

Books, Bethel and the Brooklyn Saint

Remember the kid in elementary school who was teased for reading too much? You know, the girl with thick glasses who didn't care if she was picked last for kickball because she was too engrossed in a new book. She'd sit alone at recess, lost in a vivid world that came alive in her imagination with every page turned.

Fast-forward 30 years, and it's funny how the tables can turn on "bookworms" like her. They're typically the ones now leading corporate boardrooms, arguing federal court cases and pioneering new technologies. Finance expert Dave Ramsey says a common thread among the world's most financially successful people is their discipline of reading a book almost every week.

I'm not into measuring success by your salary or your profession. Nor am I saying all kids with insatiable appetites for reading end up geniuses. But it's undeniable that books are powerful, positive life-shapers. In a day when dozens of other media offer more instant gratification, and in an era in which the digital tsunami has drastically altered our cultural landscape and intelligence—for better or worse—books still matter.

Why must I state what's been a given for hundreds of years? Because when you can carry entire libraries in your pocket (God bless smartphones), you begin to take for granted the power of a single book. That's exactly what's happening today, and sadly, we are forgetting that, amid the onslaught of "access anything, anywhere, anytime" information, books can still change things as nothing else can.

There are countless examples of this, but I can't think of one better suited to highlight in the context of this magazine than David Wilkerson's *The Cross and the Switchblade*. In late April, the Christian world mourned the sudden loss of this spiritual giant (whom we pay tribute to in this issue), yet his legacy will remain through his written words. Wilkerson's powerful 1963 account of how he risked everything to show God's love to gang members in New York City (particularly in Brooklyn and the Bronx) has affected millions around the world—and is still as riveting today as it was back then. Sure, reading habits may have changed since Wilkerson penned his first book, but the spiritual value contained on those printed pages has not.

I was reminded of this when I visited Bethel Church in Redding, Calif., to write this month's cover story and

saw firsthand what a “revival culture” looks like after 15 years of passionately pursuing God’s presence as a community of believers. Bethel isn’t just a revival culture, it’s a *reading* culture too. Everywhere I went, people were talking about books by Bethel leaders. Why? Because those books carry the DNA of the church, which in turn, is the very DNA of the Holy Spirit moving there.

We’ve highlighted those and other books throughout this issue not as a generic reminder for you to read more. Instead, I hope they whet your appetite to open their pages and—as only books can do—have your life changed.