

**A Son's Reflection on
a Father's Legacy**
by Pastor Gary Wilkerson

**Dealing With Reality and
Overcoming the Past**
by Nicky Cruz

**Teen Challenge: From a
Brooklyn Courtroom to a
Global Movement**

**Grace is Greater
Than Pain**



Prayer Points 2025

FOR OUR CHURCHES

- We believe for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the pulpit and the pews.

FOR OUR CITIES

- We believe for God to raise up a gospel witness all over our cities in schools, universities, and the workplace.

FOR OUR COUNTRIES

- We believe for God to raise up Daniels, Esthers and Josephs in gov't offices around the world that will be a voice from heaven to the nation.

FOR THE WORLD

- We believe for God to save 1 billion souls.

A Son's Reflection on a Father's Legacy

by Pastor Gary Wilkerson

Growing up as David Wilkerson's son, the title *The Cross and the Switchblade* was never just a familiar phrase—it was the living message my father carried in every step. To him, the Cross wasn't a decoration on a wall; it was the power of God's love—active, present, and able to reach into the darkest alleys of New York City. The switchblade, by contrast, symbolized the fear, sin, and violence that strangled hope from so many young lives.

He embodied that contrast. I watched him bring a gospel that never armed itself with condemnation but extended relentless love. His conviction—that “the Cross is stronger than the switchblade”—was no dramatic slogan. It became the foundation of a movement that transformed a city, and eventually, the world.

Seeing His Authority Rooted in Suffering

While writing his biography, *David Wilkerson: The Cross, the Switchblade, and the Man Who Believed*, I realized something profound: my father's authority didn't come from charisma or eloquence, but from suffering.

**My father's authority
didn't come from
charisma or eloquence,
but from suffering.**

That suffering fueled his compassion. It enabled him to stand face-to-face with gang leaders and addicts—even when the world had turned its back—and speak God's love into their wounded souls. And because



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A Son's Reflection on a Father's Legacy (continued)

his strength was born out of weakness, people sensed it was genuine—they knew he carried not just words, but wounds.

The Transformation Sweeping Through New York

I remember Dad arriving in Brooklyn—compelled by images in Life magazine—without strategy, money, or a plan, but with a heart full of God's love. From stepping into a gang trial to walking the streets, he confronted violence not with force, but with faith.

The result was nothing short of miraculous. Nicky Cruz, once the feared leader of the Mau Maus, surrendered his life and became a preacher. Together, they turned in weapons—switchblades, guns, bricks—physically and symbolically laying down their old lives to follow Christ.

From those early moments, Teen Challenge was born—not as a program, but as a lifeline for the addicted, the broken, the forgotten. Through it, the

Cross equipped thousands to overcome the “switchblade” of addiction. Its impact spread far beyond New York, becoming a global movement of hope and freedom.

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A Legacy Far Beyond Words

What struck me most as I retraced his story was his humility amid impact. He turned down White House invitations but would travel miles to meet a humble nun whose letter of faith had stirred him. That was my dad—visionary enough to dream globally, grounded enough to treasure the individual. He carried the same intensity into a small conversation as he did into a stadium revival, because every soul

mattered to him.

Direct Reflections from the Streets

His words still echo: *“You could cut me up into a thousand pieces...and every piece will still say I love you.”*

He said this to Nicky Cruz at a time when many were intimidated by threats—because love, beyond reason, disarmed more than any force. And that love didn't just win an argument; it won souls, one by one.

Why It Still Changes Lives Today

For New York City, his ministry wasn't a passing moment. It was a spiritual turning point. Those streets not only witnessed the Cross triumph over the switchblade, but also the birth of a movement of redemption, community, and hope.

As his son, I can say with certainty: that title holds more than a story. It captures a reality—an era when faith walked into fear, and fear was forced to bow. Not just once, but again and again, wherever people dared to believe. ■

DEALING WITH REALITY AND OVERCOMING THE PAST

by Nicky Cruz

Let me speak to your heart-for real.

Some people think if you don't talk about the past, it'll disappear. I used to believe that too. I thought if I buried it deep enough-under the anger, under the gang life, under the noise of the streets-maybe it would just fade away.

But the past doesn't go quietly. It echoes in your choices, it shows up in your fears, and it weighs on your spirit. And unless you face it, it keeps you chained.

I know this because I've lived it.

I was born in Puerto Rico, raised in a home where I was told I was unwanted. My mother was a witch, my father a satanic priest. Abuse and violence weren't just moments in my childhood-they were the rhythm of my life. I ran to New York City thinking I'd find freedom, but all I found was more anger and more pain.

The streets became my home. The gang became my family. And hate became my language.

I became a warlord for the Mau Maus-one of the most violent gangs in New York. I stabbed. I beat. I stole. I ruled with fear. But the truth was, I was the one who was scared. Scared of being alone. Scared of being loved. Scared of being seen.

And then came a skinny preacher named David Wilkerson. He stood in front of me and said something no one had ever dared to say to my face:

"Jesus loves you."

I spit in his face. I cursed him out. I threatened his life. But that man kept showing up. And those words kept echoing in my heart.

Jesus loves you.

It didn't make sense. How could God love someone like me? Someone so full of hate, so stained with blood, so broken? But the more I fought it, the more that truth broke through.

**You are not your past.
You are not your pain.
You are not your mistakes. You are not too far gone.**

Until one day, in the middle of a church service, I couldn't run anymore. I broke. I cried like a baby. I gave my life to Jesus, and I felt something I had never felt before: peace.

That peace didn't erase my past. But it gave me a new future. A new identity. A new purpose.

And that's what I want you to know today: you are not your past. You are not your pain. You are not your mistakes. You are not too far gone.

God specializes in lost causes. He restores what others throw away. He brings light to the darkest stories.

Today, I work with men who are just like I was. Addicted. Violent. Hopeless. And I tell them the same thing David told me: Jesus loves you.

At Victory Outreach Men's Home, I see God do miracles every single day. I see hard hearts soften. I see tears fall from eyes that haven't cried in years. I see families restored. I see dead dreams come back to life.

You might think your story is over. But I

promise you-God is just getting started.

You don't need to clean yourself up to come to Him. You just need to come.

He's not asking for perfection. He's asking for surrender.

So if you're carrying shame, give it to Him. If you're haunted by mistakes, let Him redeem them. If you're afraid to face your past, let Him walk through it with you.

You're not alone. I've been there. And if He could save someone like me, He can absolutely save someone like you.

Don't wait. Don't run. The love you've been searching for your whole life-it's right here. And His name is Jesus.

With all my heart,

Nicky Cruz



Teen Challenge: From a Brooklyn Courtroom to a Global Movement

The Birth of a Vision

In 1958, a young country preacher named David Wilkerson felt an unshakable call while reading *Life* magazine. A photo of seven New York City gang members on trial stirred him deeply. Though far removed from the streets of Brooklyn, Wilkerson believed God was prompting him to leave the quiet hills of Pennsylvania and reach out to troubled teens in the city.

When he walked into that Manhattan courtroom, he was kicked out by the judge. Yet that rejection didn't stop him—it marked the beginning of something historic. Soon after, Wilkerson began ministering to gang members and drug addicts, meeting them where they were: on the streets, in abandoned buildings, and in neighborhoods plagued by crime.

The First Teen Challenge Center

By the early 1960s, Wilkerson had established the first Teen Challenge center in Brooklyn. What started in a modest house became a residential discipleship program for young people entangled in addiction and violence. Unlike traditional approaches, Teen Challenge emphasized both spiritual transformation and practical life skills.

Here, broken lives were restored through prayer, Bible study, work programs, and mentorship. Many who once carried knives, guns, or needles began carrying Bibles and newfound hope.

Growth Beyond New York

The program spread rapidly throughout the United States. In 1971, David's brother Don Wilkerson helped expand the vision by founding Global Teen Challenge, creating a framework for centers worldwide.

Today, Teen Challenge operates more than 1,400 centers across 129 countries, offering long-term residential care, outpatient recovery, and community outreach programs. From urban neighborhoods in America to rural villages in Africa, the mission remains the same: freedom from addiction through the power of Jesus Christ.

Cultural Influence

In 1963, Wilkerson shared his story in the book *The Cross and the Switchblade*, recounting his encounters with gang leaders like Nicky Cruz. The book sold millions of copies, was translated into dozens of languages, and became a 1970 Hollywood film starring Pat Boone. This brought Teen Challenge into the global spotlight and inspired countless others to take part in addiction recovery ministry.

The Lasting Impact

The impact of Teen Challenge is measured not only in numbers but in transformed lives. Graduates who once battled heroin, alcohol, or gang violence now serve as pastors, counselors, business leaders, and mentors. Families are restored, communities are strengthened, and cycles of addiction are broken.

Independent studies have shown Teen Challenge to be one of the most effective addiction recovery programs in the world—far surpassing many secular rehabilitation efforts in long-term success rates.

Wilkerson's Legacy

David Wilkerson went on to establish Times Square Church in Manhattan in 1987, another beacon of hope in the heart of the city. Until his passing in 2011, he remained a passionate voice for the lost and hurting. His legacy endures through Teen Challenge, which continues to embody his vision of reaching “the least of these” with love and the message of Christ.

Conclusion

What began with a country preacher's obedience in 1958 has become a global network of hope and healing. Teen Challenge is more than a recovery program; it is a testimony that faith, compassion, and perseverance can transform not just individuals, but entire communities.

From Brooklyn's streets to every corner of the world, Teen Challenge stands as living proof that no life is too broken to be restored.



Brooklyn Teen Challenge — 416 Clinton Ave. Brooklyn, NY 11238

Grace is Greater Than Pain

Pastor Tim and Cindy,

Thank you so much for meeting with us. Your encouragement deeply blessed me, and I was especially moved by your advice concerning my dad. I truly felt God speaking to me through your words, reminding me to make this season count.

You may not know much of my story. My dad left my mom shortly after I was born to remarry and start another family. Although he tried to be present in our lives, the relationship between his new family and ours was often complicated and painful for my mom, which left my sisters and me caught in the middle. It wasn't until after I got married that I was finally able to forgive him for the abandonment I felt in my childhood. Since then, we've had a decent—though not very deep—relationship. I've always tried to extend grace and love, believing I had done my part.

Recently, while in NYC, I felt God urging me to move beyond the minimum and love my dad wholeheartedly so that I would have no regrets. My brother also said something that struck me as if it were from the Lord: "Papi never disowned you. You always had a relationship with us. You could always see him and know he loved you." His words were simple but true. I realized that I had been so focused on what my dad hadn't done that I overlooked the fact that, in his own imperfect way, he was present.

For many years, I carried pain and trauma from that season, but God has been healing me. He's showing me that when I only focus on the hurt, I miss the beauty He weaves in the midst of it. Through both you, Pastor Tim, and my brother—two very different voices, one not even saved yet—God reminded me of His sovereignty. He can speak through anyone, just as He once spoke through a donkey (Numbers 22).



I now realize that I wasn't truly loving my dad unconditionally. I was giving him only what I thought he deserved, the bare minimum of affection. But unconditional love doesn't measure, limit, or hold back—it gives without regret. Thank you for pointing me toward that truth and reminding me that grace is greater than pain.

I'm committed to showing my dad unconditional love and trusting that God will bring healing and blessing to that relationship.

Blessings,
V.C.

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TIMES SQUARE CHURCH

Times Square Church was founded in 1987 by Pastor David Wilkerson, author of "The Cross and the Switchblade." It is an interdenominational church located in the heart of New York City.

CONTACT

212.541.6300 | info@tsc.nyc

CHURCH LOCATION

237 West 51st Street | NY, NY 10019

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Road to a Billion Souls is a Times Square Church movement to help Christians connect with people and share Jesus in simple and natural ways.

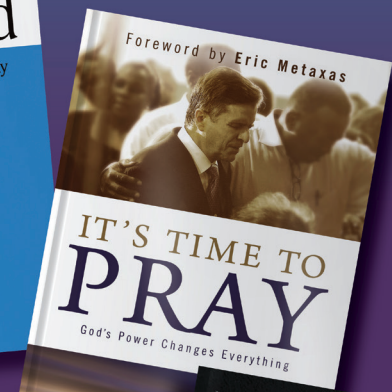
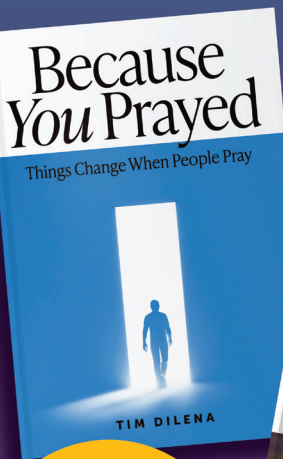


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