

04 The Castle of Performance: When You Believe You're Forgiven But Still Live Like You're Not (Part 2)

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The Rooms God Can't Enter (Until You Let Him)

In Part 1, we explored how it's possible to believe you're forgiven while still living as though God is distant, disappointed, or merely tolerant of you. We saw how performance-based faith – focused on sin management, behavior modification, and spiritual performance – doesn't require deep relationship and doesn't produce deep transformation.

Today, we're going into the castle to see exactly which rooms stay locked when faith becomes transactional – and why God can't transform what you won't let Him access.

From Transaction to Transformation

In John 15, Jesus doesn't say “Manage your sin and you'll bear fruit.”

He says: **“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.”** (John 15:4)

Abiding isn't performance. It's presence.

It's not white-knuckling holiness. It's staying connected to the source of life.

It's not trying harder to be good enough. It's resting in the One who already made you righteous.

The branch doesn't try to produce fruit. It abides in the vine. The fruit happens naturally.

But I spent years trying to produce fruit through effort, management, and performance. And I was exhausted because branches weren't designed to bear fruit apart from the vine.

The problem? I was trying to transform my castle from the outside - through behavior, discipline, willpower - while keeping the King locked out of the rooms that actually needed His presence.

The Rooms That Stay Locked

Your castle has rooms you've never let God into. Not because He can't handle what's inside. But because you're convinced He'll be disappointed when He sees.

So you manage those rooms yourself. You keep the doors locked. You perform faith in the public spaces while the private rooms stay hidden.

Here are the rooms performance-based faith keeps locked:

The Storeroom: Where You've Stuffed Pain Instead of Processing It

This is where you've packed away the hurt you don't want to deal with. Childhood trauma. Broken relationships. Disappointments. Grief you never let yourself feel.

You believe God can handle your salvation, but can He handle your trauma? Your anger? Your unprocessed grief?

Performance-based faith says: “Keep those doors shut. Just manage the pain. Don't burden God - or anyone else - with that mess. Be strong. Move forward. Get over it.”

But stuffed pain doesn't disappear. It leaks. It seeps under the door and poisons the rest of your castle. It shows up as irritability, anxiety, depression, physical symptoms your body is carrying because your heart won't.

God isn't asking you to manage your pain better. He's asking you to bring it into His presence so He can heal what you've been trying to hide.

The Dungeon: Where Shame Lives

You believe intellectually that “there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). You can quote it. You might even teach it.

But you're still condemning yourself.

The dungeon is where you lock away your identity - not your behavior, but who you believe you are underneath the performance:

“I'm the addict.”

“I'm the failure.”

“I'm the one who can't get it together.”

“I'm not really worthy of being called a Christian.”

“I'm too broken for God to actually use.”

Performance-based faith tries to manage the dungeon by locking it tighter. “Don't think about that. Just focus on doing better. Prove you're different now.”

But shame doesn't die from being locked away. It grows stronger in the dark.

God wants access to the dungeon. Not so He can confirm your shame. But so He can replace the verdict with His truth: “You are Mine. You are loved. You are forgiven. That's your identity now.”

The Dark Halls: Where Addiction Hides

These are the corridors you stumble through when the lights go out. The places you return to when willpower fails and shame takes over.

Addiction. Compulsion. The patterns you can't seem to break no matter how many times you try.

You believe God forgives you. But you've tried and failed so many times that you've stopped inviting Him into the actual struggle.

You manage it alone. Or you don't manage it at all. You just keep it hidden, perform in public, and pray no one finds out what happens in the dark.

Performance-based faith says: "Try harder. Have more accountability. Read your Bible more. Pray more. White-knuckle it until the temptation passes."

But addiction isn't defeated by management. It's defeated by bringing it into the light, confessing it to safe people, and letting God into the very place you're most ashamed of.

I spent years trying to manage addiction through willpower and spiritual discipline. It didn't work. Because I was trying to produce freedom while refusing to abide in the only One who could actually set me free.

The Tower: Where You Watch God From a Distance

The tower is the loneliest room in your castle. It's the highest point with the best view - you can see everything happening outside.

You can see God. You believe He's there. You watch Him work in other people's lives.

But you're not sure He's safe. So you keep Him in view but never let Him close enough to see your face.

You watch from the tower because performance-based faith doesn't require intimacy. It just requires belief. Observation. Theological accuracy.

You know about God. You can describe Him. You defend Him. You teach about Him.

But do you know Him? Does He know you - the real you, not the performed version?

The tower keeps God at the perfect distance: close enough to call yourself a Christian, far enough that He can't see the rooms you're keeping locked.

The Drawbridge: The Mechanism You Control

This is the most important structure in your castle. It's the decision point. The access control.

You let God in for salvation. Maybe for crisis moments when you're desperate.

But day-to-day access to every thought, fear, wound, and shame? The drawbridge stays up.

Performance-based faith treats the drawbridge like a transaction window at a bank. You slide your requests through the slot. God slides His answers back. Transaction complete. Both parties stay on their own side of the glass.

But transformation requires opening the drawbridge completely and letting the King into every room - not just the ones you've cleaned up for company.

God Is Not Distant - Your Castle Is

Here's the truth: God isn't distant. He's not disappointed. He's not merely tolerant of you.

Your castle is what's creating the distance.

Your performance mindset is what expects Him to be disappointed.

Your transactional faith is what can't imagine Him being anything more than tolerant.

But listen: **The God who forgave you isn't standing outside your castle waiting for you to get your act together. He's standing at the drawbridge waiting for you to let Him in.**

Not so He can inspect your failures.

Not so He can catalog your sins.

Not so He can confirm His disappointment.

But so He can transform what you've been trying to manage. So He can heal what you've been trying to hide. So He can bring life to the dead stone you've been living behind.

Why We Choose Performance Over Presence

Here's why performance feels safer than abiding:

Performance keeps you in control. You manage your sin. You modify your behavior. You decide when God gets access and when He doesn't.

Abiding requires surrender. You give God access to everything. The good, the bad, the shameful, the broken. You stop managing and start trusting.

Performance feels like strength. "I'm trying. I'm doing better. I'm working on it." You're the hero of your own transformation story.

Abiding feels like weakness. "I can't. I need You. Apart from You I can do nothing." (John 15:5) You're admitting dependence.

Performance gets applause. People see your service, your devotion, your spiritual maturity. You get affirmation.

Abiding is often invisible. The transformation happens in hidden rooms. The fruit grows slowly. The vine does the work while you simply stay connected.

I chose performance for years because it let me keep control while looking spiritual.

But it didn't transform me.

It couldn't. Because **transformation doesn't come from what you do for God. It comes from what God does in you when you finally stop managing the process.**

The Shift That's Coming

Paul addressed this exact issue in Galatians 3:3:

"Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?"

You started by grace - salvation through faith, not works.

But somehow, you shifted to performance - transformation through effort, management, behavior modification.

You believed you were saved by grace. But you're trying to be sanctified by works.

And it's not working.

Because the same grace that saved you is the grace that transforms you.

Not grace plus your effort.

Not grace plus your performance.

Not grace plus your sin management.

Just grace. Received. Abided in. Moment by moment.

In Part 3, we'll explore what abiding actually looks like in practice – how to shift from performance to presence, how to lower the drawbridge, and what happens when you finally let the King into every room.

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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/

You matter. Your life matters. Please stay.

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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