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Brandon Micheal Hall (Miles Finer) and Joe Morton (Rev. Arthur Finer) in "God Friended Me." (Photo: CBS)

TV UNWIND

'God Friended Me' Star Joe Morton Talks New Role After 'Scandal'

Actor, Now Playing a Pastor, Reveals He Once Thought About Becoming a Priest



By **Brandi Hunter**

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Joe Morton, the award-winning actor known more recently for his role on "Scandal," transforms into a man of the cloth in the new series "God Friended Me", premiering Sunday, September 30 on CBS.

Morton, whose acting career spans nearly five decades, plays the Rev. Arthur Finer in the show, which has drawn comparisons to "Touched By An Angel" and "Highway to Heaven."

In "God Friended Me," **Finer's atheist son Miles (Brandon Michael Hall) gets his world turned upside down when he accepts a friend request from God on Facebook. Miles then starts getting "poked to help strangers for reasons that aren't immediately clear," according to the network.**

In the following Q&A, Morton gives insight into his character, tells what viewers can expect from the show, and reveals that he once believed for "a quick minute" that he wanted to be a priest.

Editor's note: *This interview may include spoilers.*

What did you find appealing about "God Friended Me" and about this role?

In terms of the role, I was deliberately looking for something that would be diametrically opposed to what I did in "Scandal." So, that's why I started to look at this role. In terms of the show itself, what I love about the show is that, one, it's an African-American family. Two, it's about finding ways of helping people in order to discover that we are all valued. I just love that idea. I think it's something that's needed these days.

So you intentionally decided to play a character that is very different from Eli Pope? Why?

I think that the opportunity that I was given on "Scandal" is probably a once-in-a-lifetime kind of opportunity. I don't know of any particular television show, especially on network TV, that's going to put me in a position where they're going to write a monologue that can go on for a page and a half. So instead of always looking at scripts that were dark and dramatic and then being disappointed that I couldn't find something like that, I thought, "Let's just look for something different."

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Brandon Micheal Hall (Miles Finer) and Violet Beane (Cara Bloom) in "God Friended Me." (Photo: CBS)

We see right off in the pilot episode what issues Miles Finer (Rev. Arthur Finer's son) will deal with in the series—losing his mom, a strained relationship with this dad. What issues will we see the reverend deal with specifically?

One is having to deal with the loss of my (character's) wife and Miles' mother. We'll get into how that impacted him and what he did. We'll see that maybe he wasn't as attentive to his children as he should've been because he was dealing with his own wounds in terms of losing his wife. That's also layered with the idea that before he became a reverend, what he really wanted to be was a jazz musician who played the saxophone. And while he was in Vietnam he had to use scriptures and prayer to help his fellow soldiers in Vietnam, and that's what inspired him to become a minister. But we will see during the course of the show that some of the pull to play saxophone is still there.

I've seen comparisons of "God Friended Me" to other faith-related shows, such as "Touched By An Angel," "Highway to Heaven," and "Quantum Leap." How does "God Friended Me" compare to those shows?

We're not the same in any way, in that all the shows that you mentioned have angels or God actually make an appearance, but they are truly Christian, faith-based shows. Miles gets a friend request on his Facebook page from an account called God. We don't know that it's God. For all we know it could be somebody in their basement who's just got great equipment like in "Person of Interest" that can point to people who need help. So, primarily, there's no deity that will show up.

The clouds won't part and sun shine and the rest of it. What will happen is you will see is Miles pushed to help other people, and as he does so, all the trepidation in doing that. And the other thing is that [what] he'll have to struggle through, or I should say discover, is that we are all connected. As you saw in the pilot, his first friend request, John Dove, is in fact, the doctor who saves his second friend request Cara Bloom who gets hit by a car.

You went to a Catholic military school. What part does faith play in your life? Have things changed from what you believed then to what you believe now?

I was baptized Catholic, went to a Catholic military school and even when I was in Catholic military school there was a quick minute when I believed I wanted to become a priest. That didn't really happen at all. I think because of the kinds of prejudices that I saw and began to recognize within the Catholic church, I left the church. I don't practice Catholicism anymore. My way of viewing the world is that you don't have to believe in God to believe in good.

With all that's happening in the U.S. and worldwide with leaders invoking religion to justify some really polarizing decisions, what do you hope "God Friended Me" contributes to conversations everyday people have when we're thinking about where we stand on issues?

I think that the point of view of the show is that we are on this planet to help one another, not build walls, not to build any sort of wedges that separate us and make it more difficult for us to heal and to talk and to compromise with one

another. We are all connected. I saw a story where Trump is trying to make it more difficult for people to get green cards. That's exactly the opposite of what this show is about. We're trying to figure out ways to bring people closer together. It's almost like a call to action, in that what we're saying is please, don't make it so easy to say "I don't want to get involved." Make it easy for people to say, "I would love to get involved. I would love to help you," and begin to recognize more and more the connections between human beings on this planet.



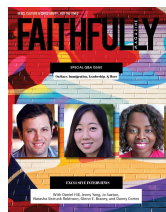
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