

# **The Cross and the Switchblade Study Guide**

**The Cross and the Switchblade by David Wilkerson**

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## Plot Summary

This book chronicles the spiritual journey undertaken by the young evangelical pastor of a small-town, American church when he embarks on a mission to help the members of troubled street gangs in New York City. Set in the late 1950's and early 1960's, the narrative traces the growth of his ministry from personal, one-on-one encounters into a thriving, sometimes miraculously funded, community outreach program. Along the way, the book explores themes relating to the power of Christian faith and the causes and effects of drug addiction.

The book begins with the author's description of the photograph (of a gang of teenagers accused of killing a polio-stricken fifteen year old) that eventually led him to change his life. He writes that through prayer, he came to believe that God's will for him was to travel from his small parish in rural Pennsylvania to the rough streets of New York City.

On his first trip into New York, the author discovers the depths of his innocence about the city, its justice system, and above all the nature of street gangs. His quest to visit the boys from the photograph is defeated at every turn; he feels humiliated and unsure about how to proceed. He is nevertheless reminded that "the Lord works in mysterious ways." After praying for further guidance, he decides to visit New York several more times, becoming more aware of how much work there is to do outside the particular gang he initially sought to help. A visit to his grandfather, a retired Pentecostal preacher, inspires him to consider broadening his mission to other members of other gangs. Again he prays and realizes he is being "called" to move to the city to begin his ministry there full time.

The author's first attempts at street corner evangelism result in the conversion to Christianity of a couple of the toughest gang leaders in the city - and the resentment of others. He also gathers allies, fellow ministers eager to help him free troubled young people from their addictions to drugs, sex and violence. At one point, the author initiates a series of rallies for the young people, which are at first sparsely attended and raucous, but through faith, prayer and trust, the author eventually wins the gangs over.

As the author's ministry expands and as he encounters increasing success with his techniques of reaching out to young people, the author again receives what he believes to be divine guidance. This time, he is inspired to fulfill his dream of establishing a drop-in center that the troubled youth of the area could use as a resource, a shelter from the horror of their lives. With the practical support of his wife and the financial support of some wealthy benefactors, he establishes what comes to be known as the Teen Challenge Center, and trains young students from Bible colleges across the country in the specific needs and circumstances of his ministry.

As the Center establishes itself and becomes more secure, it fosters and nurtures young people from the street as they awaken to a new, evangelically-based spirituality. Several of them, in fact (the author writes) move into the ministry. There are hardships (lack of funds, lack of food) but, the author writes, the Center's needs were all met



through the power of prayer. Even though extended negotiations fail to win a full reprieve from the pending payment of a second mortgage, at the last minute (and exactly as prayed for) a donation for the full amount of the mortgage comes in from a wealthy donor. The Center, and the author, are free to continue their work. An epilogue describes how that work is expanding to other large cities with similarly troubled teen gang populations.



# Chapters 1, 2 and 3

## Chapters 1, 2 and 3 Summary and Analysis

This book chronicles the spiritual journey undertaken by the young evangelical pastor of a small town American church when he embarks on a mission to help the members of troubled street gangs in New York City. Set in the late 1950's and early 1960's, the narrative traces the growth of his ministry from personal, one-on-one encounters into a thriving, sometimes miraculously funded, community outreach program. Along the way, the book explores themes relating to the power of the Christian faith and the causes and effects of drug addiction.

Chapter 1 - The author describes seeing a picture in Life Magazine of seven male teenagers in New York City who had murdered another teenager (see "Important People - The Dragon Gang and Michael Farmer"), and how he felt inspired to go to New York and help them. He describes how reluctant he was to leave his small church in rural Pennsylvania, narrating the events that brought him and his family there - events that, he suggests, were the result of intense, trusting prayer. He describes how he told his congregation of his decision, how they put together a collection to pay for his trip, and how he and a fellow worker took encouragement from a randomly-chosen Bible quote.

Chapter 2 - The author describes his anxiety ridden journey to New York, his unease and innocence about the city, his embarrassment about how that innocence makes him appear to people, and his simultaneous determination to see the judge presiding over the trial of the seven teens. He writes that at the end of the first morning of proceedings, he pushed his way forward to see the judge but was detained by security, who accused him of lying about his credentials and, in fact, being an agent of the gang. After convincing them that he was telling the truth, and after the judge decides to not press charges, he is released and then interviewed by the press, who embarrass him with their apparently ridiculing questions about his Bible. Humiliated and frustrated, the author returns home, concerned about how he is going to face all the people who put so much faith in him.

Chapter 3 - On the return trip to Pennsylvania, the author visits his parents, where his mother advises him to not give up - "God works in mysterious ways, she says, his wonders to perform." The author writes of how he kept those words in mind in the days following his return, when he is confronted several times by people who he thinks he behaved foolishly. Eventually he again receives what he believes to be divine guidance, this time this time telling him to return to New York. He initially resists the idea but eventually accepts, again receives money from his congregation, and returns to New York. Shortly after arriving, he has a (divinely inspired?) impulse to walk around town for a bit. He encounters members of The Rebels street gang, who recognize him from the newspapers and think of him as a friend - he, too, has been in trouble with the police. One of the Rebels takes him to meet another gang, the Grand Gangsters Incorporated, where he has his first encounters with Maria (see "Important People") and, through her,



with teen sexuality (see "Quotes, p. 30) and hard-line drug use. There, for the first time, his message that all the teens are loved by God is, to his surprise, heard and accepted.

The essential thematic message of the book, as embodied in the personal journeys and experiences of the author and the troubled young people he encounters, is stated directly in these initial chapters. This is the author's contention that absolute, trusting faith in the power and inspiration of the Holy Spirit can, and will, bring about total and life-affirming transformation in those who profess it. In evangelical terms, making statements about that faith is often called "witnessing" or "testifying," speaking of personal experience of the power of the Spirit. With that in mind, then, the book can easily be described as one long "witness" or "testimony" to the power of the Christian God and of faith and trust in that God. In storytelling terms, the initial statement of the theme here foreshadows the many occasions throughout the book when it reappears as a narrative and/or spiritual motif, thematically reinforcing itself on every occasion. In other words, the author's experience of divine guidance here foreshadows the many other occasions throughout the book when he has a similar experience.

Also in terms of storytelling, it's important to note right from the outset that the author's point is what he's saying, not how he's saying it. There is a certain sparseness or starkness to the way the narrative is presented - a certain "just the facts" quality, with little or no inclusion of attention-taking poetic phrases or self-conscious word usage. This is not literature. It is, however, a well constructed (if somewhat one dimensional) story (for further consideration of this point see "Style- Structure").



# Chapters 4, 5 and 6

## Chapters 4, 5 and 6 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 4 - In this chapter, the author describes his efforts to get the signatures of the parents of the members of the Dragon Gang. Those signatures, he is told, will enable him to visit the boys in prison. His initial attempts to find the parents end in frustrating failure, but then what the author portrays as another prayer-based miracle occurs - he is guided to the front door of the father of one of the boys, who read about the author and his mission in the papers and prayed that he (the author) would come. After the man gives the author his signature, the author encounters another member of the gang (Angelo Morales, see "Important People") who takes him around to the homes of the other parents where he gets all the signatures he needs. Nevertheless, the author is refused permission to see the boys - the chaplain at the prison feels it would be too confusing for them to meet with another spiritual adviser. On his way back to Pennsylvania, the author is frustrated and confused, but then has an idea - he'll seek guidance from his father's father.

Chapter 5 - The first part of this chapter contains lengthy reminiscences of the author's grandfather (Grandpap - see "Important People") - in particular, reminiscences of Grandpap's passionate faith, preaching, and personal inspiration. A particularly important memory is of the apparent healing of the author's father through public prayer - the sort of prayer Grandpap told the author as a young boy to practice, and the sort of prayer he (the author) has practiced throughout the narrative so far. Grandpap tells the author that his mission is probably greater than he first thought and inspires him to remember an important lesson in the Bible (see "Quotes", p. 49). Finally, Grandpap recalls seeing a snake shed its skin, a moment he describes as an image of evil transforming into something beautiful. He compares that experience to what he believes the author was about to experience on the streets of New York.

Chapter 6 - At the beginning of this chapter, the author contacts the mother of one of the members of the Dragon Gang, who reveals that she and her family are receiving threats of death and violence and have made the decision to move the boy out of the city into safety. The rest of the chapter is taken up with the narration of the author's weekly visits exploring New York (particularly Bedford-Stuyvesant - see "Objects/Places"), and his realizations as the result of his explorations - that the street gangs are all acting out of a sense of deep loneliness and feeling unloved. He describes his belief that all their activities - the violence, the illicit sex, the drug dealing - all originate from that source, and describes his sudden, prayer-inspired flash of insight that if they had a friendly, loving, non-judgmental place to go, they could do what really needed to be done ... start life over. At the end of the chapter, he imagines such a place in detail, but realizes it would take "a series of miracles such as [he's] never seen to bring it into being.

The book's central theme (relating to the power of Christian faith - see "Themes") manifests several times in this section. First, there is the visit to the gang member's



father and the encounter with Angelo Morales, which foreshadows Angelo's appearance as a faith-transformed minister later in the book. There is also the inspiration the author receives at the end of Chapter 6, the initial impulse for (and therefore, in narrative terms, the foreshadowing of) the Teen Challenge Center (see Chapter 14). Most importantly, there are the incidents in Chapter 5, the recalled healing of the author's father through prayer, the stories of Grandpap's history, and the advice Grandpap offers the author.

Meanwhile, the book's secondary thematic focus (its examination of the causes and manifestations of drug addiction) comes into play for the first time in this section. Here the author introduces his theory that the core of all drug addiction, and therefore the core of its manifestations (sexuality, violence, thieving) is loneliness. For further exploration of this aspect of the book, see "Themes - The Sources and Effects of Drug Use"). A related point explored here is the nature and effects of collateral violence - that is, violence not directly caused by the drug addict's cravings (such as violence entered into as part of an effort to get money for drugs, or the drugs themselves). The collateral violence referred to here is that done to the addict's family, by those whose anger at the boy is spilling over onto his family. In other words, the thematically relevant implication of this narrative vignette is that violence has a ripple effect, spreading out from the initial source and affecting others who actually have nothing to do with the original trigger.

Finally, there is the interesting irony of Grandpap's snake imagery. In Biblical spirituality, humanity (as embodied by Adam and Eve) was corrupted by the influence of a snake, the reason why snakes have, throughout post-Christ history, have been portrayed as evil. This lends additional (weight? depth? meaning?) to Grandpap's story of the snake's transformation, the implication being that if such a universal embodiment and/or symbol of evil can transform into something beautiful, so can a simple human being.





# Chapters 7, 8, 9 and 10

## Chapters 7, 8, 9 and 10 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 7 - The author describes how, as he contemplated possible ways to achieve his dream, he recalled an incident from his childhood in which his Biblically-defined faith enabled him to face down a bully and gain a reputation for toughness. This recollection, he writes, gave him courage to move his ministry further into the heart of gang-defined New York (Fort Greene, Brooklyn - see "Objects/Places"). His first attempt at street preaching ends with an arrest but no charges, but his second is more successful - again, the gangs are aware that he, too, has been in trouble with the police and are therefore respectful. As he begins preaching, his confidence grows, and eventually (and to his amazement), two gang leaders join him in prayer. Two others, however (especially Nicky, one of the leaders of the Mau Mau gang - see "Important People"), still treat him with hostility. He arranges for the two new Christians to connect with other ministers, but doubts the sincerity of their conversion - doubts that are challenged by his wife, Gwen, who accuses him of trying to argue away the miracles he's brought about. "People who don't believe in miracles, she says, shouldn't pray for them."

Chapter 8 - In this chapter, the author describes his discovery of the Reverend Ortez (see "Important People") and his church. After the congregation there hears his story, the idea emerges that large numbers of teenagers could be reached if a mass rally were held. A generous member of the church agrees to provide funding, a coalition of like-minded churches is formed to help with the arrangements, and plans go ahead. Meanwhile, the author reveals (almost in passing) that back in Pennsylvania, Gwen is due to give birth at around the time of the rally. With good humor, she recognizes the power of the author's calling and gives him her blessing. The author then writes how, as word of the rally spread, he found that gang members were reluctant to attend and was surprised to discover that they all somehow discovered that becoming engaged with the Holy Spirit would make them cry (see "Themes - The Cleansing Power of Tears) and were afraid of appearing vulnerable. They were also afraid of losing their power if they left their home turf. At one point Maria (see "Important People" and Chapter 7) visits the author at the home of the Ortizes and threatens to kill herself if they don't leave the gangs alone. Ortez' wife Delia calmly convinces her to let go of her threat and to let the other members of the gang come to the rally. The author writes that Maria "walked out of the Ortez apartment, head high and hips swinging."

Chapter 9 - At the beginning of this chapter, the author describes the failure of the rally (in fact a series of events spread over several nights). He also describes his encounter with Little Jo-Jo, a gang leader whose experiences of compassion and faith (see "Important People") trigger a profound spiritual conversion (see "Quotes", p. 90) and who inspires the author to approach his preaching with a different technique and perspective. Also at this time, Gwen gives birth to a little boy.



Chapter 10 - In this chapter the author describes the final night of the rally - how the Mau Mau gang was the last to show up, how he manipulated Nicky (see Chapter 7, also "Important People") into taking the collection and returning it complete (without stealing any). Most importantly, he tells how he (the author) turned the outcome of the initially raucous meeting completely and publicly over to God, with the result that the entire Mau Mau gang came forward to accept God into their hearts. After the Mau Maus, he adds, came the rest of the gangs - more boys than girls, however, with the girls attempting to seduce the boys back into sexual activity (see "Quotes", p. 97). The chapter concludes with the author, full of celebration of what he's accomplished, being gently and humorously reminded by his wife that she's accomplished a thing or two (i.e. giving birth) herself.

Again, there are several noteworthy elements in this section. The central thematic motif relating to the power of faith recurs several times, most notably in the author's description of the final night of the rally (the reference to Nicky's actions foreshadows his reappearance in Chapter 11, when he explains the circumstances of his returning the collection). The secondary thematic motif relating to loneliness also appears in relation to the rallies, as the author's message about the loneliness at the core of their lives reaches the gang members and is a key component of their turning their lives over to Christ. Finally, the book's third central thematic motif relating to tears is introduced here - for further consideration of this motif see "Themes - The Cleansing Power of Tears".

In terms of narrative structure, this section marks a turning point of sorts - the author overcomes obstacles and achieves a certain level of accomplishment in his work. He has realized a certain degree of transformation - but, as he himself acknowledges, he has even further to go.

Finally, there is in this section an intriguing glimpse of the author's home life while his life in New York is taking so much of his attention. It would be tempting to interpret his absence from his child's birth as unsupportive at best, insensitive at worst. It's important to remember, however, that in the minds and lives of the author and his wife, and perhaps in the minds and lives of evangelical Christians in general, there is nothing more important than the mission. Both the author and his wife recognize and accept that that the work of God must come first. It could be argued that there is no more profound example of God's work than the birth of a child - but again, in this specific case, it's clear the author and his wife are on the same page ... the lives of so many other children take precedence over the new life of one. For further consideration of this aspect of the author's story and life, see "Themes - Self Sacrifice".



# Chapters 11, 12 and 13

## Chapters 11, 12 and 13 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 11 - Here the author begins contemplating whether he should move his family to New York City to take up the challenge of working with the street gangs full time and takes one more trip into the city to seek inspiration. When he arrives, he encounters Nicky, who reveals his desire to become a preacher. Astounded and excited, the author invites him to speak at a suburban church which had expressed an interest in learning more about the gang situation. Nicky agrees and tells his story of abandonment, violence, confrontation, and anger, describing how the author told him (in Chapter 7) that he was loved, and how the author (in Chapter 10) trusted him and how, as a result of being treated this way, he accepted God and Jesus into his heart. The author describes how the suburban audience listened intently to Nicky's story, and how a collection was taken "which started Nicky on a long and remarkable journey."

Chapter 12 - This chapter opens with the author describing how his sense of self-congratulation at Nicky's transformation was quickly shattered when he learned that one of his earliest success stories was forcibly "drafted" back into the gang and subsequently involved in a violent confrontation that resulted in his being imprisoned. As he describes the lesson he learned (that he has to follow up with the gang members he converts), he also describes how, a short time afterward, he and Gwen both experienced the faith-inspired revelation that it was time for them to leave their Pennsylvania home and for the author to move his preaching in a new direction. In particular, he describes this revelation as coming to him in a moonlit, healthy wheat field, and his understanding that he was to "harvest" the souls of the teens in New York in the same way as the wheat in the field would be harvested. As seeming confirmation of this vision, he is invited to participate in the forming of a new teen ministry in New York.

Chapter 13 - The author describes the first stages of his New York ministry, called Teen Age Evangelism - the smallness and discomfort of his rooms (which, he writes, led him into an even deeper and richer prayer life), the struggle to reach troubled teenagers, and the success he eventually found reaching out to teenagers through a short, simple, television program. He describes how the program quickly led the ministry into debt and how a series of (circumstances? coincidences? miracles?) led him and the ministry to a benefactor who agreed to fund their operations up to a maximum of ten thousand dollars. "It was becoming increasingly clear to us," the author writes, "that the hand of the Lord was in our work."

The book's central thematic motifs all appear in this section - the power of faith (as manifest in Nicky's story, the author's personal revelation of his future, the donation), the dangers of drug use (as manifest in the story of the lapsed gang member), and the cleansing power of tears (as manifest, almost in passing, in Nicky's story). Meanwhile, a



new metaphorical motif (the wheat sheaf) is introduced here, foreshadowing its appearance in Chapter 15 as affirmation that the author is on the right spiritual track.

In terms of storytelling, the key point to note here is the author is establishing of a new objective, the next stage on his personal journey. As is the case with many fictionalized narratives, including myth and legend, this stage of the author's personal journey has an archetypal resonance - the author, like the archetypal Hero, has the chance to apply what he has learned in the first stages of his transformation to the next stage, while at the same time acquiring even more knowledge and experience which will, in turn, serve him as he moves into the stages yet to come. For further consideration of the similarities between archetypal Hero stories and the author's narrative, see "Themes - The Hero's Journey" and also "Topics for Discussion - Consider the reference ..."



# Chapters 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18

## Chapters 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 14 - The author begins this chapter by describing his decision to resume face-to-face encounters with troubled teenagers (see "Quotes", p. 128), and the development of his new dream, the Teen Challenge Center (see "Objects/Places"). He describes how Gwen inspires him to find the place first and let the money follow, how he and his colleagues on the board of Teen Age Evangelism find a cheap place in which to house the center, and how they find their way to a decrepit mansion (see "Objects/Places - 416 Clinton Avenue"). He describes how he and the board purchase the mansion through a combination of hard-nosed business sense and, according to the author, prayer-inspired financing. Finally, he describes how the time for them to pay the second mortgage came "with devastating swiftness."

Chapter 15 - In this chapter, the author chronicles the process of turning 416 Clinton Avenue into the Teen Challenge Center ... cleaning out accumulated debris, redoing plumbing, repainting, raising funds for furniture (see "Quotes", p. 141), and recruiting young people willing and able to undertake the hardships of a potentially violent street ministry. Everything falls into place, and the author suggests that it's due to the prayer-sought influence of the Holy Spirit. The chapter concludes with Gwen pointing out the ornamentation on the fireplace in the chapel - a sheaf of wheat, a clear echo of the author's vision of the future described in Chapter 12.

Chapter 16 - Here the author describes how he taught the Center's young missionary recruits about the world they were about to enter, showing them the horrific circumstances in which so many people lived, confronting them with their own preconceptions, and teaching them to communicate the truth of their faith instead of simply mouthing rehearsed answers. He then describes how busy those young missionaries became, and recounts three specific examples of how the Center's work succeeded in helping troubled young men turn their lives around (see "Important People - George, Pedro and Lucky").

Chapter 17 - This chapter begins with a brief description of the daily routine at the Teen Challenge Center, and then narrates the return of Nicky, now an ordained minister and interested in working at the Center. The author also describes the involvement of Linda Meisner (see "Important People") in the Center's work - specifically, her reaching out to the young girls affiliated with the various gangs. In describing her sometimes dangerous, usually troubling encounters with the girls and the boys who considered the girls their property, Linda is able to defend herself simply by saying to them "God bless you." The chapter concludes with a quote from one of Linda's letters home, in which she says she "can actually feel the presence of evil. I know that my life is in danger. I only have one desire ... to burn out for God."



Chapter 18 - In this chapter, the author begins by describing the happy, joking atmosphere that generally fills the center, and then describes how supplies of food were inconsistent at best. He then describes how one day a complete lack of food for twenty-five people was eased through another near-miraculous prayer. Finally, he refers to a looming financial crisis - the due date of the second mortgage, meaning that the Center had to come up with fifteen thousand dollars from somewhere.

Where most of the earlier chapters of the book had a variety of narrative foci, this section focuses almost entirely on the ways and means of the Teen Challenge Center and its prayer-inspired inception and purpose. Important elements to note here include the implied metaphor of the cleaning out process - in the same way as the building is cleansed of its decades-old mess and decay, the teenagers who come to the Center for help are cleansed of their life-long, personal, drug-induced mess and decay. There is also an interesting and noteworthy contrast between the two sorts of young people appearing in this section - the idealistic, naïve, clean-living young missionaries and the cynical, wounded, corrupted young street people. The wheat sheaf symbol reappears, reinforcing the author's prayer-inspired belief that he is in the right place at the right time doing the right thing. Finally, the reference to the fifteen-thousand dollar mortgage foreshadows events in the book's final chapter, in which the resolution of the mortgage crisis plays a key role in defining the climaxes of both the book and the author's personal (Hero's?) journey.

An intriguing element in this section can be found in the concluding moments of Chapter 17 - specifically, the author's quote from Linda's letter. There is a definite sense of martyrdom, of willingness to die for one's faith, that appears here, the only point in the entire book at which it happens. For further consideration of this question see "Themes - Self Sacrifice".



# Chapters 19, 20, 21 and 22

## Chapters 19, 20, 21 and 22 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 19 - This chapter begins with the author's encounter with Maria (see Chapters 3 and 8), who is unable to stop using drugs but is still able to call for help in preventing a drug-related murder. The author then develops a careful analysis of how teenagers become addicted to drugs and what happens to them - how drug dealers choose the loneliest children as their targets to increase their clientele, how those children become dealers themselves to pay for their own habits, and how the body and spirit both break down after long-term addiction. The author illustrates his story by referring to the examples of several young people who are either so lost in their addiction that they can see no other way of living, or who attempt to break their addiction but end up returning to it. He also discusses the economics of the drug trade, referring to how much money can be made from selling drugs, how much it costs to maintain a drug habit, and the extent to which the economy in general is negatively affected by the drug trade.

Chapter 20 - This chapter narrates the author's increased struggle against the influence of drugs in the lives of the young people he serves. He narrates the story of a young guest of the Center desperate to get off heroin, who goes through the trauma of the initial three-day withdrawal only to immediately go back out onto the street and get arrested for theft and drug possession. This leads the author to wonder what more he could have done and to ask recovering addicts in the Center how they managed to get through their difficult times. They all tell him the biggest aid to their recovery was being baptized into the Holy Spirit, leading the author to believe that he "was on the verge of something tremendous."

Chapter 21 - In this chapter, the author explores what it means to be baptized into the Holy Spirit, an event that he describes in relation to the Pentecost (see "Objects/Places - The Pentecost"). He has a conversation with a Roman Catholic priest, describing his family history of experiencing the Pentecost, the actual physical and manifestations of the experience, and telling him the effect that such an experience has on the young people at the Center. He then describes how the priest was introduced to some of those young people, one of who describes the experience in some detail (see "Quotes", p. 198). After the priest leaves to discuss what he has learned with his fellow priests, Nicky leads a prayer service at the Center and inspires a young man to have an experience of Pentecost exactly as the author and the other young people described.

Chapter 22 - The author begins this chapter by saying that "we did not find that the baptism of the Holy Spirit always freed a boy. In fact, it did just the opposite: it trapped him." He then spends the rest of the chapter defining what he means by the second trap - the healthy, safe, redeemed trap of the Holy Spirit. He cites several examples of former drug addicts whose lives have been changed for the better by first accepting baptism and then living within the healthy "trap" of the Spirit,. He further illustrates his point by narrating the stories of other former addicts whose slips back into drug



addiction weren't permanent. As the result of their new life in the Spirit, the author suggests, as the result of their being "trapped," the lure of drugs was unable to regain a hold over them. The chapter concludes with the author's narration of what eventually happened to Maria - how she found the Holy Spirit during a visit to the Orteza' church, how she prayerfully stood her ground against former gang members who wanted her money, and how she moved to Puerto Rico to attend a Spanish-speaking religious college.

The main noteworthy element in this section is the way the author entwines his two primary thematic motifs - his demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit and his exploration of the causes and effects of drug use. At this point, there is the strong implication that seeking the spirit and taking refuge in drugs are in fact both sides of the same coin, the same need - the loneliness the author suggests is at the core of drug abuse, an emptiness filled by Spirit on the one hand and by drugs on the other. In this context, it's possible to see the work of the author and of the Teen Challenge Center as encouraging teenagers to make the healthier, safer, more life-affirming choice.

In narrative terms, actual storytelling seems to take something of a back seat to the author's thematic explorations (as defined above) and practical explanations (of the complex mechanics of the drug trade, of the Pentecost, of his personal theories). In a novel, in which part of the structural process is to build narrative momentum to a point of climax, such a detour into explanation would, in all likelihood, come across as stopping the story dead. There is certainly a sense of that here - the engaging forward movement of the author's story, which has been a powerfully effective component to this point, slows significantly to allow for his diversions. This is not to say that the diversions themselves are a bad thing; they are, in fact, important illuminations of just how far the author has come on his personal (Hero's) journey of transformation from innocence to knowledge. Ultimately, however, they are non-dramatic and passive, particularly when juxtaposed with the energetic nature of both the previous and forthcoming sections.





# Chapter 23 and Epilogue

## Chapter 23 and Epilogue Summary and Analysis

Chapter 23 - In this concluding chapter, the author returns to the subject of the payment of the second mortgage (last referred to at the end of Chapter 18). He describes how the time draws closer for the mortgage to be paid, how money isn't coming in in sufficient amounts, how he manages to get an extension on the due date, and how the staff and teenagers at the Center, at the author's direction, thank God for the Center paying it off, even though the money isn't yet there. Eventually, the author and his board reach one of their original benefactors and make their plea for funds - and finally, during a prayer service on the day the mortgage is due, a messenger arrives with a check for the full amount from the benefactor. Struck dumb with awe and gratitude, the author describes how the check was passed around from person to person at the service (see "Quotes", p. 215).

Epilogue - In this brief section, the author describes the early success of the new Teen Challenge Center in Chicago and plans to construct more centers in other large cities. He comments that there is always a demand for more money but adds that the Holy Spirit always provides. "The Holy Spirit is in charge," he writes, and concludes by suggesting that saying so in words isn't nearly the proof of the Spirit's power that the lives lived by those whom the Spirit has touched is.

Explorations of the book's second thematic motif relating to drug use are almost entirely missing from this section, which instead relates the narrative's most powerful anecdote related to the theme of the power of faith. It's important to note that the book's third thematic focus also comes into play - tears as a manifestation of the transformation wrought by the Holy Spirit. In this case, however, those tears are the result of a corporate, financial transformation as opposed to a personal one.

In narrative terms, this section could easily and accurately be defined as the book's climax - the highest point of emotion, the achievement of the central character's goal. In archetypal terms, it is also the climax of The Hero's Journey (see "Themes - The Hero's Journey"), the return of the Hero to the world with the power and the knowledge to achieve triumph...which, as the epilogue confirms and which has been the case with the narrative's earlier triumphs, is merely the conclusion of one phase of a larger, longer, more profound journey.

# Characters

## The Author (The Rev. David Wilkerson)

At the time the book was written (the late 1950's), the author was in his late twenties and early thirties and the pastor of a small, rural Pentecostal church, when he received a spiritual call to minister to the troubled young people of New York City. While an exploration of the development of his personal character is far from the main point of the narrative, it's important to note that he does undergo considerable personal transformation over the course of his story. As he himself suggests, he appears in the narrative as initially naïve in the ways of the city, its inhabitants and its troubles, particularly those of the young people he feels called to help. As he becomes more and more deeply involved in his mission, in many ways he becomes more and more worldly, not only exposed to the darker, addictive, destructive sides of humanity but also to the bureaucratic, self-interested, finance-driven ways of the non-religious (secular) world.

The author's transformation, however, is not limited to his increasing worldliness. It also involves a deepening of his spiritual faith, which was significant to start with but becomes even stronger and even more of a motivating, defining characteristic as the narrative unfolds. Time and again, his faith is challenged and tested, and time and again he makes himself take a considerable leap of faith, trusting in what he believes God and the Holy Spirit have called him to do. These leaps of faith become more and more extreme, more and more challenging, but though he does at times question what he is being asked to do, he takes up the challenge and, more often than not, triumphs ... or, as he would probably say, the Spirit moving through him triumphs. In that sense, his personal/spiritual journey is, in some ways, parallel to those of the drug-addicted teens he feels called to minister to, making the eventual triumph of faith he experiences as much of a lesson to the faithful and unfaithful alike as the triumphs of the teens whose struggle he so compassionately chronicles.

## The Dragon Gang and Michael Farmer

The Dragon Gang is the name of a group of troubled, drug-addicted teens in New York City whose sensationalized story (as published in Life Magazine - see "Objects/Places") is the initial trigger for the author to travel to New York and begin his ministry to young people. While both the gang and the story are referred to throughout the narrative, particularly in its early stages, the individual members of the Dragons never actually appear - despite his many, and determined attempts. They are, however, referred to continually as inspiration for the spiritual work the author strives to establish and maintain. While the author suggests that the Holy Spirit inspired him to extend his reach beyond the troubles of this particular group of teens, it is also possible that his determination to help other young people is at least a partial substitute for his being unable to help the Dragons.



Meanwhile, fifteen-year-old Michael Farmer is the victim of a vicious, murderous attack by the Dragon Gang. The story of the attack and the criminal proceedings faced by the gang members form the substance of the Life Magazine story. Farmer suffered from polio, a physically-debilitating disease which made him particularly vulnerable, a fact that suggests two important points - that he was unable to defend himself and that the attack was therefore particularly brutal and insensitive. It might not be going too far to suggest that the attack can be seen as a metaphor for one of the author's central contentions - that drug use is essentially such an attack, albeit a self-inflicted one, on a lonely, vulnerable individual. By extension, then, Farmer himself becomes an embodiment and/or symbol of the vulnerability at the core of the experiences of all the troubled young people whose stories the author tells throughout the narrative.

## **Angelo Morales**

Morales is the member of the Dragons Gang encountered by the author on his search through New York for the families of the gang members. As he's taking the author to meet them, he reveals he wasn't with his buddies on the night of the attack because he had a toothache. He later leaves his membership in the gang behind to accept the ways of the Holy Spirit, and is one of the author's first missionary success stories.

## **Maria**

Maria is a teenage drug user first encountered by the author on one of his early visits to New York (see "Quotes", p. 30). Tough, strong, and resistant to the author's teaching, she reappears throughout the book, continually troubled by drugs and continuously desperate to improve her life. Her experiences are key to the author understanding that teenaged women are just as vulnerable to the lure of the streets as young men and can be just as eager for transformation. Eventually (see Chapter 22) she conquers drugs completely and begins a new life.

## **The Rebels, the Grand Gangsters Incorporated, the Chaplains,**

These are the various teenaged gangs encountered by the author as he moves deeper and deeper into the street life of New York City. At various points throughout the narrative, individual members of the gangs (and sometimes the gangs themselves) accept the teachings the author offers, leaving violence, drug use, and illicit sexuality behind and accepting the ways of Christ and the Holy Spirit into their lives.

## **Gwen Wilkerson**

Gwen is the author's supportive, wryly humorous wife, a relatively small but always interesting presence in the narrative. She is an intriguingly multi-faceted character, in



that she is as spiritually engaged and faithful as her husband but more down to earth. Several times throughout the narrative, she urges him to remember and/or consider the practicalities of his choices, always with humor and warmth (see "Quotes", p. 12).

## Grandpap

The author's grandfather, a passionate and outspoken evangelist (the latest, the author writes, in a long family line of Pentecostal preachers - see "Objects/Places - The Pentecost") inspires him to broaden his mission, suggesting that God is asking him to not just minister to the boys in the Dragon Gang but all the troubled young men of the city.

## The Ortez Couple

The Reverend Ortez is a preacher in an evangelical Hispanic church encountered by the author on his mission-inspired wanderings through New York. Ortez helps the author establish his street ministry and offers him a place to sleep whenever he's in New York. His wife Delia is supportive, loving, and a capable missionary of God in her own right, but operating on a personal rather than institutional (church defined) level.

## Little Jo-Jo

Jo-Jo is the exceedingly tough leader of a gang called the Coney Island Dragons. He is gradually won over by the unconditional compassion of the author and of Delia Ortez, and by the apparent miracle of his prayer (for the author's and Gwen's baby to be a boy). In his turn, he teaches the author a lesson about humility - it's not his will he's preaching about or embodying, but God's.

## Nicky

Nicky is one of the leaders of the Mau Maus. He first encounters the author when he (the author) makes his first attempt at street preaching (Chapter 7), and reappears when the author holds his rallies at St. Nicholas Arena (Chapter 10). The story of his life, and of his conversion to Christianity, is told in Chapter 11. At the conclusion of that chapter, the author reveals that Nicky is determined to enter the ministry. In Chapter 17, Nicky arrives at the Teen Challenge Center and begins to work there as a preacher. His preaching in Chapter 21 not only inspires a young man at the Center to accept the Holy Spirit into his heart and life, but is also a vivid embodiment of the author's thematic celebration of the Spirit's power.



## **George, Pedro, Lucky**

George, Pedro and Lucky are three of the Teen Challenge Center's early success stories, all teenage criminals who transform their lives as the result of the Center's intervention. The handsome George gives up his life as a jewel thief and pays back his victims. Pedro confesses to his crimes (and, perhaps miraculously, facing no charges), and Lucky finds a place where he feels safe, comfortable, respected and welcome enough to take responsibility for himself and his life.

## **Linda Meisner**

Linda is a young woman from Iowa who joins the staff at the Teen Challenge Center specifically to work with the young women (Debs) affiliated with the gangs. Her encounters with Maria (see above, also Chapter 19) is a key factor in both her decision to stay with the Center and her determination to reach out particularly to the troubled young women of the community.



# Objects/Places

## Life Magazine

"Life" was a popular and influential American magazine for several decades. Unlike other news magazines such as "Time" or "Newsweek," the editorial content of "Life" was composed mostly of photographs, a fact that suggests that the author's reaction to the story of the Dragons and Michael Farmer (see "Important People" above) was triggered as much by what he saw as by what he read.

## Philipsburg, Pennsylvania

This is the author's home town, a small community where he preached in a "little mountain church." The fact that the town is surrounded and protected by mountains has two possible, non-mutually exclusive, metaphoric values. The first is that the community, and by extension the author, is protected from the dark, worldly sides of humanity found in larger centers like New York, while the second is that he is surrounded and protected by the Holy Spirit and by his faith in that Spirit.

## New York City

One of the most renowned, and the most socially/politically troubled and diverse cities in the world, New York initially appears to the author as frightening, dangerous, and intimidating. After getting used to its ways, and as he becomes more connected to the spiritual calling and/or activity that brought him there, the author comes to regard both the city and its troubles as a source of opportunity.

## Bedford-Stuyvesant

This is the area of New York City described to the author as being the worst place to be, and in which he begins his ministry. "How little I realized," he writes, "...how [the streets of Bedford-Stuyvesant] would some day be as familiar to me as the friendly streets of Philipsburg."

## Fort Greene, Brooklyn

Here the author begins the phase of his work that involved preaching to the gangs. It is the home of the Chaplains and the Mau Maus, "the toughest, hardest gangs in town..."



## St. Nicholas Arena

The rally staged by the author and Reverend Ortez' church in their efforts to reach as many gang members as possible takes place here. For consideration of the metaphoric/symbolic implications of its name, see "Topics for Discussion - What is the symbolic value ..."

## 1865 Victory Boulevard

This address (which the author sees as both appropriate and ironic) is the home of the first offices for his new teen ministry. At first run down and cramped, the offices eventually become the populous, busy center for his outreach work.

## The Teen Challenge Center

The Teen Challenge Center first manifests as an idea, the embodiment of the author's dream, to establish an on-site, in-the-core-of-the-city location in which the needs of the community's troubled teens (and their families) could be immediately and effectively addressed. "It would be an induction center," he writes, "where [teens] would be prepared for the life of the Spirit." Later in the narrative, it becomes a bustling, nurturing, striving center of joy, faith, and transformation.

## Illegal Drugs

Throughout the book, the author contends that the drug trade is the core source of the troubles experienced by the teenagers with whom he works and who he's striving to save. He describes drugs as initially appearing to lonely teens as a source of pleasure, freedom and community, but eventually becomes a destructive, all-consuming, spiritual and physical trap. See "Quotes", p. 188.

## The Pentecost

As the author describes it, the Pentecost is an experience portrayed in the New Testament of the Christian Bible. After the Crucifixion of Christ, His disciples were gathered together when the room was filled with a rush of air; tongues of flame appeared over their heads, and they felt the intimate, immediate presence of God in Spirit. They also, according to the author, began to speak in a strange language inspired by the Spirit. Pentecostal Christians such as the author believe it's possible for contemporary individuals to experience the Pentecost in exactly the same way.



# Themes

## The Power of Christian Faith

As discussed in "Style - Perspective" and "Tone," there is the very clear sense that the author has written this book with the intent of inspiring both Christians and non-Christians with the power of Christian faith. Time and again, he portrays himself and those with whom he works and lives as being defined and/or changed by the power of deep, fervent, spoken prayer to the Christian God. Time and again, he portrays the (often desperate) circumstances in which he finds himself as being positively resolved by trusting, faithful, detail-specific communication with that same God. Time and again, he refers to the power of Christ and of the Holy Spirit, suggesting that true faith can move, if not mountains at least the checkbooks of those with money to spare. In short, his personal faith and his belief in the universally accessible power of God is the thematic center of both his life and his narrative here, presenting himself and his work as examples of how the Christian can live, work and create change even under the darkest and most dangerous of circumstances. It's important to note, however, that rarely in the book, if ever, does he discuss any other faith in either a positive or negative context. This does give rise to a certain sense of righteousness and/or exclusivity, but on the other hand, there is also, in this context, an apparent lack of use of the word "only." In other words, there is little sense that he is saying that "only" Christian faith can produce the kind of near miraculous transformations he describes.

## The Sources and Effects of Drug Use

If drug use in this book was an actual character instead of a circumstance and/or a situation, it would easily be described as the antagonist, the central opponent against whom the author, his allies, and his recruits, all struggle. Several times the author clearly contends that the other "evils" faced and experienced by the teens with whom he works are side effects of drug use. Thieving (to get money for drugs), prostitution (in return for either drugs or money to pay for them) and violence (often linked to the desire for control over drug-dealing territory) are all, in the author's mind, manifestations of the addict's increasingly desperate, not to mention self-degrading, need for the next "hit."

It's important to note, however, that the author also traces the origins of drug use, and therefore of all these other arising activities, to a single source - loneliness. On several occasions throughout the book, he suggests that the need to feel as though one belongs, as though one is loved, as though one is free, as though one is wonderful - the need to simply feel good is the core reason why drug use begins, as twisted a fulfillment of those needs as it is. This, he also suggests, is the true value of his ministry, teaching those who find belonging in drugs that, in fact, they also (and more healthily) belong with/in the Holy Spirit. This is the core of his teaching - that everyone, no matter who they are or what they've done or how bad they feel about themselves, is loved by Christ and the Holy Spirit, and therefore belongs to/with them, and therefore has no reason to





feel lonely, and therefore has no reason to turn to drugs for comfort. This is his personal teaching, and one of the central themes of the book.

## The Cleansing Power of Tears

Throughout the narrative, but perhaps most dramatically in Chapters 8 and 9, tears are portrayed as vivid external manifestations of a powerful internal change - specifically, the handing over of a life and/or a heart to the guidance and control of Christ and the Holy Spirit (see "Quotes", p.90). The author makes the clear point that from his perspective, crying is one of the first and clearest manifestations that someone has been touched by Spirit. "When finally we let the Holy Spirit into our innermost sanctuary," he writes, "the reaction is to cry. I have seen it happen again and again. Deep soul-shaking tears, weeping rather than crying. It comes when that last barrier is down and you surrender yourself to health and to wholeness." It seems clear that tears in this context are, for the most part, tears of joy, although there is also the clear sense that they are on some level tears of grief, for the life and freedom and integrity that had been lost.

Meanwhile, it's interesting to note that on several occasions throughout the narrative, teenagers reached by the author and his ministry burst into tears, while the author rarely - if ever - describes HIMSELF as weeping. When he describes his own experience of connecting with Spirit (Chapter 5), when he receives the revelation of his new mission (Chapter 12), even at the narrative's climax when he receives the check to pay off the second mortgage (Chapter 23) - nowhere does he describe himself as weeping in the same way as those he teaches. What is the reader to make of this - that the author doesn't, to put it crudely, practice what he preaches? That the author is too much of "a man" to cry (an idea supported by his occasionally chauvinistic comments about his wife and about women)? That the author's joy is already so complete and so lived that he doesn't need to manifest it through tears? There is no obvious answer to this question, other than to suggest that the author, for whatever reason, experiences himself as above those he feels called to serve, already enlightened, an idea born out by his tonal, sermon-like approach (see "Style - Tone").

## Self Sacrifice

The theme of self sacrifice manifests in various ways throughout the novel, many of which are relatively low key - specifically, the author's early sacrifices of time with his family and parish, his sacrifices of his dignity and, to a degree, of his reputation as he begins his ministry, his later sacrifices of comfort as he begins full time ministry in New York. Later, however, his sacrifices become more demanding - specifically, his sacrificial choice to be with the teenagers at the rally instead of at his wife's side as she's giving birth to his son. Most dramatically, the desire for self sacrifice, perhaps even martyrdom, is evident in the quote from Linda Meisner's letter (see the end of Chapter 17). It's important to note, however, that the theme of self-sacrifice also plays out in the decisions of the various young people to abandon their drug-influenced lives, sacrificing



what they have come to believe is safety and community for "true" safety and community.

This sub-theme is, in fact, a manifestation of the main theme relating to the power of the Christian faith - in particular, the tenet of that faith which suggests that denial of self and of earthly desires is one way of drawing closer to the all-powerful, all loving Holy Spirit. The ultimate manifestation of this in the Christian faith is, of course, the sacrifice on the Cross, a selfless choice which countless Christians seek to emulate in their daily physical and spiritual lives. Not all of them go to the extremes of Christ and the other Christian martyrs, but what's interesting to note about this book is that on one occasion, one person (Linda Meisner) suggests that her mind has at least begun to consider martyrdom as part of her destiny.

The desire for martyrdom is a sometimes disturbing component of many religious faiths, and has the connotation of a degree of fanaticism, almost insanity. It could also be argued, however, that the desire for martyrdom is simply a manifestation of powerful, overwhelming passion and deeply held beliefs that could in fact be the fuel for good works such as those done by Linda Meisner. The reader's perspective on the subject, not to mention interpretation of the letter, will probably depend upon their personal faith and their opinion of those who share strong faiths. The fact remains, however, that Linda, like the author and other leaders referred to in the book, are ultimately prepared to make profound personal sacrifices for what they believe to be the greater good. For further consideration of this question see "Topics for Discussion - Consider the sense of self-sacrifice ..."

## The Hero's Journey

Several years ago, in his book "The Hero with the Thousand Faces," noted mythologist Joseph Campbell presented and developed his theory that throughout world cultures, there were several archetypal and/or universal patterns that appeared throughout the myths and stories both popular in and significant to those cultures. Among those patterns was The Hero's Journey, a narrative describing an individual's journey from a place of safety through a period of danger and trial into a place of enlightenment and strength. A key component of Campbell's theorizing was that physical journeys (into strange lands) paralleled spiritual journeys (into uncharted spiritual territory). The journey undertaken by the author throughout this narrative can, in this context, be seen as having several elements similar to those of the archetypal Hero's Journey. On a very basic level, the Hero on such a journey moves from a place of innocence (which the author himself clearly portrays in the opening chapters) through a period of trials (which begin in earnest here) into a place of spiritual enlightenment (or, in the author's case, deeper spirituality). Eventually he emerges transformed and determined to bring what he has learned into the world, which the author does at the conclusion of the narrative here. In terms of the events of this chapter, then, the author's success portrayed here is an important point of intersection between his journey and The Hero's Journey - in both circumstances, accomplishment is preceded by struggle and followed by increased

effort. For further consideration of this aspect of the novel see "Topics for Discussion - Consider the references ... "



# Style

## Perspective

motivations, and his journey of transformation (for further consideration of this particular aspect of his perspective see "Important People - The Author"). The particular style (for lack of a better term) of that faith is especially important to note. Where the arguable majority of Christian faiths (both Protestant and Catholic) are perhaps more passive and church-oriented, the author's faith is grounded in both an active experience of The Pentecost (see "Objects/Places") and a belief in equally-active evangelism (taking that faith to people, as opposed to simply inviting them to join it). In other words, his life and the story told in the book of one particular aspect/phase of his life are both defined by his intense, passionate, sometimes questioning, but always trusting, experience of Christianity.

The second key component of the author's perspective is the fact that he has lived the experiences he is writing about. While he has never personally experienced the soul-destroying activities of the young people he writes about (the drug use, the violence, the promiscuous sexuality), he has observed both the activities and the results of those activities first hand. In other words, he knows what he's talking about, both in terms of the dark side of his story and what might be called the light side - his witnessing of the conversions of troubled young people to the life of Christ and the Spirit.

Both these components, then, serve to define not only author's background and expertise. They also define his reasons for writing, his intended audience, and the impact he desires to make. In short, in writing this book he is attempting to continue his ministry, his reaching out for troubled young people in the hopes that they too can be awakened to the hope, and indeed the living fact, of a new life in the Holy Spirit.

## Tone

The book is written in first person, and while it is possible for some non-fiction writers to write in that perspective with a degree of objectivity, there is the very clear sense that in this case, the author is writing from an entirely subjective point of view. As discussed above, he is writing from a clearly defined sense of purpose and mission - in other words, he isn't simply presenting facts and/or narratives and leaving interpretation of those facts and narratives up to the reader (as a more objective author might). He is, rather, presenting what he believes to be clear evidence that HIS interpretation of the facts, and of the events about which he's writing, can lead only to experiences and insight parallel to his own, and those of the teenagers with whom he works. He is, in effect, suggesting that what happened to him and what happened to the teenagers with whom he works can happen to the reader if s/he does he/they did and acts on faith. In many ways the narrative is an enthusiastic sermon, an excited and determined faith-defined instruction on how to live, think, feel, and act.



The effect of this tonal approach will vary from reader to reader. Like-minded readers (that is, those with a perspective that isn't necessarily Pentecostal or Evangelical but which is still Christian) might very well find themselves in enthusiastic agreement with the author's fervent advocacy of faith-based action. Non-Christian and non-religious readers, on the other hand, if they read the story at all, might well find the author's insistence on the power of the Christian faith and the frequently almost-miraculous power of prayer as simultaneously unlikely, contrived, and almost propagandist.

## Structure

For the most part, the narrative is essentially linear in structure - that is, events are described in the chronological order in which they occur. Later in the book, the narrative occasionally leaves the timeline and detours into detailed explorations of, for example, the nature, causes, and ramifications of drug use. The effect of these detours is to draw the reader's attention, unsubtly but purposefully, to the book's tonal and thematic intent - to awaken the reader's awareness of both the terrible effects of drug use and of the potential power of faith.

All that said, there remains the very clear sense that the book's structure is essentially and traditionally novelistic, tracing the narrative and personal journey of a central character (in this case, the author) experiencing a personal/spiritual/emotional transformation. The main benefit of this structural sensibility is the sense of narrative, and in this case spiritual, momentum it reinforces. In the same way that a fictionalized narrative moves with a certain inevitability towards a climax or high point of emotion, the non-fictionalized narrative here moves, also with a certain inevitability, to the emotional and spiritual climax in Chapter 23 - what the author defines as the faith-inspired "miracle" of the second mortgage. This is the high point, both structurally and thematically, of the author's extended sermon, the point to which his experiences and his narrative of those experiences have been steadily building. The effect of this simultaneous thematic and narrative momentum is that a reader might very well find him/herself carried along by this structural and spiritual impetus to the point where s/he is inclined to, at the very least, begin believing in the same way as the author and his inspired students do.



## Quotes

"The seven boys stabbed [Michael Farmer] in the back seven times with their knives, then beat him over the head with garrison belts. They went away wiping blood through their hair, saying 'We messed him good.'" p. 4

"What a wonderful thing it is to spend a solid hour just being thankful. It throws all of life into a new perspective." p. 10

"'You really feel this is the Holy Spirit leading you?' Gwen asked. 'Yes I do, honey.' 'Well, be sure to take some good warm socks.'" p. 12

"One Hundred Court Street is a mammoth, frightening building to which people flock who are angry with each other and want vengeance. It attracts hundreds every day who have legitimate business there, but it also draws curious, gawking spectators who come to share - without danger - in the anger." p. 17.

"Boys and girls of high school age sat together in this cold and ill smelling room and I realized with a jolt ... that Maria had probably not taken off her own shoes, nor pulled down her own dress." p. 30

"'The heart of the Gospel is change. It is transformation. It is being born again to a new life.'" David to Grandpap, p 49.

"The feeling of being guided by a purpose other than my own, never left me, though the nature of it was more mysterious than ever. I knew of no other way to respond than to return to the city again and again, holding myself open, waiting always for the direction to become clear." p.53

"Before the night was over, Jo-Jo was a changed boy. It began with tears; Jo-Jo cried the bitterness out and he cried the hatred out. He cried out the doubts and the fears too. And then he was all through there was room for the kind of love the Christian knows, which doesn't depend on parents or preachers or even upon prayers being answered in the way we think they should be answered. From that day on, Jo-Jo had a love that was his for always, and he had taught me a lesson that was mine for always." p. 90

"I suppose the girls, hearing us talk about love, felt a simple jealousy. They didn't want to share love with anybody, and were fighting in the only way they knew how to hold on to the little, poor, shoddy, shreds of 'love' that they did have." p. 97

"Jesus did not have the television or the printed word to help Him. His was a face to face ministry. Always, the warmth of personality was involved. I knew as soon as I returned to my original technique of going out into the streets that this was the method meant for me, too." p. 128

"With less than a hundred dollars in the bank, God had raised up this home, But now we had to put it to use. We wanted to fill it with His children. But before we could do that we



had to give His children a place to sit down. We had a fine building, but there was nothing in it." p. 141

"Lump a thousand tortured families together in a single neighborhood and you have a floating population of teenagers who are hostile and afraid, who flock together looking for security and a sense of belonging. They will create a home for themselves by fighting for a 'turf' which is theirs, and which no stranger can violate. This is their fortress." p. 151.

"Christ's love is a love without angles: a love that asks nothing in return. It is a love that wants only the best for these boys and girls. And this is the quality that redeems." p. 165

"...there are two habits you've got to kick if you're hooked. The body habit, and the mind habit. The body habit's not too much of a problem: you just stay in sheer hell for three days ... and you're free. But that mind habit ... there's a thing inside you that makes you come back ... a monkey on your back or a vulture in our veins." p. 188

"Like a blinding light, Jesus burst into my heart. Something took over my speech. It made me feel like I was sitting down by a river that somehow was flowing through me and bubbled up out of me like a musical language." p. 198

"We have much to learn about what this religious experience can and cannot do in unhappy lives. Every day we are making new discoveries. Every day we learn how to make our role more effective, how to increase our percentage of permanent cures." p. 207

"If you look closely at that check, you will see that it is stained: it is really quite grubby from having passed through the hands of two dozen youngsters who have learned what it is to believe. And perhaps there are a few tearstains on it, too. Tears of gratitude to a God who moves in mysterious His wonders to perform." p. 215



## Topics for Discussion

What is your experience of drug use - your own, of those around you, as portrayed by the media? Do you agree or disagree with the author's contention that it often or even usually springs from a desire to alleviate loneliness? Explain your answer.

What is the symbolic value of the name of St. Nicholas Arena where the author holds his rallies? In other words, who was St. Nicholas - what was he known for in the past and what is he known for/as in more contemporary society?

What is your experience of spirituality? Has faith ever moved you to make major changes in your life the way it has moved the author and the teenagers here?

In what ways has the experience of being a teenager changed from the experiences portrayed here? In what ways hasn't it changed? What do you think are the common factors between, for example, drug use then and drug use now? If the core reasons for such behaviors are the same, what different activities do teenagers now participate in that help them cope with those reasons?

Have you ever experienced what you might call a miracle, and what others might call coincidence? Do you believe that faith and/or prayer, Christian or otherwise, played a role in that experience?

Do you feel a spiritual purpose in your life, that a divine source is guiding your choices and/or experiences? Can you describe how that feels, as opposed to experiences you DON'T experience as being divinely guided?

What are the similarities between the evangelical and/or Pentecostal faiths as portrayed in the book and in contemporary society? What are the differences? Do you believe there is still a place for such faiths in contemporary society? Why or why not? What are the benefits of such faith? What are the down sides?

Consider the reference to the work of Joseph Campbell throughout the book (see "Themes - The Hero's Journey"). In this context, research more details of his theories about The Hero's Journey. Using that research as a reference, chart the archetypal parallels between that Journey and the Journey experienced by the author over the course of his narrative.

Consider the sense of self-sacrifice, perhaps even martyrdom, that can be read in to the quote from Linda Meisner at the end of Chapter 17. What, in your opinion, are the limits of self-sacrifice? For what would you be prepared to sacrifice important parts of your life, perhaps even your life itself? For what would you not make sacrifices? Why or why not?