

Filming God

How does a skeptical filmmaker venture into the heart of darkness to test the depths of God's 'furious' love? Have you thought about asking God for an idea?"

That was the question Darren Wilson's wife, Jenell, posed to him after he experienced what he called "an idea block." At the time, Jenell's query irritated Wilson. In fact, it initiated an argument.

"I am not going to ask God for an idea," Wilson replied. "That's for people who aren't creative enough to come up with their own ideas. Only noncreative people ask for help." After all, if anyone knew about creativity, it was Wilson. An assistant professor at Judson University outside Chicago, he teaches multiple classes on storytelling and video production.

Yet as a result of that conversation five years ago, Wilson is now the reluctant filmmaker of two grass-roots films that have swept across America and impacted hundreds of thousands worldwide. *The Finger of God* and *Furious Love* both document a skeptic's journey into unfamiliar territory—namely, places where God is moving with both signs and wonders *and* with a love that shines brighter than the world's darkest places. Perhaps it was Wilson's reluctance that made him the perfect choice to capture miracles on film. He was skeptical of people who said they heard God or saw God or were touched by God's power. And he didn't think God was in the business of giving ideas.

Weeks after Jenell urged him to turn to God for creativity, however, Wilson was still idea-less—and frustrated. And so he decided to give it a shot. One night he went to bed after his family was asleep and prayed into the darkness, "God, if you've got an idea, I guess I'll take it." He closed his eyes and within five minutes rushed downstairs to his kitchen table

and began writing as fast as he could.

It wasn't exactly a hit with Wilson. "I sat back and looked at it and said, 'I don't want to make this movie. I'm not a filmmaker, I'm a writer. I want to make *real* movies.'" Wilson put the idea on the shelf.

Angels in Toronto

Raised in a strong Christian family that attended a "normal" Baptist church, Wilson wasn't thrilled to see his parents and his wife excited about a major prophetic conference in Toronto in May 2006. His wife promised, "If you go to this one, this one time, I'll never ask you to go to a conference again."

"Deal," Wilson replied.

Though he couldn't deny the Toronto conference was impacting his family, he struggled with processing what was happening. "I was really uncomfortable with those surroundings," he says. "At the conference, every single person prayed the same thing for me: 'There's something on the shelf gathering dust, and God wants you to take it down off the shelf and run with it.'" He also couldn't ignore that each prophetic word ended with the same statement: "And you know what I'm talking about!"

The last night of the conference was what Wilson calls "super-charismatic-Toronto at the height of its nuttiness." He was uncomfortable and wanted to leave, but instead chose to close his eyes to ignore the expressive crowd during worship. Moments later, prophetic speaker Bob Jones walked onstage and interrupted worship.

"An angel just entered the building and his name is Breakthrough!" Jones announced.

Not only did Wilson think he was rude, he wondered how Jones knew this—and completely dismissed it as yet another crazy Toronto incident. Wilson closed his eyes again, but this time

felt someone walk by him. He opened his eyes and saw no one. He closed them again and saw the outline of the figure of an angel. The angel turned, walked up to Wilson and stood in front of him.

"I kept opening my eyes and he wasn't there, then I'd close them and saw an outline of a figure," he says. "I could feel him, and he was the most intense individual I've ever encountered. He was shaking with intensity, his hands clenched—fierce. I could feel the intensity and kind of leaned back because it was so intense."

At that point, Wilson realized Jones was telling the truth. The voice was not audible but very clear in his head. The angel said, "Are you ready?"

"I had no idea what he was talking about," Wilson says. "But I grew up in church and I knew if an angel asks you something, say yes. So I said yes."

The third time the angel grabbed Wilson's head in his hands and screamed in his head, "*Are you ready?*"

Wilson replied out loud this time, "Yes! Ready for what?"

"Make that movie," the angel said.

From Miracles to Witches

Weeks later Wilson was sitting in front of Bill Johnson in Redding, Calif., taping his first interview for the movie, *The Finger of God*. He had long respected Johnson's teaching and the interview was a pleasure, but the rest of the film's contents took him outside the safe quarters of a pastor's study. Still skeptical, Wilson took his camera to the streets and filmed healing miracles as they happened. And the list is long: a man raised from the dead, gemstones that appear out of thin air, crippled people healed on the streets, people who show gold fillings in their teeth after professing to be

touched by God, African children who perform miracles daily, manna in the Pentagon, and rare footage from Chinese underground house churches.

"I had no budget, no script, and no idea what this movie was ultimately going to look like," Wilson says. "I teach storytelling and film at a University in Chicago, and here I was breaking all of my own rules."

When he finished the film, he told his friends that he'd be amazed if even 1,000 people saw the movie. He knew it didn't contain the greatest production value—simply "a guy going around with a camera," as he describes it. He couldn't afford a distributor, so he put the movie up on Amazon and considered his job complete.

To his surprise, people watched the movie and the film caught on by word of mouth. The momentum grew until Wilson found himself on Sid Roth's television show and later on TBN, which only increased the interest in the film he didn't want to make. Without advertisement, *The Finger of God* has currently sold more than 70,000 copies. Sales took off so quickly that the Wilsons found themselves spending five to six hours a day shipping DVDs out of their living room. They were relieved when a friend directed them to a shipping company that now handles their orders.

But there was no time to rest in success. On the Wilsons' last trip to film the gypsies in Istanbul for *The Finger of God*, missionary Heidi Baker prayed for Darren Wilson and his wife, Jenell. Baker's prayer turned prophetic: "I don't know how to tell you this, but I see you filming the occult and I see you filming the satanic and I feel the Lord is saying you need to go into the darkness to show the light."

And with that, *Furious Love* was birthed. Wilson says the purpose of the second film is to show two things: one, that the war is real; and two, that the only way to win is through

love.

With new marching orders, Wilson and his production team went out again to the world's darkest corners and filmed the demon-possessed, former Satanists, prostitutes, "lady-boys," witches and those involved with witchcraft, heroin addicts and New Age believers. He also put on camera the stories of Christians who have collided with the power of darkness that ravaged their families—the persecuted church. In the end, *Furious Love* became Wilson's journey into the most evil places to document acts and experiences of God's furious love that overcomes any darkness.

The filmmaker admits that growing up in church, love was merely a buzzword that accompanied pictures of lambs in a field or Precious Moments figurines. "It became so saccharine and almost cheesy," he says. "I felt the Lord wanted me to make the best movie about love ever. If it's got to be love then it has to be titanium love, love that leaps off the screen at you. What better way than furious love? It's not cheesy, weak or a little lamb lying in a field. His love is violent and it will rip through the darkness. And it doesn't just deal with the darkness. Here's what I've discovered: When His kids are being threatened and we call on Him, He gets real, like an upset parent, and He destroys the darkness.

"I love C.S. Lewis. God is like Aslan—a lion, ferocious, terrifying. Furious love tries to convey, redefine and rediscover the power of that love—that first love we all encountered. That first time you encounter it, you realize what love really is. We have to show this somehow."

With raving fans of Wilson's two movies around the world, the reluctant documentarian is now hosting an event called *Furious Love* on April 6-9 at the church where he grew up in Monroe, Mich. Designed to show fans how to do the same things they saw in the films, the event will approach evangelism, healing and deliverance in various styles and comfort levels. Most of the

Christians featured in *The Finger of God* and *Furious Love* will be teaching at the conference, which coincides with the release of Wilson's first book, *Filming God* (Destiny Image).

While Wilson's films are widely received and rampantly catching the attention of the American church, the films are not without their skeptics. Wilson isn't just OK with this, he welcomes it.

"I have no problem with people wrestling with this stuff—I did," he says. "For people who come into this debate with hostile preconceptions, no amount of 'documentation' is going to be enough. If this is real, it changes everything, and many people don't want everything to change in their lives, so they put up walls in the guise of 'healthy skepticism.' I did.

Unfortunately, the only instance of skepticism accounted in the Bible, Thomas, wasn't deemed very 'healthy' by Jesus. Are there wolves in sheep's clothing? Of course. But there are also many, many sheep in God's clothing. There is a difference between skepticism and discernment."

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