

**General Topics :: Ray Comfort on David Wilkerson**

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Everyone has heroes, or at least people they greatly admire. David Wilkerson was one of mine, along with John the Baptist and a few others. So I was deeply saddened when my daughter called to tell me he had been killed in a car accident. Of course, there was the sweet knowledge that he was with the Lord, but there was also the bitter reality that we no longer had him here on earth.

His passing brought back a flood of memories. Back in 1980, I screened the movie *The Cross and the Switchblade* at our church. It was based on his best-selling book, and starred Eric Estrada (from the television series *"CHiPs"*) as Nicky Cruz, the hardened gang member who mocked the naive country preacher who had come to his rough neighborhood.

I loved the way Wilkerson trusted God and went to New York, gave his shoes to some hoodlum, and ended up walking around the city in his socks. He epitomized the love that each of us should have for the lost. I decided there and then that I had to fly David Wilkerson seven thousand miles to New Zealand for a series of meetings.

New Zealand is about 16 hours ahead of New York, so I climbed out of bed at 2:00 a.m. on a Tuesday morning to put in a long-distance call to the United States. After about forty minutes of complications, I finally got through to the church and was disappointed to hear a busy signal.

The next morning I got up at the same time, and after another forty or so minutes I was able to contact his personal assistant. I boldly said, "May I speak to David Wilkerson, please?" Any second now and I would be speaking to the man himself. The voice came back, "Mr. Wilkerson is not available." I said, "But I'm calling from New Zealand!" Once again I heard a stern, "Mr. Wilkerson is not available." I placed the phone down and felt a little stupid. David Wilkerson was unreachable.

Fast-forward thirteen years to 1993. Sue and I were now living in the U.S. A few years earlier, a pastor had heard my teaching called *"Hell's Best Kept Secret,"* had said, "America must hear this message!" and invited us to base our ministry in Southern California.

A woman called my office and said that David Wilkerson had listened to *"Hell's Best Kept Secret"* and wanted to speak with me. He would be calling in a few minutes. When the phone rang, I quickly picked it up, and sure enough it was that famous voice. He wanted to fly me from Los Angeles to New York to share the teaching with his church. I could hardly believe my ears.

A few days later, I was sitting wide-eyed having lunch with David Wilkerson in New York City. Just the two of us. It was almost like having lunch with John the Baptist. Seriously. I hardly heard a word he said because I kept thinking, "That is David Wilkerson! It's him. The man. I could reach out and poke him in the eye. I can't believe this!"

I then preached in his church, and had the wonderful experience of walking with him (with his shoes on) through the streets of New York, as he gave me a personal tour of his ministry. When I arrived back in the Los Angeles airport, I saw Pat Boone at the baggage claim and cleverly broke the ice by saying, "Hi, Pat. I'm Ray Comfort. Have you heard of David Wilkerson? I just spoke at his church." It was then that I remembered Pat Boone starred as the famous preacher in *The Cross and the Switchblade*. Duh.

A year or so later, I spoke for a pastor in Texas. He kindly gave me an endorsement for the ministry. It said, "I have served as a local pastor, Teen Challenge Director, Crusade Director for David Wilkerson, and missionary, but never during those years did I encounter an evangelist with a more life-changing message."

It was then that I found out that he was the secretary who, fourteen years earlier, had told me that David Wilkerson was not available. Sure he was. It just had to be in God's timing.

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