

4 Toxic Stages of Performance Based Christianity

Getting free of performance-based Christianity will revolutionize your life, but I have found that many people need to untangle themselves from the cycle that this kind of living produces. Unfortunately, the toxic thread of performance has woven itself into every almost every fabric of people's lives.

Getting free is possible and life-changing, but it takes intentional recognition and desire to change; otherwise the performer will get locked into a never ending "Performance Hamster Wheel."

Here are the first four of the 10 stages of this performance-based Christianity that has become a counterfeit in so many lives.

Stage 1: A Lack of Love and Identity Exists

You were meant to be loved and affirmed in who you are and not just for what you do. Performance-based Christianity exists in people who have not experience identity affirmation. Therefore they feel they need to perform well to feel loved by God and people around them.

Instead of having an identity as a son who is loved by our Father in heaven, performers live as spiritual slaves, where their identity is based what they do and how well they do it. They evaluate their relationship with God based on how well they perform religious duties and maintain a level of righteous works.

Spiritual sons know they are loved by God for who they are,

not just for what they do. Slaves have no sense of affirmation apart from their works.

So when that void of identity is not filled, a broken heart is trained to perform for attention, approval and validation. They see earning love through performance as the only option.

Stage 2: Counterfeit Mindsets Enter

When you're not secure in who you are, performance brings in some easy lures to grab onto. It entices spiritual slaves with dreams of success, status and achievement, while slowly draining the person of love, satisfaction and peace.

One of the spiritual errors that reinforces performance based Christianity is "law-based thinking." You will see the Scriptures as a rulebook rather than an invitation for relationship. Law-based thinking reinforces performers, where they keep an evaluation of themselves based on how well they are keeping up with good works. On days you perform well, it seems that God is "OK" with you. On days you don't, He seems silent, distant and disappointed.

Thoughts scream to "work harder" and "do more" to try to get into a better place with God. This all keeps a person from experiencing the unconditional love and acceptance of God. When works override being loved unconditionally, God's design for life becomes spoiled.

At this stage, the problem is that toxic thinking has infected the motives of a person. They are now unknowingly chasing after love and performing for it all along the way. Most of the time, they are not even aware of this motivation. They just feel a "drive" or "impulse" propelling them into their daily actions.

Performance-based Christianity promotes that believers develop fabricated personas, where they don't know how to be themselves in their ministry and Christian interaction.

Performance based Christianity conditions us to think that we are more “anointed” when we get into a certain “persona.” Many pastors don’t know how to just be themselves and let who they are flow authentically.

I tell people all the time: the most anointed you can be is to be yourself as you are learning who you are each day. Today more than ever, we need dynamic and authentic communication from people being themselves, not a fabrication. For decades, PBC has taught us that putting on a “show” is the most effective way to change lives. In reality, authentic living, with healthy vulnerability, is where leaders can invite people into the same journey they are in themselves.

Throughout this stage, rejection is subtly implanting counterfeit values. If you’re honest with yourself, you may find these rejection-based motives lurking within.

Here are toxic beliefs that performers carry deep down. Performers:

- Feel they have to earn the love and acceptance of others.
- Base how they feel about themselves on how well they perform their daily duties. “If I don’t do well, I will not be loved.”
- Spend a lot of time mulling over the worries or pressures of tomorrow and fear not doing well in whatever they do. “I will not be accepted or belong.”
- Tend to strive and live in a “works” mentality.
- Live from pressure, where situations fall back on their efforts.
- Do things to get a sense of God’s approval.
- Take themselves and what they do too seriously.
- Overthink how they come across to others.
- Have this excessive need to be “successful” and become known for their accomplishments.
- Are not comfortable with vulnerability and weakness.

- Often ignore important relational and identity issues of the heart, usually just to keep going and moving. Remember, with performance, the “show must go on.”

Stage 3: Performance Living Becomes a Way of Life

If no one paid attention to our performance, then this subject would not even be an issue. The problem is our culture feeds performance in every way. We spend more time affirming what people do than loving who people are unconditionally.

Performers get affirmation for what they do. It becomes an instant hit that brings them momentary pleasure. They feel good receiving it, but the affirming lands in a bucket that has holes in it. Affirmation is needed over and over. Performers live off the affirmation they get from doing, to the point that it dictates their life.

Performance-based people suck in affirmation like a vacuum, but then quickly return for more. They find that performance is the only way to experience any sense of affirmation, so they invest more energy into becoming better at whatever they do. Their work and activities become their primary source of identity.

Stage 4: Performance Living Kicks Back

Over the long haul, performance-based living wears a person out. Toxic behaviors begin to manifest in such a way that relationships are hindered, wholeness begins to collapse and health starts to wane.

There are many performance “backlashes” that become evident over time, including when a person:

- Comes across as always busy, overloaded and overworked.
- Manifests a deep “need to succeed” at all costs, so the

performer becomes immersed in activity.

- Become a workaholic with driven and perfectionistic tendencies.
- Have a “win/lose” attitude about life and issues.
- Becomes argumentative and overly competitive.
- Feels the need to be the “grown-up one” in the room.
- Struggles with being a false burden bearer.
- Gives out love but cannot receive it.
- Helps others but is uncomfortable with receiving help. Ministers to others but does not present as someone who can be ministered to. Cannot receive something from someone without feeling the need to have to do something back.
- Does not know how to be themselves and just “be” in relationships.
- Struggles with relational intimacy, so they just stay busy.
- Complains of loneliness. They have spent so much time performing that investments in their relationships have not been a priority.
- Battles with anger, either pent-up or expressed.
- Carries deep fabrications that work well in the performance setting, but fall apart in normal relationship interactions.

The performer is often not aware as to why these toxic fruits are manifesting, so they just dive deeper into busyness of performing and avoid pausing to deal with their inner brokenness. They often think that this is just the way life is, so these patterns become deeply embedded.

Stay tuned for part two of this article! {eoa}

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