

Charisma Publisher Steve Strang Remembers David Wilkerson

✖ It was early evening, April 28, when a cell-phone call let me know the devastating news: David Wilkerson had been killed in a tragic traffic accident. Dr. George Wood, general superintendent of the Assemblies of God, had just learned the news and felt I would want to report it. Knowing how important this was, we had a story online within 40 minutes that included a statement from Dr. Wood until we could get more details. The traffic on our website was so great the site temporarily crashed, and the article had more forwards on Facebook than any in the history of Charisma News.

That's because David Wilkerson was one of the great Christian leaders of our generation, and his passing is a loss to the global church. He was the model of integrity, and he finished strong in a day when some televangelists are photographed in foreign countries with women they aren't married to while others are exposed for secret gay activity while publicly opposing the gay agenda. Wilkerson was the paragon of virtue and his influence was tremendous.

We covered him many times in *Charisma*—twice on the

cover. We've posted some of those articles on a special tribute page at [that](#) includes videos, photos, memorable quotes from Wilkerson and much more—including tributes and remembrances from leaders around the world that we'll add as they're written. If you'd like to share your own thoughts about this great man, you can post them on our website, [. Or](#) send us your own tribute of fewer than 500 words and we'll include the best on our tribute page.

[Click here](#) for videos, photos, articles and more in tribute to David Wilkerson.

Wilkerson was best remembered for his book *The Cross and the Switchblade* and for founding Teen Challenge, which now has centers around the world (including one a few miles from our office). Dr. Wood says there are currently 24,000 men and women with life-altering addictions being helped on any given day. In the late 1980s, Wilkerson founded Times Square Church, which has had a great impact in New York City.

What hasn't been highlighted as often—until now—are the ways Wilkerson's life influenced others in ways he probably never knew. For example, the young Roman Catholics at Duquesne who received the baptism in the Holy Spirit, which sparked the Catholic charismatic renewal, had read *The Cross and the Switchblade*, as well as *They Speak With Other Tongues* by John Sherrill. Along with his wife Elizabeth, Sherrill co-authored Wilkerson's

book.

There is a chapter in *The Cross and the Switchblade* in which Wilkerson tells a Catholic priest that the former drug addicts who received the baptism in the Holy Spirit had more power to live for God. In the book he described what the Bible says in Acts about the Holy Spirit. My longtime friend Bert Ghezzi, who was among the first leaders in the Catholic charismatic movement, told me that reading those books certainly made the students (which included him) more open to the Spirit in those fateful days in early 1967. That movement today is said to now include 120 million around the world.

It seems nearly every Christian leader from that era has a David Wilkerson story. Dr. Wood remembers that at the time David Wilkerson's dad was pastor of the Assembly of God church in Turtle Creek, Penn., his own father pastored 30 members at the Assembly in nearby Pitcairn, Penn. A young, enthusiastic David Wilkerson wanted to preach in Pitcairn, but Dr. Wood's father—ever mindful of his small flock—wasn't sure David was ready and didn't let him preach there.

John Sherrill remembers how when *The Cross and the Switchblade* was translated in many languages, sales took off around the world except in one Scandinavian country. Wilkerson suspected the translation was bad, so he had someone read it and discovered the translator had stripped

out all references to the power of the Holy Spirit due to a personal theological bias. Wilkerson was so upset he insisted the book be republished with the material on the Holy Spirit reinserted as he'd intended. The sales after that took off.

I also was impacted by Wilkerson. I read his book as a teenager, and his description of drug addiction scared me so much I never experimented with drugs, even though it was the norm among many in my generation. I had the privilege of interacting with David Wilkerson many times over the years, and I have my own story about him.

In February 1972, as a junior at the University of Florida, I found out Wilkerson was speaking at a youth rally in Lakeland, Fla. I drove 120 miles from Gainesville with two friends to attend. It was that weekend I met a beautiful woman named Joy, who today is my business partner, my wife and my best friend.

Years later when I took a picture (shown below) with Wilkerson at his church office in New York, I was able to tell him about his influence on my life and career—because without Joy, there would never have been a *Charisma* magazine.

I, along with millions of others around the world, thank God for the life and influence of David Wilkerson.