

Denver Man Recalls Wilkerson's Mentorship In East Texas

Written by {ga=Raymond Billy}

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Darrell Creswell spent two weeks at David Wilkerson's East Texas home in 1978. He learned first-hand from an evangelist gifted at reaching troubled youths.

Courtesy Photo **By Raymond Billy**
ResonateNews.com

Darrell Creswell fondly remembers David Wilkerson as one of the most compassionate men he's met. The Denver resident and itinerate evangelist said he's known a few others who have matched Wilkerson's love for people, but said it's a quality not normally seen — even in ministry circles. With the death of Wilkerson at the age of 79 — following a two-vehicle wreck in Cherokee County, Texas, on Wednesday — Creswell said a void has been left in the world of Christendom not likely to be filled soon.

“His kindness knew no end,” Creswell, 53, told ResonateNews.com on Thursday. “He once told me to say 'I love you' to every child I meet because it might be the only time that child hears it.”

That concern for forsaken youths was immortalized in Wilkerson's book “The Cross and the Switchblade.” The book was later adapted into a feature film starring Erik Estrada as gang member Nicky Cruz and Pat Boone as Wilkerson. The story documented Wilkerson's evangelism in some of the toughest gang neighborhoods in New York City. Shortly after reading the book in 1978, Creswell had an unexpected encounter with Wilkerson.

At the time a 20-year-old youth director for First Assembly of God Church in Graham, Texas, Creswell told the ministry's pastor, Forrest Gibbs, how impressed he was with Wilkerson's ability to reach the seemingly unreachable for Christ. Creswell aspired to have the same influence on young lives. Gibbs happened to be acquainted with Wilkerson and arranged for Creswell to meet him. The encounter ended up being an apprenticeship of sorts, as he ended up staying at Wilkerson's East Texas home for two weeks.

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“I was in awe of being in his home,” Creswell recalled. “After awhile, that went away. But what remained was a deep respect for this man who had changed so many people's lives for the better.”

Creswell shadowed Wilkerson during the visit, attending meetings with him at the Teen Challenge campus in Lindale, Texas. He said he was able to witness how to run an effective ministry organization and how to conduct evangelical outreach. But, beyond administrative competence, Creswell said Wilkerson's benevolence will always stand out.

“David went after people that nobody else wanted,” Creswell said. “He had a way of making you feel important — he wanted people to know God valued them.”

Creswell said his relationship with Wilkerson continued well into the 1980s — through good times and bad ones. He said he parlayed his training from Wilkerson into youth pastor job at Westside Assembly of God church in Davenport, Iowa. But after joining the scandal-plagued Calvary Temple Church in Denver — a ministry whose pastor was once convicted of securities fraud — Creswell became disillusioned with religion.

He said in the late 80s, he turned his full attention to oil drilling. Creswell said during that time, he allowed his moral standards to slip severely. Wilkerson sought to restore him to Christian ethics.

“He was pretty disappointed in me,” Creswell recalled. “He called me up and urged me to get myself together and get back in ministry.”

Creswell now spends his days as a speaker and evangelist in the Denver area making mentorship of other Christians a priority. He said more than three decades after meeting Wilkerson, he still draws upon the No. 1 lesson he learned from the famous evangelist.

“As a young man, I was motivated by success. But, David always told me to keep focused on compassion,” Creswell said.

Story editor: **Patrick Butler**