

An Introduction to the DNA of Teen Challenge Ministry

By Dave Batty

A. What brings real success to Teen Challenge ministry?

1. DNA is our identity
2. DNA is who we are at the depths of our heart and soul and spirit.
3. DNA is what brings **life** to our ministry

B. What is the basic DNA of Teen Challenge?

What are the essential ingredients that bring “real life” into this ministry?

What is the DNA that God wants in this ministry?

1. Prayer

Psalm 126:5-6

Hebrews 11:6, Hebrews 4:15-16

Matthew 21:22

“We prayed a lot—not because we were overly spiritual—we prayed to survive! And we saw God do miraculous things.” – Don Argue, Director of Evangelism 1962 Brooklyn, NY, *Teen Challenge 50 Years of Miracles*, page 27

“I learned how important it is to strike a balance between prayer of petition and prayer 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.” – David Wilkerson, *The Cross and the Switchblade*, page 13.

2. Evangelism – love for the lost

We have the challenge and the opportunity to put hope within reach of every addict.

Jeremiah 29:11

2 Peter 3:9

John 3:16-17

“That afternoon I had a chance to preach my first sermon to a New York gang. I didn’t try to get a complicated message over to them, just that they were loved.” – David Wilkerson, *The Cross and the Switchblade*, page 29.

3. Dependence on the Holy Spirit for changed lives

Acts 1:8

John 15:5

“Right there I turned the meeting over. ‘All right, Jesus,’ I prayed, ‘there is nothing more that I can do. I invited these young people here, now I’m going to step out of the picture. Come, Holy Spirit. If You want to reach the hearts of any of these boys and girls, it will have to be through Your presence. Have Your own way, Lord. Have Your own way.’” [The silent prayer David Wilkerson prayed in the meeting right before Nicky Cruz and many other gang members came forward to receive Christ into their lives in 1958.] *The Cross and the Switchblade*, page 79.

“All we can say, perhaps, is that we have found a power which captures a boy more strongly than narcotics. But that power is the Holy Spirit Himself which, unlike narcotics, does a strange thing: He captures only to liberate.” –David Wilkerson, *The Cross and the Switchblade*, page 166.

“The Holy Spirit is in charge. As long as He remains in charge, the programs will thrive. The minute we try to do things by our own power we will fail. This is the guiding principle of the Center here in New York; it is the principle which directs our new Center in Chicago, and the one that is starting in Philadelphia, and in

Boston, and in Los Angeles, and in Toronto. The Holy Spirit is in charge here. We should write it for all to see on the lintels of every doorway we build. But since that might seem like so many words, we will do better: we will write it on our lives. And in all the lives we can reach out to and touch and inspire with the living Spirit of God.” –David Wilkerson, *The Cross and the Switchblade*, page 172.

4. **Jesus** is the program—the structure is discipleship

John 14:6

John 8:36

2 Corinthians 5:17

“It was normal, in the early days of the center [Brooklyn], to have thirty-nine workers going out each evening, and one person staying behind to tend the ten or so ex-addicts who were drying out. ‘But we would come home,’ Don [Wilkerson] said, ‘to find only nine left, and the next night eight, and the next, seven. We came to realize that it was not enough to have them kneel and accept Christ, if we were not going to care for them and give them a real chance.... In short, we found that evangelism without discipleship was not true evangelism.’”
–Don Wilkerson, *The Jesus Factor*, page 25.

5. **Lead** like Jesus

Servant leadership

John 5:19

1 Corinthians 4:16 and 11:1

Philippians 3:17

“It sprang, full-grown, to mind. The house I had dreamed of—we might call it Teen Challenge Center—would be located in the heart of the roughest part of the city. It would be headquarters for a dozen or more full-time workers who shared my hopes for the young people around us.... Each worker would be a specialist.... Here we could bring boys and girls who needed special help. They would live in an atmosphere of discipline and affection. They would participate in our worship and in our study. They would watch Christians living together, working together; and they would be put to work themselves. It would be an induction center, where they were prepared for the life of the Spirit.” –David Wilkerson, *The Cross and the Switchblade*, page 104.

6. A culture of personal **responsibility**

Psalms 51:6

2 Corinthians 5:15

2 Corinthians 7:1

“When the guys come to the induction centers,” Don added, “they’re like children who have been stuck in their rebellion for a long time. So they have to be regulated like children till their consciences become fully awakened and they begin to want to set their wills to doing the will of God. When that happens, they are more or less ready to come to a center where they will receive training in how to respond in Christ to almost every conceivable life situation. The more freedom and responsibility that they show they are ready for, the more they are given in anticipation of that time when they will be on their own, with God.” –Don Wilkerson, *The Jesus Factor*, pages 23-24.

7. Faith

Running through all of these DNA strands is faith—a power from God that always leads to action!

John 11:40

I Kings 18:16-45

James 2:14-17

Hebrews 12:1-2

“That noon we were supposed to hand over a certified check to the holders of our second mortgage. The amount needed was \$15,000 (USD). I had been counting so much on another miracle ... yet here we were at our deadline and there was no money ... That afternoon I did a rather brash thing. I called all the young people together, gang members, drug addicts, college boys and girls, staff members, and told them that the Center was safe. There was a great rejoicing. ‘I think we ought to go into the chapel and thank God,’ I said. So we did.... Finally someone looked up and asked: ‘Say David, where did the money come from?’ ‘Oh, it hasn’t come yet.’ Twenty-five blank expressions. Twenty-five frozen smiles. ‘It hasn’t come in yet...but by September 10th, I’ll have a check for \$15,000 to show you. I just thought we ought to thank God ahead of time.’ And with that I walked out.” – David Wilkerson, *The Cross and the Switchblade*, page 168-169.

C. How do I make the DNA of Teen Challenge part of my ministry?

1. How did the pioneers of Teen Challenge develop the DNA of this ministry?
 - a. These godly DNA characteristics were **already** part of their life and ministry **before** they came to work at Teen Challenge.

- b. They **applied** this DNA to their ministry in Teen Challenge, which led to God's blessing on the ministry.
 - c. They continued to **grow** the longer they worked in Teen Challenge.
- 2. How would you assess your strength or weakness in applying these seven characteristics of the DNA of Teen Challenge?
- 3. What are some recent stories that show the presence of the DNA of Teen Challenge today?
- 4. How can you begin to take steps and develop these DNA characteristics into your daily ministry?
Proverbs 3:5-6

Discussion Questions

1. Share an illustration, testimony or experience of this DNA characteristic.
2. Share a scripture reference for this DNA characteristic that connects well with the Teen Challenge context.
3. How do you see this DNA characteristic still evidenced in Teen Challenge 50+ years after it started?
4. How has the expression of this DNA characteristic changed?
5. Are there expressions of this DNA characteristic that have been lost?
6. What is lost if this DNA characteristic is neglected?
7. How do we practically keep this DNA characteristic alive in us as leaders and in the Teen Challenge ministry?
8. How do we make sure the DNA is transferred to every new Teen Challenge staff?
9. How do you see yourself as a carrier of this DNA characteristic?
10. What part do you play in passing this along to these new leaders?