

YOUNG READER'S EDITION

**THE CROSS
AND THE
SWITCH-
BLADE**

DAVID WILKERSON
WITH JOHN AND ELIZABETH SHERRILL

ABRIDGED BY LONNIE HULL DUPONT
ILLUSTRATED BY TIM FOLEY



Chosen

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Minneapolis, Minnesota

David Wilkerson with John and Elizabeth Sherrill, *The Cross and the Switchblade Young Reader's Edition*
Chosen Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 1963, 2000, 2008, 2018. Used by permission.

© 1963, 2000, 2008 by David Wilkerson
© 2018 by Global Teen Challenge and World Challenge

Published by Chosen Books
11400 Hampshire Avenue South
Bloomington, Minnesota 55438
www.chosenbooks.com

Chosen Books is a division of
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

ISBN 978-0-8007-9879-6
Library of Congress Control Number: 2017963563

Text abridged by Lonnie Hull DuPont

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture is taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

Scripture marked NEB is taken from *The New English Bible*. Copyright © 1961, 1970, 1989 by The Delegates of Oxford University Press and The Syndics of the Cambridge University Press. Reprinted by permission.

Cover design by Studio Gearbox
Interior illustrations by Tim Foley

18 19 20 21 22 23 24 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

In keeping with biblical principles of creation stewardship, Baker Publishing Group advocates the responsible use of our natural resources. As a member of the Green Press Initiative, our company uses recycled paper when possible. The text paper of this book is composed in part of post-consumer waste.



To my wife, Gwen

1

This whole strange adventure got its start late one night when I was reading *Life* magazine and turned a page.

At first glance, it seemed that there was nothing on the page to interest me. It carried a pen drawing of a trial taking place in New York City, 350 miles away. I'd never been to New York, and I never wanted to go, except to see the Statue of Liberty.

As I started to flip the page over, my attention was caught by the eyes of one of the figures in the drawing. A boy. One of seven teenage boys on trial for murder. The artist had caught such a look of bewilderment and hatred and despair in his features that I opened the magazine wider to get a closer look. As I did, I began to cry.

"What's the matter with me!" I said aloud. I looked at the picture more carefully. The boys were members of a gang called the Dragons. Beneath their picture was the story of how they had brutally attacked and killed a fifteen-year-old polio victim named Michael Farmer. The seven boys



David Wilkerson with John and Elizabeth Sherrill, *The Cross and the Switchblade* Young Reader's Edition Chosen Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 1963, 2000, 2008, 2018. Used by permission.

stabbed Michael in the back seven times with their knives, then beat him over the head with belts. They went away wiping blood through their hair.

The story turned my stomach. In our little mountain town such things seemed unbelievable.

That's why I was dumbfounded by a thought that sprang suddenly into my head—full-blown, as though it had come into me from somewhere else.

Go to New York City and help those boys.

I laughed out loud. "Me?"

Go to New York City and help those boys. The thought was still there, vivid as ever.

"I'd be a fool. I know nothing about kids like that."

But the idea would not go away: I was to go to New York, and I was to go now, while the trial was in progress.

Until I turned that page, mine had been a predictable but satisfying life. The little mountain church that I served in Philipsburg, Pennsylvania, had grown slowly but steadily. We had a new church building, a new parsonage, a swelling missionary budget.

My wife, Gwen, and I were happy in Philipsburg. The life of a country preacher suited me. Most of our parishioners were either farmers or coal workers, honest, God-fearing and generous. They brought in tithes of canned goods, butter, eggs, milk, and meat. They were people you could admire and learn from.

Gwen and I worked hard in Philipsburg. By New Year's Day, 1958, there were 250 people in the parish—including Bonnie, our new little daughter.

But I was restless. I was feeling a kind of spiritual discontent that wasn't satisfied by looking at the new church

building or the swelling missionary budget or the crowding in the pews. I remember the night I recognized it. It was February 9, 1958. On that night I decided to sell my television set.

Gwen and the children were asleep when the idea came to me, and I was sitting in front of the set watching the *Late Show*.

What would happen if I sold that TV set and spent that time—two hours a night—praying?

Right away I thought of objections to the idea. I was tired at night. I needed the relaxation. Television was part of our culture; it wasn't good for a minister to be out of touch with what people were seeing and talking about.

I got up from my chair and stood at my window looking out over the moonlit hills. Then I bowed my head. I made an experiment in a special kind of prayer that seeks to find God's will through a sign. "Putting a fleece before the Lord," it is called, because Gideon, when he was trying to find God's will for his life, asked for a sign. He placed a lamb's fleece on the ground and asked Him to send down dew everywhere but there. In the morning, the ground was soaked with dew, but Gideon's fleece was dry: God had granted him a sign.

"Jesus," I said, "I'm going to put an ad for that TV set in the paper. If You're behind this idea, let a buyer appear right away—within an hour . . . within half an hour . . . after the paper gets on the streets."

I made it pretty hard on God, because I really didn't want to give up television.

When I told Gwen about my decision next morning, she was unimpressed. "Half an hour!" she said. "Sounds to me like you don't want to do all that praying."

Gwen had a point, but I put the ad in the paper anyhow. It was a comical scene in our living room after the paper appeared. I sat on the sofa with the television set looking at me from one side, the children and Gwen looking at me from another, and my eyes on a great big alarm clock beside the telephone.

Twenty-nine minutes passed.

“Well, Gwen,” I said, “it looks like you’re right. I guess I won’t have to—”

The telephone rang.

I picked it up slowly.

“You have a TV set for sale?” a man’s voice asked.

“That’s right. An RCA in good condition. Nineteen-inch screen, two years old.”

“How much do you want for it?”

“One hundred dollars,” I said.

“I’ll take it,” the man said.

“You don’t even want to look at it?”

“No. Have it ready in fifteen minutes. I’ll bring the money.”

My life changed. Every night at midnight, instead of flipping channels, I stepped into my office, closed the door, and began to pray. At first the time seemed to drag and I grew restless.

Then I learned how to make Bible reading a part of my prayer life. I’d never read the Bible through, including all the begats. I learned how important it is to strike a balance between prayers of petition and prayers of praise. What a wonderful thing it is to spend a solid hour just being thankful. It throws all of life into a new perspective.

It was during one of these late evenings of prayer that I picked up *Life* magazine.

I'd been fidgety all night. Gwen and the children were in Pittsburgh visiting grandparents. I had been at prayer for a long time. I felt particularly close to God, and yet for reasons I could not understand I also felt a heavy sadness. I wondered what it could possibly mean. I felt uneasy, as though I had received orders but could not make out what they were.

I got up and walked around the study. On my desk lay a copy of *Life*. I reached over to pick it up, then caught myself. No, I wasn't going to fall into that trap—reading a magazine when I was supposed to be praying.

I started prowling around the office, and each time I came to the desk my attention was drawn to that magazine.

“Lord, is there something in there You want me to see?” I said aloud.

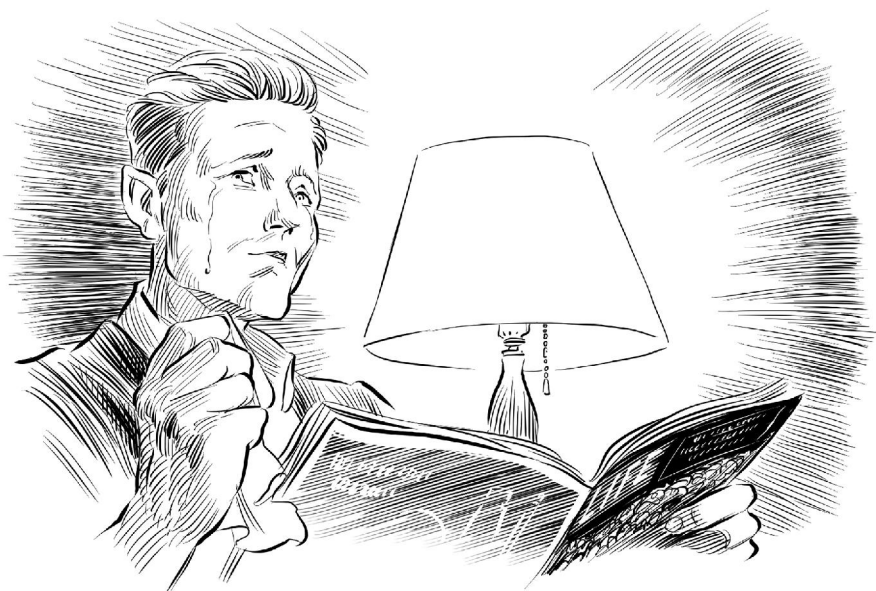
I sat down in my desk chair and opened the magazine. A moment later I was looking at a pen drawing of seven boys, and tears were streaming down my face.

The next night was Wednesday prayer meeting at church. I decided to tell the congregation about my new twelve-to-two prayer experiment, and about the strange suggestion that had come out of it.

Wednesday night turned out to be a cold, snowy evening. Not many people showed up, and those who did get out straggled in late and sat in the back, which is always a bad sign to a preacher.

I didn't preach a sermon that night. Instead I asked everyone to come down close “because I have something I want to show you,” I said. I opened *Life* and held it down for them to see.

“Take a good look at the faces of these boys,” I said. Then



I told them how I had burst into tears and how I had gotten the clear instruction to go to New York, myself, and try to help those boys. My parishioners looked at me stonily.

Then an amazing thing happened. I told the congregation that I wanted to go to New York, but that I had no money. Although there were so few people present, my parishioners silently came forward that evening and one by one placed an offering on the Communion table. The offering amounted to 75 dollars, enough to get to New York City and back by car.



Early Thursday morning I climbed into my car with Miles Hoover, the youth director from church, and backed out of the driveway. I kept asking myself why in the world I was going to New York, carrying a page torn out of *Life*.

I kept asking myself why the faces of those boys made me choke up, even now, whenever I looked at them.

"I'm afraid, Miles," I confessed, as we sped along the Pennsylvania Turnpike.

"Afraid?"

"That I may be doing something foolhardy."

We drove in silence for a while.

"Miles?" I kept my eyes straight ahead, embarrassed to look at him. "Get your Bible and open it at random and read me the first passage you put your finger on."

Miles looked at me as if to accuse me of practicing some kind of superstitious rite, but he reached into the back seat and got his Bible. Out of the corner of my eye I watched him close his eyes, open the book, and plunge his finger onto a spot on the page.

He read to himself, then turned to look at me.

The passage was in the 126th Psalm, verses five and six. "They that sow in tears," Miles read, "shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."

We were greatly encouraged as we drove on toward New York. It was a good thing, because it was the last encouragement we were to receive for a long time.