

# Significance

by EARL F. PALMER

DURING A MOUNTAINEERING EXPERIENCE, two of us found a small lake beneath Mount Shasta. We studied the map and noticed that it was indicated but unnamed. We stacked up a rock marker at the site and we called it Lake Palzag to honor our last names, Harry Zagorites and Earl Palmer. Though the name did not endure on future maps, the desire to leave a mark of discovery and significance stayed with me.

I have been wondering about this motivation — is it good or bad?

The desire for significance may become toxic, turning my thoughts too much towards myself and my own importance. The desire for recognition, when too powerful, has a way of attaching my needs so tightly to me that I actually clutter the alpine lake with the plaque on the wall — and the wall for the plaque.

But I've come to the opinion that the motivation can be both, and that the good side outweighs the bad.

If there is a bad yearning for significance, there is also a good yearning. We need to make a positive difference in the world and it is good to know that we are making that difference. This is the joy of seeing God's love in people's lives who discover that love for the first time. We are rememberers and we record those memories, sometimes with certificates similar to lake markers. The animals don't do this. If they have names for their trees, rivers, and mountains, they keep it 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. He is the Creator who made them all, but he honors us by calling them what we call them, even the hippopotamus.

It is a mystery, one we shouldn't ignore. God cares about human awareness and significance and he has signs everywhere to prove it.

Another question arises: What then is a significance that we can celebrate? I think it is in helping others, especially those younger than we, to discover this very mystery of significance. Words and deeds that show love to another person are the most significant acts of our lives, much like the servants of the master in Matthew 25 who invested the talents that belonged to the owner of the

field. The Owner has given us treasures to give away. It is the mystery of the owner's generosity that becomes good news we have to share and something much better than pride is the result. That better result is the divine accolade of the Lord of the estate at day's end: *Well done, good and faithful servant, you have been faithful in little, I will give you more responsibilities. Enter the joy of your master* (Matthew 25:21,23).

Then I realized one more thing. Here in this divine accolade we discover the cure for toxic needs for recognition — to be unequivocally endorsed by someone who really matters. Therefore, the journey to humility is not humiliation. A family that seeks to break the pride of a child by scolding or mocking only succeeds in demoralizing the child. This doesn't produce a generous and humble human being, but we do produce fearful and suspicious ones who will spend a lifetime trying to ensure self-significance.

God is wiser than we are and that wisdom is shown in his way of curing our pride. He does it with grace — when human sins increase, and they do, God's grace increases more, and it does. There is no room for pride when we hear the Lord of the estate say, "Well done, good and faithful servant — enter the joy." If God compliments you for doing such a thing, then accept the compliment. But what makes it so good is that Jesus calls it all "joy." Could it be that he loves the names we choose? Does he say something like: "Well done, you showed them my lake. The name has a kind of ring about it — Lake Palzag! That is a funny name."

And there was laughter in heaven for the end of insignificance.

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