

## 05 The Castle of Performance: When You Believe You're Forgiven But Still Live Like You're Not (Part 3)

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### From Performance to Presence: Lowering the Drawbridge

*In Part 1, we identified the gap between believing you're forgiven and actually living forgiven – and how performance-based faith keeps God at a distance.*

*In Part 2, we explored the specific rooms in your castle that stay locked when faith becomes transactional: the storeroom of stuffed pain, the dungeon of shame, the dark halls of addiction, the tower of isolation, and the drawbridge you control.*

*Today, we're talking about what changes everything: how to shift from performance to presence, what abiding actually looks like in practice, and what happens when you finally let the King into every room.*

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### What Abiding Actually Looks Like

Abiding isn't passive. It's not “Jesus take the wheel” while you check out.

Abiding is active dependence. Moment-by-moment connection. Bringing every room – even the shameful ones – into His presence.

Here's what it looked like for me:

**In the dark halls of addiction:** Not just “God, help me stop,” but “God, I can't stop. I've tried for years. I'm bringing this into the light. I'm telling safe people. I'm not managing this alone anymore.”

That was terrifying. Because it meant admitting I couldn't control it. It meant letting others see the room I'd kept locked.

But it was also the beginning of actual freedom. Not because I tried harder. But because I stopped trying to manage it alone and started abiding in the One who could actually transform it.

**In the storeroom of pain:** Not just stuffing the hurt from my parents' divorce and the wounds of my childhood, but actually grieving it. Feeling it. Letting God sit with me in it instead of thinking I was strong enough to overcome it.

I'd spent years believing “real Christians” moved past pain quickly. That processing trauma was self-indulgent. That strength meant not feeling.

But abiding meant bringing my actual pain into God's presence – not the sanitized, managed version. The raw, messy, angry version. And discovering He could handle it. My life became a living Psalm and I finally understood David's many cries to the Lord.

**In the dungeon of shame:** Not just believing theologically that I'm forgiven, but bringing my actual shame into His presence and hearing Him say: "There is no condemnation. You are Mine. That's your identity now."

I had to stop performing that I was "healed" and start being honest about still feeling broken. I had to let safe people into the dungeon with me. I had to choose God's verdict over my own self-condemnation.

**In the tower of isolation:** Not just going to church and checking the box, but actually entering the courtyard – the small group where masks come off. The Great Hall – the body of Christ where I'm known beyond my brokenness.

This meant risking rejection. It meant being seen. It meant trusting that safe people wouldn't run when they saw what was really inside my castle.

This is abiding. And it's terrifying. Because it requires lowering the drawbridge you've spent years keeping raised.

But it's also the only path to transformation.

### **The Moment Everything Shifted**

At 30, I was trying to win back the heart of my ex-girlfriend. It took over 9 months to get her to trust me again. But had I overcome the same pattern, same fear, same self-sabotage that ruined my chances at love previously?

I'd dated her twice. Broken up with her twice. Both times using the same excuse: "We're too different." Both times, it was a lie. The real reason? Fear. The vow I'd made at 16 was still controlling me, and I couldn't let anyone – including her – get close enough to really see me.

But this time, something was different. I'd been in counseling for six months. I'd renounced the vow. I'd started letting God into rooms I'd kept locked for years.

And I realized: **I'd been managing my relationship with Dawn the same way I'd been managing my relationship with God – through control, performance, and keeping the drawbridge raised.**

God wasn't asking me to try harder with Dawn. He was asking me to surrender her completely. To put her on the altar like Abraham put Isaac.

Not as a transaction ("If I surrender her, You'll give her back").

But as a relationship ("**I trust You more than I trust my ability to control outcomes**").

That surrender – that shift from performance to abiding, from transaction to relationship – changed everything.

I stopped trying to manage the relationship and started trusting God with it.

I stopped performing and started being honest about my fear.

I stopped keeping the drawbridge up and started letting her – and God – see the real me.

Less than a year later, I married Dawn. Not because I finally got my act together. But because I stopped performing and started abiding – trusting in the One who knows the outcome even when I don't.

### **An Invitation to Stop Performing**

If you're exhausted from performance, here's what I want you to know:

**God is not distant.** Your castle is keeping Him at arm's length.

**God is not disappointed.** Your performance mindset expects Him to be, but He's not standing outside your walls shaking His head. He's standing at the drawbridge waiting for you to let Him in.

**God is not merely tolerant.** Your transactional faith can't imagine Him delighting in you. But He does. Not because of what you do for Him. But because of **who you are to Him.**

You don't need to try harder. **You need to abide deeper.**

You don't need to manage better. **You need to surrender more fully.**

You don't need to perform for an audience. You need to open the drawbridge and let the King into every room.

### **What This Requires**

Here's what the shift from performance to presence actually looks like:

#### **1. Acknowledge the gap.**

Stop saying “I know I'm forgiven” and then living like you're not.

Admit the performance. Own the exhaustion.

Say it out loud: “I've been managing my faith instead of abiding in relationship. I've kept You (God) outside the rooms I'm most ashamed of. I'm tired of performing.”

**You can't change what you won't acknowledge.**

#### **2. Stop managing.**

Whatever you've been white-knuckling – sin, shame, pain, control – stop!

Not because you're giving up. But because you're finally admitting: **I can't manage my way to transformation.**

**The branch doesn't produce fruit by trying really hard. It abides in the vine. The fruit happens naturally.**

Stop trying to be the vine. Start being the branch.

#### **3. Open the rooms.**

The storeroom. The dungeon. The dark halls. The tower.

Invite God into the places you've kept locked. Not so He can condemn you, but so He can heal you.

This doesn't mean you throw open every door all at once. But it does mean you stop keeping rooms permanently locked.

Start with one room. The one you're most afraid to open, and if you can't – then choose another. But open something to Him. Bring it into the light. Confess it to God. Confess it to a safe person.

Watch what happens when you stop managing and start surrendering.

#### **4. Find your courtyard.**

You can't abide in isolation. You need people who know the real you – not the performed version.

Find a small group where masks come off. A counselor who creates safe space. A pastor or elder you trust. An accountability partner who won't let you hide. **A community where confession is normal and grace is the language everyone speaks.**

This is the courtyard – the place where you're known in your brokenness and loved anyway.

Performance-based faith avoids the courtyard because it requires honesty. Abiding requires you to let go.

#### **5. Abide daily.**

This isn't a one-time decision. It's a daily choice to stay connected to the Vine.

What does that look like practically?

**Morning:** “God, I can't do this day on my own. I'm abiding in You. Help me stay listen to You and not to the lies.”

**Throughout the day:** When shame whispers, when addiction tempts, when control feels safer than surrender – pause. Reconnect. “I'm abiding. Not managing. Abiding.”

**Evening:** “Lord, here's what I messed up today. Here's where I tried to take control back. Here's where I need You right here, right now.”

Not performance. Not sin management. Just honest connection with the Vine.

#### **The Transformation You're Looking For**

You've been trying to produce fruit through behavior modification.

But the branch doesn't produce fruit. The vine does. The branch just abides.

You've been trying to transform your castle through performance.

But 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 and start trusting the King.

### **Lower the drawbridge.**

Not because you have to earn God's presence.

But because He's already here, waiting for you to let Him in.

### **When the Drawbridge Finally Came Down**

I wish I could tell you that once I learned to abide, everything became easy. That the castle transformed overnight. That I never struggled with performance again.

But that's not how it works.

I'm in my mid-50s now. I've been married to Dawn for over 25 years. I have four adult children. And I'm still discovering rooms in my castle I didn't know existed.

Just this week, I realized I've been using work to avoid processing some hard situations going on around me. Different room. Same old pattern of management instead of abiding.

The difference now? I recognize it faster. I bring it into the light sooner. I don't try to manage it alone.

### **God isn't outside the walls anymore. He's inside, transforming from the center out.**

The storerooms still fill up sometimes – but now I know how to empty them before they overflow.

The dungeon still whispers lies about my identity – but now I know whose voice to listen to instead.

The dark halls still tempt – but now I have people who walk them with me instead of managing them alone.

The tower still calls me to isolation – but now I choose the courtyard even when it's hard.

And the drawbridge? It's down. Not perfectly. Not always. But more often than not.

Because I've learned: **The castle can't transform until the King has access to every room.**

### **The Final Word**

Stop performing. Start abiding.

The transformation you're exhausted from trying to achieve? It's already available. Not through more effort. Through more surrender.

God isn't distant. Your castle is.

But the drawbridge is yours to lower.

And on the other side? Not condemnation. Not disappointment. Not tolerance.

But the presence of a King who's been waiting to transform what you've been trying to manage.

He's not asking you to get it all together first.

He's asking you to open the door.

The rest? He'll handle. Because that's what the Vine does.

**You just have to abide.**

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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 over 20 years performing faith before learning what it means to abide. He's still under construction.**

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