

David Wilkerson: A Man of Unlimited Faith

This obituary, written by David Wilkerson's family, appeared in the program for his funeral in Tyler, Texas, on May 2.

Loving husband and father, doting grandfather. Friend to the outcast and hurting. Fearless witness to Christ's saving power. Passionate voice for God to his church. Tender supporter of widows, orphans and the poor. And spiritual father to generation upon generation—from the destitute to the powerful, from adults to teenagers, from loved ones to strangers from every walk of life.

These traits only begin to define David Wilkerson. For over six decades he served the Lord faithfully in ministry, founding and leading outreaches that have grown international with each decade. Behind it all has been an unwavering belief in God's love for every human being and His relentless desire to reach them.

"Brother Dave," as he liked to be called, was known literally to millions for his unlimited faith. He believed God could change the lives of gang members and transform the most desperate drug addicts—and the Lord did. He believed a dynamic

church could be launched in the heart of Times Square, New York City—and God brought it to pass. He believed he could be a man who loved his wife and children well—and he did.

David Ray Wilkerson was born May 19, 1931, in Hammond, Ind., to a line of devoted Pentecostal preachers.

After he was ordained in the Assemblies of God, he married the love of his life—Gwendolyn Carosso, who would serve beside him in ministry for 57 years.

From the very beginning Brother Dave applied a creative, innovative spirit to ministry. In an early pastorate, he a car drove up the aisle of the church to illustrate a humorous point. Yet he preached from anguish and pain, believing God works through our weakness. He knew that God confounds the wisdom of the world to reveal Himself—and that the truth was proved again and again by the ministries Brother Dave founded.

In 1958, he traveled from his small church in Phillipsburg, Pa., to reach out to gang members on trial in New York City. “He had never been to New York—he had certainly never met a gang member or a drug addict,” according to his brother, Don Wilkerson. “He just came home, with his simplicity, with his naivete, whatever you want to call it, and he changed people’s lives.”

As Brother Dave’s friend McCandlish Phillips, the *New York Times* reporter, wrote: “His method

was an absolute model of simplicity, directness and total non-sophistication—he just went out there on the streets and mixed with the kids and reasoned with them face-to-face, often quoting the Bible—and it worked.”

Out of that bold move was born the Teen Challenge ministry, a Christ-centered drug and alcohol rehabilitation program. The ministry became well known through the book *The Cross and the Switchblade*, which has sold over 50 million copies and been translated into 30 languages. The ministry has grown to more than 1,000 centers in the United States and 80 other countries.

The Lord then stirred Brother Dave to found Youth Crusades, his evangelistic ministry to young people. An entire generation became inspired that their lives mattered greatly to God. Brother Dave also wrote prolifically, his books moving generations of readers toward a life of holy devotion in Christ. The dozens of books he produced were filled with powerful insight, clarity and conviction. And he lived out the Christ-like example he wrote of, speaking continually of his own weaknesses and Christ’s faithfulness to him.

Like his namesake, King David of old, Brother Dave served God’s purposes

in his generation. He preached with uncompromising passion and relentless grace. He was not one for fanfare, acclaim or ceremony. He turned down invitations to meet with world leaders, yet he would give everything he owned to support a poor orphan or widow in distress.

His last mission on earth was to be an advocate for the poorest of the poor—to provide relief and support for hungry children, widows and orphans, in the U.S. and in impoverished countries. The outreach he founded to do this, Please Pass the Bread, ministers to thousands of children daily through 56 outreaches in eight countries.

He ran his race well, and when he was finished he was called home by his Lord. David Wilkerson impacted the lives of literally millions, and the God-inspired works he founded now outlive him. The impact of his life is immeasurable—not only in his preaching, writing and founding of world-changing ministries, but in his love, devotion, compassion and ability to stir our faith for greater works. David's son Gary offers this word to all who knew and loved his dad: "I know if my father were able to encourage you with his words today, he would invite you to give your all to Jesus, to love God deeply and to

give yourself away to the needs of others.”

Brother

Dave’s final blog posting, titled “When All Means Fail,” is a fitting word of departure to all whose lives he touched:

“Beloved,

God has never failed to act but in goodness and love. When all means

fail, His love prevails. Hold fast to your faith. Stand fast in His

Word. There is no hope in this world.”

David

Wilkerson’s passing is a deep personal loss for many. Yet we rejoice

knowing he lived life to the very fullest, in obedient devotion to

God and with a radical love for Jesus.

He is

survived by his wife, Gwen Wilkerson; daughter Debi Jonker, her

husband, Roger, sons Brent and Matthew and Matthew’s wife, Christina;

daughter Bonnie Hayslip, her husband, Roger, sons David and Brandon

and Brandon’s wife, Christina; son Gary Wilkerson, his wife, Kelly,

and children, Ashley, Elliot, Evan and Annie; son Greg Wilkerson, his

wife, Teresa, and their children, Alyssa and Ryan; brothers Don

Wilkerson and Jerry Wilkerson and sister Ruth Harris. His grandsons

served as his pallbearers.