

# A Sermon for DaySpring Baptist Church

By Burt L. Burleson

## *“Dr. Wisdom Makes a Campus Visit”*

II Samuel 12

August 6, 2006

Adam had plopped down on the back row of the lecture hall where he wouldn't be noticed. He felt out of place. He was out of place. The room was filled with professors and graduate students, mostly from the philosophy, theology and psychology departments, who had come to hear the pastor of his home church give a paper entitled, “Dealing with our Darkness.”

He got some of Dr. Wisdom's talk... but most of it went over his head. There were times during the hour when his pastor seemed to move away from the paper he'd written and started preaching... sort of like he was back home, but most of it was pretty “heady.”

The talk was definitely well received. There was an extended time of questions and answers as well as a decent round of applause at the end.

Adam waited at a distance afterwards, as folks made their way over to Dr. Wisdom. Many of them were obviously old friends and colleagues and called him by his first name, Logan. It had been over 20 years since he was on the faculty, and Adam enjoyed watching the warmth exchanged between these old friends.

Finally, the line of scholars had dissipated and Logan Wisdom walked over and gave Adam a big hug. **“Sorry about the wait,”** he said, **“You still got time for coffee?”**

**“I've got about an hour,”** Adam replied. **“Then I've got a Geology lab to get to.”**

**“I hated Geology,”** Dr. Wisdom said as he headed for the door with Adam in tow. **“I kept wanting to understand why things were named what they were named, rather than just learning and memorizing the ‘gazillion’ names of all those rocks.”**

Adam laughed politely.

**“Shall we just head over to the SUB?”** Dr. Wisdom said.

**“Sure,”** Adam answered. **“They've got a Starbucks in there.”**

**“Starbucks... man, have things changed.”** And Adam noticed his pastor gazing and watching as they made their way across campus. There were students everywhere in shorts and flip-flops, toting backpacks and, more often than not, listening to an iPod or MP3.

**“It's so different... We had to wear slacks to class and all the girls, and there weren't that many, had to wear dresses.”**

**“We had one cafeteria... with food that tasted like something the army would serve up. We had curfews... and lots of other rules... no dancing... smoking.”**

Adam jumped in awkwardly, **“Sounds like a fun place.”** And he kind of winced inside because he thought it sounded stupid. He was always a little anxious at first with his Pastor. Not that Dr. Wisdom was intentionally intimidating. He was just so... large in Adam's mind. It was a mixture of his age and his mind and his goodness.

Adam knew he was lucky to have connected with this man and blessed that he seemed to have taken an interest in helping him. The conversations they'd had... had been significant in his spiritual development and always seemed to come at just the right time. He was beginning to suspect that wasn't just a coincidence.

As they walked, Adam listened to his mentor talk about what the college was like “way-back-when”... the fun he'd had... the trouble he'd gotten into. He even once added, **“Don't tell your folks about that one.”**

The SUB wasn't crowded that late in the afternoon. The two friends got their coffees and plopped down at the table in the corner.

**“So, how'd you like the talk?”**

**“Well, honestly,”** Adam replied, **“I had trouble understanding a lot of it, but there were parts that made sense and seemed to be applicable to my context.”** And as the words were coming out, Adam was thinking, *“That sounded like a sophomore trying too hard to sound smart... relax, Dude.”*

**“What parts,”** his pastor asked, **“Where'd you connect?”**

**“Mostly with that section in the middle where you were talking about how hard it is to see your own darkness. How we tend to think we’re seeing ourselves but often that’s not the case... I think that’s true.”** Adam concluded.

**“It has been for me,”** said Logan Wisdom.

Adam went on. **“The idea really fit with my Old Testament lecture this morning... It was on the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of II Samuel where Nathan confronts David with his sin.”**

**“That’s a great story, huh.”** His pastor added.

**“Well... yeah... but...”** Adam trailed off.

Dr. Wisdom saw his face and jumped in. **“There’s some parts of it that bother you, right?”**

**“Exactly...”** Adam said excitedly, like he’d been given permission by a holy man to not like something in the Holy Book. **“In the first place, it’s just hard for me to see how David was so stupid and so out of touch with himself. It doesn’t make sense and it doesn’t seem realistic. He steals another mans wife, commits adultery, and then murders... He was so good and so smart and so successful... this fall doesn’t make sense.”**

**“It does to me,”** Dr Wisdom interrupted. **“David is like all of us in that his curse in this case was his blessing pushed too far. David had so many strengths and he’d had so much success. And the odd thing was, that was what made him so vulnerable.”**

Adam looked blank.

His pastor continued. **“Remember the story where David dances in his underwear with all his might.”**

Adam nodded.

**“Well... David could do that because of who he was. He was passionate. He was spontaneous. He was secure in himself. All good things, right?”**

Adam kept nodding... he could tell his pastor was about to go to preaching and he loved it. **“Right!”**

**“Those strengths of his... the passion and spontaneity, his ability to be decisive, his confidence in himself... were exactly the places of his temptation. His sin was just his strength misused. His curse was his blessing pushed too far.”**

Dr. Wisdom paused to see if the idea was sinking in... He couldn’t tell so on he went. **“Adam, the things that are inside of us are good. Think of them as energies of God... characteristics of God. And sin is when that good thing has been corrupted.**

**“So, for instance, someone who is very compassionate (which is a gift)...”** Dr. Wisdom looked at Adam making sure he got it... **“That same person is likely to struggle a lot with getting her feelings hurt. It’s her strength, undisciplined... her sensitivity misused.**

**“Or take him for example.”** Logan Wisdom was pointing across the room towards the President of the College who happened to be walking through the SUB.

**“He undoubtedly is a natural born leader... and I’d be willing to bet he has struggled with not running off and leaving people... or worse, running over them.”**

**“Any gift is always a potential stumbling block... power, charisma, intelligence, depth, the ability to make friends... our strengths are potentially the places where we will sin and struggle the most.”**

Adam was nodding now.

**“And the older and more mature and the more successful you get... like David got... the more vulnerable you can be. The ego... just gets trickier and sneakier and more and more subtle.”**

Adam jumped in with some ambivalence in his voice, **“So, what you’re saying is that the more I grow as a Christian, the more difficult temptations may be?”**

**“I think the more progress we make,”** Dr. Wisdom interpreted, **“The more disguised evil becomes, and the harder it is to see our own darkness. We have to work to the very end.”**

The conversation stalled for a moment so they both took a sip of coffee. Adam, his Tall Mocha Latte... and Dr. Wisdom, his Decaf. They swallowed, the pastor intentionally leaving the silence alone until Adam broke it.

**“There’s something else, I don’t like... and I mean, I really don’t like it.”**

**“Oh?”**

**“Yeah, I’d heard this story a lot growing up. Everyone knows about David and Bathsheba... but I never heard the part about the baby dying... and that God caused the baby to die to punish David. I’d never heard that... it says, ‘God struck the child’.”** Adam was almost angry as he said it.

**“So what’d your ‘Prof’ do with that?”**

**“Well, we talked some about... uh... what’s that word for *how you read something*?”**

**“Hermeneutics,”** his pastor suggested.

**“Yeah, that’s it... And she was saying how we have to look at all of scripture and especially at Jesus as we draw conclusions about God. We can’t create our theology from one passage. Some of the students got real antsy about that and one even accused her of not believing everything the Bible says.”**

**“Did her idea help you?”**

**“Some... but not ultimately... It seems like David’s sin caused so much pain for everyone... and no one else deserved to suffer for his sin and I have a real problem with that... and a real problem with God even letting it happen.”**

Dr. Wisdom was quiet for a while to make sure Adam was through. Then he sighed... **“I hate it too. I hate it when the innocent suffer... and the Bible doesn’t give us much in the way of explanation for that... And I hate that.”**

He took another sip of Decaf. **It just tells us its true, which is what this story does.”**

**“Adam...”** the pastor leaned forward as if what he was about to say was really important, **“When do innocent people and vulnerable people not suffer for our sins?”**

**“Who do you think suffered the most from the Enron debacle? It wasn’t the CEO... it was the single mom secretary making ten bucks an hour. It was the computer programmer who had all his retirement wiped out.”**

**“That’s true,”** Adam nodded.

And then Dr. Wisdom went into a litany.

**“Think of it... when there’s a tyrant leader, who suffers?”**

**“When a parent is selfish... who suffers?”**

**“When someone’s abusive... who is wounded?”**

**“When the majority are bigots... who sits at the back of the bus?”**

**“When someone is lazy... who winds up paying for it?”**

**“The innocent are always the victims.”**

Adam protested, **“But it was David and David’s private behavior in his own bedroom. His isolated sin. I can understand Enron but this is different.”**

Dr. Wisdom pounced...

**“Adam listen to me...”** more or less interrupting Adam as he said pointing his finger down poking the table, **“There is no such thing as private sin. It’s an illusion.”**

**“There’s no such thing as a private life. Everything matters everywhere... everything we think and do... and don’t think and don’t do. Everything is connected and so all of who we are in every moment is significant. We matter that much. And it’s good news and... it’s bad news... just ask David.”**

About that time the pastor realized he was talking so loud the table next to them was looking.

**“Uh... sorry... I didn’t mean to get all hot and bothered. It’s just something I’ve had to learn and learn the hard way. It’s a lie the culture tells us. The truth of our faith is that everything is connected. So, when David does what David does, it starts a ripple that even God can’t reel in... or won’t.”**

**“God seems to choose to work in and with the messes we make, rather than undoing them.”**

Adam resonated with his pastor’s last line. **“I think I know what you mean. That’s why that part of your talk about the work of darkness intrigued me. And I keep wondering... like, what does this darkness do to David? Where does this episode take him? I mean, how does it change him?”**

**“If it’s like the darkness I’ve known,”** Dr. Wisdom offered, **“It takes him places he’d have never gone without it. God seems to insist on using the worst things to do the best things. God seems to redeem... more than erase.”**

Adam had heard his pastor twice in one conversation mention his own life and he wasn’t sure it was the right thing to say but he said it anyway. **“You’ve had darkness?”**

**“Yes.”** His pastor said simply. **“Yes I have.”**

Adam waited to see if Logan Wisdom would offer anymore, but he didn't. So Adam went on.

**“It scares me... thinking you've been through real darkness. I guess I was hoping there was some path I could take to get me out of it, you know.”**

**“There isn't...”** His pastor looked old as he said it. **“It's just the way of things... Some of it you may bring on yourself... some of it will just happen. Some of it is God's doing. All I know is that I wouldn't be who I am without it. And I'd never have known grace, real grace, without it.”**

**“I believe in a different way on the other side of my darkness.”**

Adam seemed sobered by what he'd heard... but hopeful. And then he remembered David's story and the end of it. **“That's what the ending is all about right? ... The end of the David and Bathsheba story?”**

Dr. Wisdom smiled, **“I was hoping you'd notice that...”**

**“Yeah,”** Adam went on excitedly, **“Solomon is born and Nathan tells them to give him the nick name 'Jedidiah' which means The Lord loves.”**

Logan Wisdom jumped in. **“I told you it was a great story... Can you imagine it, Adam? For years and years, every time David calls his son's name he's being reminded of the love of God coming up from the mess he'd made. 'Jedidiah, it's time to eat. Jedidiah pick up your toys. Jedidiah, Jedidiah. The Lord loves, the Lord loves, the Lord loves...' echoing always.”**

**“It's not that there's still not much to bear or that everything has been erased. Things are pretty messed up, Adam... But David knows it's all been forgiven and that the love of God is deeper than the mess he made... deeper than all his darkness.”**

It was a moment of clarity for Adam that he'd never forget. He'd always remember being in the SUB, sitting there with his pastor and feeling like the heavens had opened for a moment and so much made sense. He would always remember that moment of knowing when he understood deep within that the love of God was all around him and in him... that all things were being made new. All things... always. Everything belonged.

**“Guess I better let you get to that Geology lab,”** Dr. Wisdom said interrupting the ecstasy Adam was feeling.

**“Yeah... thanks for talking to me... It... well... changes everything.”**

With that the two made their way out of the SUB. Logan Wisdom walked Adam to the science building and, before Adam went in, the pastor gave his student a big hug. And then, just like they always did at church, he looked him in the eyes and said, **“Adam, the peace of Christ be with you.”**

**“And also with you.”**