

# The Castle of Performance: When You Believe You're Forgiven But Still Live Like You're Not (Part 1)

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You can say all the right things about grace and still live under the weight of performance. You can believe God forgives you and still treat Him like a disappointed parent you're trying to appease. You can know the doctrine of transformation and never experience it.

I know, because I did all three for decades.

## The Distance We Create

Brian Fisher, founder of Soil and Roots ([soilandroots.org](http://soilandroots.org)), recently wrote something that stopped me cold:

*"It's entirely possible to believe you're forgiven... and still live as though God is distant, disappointed, or merely tolerant of you."*

*When faith becomes transactional – focused primarily on sin management, behavior modification, or spiritual performance – it doesn't require a deep relationship. And it doesn't naturally produce deep transformation."*

Read that again. Slowly.

You can believe you're forgiven and still live as though God is distant.

You can have "saving faith" and still operate from a transactional mindset.

You can manage your sin, modify your behavior, perform all the spiritual disciplines – and never experience the transformation you're exhausted from trying to achieve.

I accepted Christ at age 5. I didn't start living like I was actually forgiven until my late 20's.

For over 20 years, I believed the doctrine. For over 20 years, I kept God outside my castle.

## The Castle of Performance

The castle I built wasn't just to keep people out. It was to keep God at a safe distance too.

Not the "God who saves" – I let Him in for that transaction. I prayed the prayer. I believed the right things. I was going to heaven when I died.

But the "God who transforms"? The one who wants access to every room, every wound, every shame-filled corner? Him... I kept outside the walls.

Because letting Him into those rooms would require more than belief. It would require relationship. Vulnerability. Surrender.

And I wasn't ready for that.

So instead, I performed.

### **What Performance-Based Faith Looks Like**

Here's what transactional faith looked like in my castle:

**Sin Management:** Just... don't. Don't mess up. Don't fall into temptation. White-knuckle your way through. Try harder. Fail again. Feel shame. Recommit. Repeat.

**Behavior Modification:** Go to church. Read your Bible. Pray before meals. Check the boxes. Do the things Christians are supposed to do. Maybe if you act Christian enough, you'll become Christian enough.

**Spiritual Performance:** Do devotionals. Serve in ministry. Memorize Scripture. Impress people with your spiritual maturity. Build a reputation as a "good Christian." Keep the drawbridge up while looking like you've let God in.

None of these are bad things. But when they become the *primary focus* of your faith? When they replace relationship with God instead of flowing from it?

Brian Fisher is right: "It doesn't require a deep relationship. And it doesn't naturally produce deep transformation."

I managed my sin for years. It didn't transform me.

I modified my behavior through sheer willpower. It didn't last.

I performed faith in front of others while my castle stayed locked from the inside.

And God? He stayed outside. Not because He wanted to. But because my faith didn't require Him to be any closer.

### **"I Know I'm Forgiven... But"**

This is the signature statement of transactional faith:

"I know I'm forgiven... but I still feel ashamed."

"I know I'm saved... but I don't feel close to God."

"I know God loves me... but I feel like He's disappointed in me."

"I know I'm a new creation... but I keep doing the same old things."

The "but" reveals the gap. The distance between what you believe doctrinally and what you're experiencing relationally.

You believe God forgave you. Theologically, you're solid.

But you're still living in the dungeon of shame. You're still watching Him from the tower of isolation. You're still managing sin from the storerooms instead of bringing it into His light. You're still performing from behind the walls instead of abiding in the Vine.

**Believing you're forgiven and living forgiven are not the same thing.**

One is a transaction you completed.

The other is a relationship you're experiencing.

### **The Exhaustion of Performance**

Here's what no one tells you about performance-based faith: it's exhausting.

Sin management is a full-time job. You're constantly monitoring, controlling, white-knuckling. One slip and the shame spiral starts.

Behavior modification requires constant effort. You're trying to be better, do better, prove you're good enough. The bar keeps moving. You're never quite there.

Spiritual performance demands an audience. You need people to see your devotion, your service, your transformation. Because if they don't see it, does it even count?

I lived this way for years. And I was tired.

Tired of trying harder.

Tired of failing again.

Tired of pretending I had it together.

Tired of keeping God at arm's length while insisting I believed in Him.

### **The Vow That Kept God Out**

At 16, I made a vow in a moment of anger and pain. It was a promise to myself about control – that I would never let anyone have power over me again.

That vow destroyed every relationship I had for the next decade. But more than that, it revealed something deeper: I believed control was my job, not God's.

I believed I could manage my life, modify my behavior, and perform my way into wholeness.

I didn't need God in the storerooms where I stuffed my pain. I didn't need Him in the dungeon where I hid my shame. I didn't need Him in the dark halls where addiction lived.

I just needed Him to save me. And maybe give me strength when I asked for it. But full access? Surrender? Letting Him into every room?

No. That felt too vulnerable. Too out of control.

So I kept the drawbridge up and called it faith.

### **What Changed**

At 23, broken and exhausted, I finally heard God say: "Get on your knees."

Not "try harder." Not "perform better." Not "manage your sin more effectively."

Just: "Get on your knees. Stop performing. Start abiding."

For the first time in years, I stopped trying to manage my castle and started letting the King in.

It wasn't dramatic. It wasn't instant. But it was the beginning of something I'd been missing for 18 years: actual transformation.

Not behavior modification. Not sin management. Not spiritual performance.

Real change. From the inside out.

But it required something I'd been resisting: lowering the drawbridge and letting God into every room – even the ones I was most ashamed of.

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**In Part 2, we'll explore the specific rooms in your castle that performance-based faith keeps locked – and why God can't transform what you won't let Him access.**

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**If you're in crisis:**

- Christian Faith-Based Resources: <https://mentalhealthhotline.org/christian-faith-resources/> or call 1-866-903-3787 (24/7)
- Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741741
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 988 (call or text)
- International Association for Suicide Prevention: [https://www.iasp.info/resources/Crisis\\_Centres/](https://www.iasp.info/resources/Crisis_Centres/)

**You matter. Your life matters. Please stay.**

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**William James Meyer is the author of “Do You Live in a Castle? Breaking Free from the Walls That Hold You Hostage.” He writes from a Christian perspective as someone who spent 23 years performing faith before learning what it means to abide. He's still under construction.**

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