

Paying Tribute to a Champion

✖ Nearly 13 years ago, I was working on the *CharismaNow* television broadcast when Steve Strang handed me one of the most amazing honors in my professional and personal life. My assignment: Interview David Wilkerson and Nicky Cruz at Times Square Church in New York City. The occasion was the 40th anniversary of Teen Challenge, and *Charisma* had already covered the story in print.

I once lived in New York and had the chance to meet both of these stirring preachers. Like millions of others, I was first exposed to David Wilkerson's ministry through his book, *The Cross and the Switchblade*, but when I began attending the Brooklyn Tabernacle, I had the enormous privilege of hearing him preach many times. He and my own pastor, Jim Cymbala, were very close friends. They shared similar passions—their hunger to know God, compassion for the lost, and their desire to see the church fully engaged in fulfilling its calling and mission in the world.

Rev. Wilkerson frequently visited "The Tab." Often, he was part of special evangelistic services at the church, and he joined with us in street meetings all over the city. But even when he wasn't around, his presence was felt because we used the film version of his

book as a powerful soul-winning tool and saw hundreds come to Christ over the years.

In person, he seemed somewhat reserved and unassuming, but extremely focused. I can remember one of his recurrent themes had to do with our taking our calling in Christ seriously. He never seemed to lose sight of the urgent need for men and women to hear the gospel and come to know Jesus, and he certainly inspired me in this regard.

I never saw him without being mindful of his compassion for the lost and his passion for the church. Some thought he was angry at times, but I thought he was heartbroken because he thought the church was losing its way. He told me during the interview that we were forgetting our mandate to call men and women to repentance. But he also told me no one should ever preach repentance until they have a firm understanding of God's mercy.

David Wilkerson's prophetic voice will be missed, but he said what was important. He shared with the world the wisdom God gave to him. Thankfully, much of it has been preserved for us. But his richest legacy won't be in the collection of works he produced; it's in the lives of the people he inspired and those who found hope in Christ, many of whom had no hope at all before the skinny preacher with the courage of a lion came to town.

When I ended my interview, I asked him how he wanted to be remembered. He said, "I don't think of those things. I really don't care. As long as He embraces me when I stand before him, and
says, 'Well done,' that's all."