

False Belief

Self worth =
Performance + Others' opinion

God's Truth

Self worth =
God's truth about you

False Belief

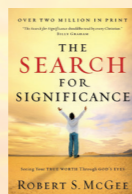
I must meet certain standards
to feel good about myself.

God's Truth

Justification: I bear Christ's
righteousness and am therefore
fully pleasing to God.

Potential Obstacles to Receiving God's Truth About You:

- Addiction to others' approval
- Wanting to live the Christian life by a formula (your own law)
- Thinking you can be in control of guaranteeing your own worth



Adapted from *The Search for Significance* by Robert McGee

*No matter what might
happen in my life, my
marriage, family or
career, my value comes
from God. Not from
anyone else's opinions
of me, and not from any
of my own opinions that
differ from God's.*

—Mike Jordahl

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Upfront

real talk about real stuff . . . upfront

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the performance trap

by Cynthia Hagen



Cynthia Hagen

Performance is a cracked cistern that can never be filled. Like a heartless mistress, it entices its victims and leaves them broken and bleeding in a bleak, hopeless pit of failure. “When have I done enough?” they ask. “When am I good enough?” The answer is “Never,” and this steals their life, joy, and fellowship with the true lover of their soul.

Dramatic? Maybe, but that’s actually a good description of what I’ve seen in staff trapped by the need to achieve. I used to think performance wasn’t so bad compared to other pitfalls. But as I’ve seen the consequences and understood how much it violates the gospel, I’m now convinced it’s one of the worst.

Over the past eleven years, I’ve conducted hundreds of New Staff Interviews, and the highest self-reported or discerned struggle comes in the area of performance. I’ve watched people wear this like a badge of honor, like the cliché “right” answer when asked in a job interview, “What is your greatest weakness?” (“Sometimes I’m overly responsible.”) Within three years, I’ve seen some of these applicants back in PRT in total burnout. They’re exhausted, bitter, depressed, doubting God and/or the Bible.

For them, Jesus’ yoke is not easy. His burden is not light. And there’s a good chance they’ve passed this “reality” on to at least some of those they’ve worked with.

Identifying performance orientation and its roots usually isn’t hard. We grow up in families that verbally or nonverbally reward achievement. The churches we’re raised in often value behavior but ignore the motive. As children, we soon notice how certain grades, personalities, and actions result in praise and love. Strategies developed in our childhood carry over into adult life.

Finding the systemic roots is often the easy part. The challenge comes with how to break out of this way of living. It’s difficult but, by God’s grace, far from impossible. Here are some steps I’ve seen Him use to free His people.

Agreeing with God that performance is sin. People trapped in performance hate to admit they’re sinning. Not surprising, considering how much affirmation they’ve received for it over the years. They wrestle emotionally, resist, excuse, minimize—practically turn themselves inside out—to avoid facing the truth that they’re trusting in themselves to find life and value, a direct contradiction of the gospel. This may not feel like pride, but it is. Until they face that, they can’t open themselves to God’s forgiveness.

The next step, **repentance**, involves a clear declaration along the lines of “I will turn away from performance as my way of gaining worth and significance. Instead, I’ll trust in Christ alone for my value and identity.” Walking this out can be intensely challenging, because it requires utter dependence



the heart of our performance

by Brad Hillman
People Resources Team Director

I was talking with a group of leaders, explaining that in our new staff interviews and individual counseling, we've observed a marked increase in staff struggling with a performance orientation.



One of the leaders got my attention and said, "Actually, in my area, we've got some staff that could use an increase in their performance orientation!"

I smile as I remember that meeting. Yes, I'm with Paul who said, "Whatever you do, work heartily . . ." (Col. 3: 23a). Within reason, margin, and common sense, yes, we need to work hard. We have been called to a "Great Commission," and with that come great responsibility and, at times, great sacrifices.

Having said this, performance orientation isn't about how much you do, but why you do it.

It's not how strong your foot is on the accelerator, but why you're pushing down. There are those who work many hours per week who are not performance oriented and those who work only a few hours per week who are. It's all about identifying the intent of the heart. Paul invites us to hard work in Colossians 3, but he also speaks to our motive. Verse 23 ends, ". . . as working for the Lord, not for human masters."

Even with this, check your heart. Ask yourself, "Am I working these hours to receive God's approval and avoid His wrath? Or does my redeemed heart, in gratitude to God's grace and with a willingness to be used by Him, freely choose to stay at the job a little bit long?"

Jesus calls us friends, not slaves. Friends don't demand. Friends invite. Our friend, our Father, invites us to join the "family business" where we are co-owners, not underpaid employees who try to impress the boss or look better than our coworkers. We join Him to spread—and be—the message of good news.

on God—the very thing they're struggling to avoid. Some people experience panic attacks. Deep inside, they believe giving up their broken cistern will mean having no water at all. It may be a lifelong process to truly draw on God's living water through the grace of Jesus and the gospel.

Changing the lens through which they see Scripture. The performer, subconsciously or not, highlights the "do's" of the Bible. In passages like 2 Corinthians 5, they tend to skip over the first part, which celebrates truths about the grace of God, who they are in Christ, and what the gospel has done in their lives. They hear this as "blah, blah, blah," and focus only on what comes after the word "therefore": all the things they should be doing.

This may sound like an exaggeration. In most cases, it isn't. When the staff I've interviewed drag their exhausted bodies, minds, and souls back to PRT, I hurt for them. I wish I'd been able to convince them three years earlier that performance does not truly please God or man. I have to remember that God's timing is perfect

*The gospel message whispers,
but it's always there, consistently repeating,
"You are my child. I love you."*

in their lives. When they're ready, He'll do the work.

Our culture, both worldly and Christian, screams at us, "Do more! You're not enough! Don't screw up!" The gospel message whispers, but it's always there, consistently repeating, "You are my child. I love you. I died for all your sins and imperfections. I see you as perfect. There is *nothing* you can do that will make you better or worse in My eyes."

This is God. Not a taskmaster who can never be pleased, but the lover of your soul.

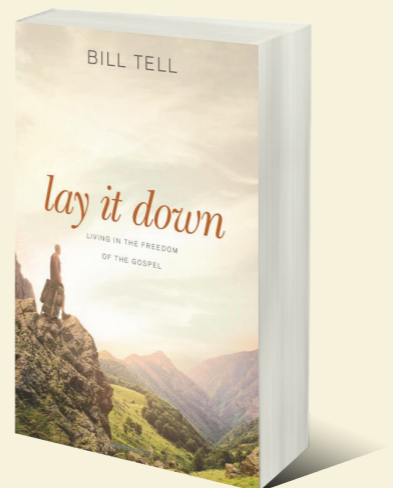
lay it down

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guarding your heart

by Mike Jordahl, U.S. Field Director, Senior Vice President

I was a 20-year-old sophomore at Illinois State when I memorized Proverbs 4:23. "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life" (NAS). I thought of it as a "purity verse" and stored it in my heart, a good reminder to be careful with what I saw and did as a young man. It was helpful.

It was not until the start of our 2009 sabbatical that I discovered another lesson in this familiar verse.

I was mowing my lawn when Proverbs 4:23 came to mind. As I prayed over it, I suddenly had a "new" thought. It was as if the Holy Spirit told me that watching over my heart was much broader than I'd realized. It had to do with every part of my life—and was between God and me. No one else.

A few mornings later, I spent my quiet time in that verse. The message was very clear as I read it in different translations. Solomon told his son to "guard his heart" (NIV), to "keep his heart with all vigilance" (ESV), and to "keep vigilant watch over all his heart" (MSG).

The truth is that at that time, my heart was in a vulnerable place. Comparison and thoughts of failure chased me. I was easily offended, and bitterness sometimes crept in. At times, sadness or a sense of impending doom were emotions I actually welcomed into my heart.

As the Holy Spirit gently instructed me, I began to pray, "Lord, help me guard my heart from thoughts and lies it shouldn't harbor."

During that time, I'd also been reflecting on Lamentations 3:24. "I say to myself, the Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him" (NIV). One day, it struck me that Jeremiah isn't talking to God or to other people. For the first time, I realized that in this verse—and many others—the speaker is talking to himself. So I asked myself, "Mike, what are you saying to *you* today?"

That was an eye-opener. I'd been telling my heart all sorts of lies. No one else lied to me as much as I did.

The more I asked me what I said to me, the more I realized I should say only what God says to me. Anything else is probably not true. One overwhelmingly big lie was that my worth came from others' opinions of me. I had experienced what felt like failure. I had to guard against the lie that I *was* a failure. No matter what might happen in my life, my marriage, family or career, my value comes from God. Not from anyone else's opinions of me, and not from any of my own opinions that differ from God's.

Maybe you're a bit like me? Maybe you're not guarding your heart very carefully these days?

If so, let me encourage you to talk with your Father. Let Him show you how. After all, this is between the two of you.



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