

# Christian Coalition of Washington

Educating and Activating Christians for Social, Political, and Spiritual Action

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February 2018

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## This Is the Message of the Gospel

God loves you so much that He sent His Son into the world to die for your sins

*For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. --John 3:17*

Earlier today, members of Congress, the Cabinet, and the President and Vice President, paid tribute to Dr. Billy Graham who died peacefully in his Montreat, North Carolina home on February 21 at the age of 99. During the well-attended morning ceremony in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda, President Trump and others referred to Billy Graham as “America’s Pastor.”

Arguably the world’s foremost evangelist of the 20th century, the President also called Graham an “Ambassador for Christ,” who changed America and the world. He recalled how his father, Fred Trump, was a fan and brought the family to see Graham speak at Yankee Stadium in 1957.

For the next two days, the public, including mourners, admirers, and the curious, will have an opportunity to view Graham’s casket in a display of sympathy for family members and respect for a man who unceasingly proclaimed a message of hope to all the world—to those with ears to hear.

William (Billy) Franklin Graham Jr. was born November 7, 1918, in a farmhouse near Charlotte, North Carolina. His father, a dairy farmer, said Billy loved to read novels for boys, especially Tarzan. He would even hang on the trees and yell like Tarzan, scaring anyone passing by. His father even teased that his “yelling had led him to become a minister.”<sup>1</sup>

Although Graham was raised in the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, he was turned down for membership in a local youth group for being “too worldly.”<sup>2</sup> At that point, a friend persuaded Billy (age 16), to attend a meeting with evangelist Mordecai Ham. During a series of revival meetings with Reverend Ham, Graham accepted Jesus as his Lord and Savior.

After high school, and studies at Bob Jones College, Graham preached his first church sermon in 1937 while attending Florida Bible Institute. In 1939, Graham was ordained by a group of Southern Baptist clergymen at Peniel Baptist Church in Palatka, Florida. In 1943, Graham graduated from Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois, with a degree in anthropology. It was during his time at Wheaton that Graham decided to accept the Bible as the infallible word of God.

Some might consider 1947 a launch-pad year when Billy held his first *Billy Graham Crusade*—eight successive days in the Civic Auditorium in Grand Rapids, Michigan, attended by 6,000 people. He called them “crusades,” says one internet source, after the medieval Christian forces who conquered Jerusalem. Graham had crusades in London, which lasted 12 weeks, and a New York City crusade in Madison Square Garden in 1957, which ran nightly for 16 weeks.

Billy would preach the gospel and invite people to come forward (a practice begun by D.L. Moody). In Moscow (92’), one-quarter of the 155,000 people in Graham’s audience went forward at his call.

During his crusades, which numbered more than 400-in-185 countries and territories on six continents, he frequently preferred the altar-call song, "Just as I Am."

### **Graham family recollections**

Billy's son Franklin, recalls that during his own teens and early 20s, "he (Franklin) proved to be anything but what most people expected Billy Graham's son to be." Franklin says, "I'm so thankful he never gave up on me or quit loving me." Franklin continues:

"After graduating from college in 1974, I headed for Lausanne, Switzerland, to work at a conference the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association was sponsoring for 2,500 evangelical leaders from around the world. My life was a mess; I was empty and lonely. During that conference, my mother and father wanted to take me to lunch to celebrate my 22nd birthday. After lunch at a little Italian restaurant on Lake Geneva, Daddy and I walked along a pathway beside the lake when he turned to me and said, "Franklin, your mother and I sense there's a struggle going on in your life." Somewhat stunned, I wondered, "How does he know this?" He continued, "You're going to have to make a choice either to accept Christ or reject Him. You can't continue to play the middle ground.

With my mind racing, wondering what he was going to say next, I heard these words: "I want you to know we're proud of you, Franklin. We love you no matter what you do in life and no matter where you go. But you're going to have to make a choice." He had pricked my conscience to the point I was actually angry. I couldn't figure out how he knew about the struggle that had been going on inside me—but he did, and he was right.

My father's words haunted me for several weeks until I finally gave up running from God and made that choice to accept Jesus Christ as my personal Savior and turn my life over to Him. I've never looked back or regretted my decision.

About 20 years after our life-changing walk along Lake Geneva, my father told me something else that would alter my life in another way; he asked me to assume the day-to-day management responsibility of the organization that bears his name. I'm at least smart enough to know I could never fill Billy Graham's shoes, but I'm grateful he gave me an opportunity to help him finish his race on earth well, and to continue his life's work."<sup>3</sup>

Following his final New York crusade in 2005, Franklin says a well-known publisher released a book with the entire text of his three sermons at Flushing Meadows Corona Park. They invited him to write some closing thoughts for the book, which filled just two pages under the heading, *A Final Word from Billy Graham*:

"No matter what your problem is," he wrote, "if you and I could sit down and talk, I would want to tell you one great truth: God loves you, and He can make a difference in your life if you will let Him.

"God loves you so much that He sent His Son into the world to die for your sins. When we open our hearts to Christ, He forgives our sins and comes to live within us by His Holy Spirit. He also gives us strength for the present and hope for the future. This is the message of the Gospel—and this is the message you have read in this book."<sup>ibid</sup>

"If my father could speak or write to us today, he would say the same thing. It was what he lived and breathed—until his very last breath," says Franklin.<sup>ibid</sup>

We salute you, servant Billy Graham, for a life well lived, and a job well done!

*Rick Forcier*

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<sup>1</sup> "Billy Graham Trivia What Did Billy Graham Read as a Child". *billygraham.org*. 8/10/2015. Retrieved 10/10/2015

<sup>2</sup> "An Interview with Reverend Billy Graham". The Charlotte Mecklenburg Story. Charlotte Mecklenburg Library. Retrieved 8/21/2015.

<sup>3</sup> Graham, Franklin, *billygraham.org/story/billy-grahams-new-home-by-franklin-graham/*, 2/21/2018