

# Evangelical icon David Wilkerson dies in car crash

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(RNS) Evangelist David Wilkerson, who wrote the popular book "The Cross and the Switchblade" and founded New York's Times Square Church, died in a traffic accident Wednesday (April 27).

Wilkerson, 79, died after his car slammed into a tractor-trailer on a highway about 95 miles southeast of Dallas, according to The Associated Press. His wife, Gwen, was also injured but is expected to recover.

Wilkerson was known most for his outreach to street gangs, which he started after viewing a photo in Life magazine of New York City teens charged with murder.

He founded Teen Challenge, a ministry to young gang members and drug addicts, in New York in 1959. In 1963, he co-authored his best-selling story, which Christianity Today magazine listed in 2006 in the No. 32 spot on its "Top 50 Books That Have Shaped Evangelicals."

Wilkerson was an Assemblies of God pastor in rural Pennsylvania before starting his New York ministries, including the nondenominational Times Square Church that meets in a converted Broadway theater.

"The kingdom of God has lost a giant of the faith. His life touched millions," said Assemblies of God General Superintendent George O. Wood, in a statement. "He was godly, humble and represented everything that is best in a spiritual leader."

Wilkerson's last blog post, on Wednesday, addressed the inevitability of death.

"To those going through the valley and shadow of death, hear this word: Weeping will last through some dark, awful nights," he wrote, "and in that darkness you will soon hear the Father whisper, `I am with you. I cannot tell you why right now, but one day it will all make sense. You will see it was all part of my plan. It was no accident.'"