

The Truth About Significance

Our significance is not based:

on how we look,

what we do,

what we achieve,

how much experience we have,

when we graduate,

how much we make,

how we play,

who our friends are

the things we accomplish

the good deeds we do

where we were born

the notes we can sing or play

the messages we preach

the battles we've won.

And our significance is not deflected by:

The scars on our body

the hurt that we feel

the past we want to forget

a bleak tomorrow

a job loss

a parenting failure

the label – divorced

the demons we battle

the death we face

the depression we can't seem to shake

the tragic choices we make

by friends who forsake

the 15 minutes 10 years ago we wish we could erase

our relapses and reboots

our poor financial decisions

the number on the scale

the people who criticize us

the ones who reject us

the ones who neglect us.

Our significance is best defined by a holy God who sent His only Son to be falsely condemned and violently murdered in our place so that we could be called His beloved.

Simple is Better

The sad tale of Bernie Madoff reminds us of the hubris, greed, and tyranny that lurks in every heart of flesh. The inventor of the world's greatest Ponzi scheme began his descent into madness out of the deep cavernous craving for more. How about us? Certainly we're not Bernie, but a little Bernie resides in all of us. What owner of a 401K doesn't squirm as he watches the Dow fall 4% in a day? What guy doesn't look at a nice car, a bigger house, a better position without that whisper for more. Jesus calls us to a greater adventure: the adventure of simplicity. Why is it that most lottery winners report being less happy than before they won it? Here's an even better question: Why spend 50 years accumulating wealth when an eternity awaits us? That's something to invest in. Live simply in this life and enjoy the extravagance of joy in the next.

It all begins with simplicity. Simplicity says: It wasn't mine in the first place, so I don't have to fight to own it. It's best given away. And once I do, life becomes less difficult. Fewer locks. Fewer statements. Less paperwork. Less maintenance. We can whittle life down to important things and we see that the best things in life are not found in malls. Needful things become fewer. Beans, Rice and water will begin to taste better than burgers and sodas. The pace slows down, the rashes disappear and sleep is less frenetic even in dreams. The body understands itself more, even on a cellular level because we were never created to endure the stress of obsession and hyper-accumulation. Preoccupation with phantom concerns and paper tigers dissolve. We encounter God because we have fewer things to hide behind. In Matthew 5-6 (*the Sermon on the Mount*) Jesus offers this truth more than once. Treasures on earth are **so** not eternal. Birds are happier. They don't worry about their kids when they fly away. They don't stay up late freaking out about the shortage of worms in the month of June. Just look at those birds and you'll forget the

bucks.

I Can Use THAT Guy

I am so thankful that God didn't candy coat the chaotic journey of men in the Bible. We're easily intimidated by guys who seem to glide through life with little mess, a perfect backyard, six-pack abs and a white-hot marriage.

Instead, God gives us a book that reminds us on every page that He uses men who are still trying to figure things out. When I have one of those *man-what-was-I-thinking* moments I remember Abraham who actually said to Pharaoh about his wife, "No, she's not my wife, she's uh... my sister. Yeah, that's it! My sister!"

When I think about my embarrassing, *trip-over-my-own-feet-to-save-my-integrity* moments, I think about Joseph who, when propositioned by Potiphar's wife, admirably ran away so fast he literally lost his clothes. We celebrate his virtue, but we have to agree that he needed a better belt.

Eutychus must be thanking God that there wasn't YouTube in the first century because a video of him falling out of a three story building during Paul's Bible Study in Acts 20 would have gone viral.

One universal truth of man is that we've all missed a rung, slept inappropriately, and said some epically stupid things and the exact time we shouldn't have. The mic was on, the occasion was not apropos, our judgment was obscured or we just plain blew it. Period.

But it's all there in the Bible and God manages get the glory and make something amazing in spite of all the kooky conundrums we manufacture in our spare time. This is the book I love because it makes me feel like God could actually use an enigmatic, flawed, perplexing man like me. In fact, the Bible hints to the fact that He not only works with people like us but He kind of enjoys telling the story. It's almost like he's saying, "Look at this! I can even use that guy!"

7 Reasons Why We Don't Need Gun Reform

(...and why none of them make any sense to me.)

(Note these are my opinions only and not necessarily the opinions of my workplace or church.)

After every mass shooting we are rebuked that now is not the time to talk about gun legislation. Is there a better time?

As believers, many feel a strange reverence toward their guns. I'm not a gun expert or politician. I do, however, believe that we have to hold our representatives accountable for facilitating the culture of violence we have created.

Below are 7 reasons why we don't need gun reform and why ***none of them*** make any sense to me.

1. "The second amendment declaring our right to bear arms protects us from a government that we might have to defend ourselves against."

Let's look logically at this argument. Our government has nuclear weapons. Do you believe that owning semi-automatic weapons will somehow protect you from the fire power of the

greatest military arsenal the world has ever known?

2. "Banning certain types of guns will not decrease the power of crazy people to kill."

That's just not true. We have the distinction of having more mass shootings than countries that don't allow semiautomatic weapons. The U.S. has 5% of the world's population and 30% of the mass shootings over the past ten years.

3. "If we ban military-styled semiautomatic weapons, only the bad guys will have them. How will we defend ourselves when we are so outgunned?"

I don't know about where you are, but I've never seen anyone walking around on a daily basis with a semiautomatic weapon to defend themselves from the bad guys. The federal government banned military-style semiautomatic assault weapons for 10 years between 1994 and 2004, and deaths from mass shootings fell. Once the ban was lifted the number of mass shootings skyrocketed.

4. "We are no worse than any country when it comes to homicides by gun shooters."

There's never been a more salacious and pernicious lie. We have 29 gun fatalities per million. the closest country is Switzerland at 7.1 per million.

5. "We need to just pray."

The Book of James warns us that faith without works is dead. It's time for our representatives work on this issue instead of playing political games and pocketing copious amounts of Super PAC money. If a person prays for her lost friend to come to know Jesus and never tells them about Jesus, is that she truly engaged in the effort?

6. "We will be taking away our right to hunt."

No one needs a semiautomatic with armor-piercing bullets to shoot a deer. Make it a fair sport and use a standard riffle or shotgun. Using such firepower doesn't make it a very

interesting sport.

7. "Guns don't kill people. People kill people."

Right. But people use **military-styled semiautomatic weapons** to kill large numbers of people. Rather than falling back on some easily spoken platitude, think logically that certain people with the military style weapons will kill more people than people with pistols and standard rifles.

The Holy Season Begins With Stopping

As a native Louisianan, I grew up in the midst of king cake, gaudy beads, and all things purple and green. I don't understand it all and when I ask, everyone has a different take on the nuances of this season. One thing that I love, after all the weird, freaky rites of late winter, is the beginning of the Holy Season. Some may look at it suspiciously. Lent to them is the by-product of laundry dryers and nothing more.

But we all need to burn some grave clothes every now and then. The holy season just happens to provide a schedule for it.

Here are a few things we can all stop doing this year even if we ancient liturgists.

- **We can all stop placing expectations on everybody or anybody.** We pray and expect great things from God- as we should. But when we heap expectations on others we all risk disappointment. When we stop expecting things from people we tend to be happier with them. And every gift and promise of growth we experience from them becomes a

wonderful surprise full of grace.

- **We can all stop just getting through the day** and start being an active participant in the day. May me stop enduring and ask God for holy resilience and the gift of moment-by-moment abundant living.
- We can **stop blaming**. Blaming was one of the first things we started doing when the mess began. The problem is that blaming never works on any level. Indeed, blame fuels the cultural narrative of racism, pride and pious pigeonholing, attitudes. We must change the conversation.
- **We can stop worrying about the government**, pay our taxes and focus on the things we can actually change in our community.
- For that matter, we could **stop worrying. Period.** (This will be impossible but it is something of which to strive.) The only one allowed to worry is God and He's not. For me, every time I start to worry I'll bring it to God and worry to him. Actually, that is what we call prayer.

The Holy Season leads us toward the cross and challenges us to stop being so tethered to the world. Everybody can do lent. You don't need a robe, an incense burner, or a bingo tournament. Stop doing internal things like these and it will change you.

Enjoy stopping and let's have some fish.

Blame or Bless

There is nothing worse than the sound of cars colliding. A few weeks ago I heard the sound. It was so loud, I first thought someone had hit *my* car. It was on the side of a busy, complicated intersection. After the collision, a man jumped out of his car infuriated and screamed immediately about how the car he hit was too close the shoulder of the road. Inside the other car, a young mother, obviously pregnant was attending to her daughter in a car seat, panic-stricken, weeping and obviously in shock. As we called for help, the man continued to plead that this accident was not his fault. Nothing he said would be quotable here, of course.

After I got home, still reeling from what I had witnessed, I felt this absolute rage welling up inside me. I couldn't shake it. How could a man who had just hit a pregnant woman be so consumed with his own innocence? He was interested in blame. As men in every instance of life, we can't be focused on blame. We are never a blessing when we blame. The last thing we should want to be is the guy that heaps heavy burdens on the hurting, broken people we encounter. When blame becomes our default position, we are incapable of empathy, responsibility and love. Since the garden days of Eden, when the first man gave a lame excuse to his Creator, we've been blaming other people. The truth is blame never helps. It stunts your spiritual growth and destroys your character. Remember, when we stand before God, we won't give an account for other people's lives, only our own.

12 Things I've Learned From My Sons

As the father of four sons I've picked up a lot of life experiences and I understand much more about the journey to manhood than I did when I began. Here are a dozen things I learned in the process.

1. There are a million types of odors that can emit from their bedrooms, cars and duffle bags. One day with my guys could send a bloodhound into shock and awe.
2. Their competitive nature can spring forth in almost any sort of daily experience from car seat assignments, trampoline brawls, frog populations in their bedrooms, and superpowers they are convinced they have.



3. They have more words for gas than Eskimos have words for snow.
4. In a matter of one day during puberty they go from inappropriate nakedness at the drop of a hat to the sudden modesty of an Amish elder.
5. Unlike the girls, when it comes to the boys, clothes are no big deal. Just make sure the five year old doesn't get creative and wear his underwear over his pants.



6. Another note about apparel... Always, *always* check the pockets before washing. Pockets are usually the storage and filing compartments for all types of boy-stuff that can ruin the clothes or ruin washing machines or both.
7. Boys have no concept of time, when they are in “time-out” for five minutes, it is the equivalent of a presidential term. If it is a day at the amusement park,



after 10 hours—“They just got there.”

8. The boys, I have discovered, are far more gullible than the girls. They easily accept Big Foot sightings, zombie apocalypses, U.F.O.s, and the existence of organic Capt’n Crunch Berry.
9. For boys, unlimited soft serve ice cream is the closest they will come to a spiritual experience before the age of accountability. It’s so unbelievable that their brains can’t process the idea.
10. Emergency rooms are an unavoidable destination (and you’ll be back. Again. And again.) They will go there and so will you, with stories and explanations that will seem impossible to you even though you, yourself, witnessed the feat of daring they attempted.
11. Unlike in the movies, animals *will* be harmed in the raising of this child. Boys don’t intentionally harm or torture them. And the animals always survive. But there are just certain things boys want to try out. They learn that large dogs should not be ridden as horses and pillowcases don’t work well as cat-parachutes when catapulted from the roof of the house.
12. In the end, boys do grow up and you’ll have a lifetime of stories to tell. You’ll also learn to love the

Sharpie™ Dinosaur drawings on your white leather couch.

He's Everything from A to Z

The incarnation is God's message that God the Father holds nothing back in order to make room for us. So common and yet so extravagant! Heaven and earth embraced that night and this is what we celebrate.

It's also is a grand proclamation that if you enter the story, you've got everything you need in the person of Christ. All else becomes trivial in the light of His appearance because He's **EVERYTHING** from A to Z.

"I AM the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End."

AUTHOR of my everything, my story A to Z

BRIGHT AND MORNING STAR above, my blinded eyes can see

COMFORTOR of weary souls, **COMPANION** of the lost

DELIVERER, **DEFENDER** despite the cruel cost

EXALTED ONE who stooped to save, found in a humble place

FAITHFUL ONE of Glory who came to me in grace

GUARDIAN of my destiny, **GOD** in flesh and bone

HEALER of my solitude, I never walk alone.

INTERCESSOR standing tall, speaking for me, still.
JEHOVAH God creator, with hands of grace and skill
KING of all the universe, immortal God of love
LORD in every circumstance, watching from above
MAN OF SORROWS, MIGHTY ONE who came to seek and save
NAZARENE of providence whose life He freely gave
ONE AND ONLY Sacrifice, The lamb upon a cross
PIERCED for my transgression, my gain found in His loss
QUIET ONE, a still small voice, whispering His plan
RABBI in my ignorance, Redeemer,
SON OF MAN
TREE OF LIFE, evergreen, The fruit of holiness
UNFAILING LOVE, UNENDING JOY, and UNBRIDLED BLISS
VICTOR of my battles. He fought to set me free.
WARRIOR like none other, battling for me.
X-RAY of the human heart, restorer from the fall
YESHUA, redeemer
ZENITH of it all...

Don't you need Him? Reach out to Him this day and you'll see
that He'll give you everything your wounded soul craves.

Because He's everything...

Your Concerned Friend...

Dear Joseph,

I'm worried about you. I wouldn't be your friend if I didn't try to speak some truth to you. Please don't get me wrong—I was all for this marriage until the stories started. Reality is hard to swallow when you are in the early months of a relationship. You and I both know it takes two to conceive. It's totally obvious that she is making up stories. She says she loves you. I have no doubt that she wants to be married to you but when someone makes a mistake, they have to face up to it instead of trying to spiritualize it. The theology of her entire story doesn't make sense.

Plus, think of the narcissism! "God has made me pregnant." Ugh... That she would take that route... To tell you the truth it angers me. We've been buddies since Sabbath School and I know what a stand-up guy you are. And you want to put her away quietly? I think that fornication and lying are doubly worthy of a little Levitical heat (if you know what I mean). But I'm not you. I just want you to be happy. Look at all the ramifications, Joseph and don't get caught in the middle of this.

Anyway, we need to talk. Plus you haven't even seen our baby boy: Judas! He's already taken his first steps. So if you are ever in town, let me know!

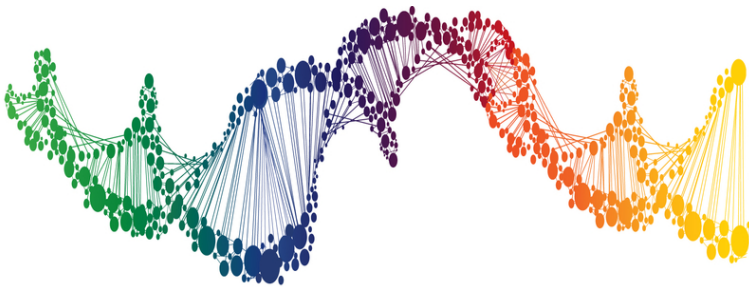
Your concerned friend,

□

The Advent of Amazing

He scattered stars to the outer regions of infinity. He separated the dry land from sea. This great God created each cell as intricate, alive and dynamic as a tiny city. The One that created Jupiter and the Milky Way would choose to create me.

Our skin and the inner workings of the human body... the blood and bones, the pelvis, the pinky, the cranium and the clavicle, the liver that filters our blood, the million miles of DNA, all of this...



*God left his amazing mark on us.
And it astounds me.
It amazes me.*

And more amazing still... His Son
I'm amazed that He would be born in a stable.
Not in a palace.
Not in the lap of luxury

I'm amazed that Ruth, Bathsheba, Tamar, David, and so many other misfits are a part of his chosen family tree.



I'm amazed that He would come to the little...

(I, too, am among His little ones... so fearful, often stumbling, often obsessed with the wrong things)

I'm amazed that it was Good News when we deserved punishment, He came with great joy to all people.

I'm amazed that He was scorned as an illegitimate son when He could have levitated above them all. I'm amazed that He remained silent.

I am amazed that Jesus would choose for friends and followers— Tax collectors, fishermen, zealots, and outcasts.

Even more, I'm amazed that he would stay to the very end pay the price for the messes we make- all the messes.

And everywhere he went people were amazed.

The amazing thing about grace, you see, is that when I was in the far country, He sought *me*!

When I lost hope in God, He never lost hope in me.

It's His all-surpassing love that drives me...

Amazed that it is laughter and joy- not tears and defeat



Amazed that it is about
bread and wine, forgiveness
and belonging.

And how I need it!

Everybody needs it.

Amazing- that a God so great would love me this much.

I'm amazed that You would love me with relentless grace

Far beyond all time and space

Relentless stubborn mercy blind

To all that I have left behind.

You loved me in the blinding rain

Even when I've caused You pain.

Amazed by the chasm that separated me from You

All the pain that You went through.

*And when you get a glimpse of this love, it will grab on to
you. It will own you in its bliss.*

And the amazing thing about this grace is that it is what it
is.

It's not earned.

It's grace.

Amazing grace.

It's grace that tore me away from the claws of Satan

It's grace that will lead me home.

It's grace that is greater than all my sin.

He is truth.

He's as right as rain.

In fact he created rain.

And if you take it into your life.

*It will
change your
perspective*



You'll look at your children differently.

You'll eat good food and love it even more.

You'll lose the chip on your shoulder that's been dogging you for years.

You'll breath easier.

No more fear of death, hell and the grave- because life is an

everlasting adventure more eternal than far-flung galaxies of deep space.

If you take it in, it will change everything.

It will scatter every self-saving instinct you've ever known.

And it will bring you once again to Bethlehem.
