The Meanings of More

A man faces the last chapter of his life; death’s dark hand is waiting for him right around the corner. How does he respond to this knowledge? He could close himself off from the world, drift away from friends and family and life until he finally drifted into a place where no one could reach him. He could wallow in self-pity and grieve for the time he would be losing, shutting out the life he does have left. Or he could rise up after this heavy blow, dust himself off, and carry on no matter his cuts and bruises. He could do more for others and more for himself. Magis, or “the more,” may seem to be a simple term. The bigger, the better, right? But which is more: a novel that tells the story of a man’s life, or a single sentence that communicates the same message? A hundred years spent on Earth, or five years spent affecting the lives of those around us in a positive way? If one person’s best is impacting hundreds of lives, and another’s best is making a difference in only one person’s life, which is more? Magis is a deeper concept than most people realize, deeper than I realized before reading The Last Lecture by Randy Pausch. But after reading the thoughts and ideas of this incredible man who had reached the end of his novel, the end of his sentence, I understand that Magis is not only the more, it is striving for excellence in all that we do. Magis does not show itself in the same way through everyone’s lives. It shifts its form, depending on the person exemplifying this value. And after deepening my understanding of Magis, it has allowed me to examine myself and how I can integrate “the more” into the way I spend my own life.

Before I read The Last Lecture, I had heard about Magis because it is Rockhurst’s theme this year, but to be honest, this word did not mean very much to me. I knew it meant “the more,” but my thoughts on the subject stopped there. I did not spend much time contemplating what Magis meant to me; there were just too many other things to worry about. Before writing this essay, I decided to try to figure out Magis a bit more, and so I did a little digging around for a good definition of Magis. And I found a wide variety: Magis is the more, striving for excellence, doing more for God, giving greater love,
care, and compassion, and understanding better ourselves and others as people of God. All these definitions sound wonderful, but they are just words on a page; they are hard to place into the real world. How are these things accomplished? What is Magis in real life? After reading Pausch’s words, my understanding of Magis has transformed into a deeper, more complex realization of what this word actually means to us as humans. “If I were a painter, I would have painted for them. If I were musician, I would have composed music. But I am a lecturer. So I lectured (p.X).” These words of Pausch have resonated with me. He knew what his skill set was; he knew what he had to offer, and he did not try to be something he was not. More is different for different people. Not everyone has the same abilities, and so there are different recipes for Magis in people’s lives. We are all given different gifts, and sharing these gifts with the world in our own specific ways is how we can do our best, how we can reach excellence. A teacher who changes students’ lives through giving his all to teaching is just as valuable as a mother who stays at home with a child, giving all her love and attention to one individual. There is no one universal “more;” there is no comparing apples to oranges. It is different for everyone. “And right then, I had the feeling that I had more in me, that if I gave it my all, I might be able to offer people something special (p.6).” Sometimes all we must do to achieve more in our lives is to completely and selflessly offer up ourselves. There is nothing more we can give than our whole beings. Also, sometimes less is more. A sentence that can communicate a whole person’s life can mean more than a thousand pages communicating the same message. It is not about the number of words used; all that matters is what words are used, and how much meaning those words hold.

For me, reading The Last Lecture was beneficial because it helped me examine my own life and acknowledge how I can strive to be more. Sometimes I struggle with perfection, expecting that perfect example out of myself and beating myself up when I cannot reach that ideal. I now understand that my more is different than the perfection I may expect. Giving my whole self, in a way, is perfection. If I give my entire being to an area in my life, there is no need to fear failing to achieve the perfect standard. And
to achieve Magis in my life, I do not have to become a superhero and change millions of people’s lives. Sometimes it is the small things that affect people the most. A kind smile, a warm greeting, an understanding ear—all of these things are just as important as the actions of heroes. Magis is not specific actions or rules to follow; Magis is the style of life I can lead. It is when I do not necessarily do a hundred different things, but I fit all of my heart and soul into one thing that I am passionate about. I want to live a life that people can see love and light and happiness in; I want to live a life where all of my actions hold meaning. If anything, there should be one thing I find in my life that I can give my all to. And when I achieve this, I believe I will be doing my best to strive for “the more.”

In *The Last Lecture*, Randy Pausch’s father is a storyteller. And his father always said that stories should be told for a reason. So, what shall we choose to fill our stories with? What will our stories tell about us? For Randy, he chose love. Love was the ultimate factor that shaped his story; it was the driving force that propelled him through his sickness, it was the motivation for the words he shared during his last lecture, and it was the strength behind his actions as he lived out the last months of his life. Randy fought a hard battle for love of his children, for love of his family. And he shared his story of love with the world. In my opinion, we could all learn from Randy’s “more.” If there is one thing to give our more to, give our most to, give our all to, it is love.