



David Wilkerson

April 27, 2011

Reverend David Wilkerson, best known as author of *The Cross and the Switchblade* and founding pastor of Times Square Church an interdenominational church in New York City, was killed in a car crash in Texas on April 27, 2011.

Rev. Wilkerson was born May 19, 1931 in Hammond, Indiana. He served as a pastor in small churches in Scottdale and Philipsburg, Pennsylvania, until he saw a photograph in *Life Magazine* in 1958 of seven New York City teenagers charged with murder. He later wrote that as he felt the Holy Spirit move him with compassion, he was drawn to go to New York City in February 1958. It was then that he began his street ministry.

Rev. Wilkerson was well-known for these early years of his ministry to young drug addicts and gang members in New York City in the 1950s and 1960s. He co-authored a book with John and Elizabeth Sherrill about his work, *The Cross and the Switchblade*, which became a best-seller. The book includes the story of the conversion of gang member Nicky Cruz, who later wrote the autobiographical *Run Baby Run* about his own life. Since it was published in 1963, *The Cross and the Switchblade* has sold over 50 million copies in over thirty languages. In 1970, a Hollywood movie based on the book starred Pat Boone as David Wilkerson and Erik Estrada as Nicky Cruz. The book was included on Christianity Today's "The Top 50 Books That Have Shaped Evangelicals."

His ministry to young drug addicts led Rev. Wilkerson to establish Teen

Challenge ministries in Brooklyn, in 1959, which has reached youth and adults with life-controlling problems through its 414 centers worldwide. The ministry's biblically-based recovery program for drug addicts has been recognized as one of the most effective efforts of its kind.

In 1967, he began David Wilkerson Youth Crusades, an evangelistic ministry to reach teenagers he called "goodniks" - middle-class kids who were restless and bored - to prevent them from being seduced into a life of drugs, alcohol, violence and lawlessness. Through this ministry, CURE Corps (Collegiate Urban Renewal Effort) was founded, in an effort to harness the idealism and sacrificial zeal of many Christian young people who knew about the Peace Corps and Vista but wanted to give their lives to Christ-centered efforts.

In 1971, Rev. Wilkerson moved his ministry headquarters to Lindale, Texas, where he founded World Challenge, Inc. which serves as the corporate umbrella for Rev. Wilkerson's crusades, minister conferences, book and tract publishing, video production, street evangelism, literature distribution, feeding programs, drug and alcohol rehabilitation centers and other charitable outreaches. World Challenge, Inc. has a mailing list to hundreds of thousands of people who regularly receive copies of his sermons and ministry updates.

In 1986, while walking down 42nd Street at midnight, Rev. Wilkerson's heart broke over what he saw. At that time, Times Square was populated mainly by prostitutes and pimps, runaways, drug addicts and hustlers, along with live peep shows and X-rated movie houses. He cried out for God to do something-anything-to help the physically destitute and spiritually dead people he saw. Recalling that life-changing night, Rev. Wilkerson said, "I saw 9-, 10- and 11-year-old kids bombed on crack cocaine. I walked down 42nd Street and they were selling crack. Len Bias, the famous basketball player, had just died of a crack overdose, and the pusher was yelling, 'Hey, I've got the stuff that killed Len.' I wept and prayed, 'God, you've got to raise up a testimony in this hellish place...The answer was not what I wanted to hear: 'Well, you know the city.

You've been here. You do it."

Pastor David obeyed God. He opened Times Square Church in October of 1987, first in rented auditoriums in Times Square (Town Hall and the Nederlander Theater) and eventually in the historic Mark Hellinger Theater, which the ministry purchased in 1989. Today, Times Square Church, with a missions-focused congregation, is a virtual microcosm of New York City. Nearly 8,000 people representing over 100 nationalities worship together under one roof.

For over four decades, Rev. Wilkerson's evangelistic ministry has included preaching, teaching and writing. Throughout that time a distinctive characteristic of his work has been his direct efforts to reach the neediest among us with help for both body and soul. He has authored over 30 books including, *The Cross and the Switchblade*, *The Vision*, *Revival on Broadway*, *Hungry for More of Jesus*, *Have You Felt Like Giving Up Lately?* and *The New Covenant Unveiled*.

In his seventies, Rev. Wilkerson traveled extensively throughout the world to exhort pastors and their spouses to renew their passion for Christ. "I've been an evangelist for 50 years, but I didn't want to preach to pastors until I had gray hair, until I'd pastored. Now after 15 years of pastoring, sharing the hurts, pains, and difficulties of the ministry as a pastor, I felt the Lord finally release me, that I might have something to say."

He is survived by his wife Gwen, his four children, eleven grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Tribute Wall



“ *My Mom Louisa Martinez was part of the Wilkerson ranch in Tyler Texas. She speaks very fondly of Mr. Wilkerson. She is now 89 years old and recalls all her wonderful memories of her time on the ranch.*

Louisa Martinez - January 27 at 03:50 PM



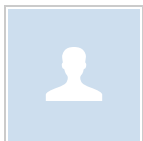
J'ai découvert ce pasteur en 1983 quand j'ai lu "LaVision" en France. J'ai été saisie par toute cette prophétie que j'ai su au fond de mon cœur qu'elle s'accomplira. Soyez béni pour l'éternité, pasteur Wilkerson, au Nom de Jésus-Christ, notre, Divin Sauveur.

Simone DARLES - February 12 at 05:54 AM



“ *I was at the opening services of Times Square Church in October 1987 and got to personally meet and talk to him and his wife at their office. They were very humble and anointed precious saints of God who genuinely loved and served God with their whole hearts. I will be eternally grateful for the impact they had on my life. Patricia Styers*

Patricia Styers - April 28, 2025 at 08:10 AM



“ *David Wilkerson*

October 05, 2023 at 02:48 AM



“ *David Wilkerson*

October 05, 2023 at 12:01 AM



“ Though I never met Br. Dave in person, he impacted my life in the deepest of ways... Since 1989 I have read his newsletters and books, and listened to TSC messages. My life is richer and more complete because of Br. Dave.##imported-begin##Marty Thomas##imported-end##

May 06, 2011 at 01:45 PM



“ Gary and Family,

Please know that you and your family are in my thoughts and prayers. Very sorry to hear about the loss of your father.##imported-begin##Linda Willis##imported-end##

May 02, 2011 at 09:40 AM



“ Greg, Sorry to hear of the loss of your father, but we know he is in a better place. I hope your mother is getting better. I will never forget your dad. The night we graduated high school your dad approached me and told me he would pay for any college that I wanted to attend. He also gave me his phone number and said if I ever needed anything to call him. I am sure he has approached many, many people with the same giving attitude. He will be missed.##imported-begin##Duane, Kim and Logan Hale##imported-end##

May 01, 2011 at 12:56 PM



“ We wanted to add this - Thinking of, and grieving "BROTHER DAVE" deeply, there is a song that keeps playing over and over in our spirit, and on our tongue that describes Brother Dave for us: our Spiritual Father, mentor, teacher, preacher, FRIEND, and that song is: "THANK YOU FOR GIVING TO THE LORD" ! It encompasses our GRATEFULNESS for Brother Dave's humble service, guidance, timely words of wisdom, preaching, ministry, and discipleship to us for the last 25 years by his service and devotion to Jesus Christ our Lord! "THANK YOU" BROTHER DAVE for giving to the Lord, for in so doing, you gave to us Spiritually more than you could ever know, (though we wrote to tell you) and to untold "MILLIONS" OF others!###imported-begin##Wayne and Nancy Gilbert##imported-end##

May 01, 2011 at 11:17 AM



“ I was stunned to hear of the sudden loss of such a great prophet of God. I truly believe that more people will be touched by his death...he will be sorely missed.
Gay Tyra###imported-begin##Gay Burch Tyra##imported-end##

May 01, 2011 at 08:59 AM



“ Our heart and prayers are with the family at this hour, and we are just too broken to even write about this tragedy and loss, and what Brother Dave meant to us right now !!! Our hearts are broken to pieces, and we do not seem to be able to come to grips with this as reality. "Brother Dave" walked us through 25 years of some of the deepest trials and pain a human can go through, and life will never be the same again without "DAVID". Rest well our brother David, rest well! I just know you got a "STANDING O" when you arrived in heaven on Wednesday afternoon - echoing "WELL DONE GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT". LORD, bless, heal, comfort, touch, strengthen this family in this bitter/sweet hour of losing their dear husband, father, grandfather, uncle, cousin and FRIEND, as only YOU can do. IN LOVING and GRATEFUL MEMORY of this "GIANT" of the FAITH. YOU WILL BE MISSED GREATLY !!! Wayne and Nancy G.##imported-begin##Wayne and Nancy Gilbert##imported-end##

May 01, 2011 at 08:55 AM



“ Pastor David, I know you are with the Lord but my heart is saddened because I always trusted your voice because I knew that you spent countless hours with the Lord and when you spoke I knew it was the Lord speaking through you. I told the Lord the other day who will I trust now and like Pastor David would say only trust in the Lord. Even so Lord come quickly. I know you will be greatly missed by your family. Pastor Dave you were truly the real thing from the Lord and we are going to miss you. Lord please raise up another voice for such a time as this. Lord please take of Mrs. Gwen and heal her body and comfort her during this time of loss and also comfort his children and grandchildren during this great loss. He will truly be missed. Thank you for allowing him to be here 79 years.##imported-begin##Cynthia D. Sanchez##imported-end##

April 30, 2011 at 04:09 PM

BZ

Danke Herr für David Wilkerson - er war ein Grosser und ein Gesalbter im Reich Gottes, der zahllosen Menschen, vor allem Jugendlichen, sehr geholfen hat!

Bruno Zimmerli - September 13, 2025 at 11:32 AM



“ Thank you for your legacy!##imported-begin##Doug Anderson##imported-end##

April 30, 2011 at 12:11 AM