

# MAGNOLIA MINDS: Just be real

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These are challenging days – at least when it comes to being real.

I love, love, love hearing people's stories, seeing their photos, and sharing in their triumphs and their heartaches. That's just me. That's how I'm hardwired and I've learned not to apologize for who I am.

If you want to talk to me about the weather, I'll engage you and mostly enjoy the conversation... for a little while. It won't be long before I'm ready to move on to more substantive things.

Now, if you want to talk about the origin of the universe, or the worst argument you ever had with your dad, or how you got that diamond-shaped scar on your forearm, or how your ancestors got to America, or what keeps you awake at night... if you want to talk to me about your hopes, dreams, and aspirations... I am right there with you. I want you to just be real with me.

The students I've worked with over the years have joked about "Tony and his deep, meaningful conversations."

Don't infer from all this that I won't engage you in any topic you'd like to discuss. I'll be polite and you'll never know the difference, but I can only pretend I'm fascinated for so long. It's all about being real. Just be real.

Don't try to hide from who you really are. You can fool others *sometimes* (but you aren't as good as that as you think. People see right through you. They just don't bother making a big deal out of it.) You can fool *yourself* even more frequently

(and in its fully-developed state, it's called *delusion*).

You never fool God, of course.

Point is, don't try to hide yourself from you or anyone else. Just be real. Be *authentic*. Authenticity means that you embrace the you nobody knows, which means that the *hidden* you needs to admit some things to the *conscious* you.

Social media allows you to present whatever heavily-edited version of yourself to the world you want, and the world may be none the wiser. That guy you met on Instagram who is an investment banker? He might very well be a Sherpa in Tibet. You might never know the difference.

With all that said, let me give you four paradoxical thoughts. These might bring about a check in your spirit. These are about knowing who you are and what you should do to nurture your lean soul. It'll help you to just be real.

– **Be confused. It's how God teaches you new things.** Ask the hard questions, even those you know can't be answered. Bewilderment, by its nature, seeks its own clarity and God can use those hard, unanswerable questions to teach you truths you can't learn any other way.

It's those "why?" questions shouted to the heavens that give God free reign to work.

– **Be broken. It's where God begins to heal.** I've heard people actually pray, "God, break me!" That's a gutsy prayer, and ill-advised if you don't mean business. Brokenness gives God a chance to put together something better than the original.

Unfortunately, when folks pray, "God, break me," they'd really prefer that God break them in some glorious, ennobling way. Martyrdom, right? Sometimes God doesn't go with noble brokenness. He can break us in shattering, messy, horrific ways if it serves His purpose.

That's uncomfortable theology, but it's true. Bet you don't hear *that* much from your local pulpit!

– **Be frustrated. It's here God leads you to make more authentic decisions.** Hey, I've prayed these exact words: "God, You *gottabe* kidding me!" That's usually in response to something, some occurrence, that makes me want to go out in the street and pound my head on asphalt.

It's being faced with a challenging (or even awful) situation and being blocked in every direction when trying to fix it. It's praying in earnest and having the sense that God is looking down from His throne and saying, "How's that praying stuff working out for ya?" And then – glory be! – your frustration leads you to another level of dependence and you make the wise decision.

You realize that, even in the midst of God's silence, He never left you. That only happens when you turn your back on your own resources and admit you are helpless. Just be real.

– **Be sad, because if we're brave enough we can hear God's wisdom through it.** I'd prefer to be happy and not sad. Duh. It feels better. At the same time, I know that in order to be complete as a human and as a believer, I have to embrace the whole gamut of emotions.

We were made to be "feeling" creatures. Sadness is part of the whole human experience. Your sadness should not be wasted. God may just teach more profound truths when we're broken-hearted than when we're happy.

We tend to turn to Him more when we're hurting than when things are going our way. It takes some real courage to accept the fact that when we're sad, God has much fuller access to our hearts.

So, whatever you are right now, no more hiding. God says you're worthy. Always.

The things the Enemy would use to disrupt, derail, and destroy your life are the very things God will use to draw you closer to Himself and use to equip you to help others.

Your trials and tests will become a testimony to God's faithfulness, healing, and overcoming power. Your life will be a testimony that will bring hope and encouragement to others.

Just be real.

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