

PERSPECTIVE

Earl Palmer

From my boyhood I have always wanted to do something significant. I wanted to make a difference in the world, to leave a mark of my own. When I was in high school, a friend 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 indicated but unnamed. We made a pile of rocks at the site and christened it Lake Palzag to honor both of our names, Earl Palmer and Harry Zagorites. When in the vicinity with others, I always pointed out the lake and told them its name was Palzag. Unfortunately, the name did not endure after I left my home in McCloud for college. Yet the drive to be significant and leave a mark stayed with me.

Though now I am a man—husband, father, pastor—I still want to make a difference. I still want to discover hidden lakes and mark them and name them and point them out to others—at least let them know that it is a friendly lake and that someone ahead of them had been to the place where they now stand.

Yet I wonder if this motivation is good. I've come to the opinion that it is both good and bad, but that the good side outweighs the bad. The bad desire for significance is called pride; pride is bad because it lacks a sense of humor. Pride turns my eyes toward myself and, in an oppressive way, it makes me preoccupied with my own significance. Pride actually expects that the name Palzag will stick to the lake and then tries very hard to make certain of it. The result is a long list of desperate attempts to ensure recognition, followed by the bitterness of inevitable despair be-

cause most people just don't care that much about my personal ambition. In fact, when they recognize my determined plan for recognition, they actively try to thwart it.

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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.

Especially when I became a pastor, I needed to recognize the dangers of pride. For just as pride spoils all work and art, pride is the spoiler of significance in ministry. Pride has a way of inevitably attaching my desire for recognition so tightly to my deeds and words that I clutter the scenic landscape of legitimate desire for significance with a garish plaque on the wall.

If there is a bad yearning for significance, however, there is also a good yearning. I am a human being with a

need to make a difference in the world and a need to know that I am making that difference. This is not pride, for it forgets itself in the joy of discovering both a small glacial lake and God's love in the life of a teenager who finds that eternal love for the first time. Though Harry Zagorites and I suspected that our rock-pile monument might last through the winter, we held no such illusions about the name we gave the lake; "Lake Palzag" was our own little joke, and we knew it all along.

It is this knowledge of our own whimsy that makes such naming harmless and even good. The joy we feel in our achievement is a monument to our humanity, for animals don't feel this. If they have names for their trees, rivers, and mountains, they keep them to themselves. But we are different, and from the earliest part of Genesis even God recognized that difference in us when he allowed us to name the animals. The Creator made them all, yet he invites us to again name each of them, and he honors us by calling them what we call them. He calls the grand river beast of Africa the hippopotamus because we thought up that name.

There is a mystery here that we cannot ignore: God himself cares about our significance, and where he gives us signs to prove that fact to us.

What then is the greatest significance we can experience in our own life journeys? The answer is simple yet profound: The greatest significance that can be gained is helping another person—especially one younger than you—to discover this mystery of our significance. This is

why the word and deed that shows the love of Jesus Christ to another person is the most significant act of my life. It is better than helping a friend discover an alpine lake—though it is something like that, because I have shared a gift that I do not own, much like the servants of the master in Luke 19 who invested the talents that belonged to the owner of the estate. The Owner has given me treasures of his 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 egotistic pride is the result: the divine accolade of the Lord of the estate at the end of the day—"Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in little. I will give you responsibilities over much. Enter the joy of your master; you showed them the good lake of my love."

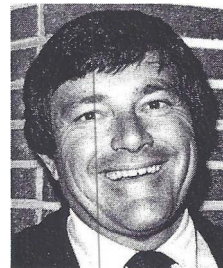
Here in this divine accolade I also discover the cure for pride (the bad quest for significance). People

become desperate for recognition because they feel lonely and unnoticed; they feel little inner significance. The best cure for pride that I know is to be unequivocally and totally endorsed by someone who really matters, whether parents, genuine friends, a mentor, wife, husband, children. The secret to humility is not humiliation; that only makes me more desperate to carve out a safe place for myself. The family that tries to break the pride of a child with various techniques—rebuke, scolding, disapproval, nagging—succeeds only in demoralizing the child. We don't produce a generous and humble human being in these ways, but rather a fearful and suspicious man or woman who spends a lifetime trying to ensure self-significance.

God is wiser than us, and that wisdom is shown in his way of curing our pride. He cures it with the gospel of grace, so that when human sins increase, God's grace increases

more. There is no room for pride when we hear the Lord of the estate say "Well done, good and faithful servant. You showed them my lake. By the way, the name is bizarre, but I kind of like it... it has a certain ring to it... *Lake Palzag*..."

And then the laughter in heaven killed insignificance. ♦



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