatest extent of humility with His very life, as shared poetically in the Spirit-inspired words of the apostle Paul: *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father* (Philippians 2:5–11).

This passage begins with the words "have this mind." What is this mind? It is one of humility. The message of true humility is unique to Christians. This isn't to say that people of other world religions are incapable of being humble. No, but true humility was exemplified and personified only in

Christ. No other religion teaches this. Other world religions take a prideful position, claiming that men can become gods, seek power, or achieve salvation by their own good works. Only in the Christian faith do we find the unthinkable, the opposite: God humbled Himself and became man. Why? Because of His great love for us!

Jesus left His Father and heaven to come to earth with the single-focused mission of saving us from our sin, which separated us from God. And He did this through the humblest of all circumstances. He entered the womb of a peasant girl and came to the world in meekness, a helpless but perfect infant, fully man yet fully God in the flesh. He lived a perfect life in this sin-filled world, died a most cruel and humiliating death, and rose from the dead, conquering sin and the grave, that we prideful, selfish sinners might be forgiven. Exalted by the Father, Jesus is the One whose name we confess as Lord and Savior, to the glory of God! He is our hope of salvation. *Q*

As keynote speaker for the 2011 Peoria LWML Convention, Deb Burma shared a glimpse of "living on the edge" for Christ as she stepped out — all the way to the edge of a diving board. Stepping out in her Savior's strength, Deb is a writer, a speaker, and a women's ministry leader — a wife, mother, and friend. She and her family make their home in Columbus, Nebraska.



From *Stepping Out: To a Life on the Edge*
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published by Concordia
Publishing House (CPH).
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