

ONLY A BOY NAMED DAVID

By Ronald S. Combs

He walked around his desk and with a smirk began his lecture. "During the course of this semester all who have the desire to remain in this section of Anthropology 201 will learn the truth. In learning the truth you will find every belief you have ever held about God or religion in general will be destroyed."

What Professor Davis said did not sink in until later. It was incredible. But all semester long he would never miss an opportunity to criticize anything involving religious beliefs that came up in class that semester. During the last class period before Christmas he gave his yearly lecture "proving" that prayer was a fallacy. His performance was so effective that by the end of the period most of the class members were literally "falling to their knees" in laughter.

As he finished his mocking attack he stood up. He was adorned in jeans, sneakers and a T-shirt that read, "Jesus is coming again, and boy is He mad!" He glared at the auditorium full of students and defiantly inquired, "After two months in this class, is there anybody here who still believes in the ridiculous notion of religion and prayer?" Then he walked around to the front of his desk. He stood gloating. In his upraised right hand he held a new piece of chalk. The classroom had a concrete floor. All eyes were glued on the professor. There was utter silence.

With a mocking jeer he continued, "Well, if there's anyone in this classroom who still believes in religion and the so-called power of prayer, I ask you to stand up and pray. Pray that when I drop this piece of chalk from my hand it will not break. In fact, I welcome you to invoke all the prayers of your Sunday school teachers. You can bring them here to pray with you. In fact, I defy you and this so-called power by stating this: Nothing--not all their prayers, not all your religion, not even your so-called God Himself--can stop this piece of chalk from breaking when I drop it. I defy you to prove me wrong."

I sat about halfway back in the classroom and could only grit my teeth. Talk about shaking your fist in the face of God! And he had been doing this for 10 years. I could empathize with King Saul as he heard Mighty Goliath jeer.

Dr. Davis' demonstration was so effective that it passed on from class to class year after year. I had almost forgotten about the incident until one fall day when one of my part-time employees knocked on my office door. I opened it and Dave asked if he could talk to me. He seemed rather nervous, so I matter-of-factly asked him what was wrong.

"Do you really believe that?" he asked, pointing to a plaque on my wall. It read, "Pray for a miracle to happen in your life today!"

I blushed rather sheepishly and replied, "Well, you know I do. I mean, you've worked for me since you were a sophomore in high school and you know what I stand for."

"Well, I know you do, but I had to ask. You know I am a Christian. We go to the same Church. And you have really been a friend. But I have a big problem. I am majoring in anthropology. Today in one of my required classes the professor got up and told us he would destroy all our beliefs about God. It's only an anthropology class, but I was talking with one of the guys I share a ride with and he told me about what this professor does during the last class before Christmas. It really hurts me. I know it hurts God. I felt God tell me to stand up against this man."

Instantly, I remembered what Dave was talking about. My heart sunk as I remembered how I, my righteous indignation and all, had cowered before the mighty Professor Davis. "I had almost forgotten you had told me you were going to take that class," I muttered weakly.

"Well, I'm angry," he retorted. "But I came to ask you to pray for me. Pray that I will have the courage to stand up when he gives that lecture. Pray that the chalk won't break when he drops it. I'm asking that every time you pray you'll mention this to God. Everytime. I have only about 14 weeks before it happens and I need everyone's help in asking God to give me the courage to stand up in front of Dr. Davis." He stood up to leave.

I could feel moisture form in my eyes. "All right," I said. "But before you go let's have just a brief moment of silent prayer." We both bowed our heads. I really wanted to believe he could do it. But I had seen that demonstration. As he started to leave my office I joked. "Okay, hero, go for the Philistines."

He smiled and said, "Well, my name is David."

"Here," I snapped, "put this in your slingshot." I tossed the anthropology book he had left on my desk into his

fumbling hands. He muttered a thank you and left. After he shut the door I shook my head. "The kid's crazy, but I wish I had his guts."

The weeks went by rapidly. Since I was working on my master's degree, I happened to be on campus the last day of class before our Christmas break. I looked at my watch. Quickly I crossed the campus to Whitehall building. I knew that in about five minutes Dr. Davis would begin his final class period before the Christmas break.

I walked around the halls and stood in the open doorway. Several other curiosity seekers peered into the large classroom that housed David's Anthropology 201 session. Stomach knotted, I stood perspiring. "What if it doesn't work?" I asked myself. Then I shook my head trying to rid the nagging doubt.

Finally the moment came.

Up stood the infamous Dr. Davis, wearing what looked like the same T-shirt and jeans I had seen him in as a student seven years earlier. Walking around to the front of the desk he asked, "After two months in this class, is there anybody here who still believes in the ridiculous notion of religion and prayer?" He had rehearsed his part many times before. And he was gloating. In his right hand he held a new piece of chalk. He looked at the chalk. There was utter silence. Again he taunted, "Is there anyone here who still believes in God and prayer?"

My young employee was sitting near the right side of the auditorium. There were more than 500 students in the class. In fact, it was one of the largest classes on the entire campus. Slowly, David stood up and walked to the aisle. Then he methodically moved toward the front. He stopped in front of the instructor. "Dr. Davis," he said in clear, confident tones, "I do."

"Well, how about this," said Dr. Davis. "We have before us a real live person who claims he believes in the stupid notion that God can answer his prayer. Is that right?"

"Yes, sir," he replied. "I know God will answer my prayer."

"Well, how about this," the professor continued. "I'll tell you what. Just in case you misunderstood, I'll explain again exactly what I am going to do."

He went through the well-known sequence of events step by step. How he would hold the chalk up, open his fingers and let it fall. Then how it would shatter into a dozen fragments, and that no power in the universe could stop it from shattering. When he had finished his little discourse he chided, "Do you still want to pray?" David said, "Yes, professor, I sure do."

The professor reveled in this glorious moment of victory, "Well, isn't this something. All right, class. I want you all to be real quiet and reverent-like while this boy prays." He almost spewed the word *prays* from his lips. He turned to David. "Are you ready?"

"Professor," he replied. "I have been preparing for this moment all my life."

Sacrilegiously, the instructor intoned, "We'll all be real quiet while you pray."

I could not take my eyes off David. Neither did anyone else in the classroom. We each held our breath. He just turned his face heavenward and prayed, "God, I know You are real, and I pray in the name of and for the glory and honor of Your Son, Jesus. And I pray for myself who trusts You with all my heart. If it be Your will, do not let this piece of chalk break. Amen."

The sneering smile was now gone from Professor Davis' face. "Is that it?"

David breathed a humble, "Yes."

The professor grasped the chalk in his right hand and held it above his head in defiance. Then he let it fall. But that day a miracle happened. As the chalk tumbled to earth it fell against the leg of his jeans. Then it toppled onto his canvas sneakers. With a muffled tinkle it rolled to a stop on the concrete floor--*unbroken!* The silence was deafening. Then a student burst into laughter. Soon another joined. In seconds the entire auditorium was laughing at the red-faced professor. I smiled and shouted at the top of my voice, "You did it, David." He turned, looked at me, and smiled. One of those disciplining grins. Then he simply pointed upward. I understood immediately.

On my way home I thought: "Lord, why could I not have had the courage and faith to stand up for You like little scrawny David? I ask Your forgiveness. May I never again be ashamed to stand up for You"

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