

Significance

Dear Pete,

From the time I was a boy I wanted to do something significant. I wanted to make a difference in the world; to leave a mark of my own. I remember the time when a high school buddy and I found a small lake on the lower slopes of Mount Shasta. When we looked closely at the U.S. Geological Survey map, we noticed that the lake was unnamed, we made a pile of rocks at the site, and from that moment on, we called it Lake Palzag to honor both our names: Earl Palmer and Harry Zagorites. I later pointed out the lake to others and told them its name was Palzag.

Unfortunately, for some reason (maybe the name was too hard to spell) the name did not endure. But my desire to be significant and leave a mark of significance stayed with me. Now I am a man, a husband, a father, and a pastor—and I still want to make a difference.

I have been wondering about this strange human motivation to leave a mark. What do you think, Pete? Is it good or bad? Personally, I've come to the opinion that it is both good and bad, but I think the good may outweigh the bad.

The bad desire for significance is called pride, a disease that preoccupies me with my own importance. The result is a long list of desperate attempts to ensure recognition, inevitably leading to bitterness and despair because most people just don't care about my personal ambition. Pride becomes a non-

forgiving and humorless master of the soul. It spoils hard work because pride is too serious, too self-referential, and, finally, too idolatrous. This is because pride is the attempt we make to ensure our own significance which is an impossibility since we are not the lake on the map—we are only the finders of the lake, and if the truth were known, the map maker found it before we did.

But if there is a bad yearning for significance, there is also a good yearning. I am a human being who needs to make a difference in the world. From the earliest part of Genesis God designed this drive within us when He allowed us to name the animals. He is the Creator who made them all, but He calls the grand animal of Africa the hippopotamus because we thought up that name. Wow! We should never ignore this mystery: God Himself cares about our significance.

What then is the greatest significance that we can experience in our own life journey? I think the answer is simple and profound: it is in helping others discover this very mystery of significance. This is why that word and deed which shows the love of Jesus Christ to another person is the most significant act of my life. It is better than helping a friend to discover an alpine lake, though it is something similar because I have shared a gift that I do not own. This is much like the servants of the master in Luke 19 who invested the talents that belonged to the owner of the estate. The Owner of the estate has given to me treasures of the estate to give away. It is the mystery of the Owner's generosity that becomes the good news I have to share. And something much better than egotistical pride

is the result. That much better result is the divine accolade of the Lord of the estate at the end of the day: *Well done, good and faithful servant.*

But then I realized one more thing. Here in this divine accolade we discover the cure for pride, that negative quest for significance. People become desperate for recognition because they feel lonely and unnoticed; they feel a lack of inner significance. The best cure for pride is an unequivocal and total endorsement by someone who really matters—like my parents, real friends, a mentor, a wife, husband, or children. The secret to humility is not humiliation, for that only makes me more desperate to carve out a safe place for myself. A family that tries to break the pride of a child by various techniques of rebuke, scolding, disapproval and nagging only succeeds in demoralizing the child. We don't produce a generous and humble human being in these ways, but we do produce a fearful and suspicious man or woman who will spend a lifetime trying to ensure self-significance.

God's way is so much wiser, Pete. He cures our pride with the gospel of grace: as human sin increases, God's grace increases more. There is no room for pride. What stands out in Jesus' parable of the talents is that the good servants invested the talents. The power in the talents themselves caused them to multiply; we only give them out. And if God compliments you for investing them wisely then accept His commendation.

What makes this so delightful is that Jesus calls it *all joy*. Could it be that He loves our simple lake naming? Does He say something like this: *Well done! You showed them my lake. By the way, the name sounds funny, but I like it. It*

has a kind of ring about it—Lake Palzag! Yes, that is a funny name. And then there was laughter in heaven for the end of insignificance.

Warmly,

Earl Palmer

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His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant!

You have been faithful with a few things,

I will put you in charge of many things.

Come and share your master's happiness!'

Matthew 25:21