



A TREE PLANTED BY STREAMS OF WATER A Message of Hope for the Jobless

Job loss hurts. Expected or not, the resulting life change is a stiff challenge even for mature Christians. Confusion, anger, denial, fear, depression and self doubt can be so acute that God's assurances, seen in His Word and conveyed by loved ones, can be difficult at first to assimilate.

David Wells, a Christian counselor in Houston, experienced it all in January of this year when his associate pastor position in a small church was abruptly discontinued. With the Lord's help and the support of friends and family, he has emerged with new strength and vision and is beginning a new independent practice ministering to several churches.

An intriguing element in healing and redirection for David was a dream his mother had on the night before his job was jettisoned. In it Diane Wells, Teaching Director for the Houston Central Day Class, was standing by a large tree in a place where severe pruning had taken place. Suddenly, a weed started growing up the side of the tree, and she grabbed it and pulled it out by the roots. Breaking off and tasting a leaf, she spoke to someone nearby as she saw another weed about to ascend the other side of tree. "These must come out," she declared. "Their leaves are bitter." She did not want weeds to threaten the tree's health. When Diane awakened, she told her husband about the dream, wondering aloud if it came from the Lord.

News of the layoff came that afternoon in a call from David's wife, Nicole. In accepting the position just twelve months earlier, David left a job as Associate Director of Counseling in a larger church, a position he had held for almost ten years. Diane noted with wonder the peace Nicole felt following the layoff. For a number of weeks, she said, God had been preparing her heart and David's for change. David had begun to feel that the fit between the pastoral position and him was not quite right. Nicole noted that she and David would need to guard their hearts because the smaller church offered David the position based in part on his long friendship with its senior pastor. In hearing this concern expressed, Diane was reminded of the dream, and she shared it with Nicole.

Later Diane remembered verses about forgiveness and Isaiah 61:3, which the Lord had led her to pray and e-mail to David ten days earlier when he asked for prayer without being specific. At that time Diane asked the Lord to "heal any grief caused by ministry and give him a spirit of praise instead of mourning." Based on the Isaiah verse she prayed as well that her son

would be thought of as an “oak of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He might be glorified.” Looking back on these petitions, Diane began to see the tree in the dream as clearly representing David. In her heart she felt that the family needed to pray that David would not let bitterness take root or a lack of forgiveness spoil any new thing God wanted to do in his life and ministry.

It might be interesting to our CBS family to know that these events occurred the week after the 2010 Teaching Directors Conference, where many heard John Guest, the featured speaker, tell how God had blessed him abundantly after a painful time when a church asked him to leave his pastoral position. Diane felt that several elements in Dr. Guest's personal story were appropriate to share with David and Nicole.

Soon after David lost his job, God provided him with several weeks of temporary contract work. One night during this period Diane had another tree dream. Again she awakened and told her husband about it. In the dream the two had bought another house, but she was less interested in it than in a tree in the yard that seemed to have been transplanted recently. It was in an awkward spot, and they were walking around the yard trying to find a better place for it. Diane wondered if this picture had anything to do with David.

She called to chat with Nicole and ask how David was doing. “Well, he was up till 2 a.m. this morning finishing up the last contract, so he's done with his temporary job,” Nicole said. “Somehow I am not surprised,” responded Diane. In that week her CBS Class, studying Genesis, was examining the passage in which Joseph interprets a pharaoh's dreams and is elevated to a position of new responsibility. The timing of this alignment reminded her that God was in control of her son's life, and it seemed to indicate that it was time for David to go on to his next place of “planting.”

Such thoughts were uplifting to David, but in all honesty he forgot them as he moved forward in his transition, doing the arduous inner work required while trying to formulate a business plan. Months later, in developing a logo for the independent counseling practice he had been encouraged and felt led to establish, the dream imagery made a surprising return. A friend of David's who works as a graphic artist and marketing specialist offered to design the logo without cost. In classic fashion Todd drew a strong, handsome tree growing amid pleasant hills, reminiscent of Psalm 1. The implied message for Christian therapy is that when personal or relational problem solving is grounded in God's Word and watered by His Spirit, with the goal of righteousness as He defines it, it has the greatest promise for success.

When David showed Todd's proposal to his parents, a bright light clicked on for Diane. “It's the tree!” she exclaimed. Puzzled until she reminded him of her earlier dreams, David said, “Well, that confirms it.”

Later, as Diane considered David's new venture, remembering that Jesus shared verses from Isaiah 61 at the beginning of His earthly ministry, she emailed David this message: “As I pondered the tree metaphor in this messianic prophesy, I thought of the similarity between Christian counseling and formal ministry. You provide 1) rest and shade for those burned out by life's stresses, 2) the nourishment of the fruit of the Spirit for those hungry to find meaning in the confusion of their circumstances, and 3) strength for those who need someone to lean on and help in finding the blessed One who will hold them in His everlasting arms.”

Touched by the spiritual force of these connections and by the calm beauty of Todd's logo design, David has included the dream story in his firm's Web site, along with this poem ...

Good Timber
By Douglas Malloch

**The tree that never had to fight for sun and sky and air and light,
But stood out in the open plain and always got its share of rain,
Never became a forest king but lived and died a scrubby thing.**

**The man who never had to toil to gain and farm his patch of soil,
Who never had to win his share of sun and sky and light and air,
Never became a manly man but lived and died as he began.**

**Good timber does not grow with ease, the stronger wind, the tougher tree,
The farther sky, the greater length, the more the storm, the more the strength.
By sun and cold, by rain and snow, in trees and men good timbers grow.**

**Where thickest lies the forest growth, we find the patriarchs of both.
And they hold counsel with the stars whose broken branches show the scars
Of many winds and of much strife. This is the common law of life.**

The Wells family experience is touching to us at the Ministry Service Center. We hope all CBS families dealing with job loss will take courage from it, assured that our magnificent God is at work, wisely, and with tender feeling for them, in the details of their circumstances.