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Surrendering the Mask

MY SIBLINGS, GRANDMOTHER AND I WERE ON OUR ANNUAL TRIP FROM MICHIGAN TO NEW YORK. We looked forward all year to this adventure. But this trip would be different. Suddenly, with no explanation, we were headed back home. I kept asking why we had to return, but nobody would answer me. I was just eleven years old.

When we finally reached home, I could tell that something was “off.” Everyone was there except for my father. “Where’s Dad?” I asked repeatedly. Again, no answer. Finally, I was taken into my little sister’s room where I was told the horrible and tragic news: my father had passed away. To us, he had seemed perfectly healthy but, one day, while doing yardwork, he suffered a heart attack that proved fatal.

Immediately I begin to question God. “Why?” I asked again and again. My dad, Nesamony Elanko, MD, was such a good person. He loved his children. “*If God is so good, why would He allow something like this to happen to our family?*” I kept asking the questions, even though I already knew the answer. Bad things happen because of sin.

In my grief and confusion, I considered agnosticism. Maybe there is a higher power, I reasoned, but there is no way of knowing for sure. Unlike most of my peers, as I was growing up, I found creation vs. evolution debates fascinating. To me, it seemed that the creationists were always getting destroyed. Their arguments just didn’t hold up. My faith wavered as I began to think that the evidence was not in God’s favor.

Eventually, however, I began to see things differently. My doubts gave way to a new

► Jacob Elanko

realization. Jesus was my only hope of seeing my dad again. I would give God another chance.

As I look back on the life-changing trauma of losing my father, I realize that I had been wearing a mask. Although I had been raised in the church and had attended church school, I had no relationship with God. I was broken. I dressed up like everyone else when I attended church. While there, I acted as if life were all blue skies and butterflies because Sabbath was supposed to be “a happy day.” In reality, however, I was struggling. I was going through the motions, but my mask was hiding my brokenness.

While not everyone experiences the early loss of a parent as I did, all of us are broken in some way. It is only by placing ourselves in the hands of Jesus that we can find a safe place to stand. Jesus is glorified through imperfect, flawed people, through each of us who put our trust in Him. God gives us the power to say, “Although I’m imperfect, I serve a perfect God.”

John 8:36 tells us, . . . *who the Son sets free, shall be free indeed . . .* Jesus frees us from the need to hide behind a mask. We don’t have to pretend that everything is just fine. Neither do we have to agonize over not being good enough or worry that what we’ve done makes us somehow beyond redemption.

True victory in Jesus starts with total surrender. When we accept His love, He helps us surrender all our pain, worries and brokenness. And, yes, even our masks. ■

Jacob Elanko was a senior at Andrews Academy when he delivered a longer version of this article as a chapel talk. He plans to study Business Pre-Law at Andrews University, beginning in the 2022–2023 school year. When he completes his education, he hopes to work as a lawyer or in business. “Whatever I do,” Jacob adds, “I’d like to help those in need and bring people closer to Jesus.”



Nik Feliciano