

“I hate tennis!” Why would one of the world’s best tennis players say that? Because André Agassi was trapped. In his book, *Open: An Autobiography*, Agassi said, “I play tennis for a living even though I hate tennis, hate it with a dark and secret passion and always have.” As early as age seven, he wanted to quit the game he gave his life to.

The unrelenting pressure from his overbearing dad helped create a hatred for the game he played so well. Finally, at age 36, he revealed the truth—he was just playing tennis for others. He was faking it the entire time.

Competing is all about performing. We prepare hard to perform well, and we quickly learn there are two outcomes: perform or perish! As competitors, we step onto the field of competition, set everything aside, and perform our best. As athletes and coaches, we have a built-in platform. We put on the jersey, look our best, and play our best—regardless of what is going on beneath the jersey. We train ourselves to not let the inside stuff affect the outside stuff since we’re still expected to compete at a high level.

The front-stage (what we present to others but not the real you) is the enemy of the soul. We want others to see us better than who we really are. The front-stage (known as our outside or false-self) of our lives contradicts the backstage (known as our inside or true-self). This battle rages within us daily, which creates an enormous amount of unhealthy inner-tension. A foundational principle of the front-stage is to impress at a distance but never up close.

The lie that drives us is: the better the performance, the more they like us. Along the way, we pray that nobody will ever discover the backstage. The pain, insecurities, weaknesses, wounds and sins in our lives are off limits. No one is allowed behind the

curtain. We hide it, bury it, and keep it in the dark where it belongs, and for sure, it must not make it to the front-stage.

The backstage and front-stage must be replaced by Christ's stage. No more shows. No more pretending. Sacrifice your image and restore your heart. Stop the show and get real. God does not need our performances to advance the Kingdom of God.

But He does need our hearts. He wants us to pursue one stage—Christ's stage. Ignoring the backstage is the enemy of our soul, but Christ is the lover of our soul. And He loves us just the way we are. But He loves us too much to let us stay the way we are!

Performance-based competition and performance-based living will kill you from the inside out. It will rob and steal your joy for competing and living. It's time to get real and be honest about your backstage. We all have one. Tear down the curtain, and let Christ reign in your life.