

Hearing Men's Voices: Purim Edition
**Unmasking Ourselves: Exploring Identity, Vulnerability,
and Purpose through the Masks We Wear**
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Program Overview: This program uses the Book of Esther as a meaningful framework to guide men in reflecting on their inner and outer lives. By weaving together artistic expression, textual exploration, and deep conversation, it creates a powerful space for connection and growth. [This brief article might also help to explain the necessity of this program.](#) The [Million Mask Movement](#) is also a good resource to use for preparation.

Program Objectives:

1. Reflect on the "masks" we wear in life, using creative expression.
2. Examine the symbolic and spiritual meaning of masks in Purim, grounded in the Book of Esther.
3. Foster deep conversations about authenticity, identity, and personal growth.

Structure:

Duration: ~2.5 hours

Group Size: 8-20 participants

Materials Needed:

- Plain white masks or cardstock templates.
- Art supplies (markers, paint, glue, feathers, etc.).
- Journals or notebooks for reflection.
- Copies of Megillat Esther (Book of Esther) or handouts with key excerpts.
- A facilitator's guide with discussion prompts.

Program Outline:

1. Welcome and Icebreaker (15 minutes)

- **Activity:** "What's Behind Your Name?"
Each participant shares their name and a brief story about its meaning or significance.
Purpose: Sets the tone of self-reflection and connects to themes of identity.

2. Introduction to the Concept of Masks (20 minutes)

- [You can also use this source sheet to help with the texts and reflections.](#)
- **Mini-Lesson:**

- **Masks in Life:** Introduce the dual purpose of masks—to conceal and to reveal. Discuss how we wear masks to meet expectations, protect vulnerabilities, or adapt to roles.
- **Purim's Masks:**
 - Explore Purim as a time when masks are worn not only in celebration but as a reflection of the deeper themes in the Book of Esther.
 - Discuss Esther's concealed identity as a Jew (Esther 2:10, "Esther did not reveal her people or her kindred, for Mordechai had instructed her not to tell") and her ultimate act of unmasking when she reveals her identity to save her people (Esther 7:3-6).
 - Highlight the hiddenness of God's presence in the story and how this parallels the hidden parts of ourselves.
- **Reflection Prompt:**
 - When have you worn a "mask" to protect or conceal your identity?
 - What might it look like to unmask and be seen fully?

3. "Masks We Wear" Art Project (40 minutes)

- **Activity:**
 - Provide each participant with a plain mask or cardstock template and art supplies.
 - Instruct participants to decorate the *outside* of the mask to represent the face they show to the world.
 - On the *inside*, write or draw what they feel they conceal from others (fears, vulnerabilities, or unspoken truths).
- **Facilitator Note:** Encourage quiet reflection as participants work. Optional: Play soft instrumental music in the background.
- **Textual Reflection:**
 - Before concluding the project, read **Esther 4:14** ("And who knows if you were not brought to your royal position for such a time as this?"). Discuss how moments of truth and vulnerability—like Esther's—can lead to personal and communal transformation.

4. Small Group Sharing (30 minutes)

- **Break into groups of 3-5** participants to share their masks and the stories behind them.
- **Discussion Prompts:**
 - What surprised you as you created your mask?
 - How does the outside of your mask differ from the inside?
 - How do you relate to Esther's journey of concealment and revelation?

5. Large Group Discussion on Masks and Identity (25 minutes)

- Facilitate a larger group discussion to explore personal insights and connect them to Purim themes:
 - **Esther's Choice:** How did Esther's decision to reveal her identity (Esther 7:3-6) resonate with the masks we wear in our own lives?
 - **Hidden and Revealed:** In what ways does Purim's hiddenness (e.g., God's name not mentioned in the Megillah) reflect the hidden aspects of our own lives?
 - **Courage to Unmask:** What would it take to live more authentically and with greater vulnerability?

6. Closing Ritual (20 minutes)

- **Activity:**
 - Pass around a candle or symbolic object. Each participant shares one word or phrase about what they are taking away from the session.
 - End with a reading of **Esther 9:22**, which celebrates Purim as a time for joy, connection, and transformation:
 - "They should observe them as days of feasting and gladness, sending gifts of food to one another and presents to the poor."
 - Offer a closing blessing: May we find the courage to remove the masks that no longer serve us and to reveal the fullness of who we are, for the sake of connection, healing, and growth.

Optional Additions:

- **Text Study:** Provide deeper analysis of passages such as Esther 3:8-11 (Haman's deception as a "mask") or Esther 8:15-17 (transformation and revelation).
- **Follow-Up Sessions:** Encourage participants to explore other Jewish texts or traditions that address identity and vulnerability.