

"good people" by
david foster wallace
essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

“ Good People” by David Foster Wallace Essay Sample

“ Good People”, written by David Foster Wallace, and published in the February 2007 issue of The New Yorker magazine is a story about two young Christians who are faced with the issue of an unplanned pregnancy. The critic reviewing this short story is Matt Bucher. He takes a psychological/philosophical approach and references the division and dichotomy within the story. Religious imagery is highlighted as well as the struggle and divisions within ourselves. Outwardly, this story seems focused on “ to abort” or “ not to abort,” but in reality, it is a story about our inner battle between good and evil; division and union.

The setting is in the spring, at the park. While sitting on a picnic table Lane and Sheri are faced with the dilemma of going through with a scheduled appointment for an abortion. Lane is torn between what he knows is right and what he wants, which is to be free from the burden of raising a child with someone he is not sure he even loves. Bucher points out the division and dichotomy within the story such as; “ two great and terrible armies within himself”, “ Two-hearted”, “ their shadow a two-headed thing in the grass before them”, the downed tree being “ half-hidden” in the water. The dichotomy suggests a dual struggle between two things: good vs. evil and division vs. union. When Lane reassures Sheri that he will be there for her and he will go with her because it was the decent thing to say. His heart and conscience struggle with the division of doing what is wrong, and knowing in his soul what his spiritual convictions demand. Sheri says nothing except acknowledging, “ Where he’d be was the waiting room”

Which would be far removed from the pain and guilt she would be experiencing in the adjacent room (Wallace 2). Bucher describes Sheri's demeanor as " she was blank and hidden." I believe her to be deep in thought and somberly aware of the seriousness of their dilemma. Lane freezes emotionally because he feels as though he knows he does not love her. He detaches himself and envisions himself escaping on a train and seeing his problems become smaller and smaller. Lane desperately wants to be " good people" and his spiritual convictions make him feel like a hypocrite and a liar and he begins to question his faith, but he does not seek counsel from his pastor, prayer partners on campus, his UPS friends or spiritual counsel at his parents' old church. This deliberate avoidance to seek counsel is because he knows that all of these mentors would not approve of their decision to abort their child. I agree with Bucher when he points out that the man in the gray suit and the fishermen across the lake are all references to a higher power. Christ is symbolized by the fish, some of the first apostles were fishermen also Sheri's last name is Fisher. Lane references the old man in the suit as reminding him of his grandfather which is an authority figure.

The eloquently written, philosophically agonizing crux of this story, Bucher points out is the " two-armies" passage, which depicts the battle Lane is experiencing within himself. " But sitting here beside this girl as unknown to him now as outer space, waiting for whatever she might say to unfreeze him, now he felt he could see the edge or outline of what a real vision of hell might be. It was of two great and terrible armies within himself, opposed and faced each other, silent. There would be battle but no victor. Or never a battle - the armies would stay like that, motionless, looking across at each

other, and seeing therein something so different and alien from themselves that they could not understand, could not hear each other's speech as even words or read anything from what their face looked like, frozen like that, opposed and uncomprehending, for all human time. Two-hearted, a hypocrite to yourself either way" (Wallace 8). In my opinion, young people probably face this problem every day and yet, I would bet that few of them have felt this deeply. Lane and Sheri want to please their God, but Lane struggles with the issue of loving her or not, and Sheri struggles with the shame if she aborts or the shame if she keeps the baby.

Through prayer, and his belief in a loving compassionate God, Lane has an epiphany and sees into Sheri's heart. He understands that through his belief in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, love conquers all. He asks himself... what would Jesus do? This is a question not many people ask themselves these days. During Lane's epiphany or as Wallace puts it, "moment of grace" Lane realizes he is "not a hypocrite, just broken and split off like all men" (Wallace 9). The vision in Sheri's heart is filled with love for her child and her God. She unfreezes him and releases him of all responsibilities and hopes he finishes his college education so that he can have a life filled with "joy and good things" (Wallace 10).

Lane understands this is a lie. Lane's heart has been cleansed with love and knows Sheri should not and will not raise their child alone. He questions whether he even knows what love is and why is he so sure that he does not love her. Through the love and guidance a loving God the union of Lane and Sheri will begin. Close reading of David Foster Wallace's, "Good People" was inspirational for this reader. Wallace's ability to create an emotional and

visual reality of humanity's battle with good and evil is apparent. Within this short story, Wallace takes the reader through the mind, heart and soul of Lane Dean and with amazing linguistic eloquence subjects the reader to a moral matrix of good, evil, division and union. Wallace has a unique way of bringing fiction closer to the way people actually live, make decisions and think.