

MAGNOLIA MINDS: A better life requires action on your part

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Who wouldn't want a better life? It can be yours.

What was it the old preacher said? "Put the hay where the sheep can get to it." Maybe today you're feeling sheepish and need some good hay. I hope this'll fit the bill.

The context: I've spoken before about the gap between where I want to be, where I need to be, and where I actually am. Chances are you know what I'm talking about. It's a matter of having values and standards and knowing clearly what they are... and failing to act on them in real-life situations.

Or, you ask for advice and if it doesn't appeal to you – even if it's good – you don't take it. Worst of all, you're aware your attitudes and actions are stifling your growth. You get frustrated and paralyzed, and you stay in the same, sorry state you're already in – and THAT leads to self-loathing and a sense of being unworthy.

Take heart. It doesn't have to remain that way. You can have a better life, but you do have to act. Let me share six thoughts with you. Each thought should ideally lead to action on your part. Let's strive for deeds and not just words with this list, okay?

– **Hate no one, no matter how much they've wronged you.** I'm sure you're saying, "C'mon, Tony, that's not what I wanted to hear right out of the chute." For some, hate comes easily and I wouldn't presume in this simple article to try to analyze why that is. It may be the ingrained, childish impulse to hurt back when we've been hurt (as if that would change anything.)

I'm not persuaded that hating anyone for any reason ends up positively for the person doing the hating. I'm not discounting the crystalline pain that comes when someone does you wrong. What I do want to state is that hate won't undo what has already happened. That's rear-view mirror stuff.

The person who hurt you entered your life for a reason, as unfathomable as that might be. We can learn lessons from good *and* bad people. Bottom line: hating someone else doesn't change a thing. If anything, it makes you feel even worse.

– **Live humbly, no matter how wealthy you are.** This may not be an issue for you, because you feel you don't have much to begin with. This actually has more to do with our Western fixation on "stuff" – acquiring and holding onto material things.

I'll admit that there are things I appreciate: air conditioning in my car, my Instant Pot, my iPhone, but I am thoroughly unimpressed with people who flaunt their things. If you determine your worth based on your "worth," then how will you feel when you don't have it any more?

The goal is to simply live humbly, as in "live within your means," and be grateful for that. I struggle with delayed gratification because when I want something I want it right then. That has put me in a tough place more than once.

Right now, take a moment and look around. My guess is you have everything you need and a lot of things you simply want, and that's not bad. You're doing fine. Better than fine, actually. You already have a better life than many.

– **Think positively, no matter how hard life is.** This is not some pop psychology or pump-yourself-up directive. You can start by realizing that you are not unique and there are a couple of gazillion other people who have faced or are facing the same challenges you are.

That may not lessen your pain, but there is some comfort in knowing you aren't alone. Secondly, thinking positively may not change your situation but it will change you. You for sure can't change other people and you may not be able to change your circumstances, but you can change *your* heart.

This should be self-evident. I mean, don't you feel better when you embrace the positive rather than dwell on the negative? *You are responsible.* You can change your outlook.

Pity the person who builds themselves a cage of misery, places themselves in it, and locks the door and tosses away the key.

When you don't think positively, what you're saying is that you're psychic to the extent that you know exactly what is going to happen, i.e., things will never get any better. You can be positive because there is always hope of a better life.

– **Give much, even if you've been given little.** We can start with giving away tangible things – money, for instance. I know money is hard to come by, and there is something in our primordial nature that makes us want to cling to what we have.

Even now, I'm watching our grandson try to grasp the concept of sharing and it doesn't come easy. He's pretty selective about what he shares and with who, but you know how good you feel when you're able to help someone else out? How about if that was your lifestyle?

If you're operating from a scarcity mindset, just remember that you're living in abundance. For believers, remember ancient script tells us God owns the cattle on a thousand hills.

That's a nice transitional thought on the principle of giving yourself away. Is there anything more noble or rewarding than spending yourself in a cause bigger than yourself, or giving yourself to someone who can be blessed because of you? You may not have much money, but you do have a big ol' heart. Be

expansive. Be extravagant.

– **Forgive all, especially yourself.** This is a companion thought to number one above. Here's the reality: folks have done you bad. You may even have a "nemesis" out there, someone who is simply out to get you or they've already gotten you.

I've looked hard and I can't for the life of me find justification to not forgive. There's not a loophole in sight. Forgiveness isn't conditional. We could tease out some scenarios where you might feel justified in saying, "I just can't forgive so-and-so for what they did," but that justification won't stand up under the reality of what we are commanded to do.

Then there's the matter of forgiving yourself. This is a tough one. You know yourself, your heart, and what you've done. It may be that there is real shame attached to something in your past.

Again, though, you can't take it back. Don't pretend that feeling bad about yourself will make you feel better. There is a biblical concept called repentance, which means not only do you feel conviction about what you've done but you resolve to accept forgiveness and turn away from the thing that caused personal grief in the first place.

Don't dwell on the bad you've done. Concentrate on the good that is in you.

– **Never stop praying for the best for everyone.** If you ever catch yourself wishing ill will on someone else, shame on you. How does it help you for someone else to be hurt? There may be a perverse satisfaction in seeing someone "get what's coming to them," but it is a satisfaction based on our own selfish sense of vengeance.

I've heard this all my life, and I've finally accepted that it's hard to hate someone when you're praying for them. You'll

have to determine what someone else's "best" is as you pray for them. A good place to start is to pray for that person's hard heart, that it be softened and opened to the possibility of goodness and peace.

Pray for a better life for them! My former boss said, "Hurt people hurt people," and that's a pretty wise statement. Wouldn't your own heart be softened if you knew someone who dislikes you is praying for you?

These six thoughts are all interconnected, and one is not more important than the other. So do a little introspection, determine where you need to go to work, and get after it. Be hopeful. Who you are not is not who you're destined to remain.