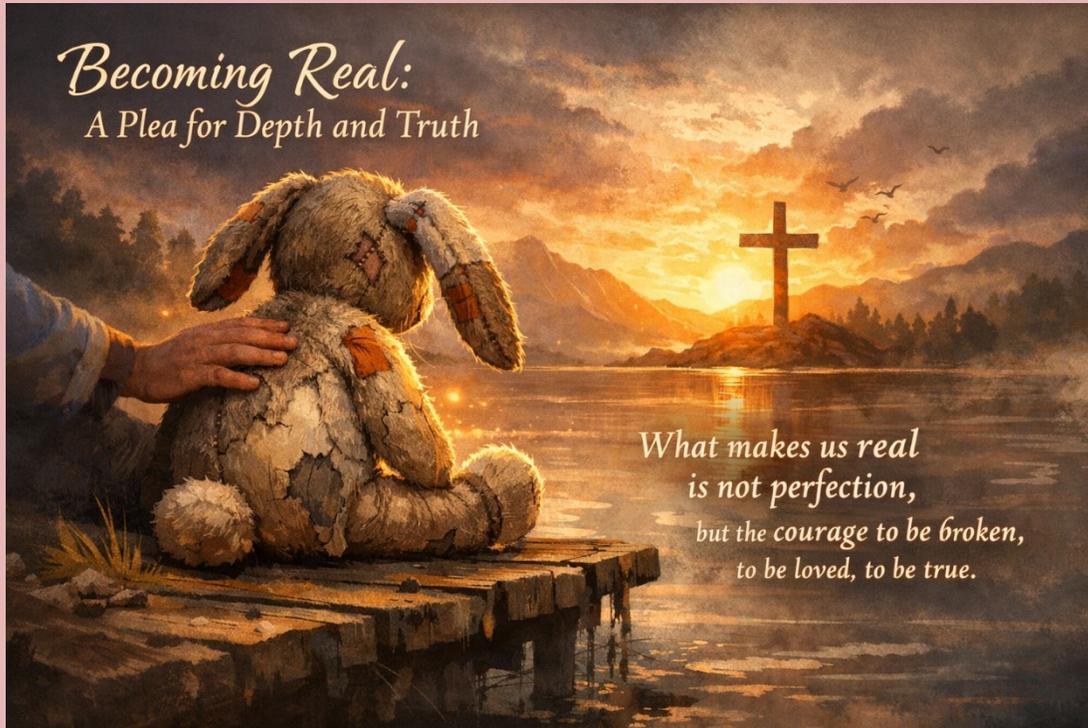


# Becoming Real: A Plea for Depth and Truth



*Jeffrey E. Hansen, Ph.D.*

This is a plea to stop living fake. A plea to go deep. A plea to be real.

There are moments when I catch myself performing a version of me that looks polished on the outside but feels strangely distant on the inside. We are conditioned early to carry the mask, to stay impressive, composed, and acceptable. We learn to function in crowds while quietly starving for depth. Somewhere along the way, we are told that looking strong matters more than being known, and that success is measured by how well we climb rather than how honestly we live.

I know that climb well. I lived for the mask longer than I care to admit. Achievement, reputation, comparison, climbing higher and higher, measuring myself against others, believing that success would finally quiet the restless ache inside. None of those things were entirely bad. But I made them everything. And in doing so, I slowly lost parts of myself I did not even realize were slipping away.

Then came a reset I never would have chosen. A painful stripping away. Losses that felt confusing and heavy at the time. Taking less, letting go of position, even stepping into a season where my income dropped and the image I had built no longer held me together. I was never wealthy in the worldly sense, but what little security I had felt began to dissolve. And in that

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unraveling, I heard something deeper. God was not punishing me. He was inviting me back to myself.

Aristotle wrote that deep friendship is rooted in shared virtue and truth, not in usefulness or status. That kind of depth cannot exist where masks rule the room. I began to see how often I had surrounded myself with performance rather than presence, competition rather than companionship. Time felt too precious to keep investing in relationships that left me feeling lonely even when I was not alone.

The descent into honesty is rarely glamorous. Those who struggle with trauma and addiction often understand this more clearly than anyone. Many of the people I have the privilege to walk beside have shown me what courage looks like. They are willing to go into the dark places, to confront what hurts, to let life reshape them. That is why I love this work. Because when someone chooses truth over image, something sacred begins to unfold. The descent is not failure. It is formation. And the climb back out happens best when no one climbs alone.

Scripture has always honored those who go deep. Jesus never called people into polished performance. He called them into examined hearts. The Psalms are filled with voices that refuse to hide behind perfection. David cried out from the depths without pretending to have it together. The Biblical story does not celebrate flawless people. It celebrates honest ones, people willing to wrestle with God and refuse a shallow life.

And yet we live in a culture obsessed with perfection. We compare, compete, curate, and polish until we barely recognize ourselves. Beneath that polished exterior is often a deep and aching loneliness. I know that loneliness because I helped build it in my own life. The real companions, the fellow soldiers, the soulmates of this journey are not the ones who project perfection. They are the ones who admit their fractures, their fears, and their unfinished stories.

The Velveteen Rabbit became real not by staying pristine, but by being worn down through love, through tears, through time. Realness rarely looks impressive. It looks maverick, torn, tattered, and deeply loved. It carries the marks of a life lived honestly. And strangely, those marks are what make a person beautiful.

Life has a way of teaching us whether we resist or not. Again and again, it presses us inward, toward a deeper examination of the heart. That is where Christ meets us, not in the illusion of perfection but in the raw, unguarded places where transformation begins. The things I once chased so fiercely now feel smaller, not meaningless, but no longer central. Success, reputation, and achievement have their place, but they cannot carry the weight of a soul. Only love can do that. Only truth can do that.

So this is a plea. Do not live fake. Do not settle for shallow connection. Dare to descend into the deep recesses of who you are and seek the companions who are brave enough to walk there with you. Let life strip away what is false so that what is real can finally breathe.

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Because in the end, what makes a person beautiful is not perfection. It is the courage to be real, to be known, and to walk forward with a heart that has been honestly seen, deeply formed, and fully alive.

*“Surely you desire truth in the inward being.” — Psalm 51:6*