

6 More Toxic Stages of Performance-Focused Christianity

Note: This is part two of a two-part series. For part one, [click here](#).

Getting free of performance-based Christianity will revolutionize your life, but I have found that many people need to untangle themselves from the cycle 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 final six of the 10 stages of this performance-based Christianity that has become a counterfeit in so many lives.

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.
- Struggle 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.

Stage 5: A Lack of Fulfillment Manifests

Even though the performer’s life may be busy, filled with activity and accomplishments, an emptiness still remains at the end of the day. Performers feel lonely and unfulfilled when it comes to love, yet they have no idea how to get off the hamster wheel. They are starving, in desperate need of love, but they just keep going.

The lack of fulfillment is present because they have never

been affirmed in love apart from what they do. Sonship is foreign because all they have known is slavery. The emptiness needs to be filled with relational connection, but performers don't have time to go deeper in relationship.

Stage 6: Addictions Enter

In the absence of unconditional love and acceptance in the performer's heart, they will turn to anything in search of fulfillment. Their daily grind of doing, going and performing leaves huge voids that are never satisfied.

At the end of the day, when the curtain falls, people left the building and the performer is alone, darkness and loneliness creeps in. In this setting, addictions rise to the occasion. Food addictions and pornography are the most common, but they can certainly manifest in any habit, behavior or pattern that cannot be broken with an act of the will. Workaholism is often a partner to other addictions.

Many do not realize that addiction struggles of any kind are often rooted in performance-orientated living. When you live in performance mode, there is little room left for dealing with the brokenness and wounds that are demanding us to tend to them.

Addictions offer a false, quick relief. They find a way to keep the person locked in a secret prison. The person hates them, but attempts to get free through more performance-oriented self-help steps, while missing the root problem of a broken heart.

Stage 7: Shame and Guilt Are Felt

The person is unfulfilled and bound to vices that won't budge. Deep down, the performer feels like a fraud or a hypocrite. The guilt over their addictions creates a shame that covers them like a shroud.

Satan has a field day in their thoughts, accusing them in every way possible. The world around them can even be ignorant to the war occurring inside the performer who carries a sense of unworthiness and even uncleanness before God, yet keeps the outside facade intact.

Stage 8: More Performance Is Engaged

The biggest problem is that the performer does not know how to get free from this vicious cycle. So they do the only thing they have been trained to do well, perform more. Performance-based Christianity teaches us to do more good things into order to feel better about ourselves. So they add extra effort, pushing with greater force and self-effort to achieve fulfillment through more activity.

In the church, this is where hyper-religious activity increases, thus reinforcing performance based Christianity. People think if they serve more, it will make them feel better about themselves before God. The problem is churches love performance-based people, because they get more things done. Yet they often sacrifice the life of their heart on the altar of doing.

Stage 9: The Crash

The performer's resources wane, and they eventually crash emotionally. They have lived in the hamster wheel of performance for too long, and their body screams for relief. Up until this point, the toxic roots of brokenness have been ignored, but now they are flailing. This is usually where phrases like "burnout" and "I am exhausted" become common expressions.

Most of the people who come to me for help are at this stage of the hamster wheel. They did not see the need for help before, especially because they believed the myth that performance living was working for them. Additionally, most of the time, performance people who crash want a quick fix,

because that is how they live their lives. “Give me a pill, say a quick prayer, do what you need to do to get me back out there.” But it doesn’t work like that.

Stage 10: Back to Performance

This is actually the saddest part of this cycle. Instead of getting some heart-help and restoration, the performer stands up from a burned-out crash and gets right back on the wheel. At the crash, the performer was halted, overwhelmed and in crisis.

They often stop everything to bring attention to their cracked emotional state. But performers are not comfortable with stillness and inactivity, so as soon as they feel a little energy return, they get right back into the race, without taking the time to heal and make necessary changes.

The cycle repeats itself, and over time, relationships are depleted. The performer loses touch with friends and family becomes an unfulfilling place of hidden resentment. It takes great courage and humility for this performance trap to be confronted and eradicated.

The only way to break free from this cycle is to recognize it, fill the foundation of your heart with God’s approval and create a new pattern of living where you don’t perform for love. You live out of the love God already has for you. {eo}

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