

## **Billy Graham**

*"My one purpose in life is to help people find a personal relationship with God, which, I believe, comes through knowing Christ."*  
-Billy Graham

Without a doubt the most influential person in the last half century is William Franklin "Billy" Graham. Even in a secular society, he has won awards every decade since the 1950's as most admired most influential and most respected in the United States and around the world. He has been a personal counsel to American Presidents since Harry Truman. He has a weekly radio program and televised Crusades that reach a worldwide audience. Born in Charlotte, North Carolina four days before the Armistice ending World War I in 1918, the son of William and Morrow Coffey Graham he lived a rural life. He grew up during the Depression of the 1930's and learned the value of hard work on the family's dairy farm. He read books on many subjects. He learned salesmanship selling Fuller Brushes during his youth and had a keen interest in Baseball.

In 1934, at the age of 16 Billy experienced a turning point in his life that would change the world. His mother insisted that he attend a local tent revival. There he made a personal commitment to Christ through the ministry of Mordecai Ham, a traveling evangelist. He was ordained by a Southern Baptist Church in Charlotte in 1939. He attended Bob Jones University, but left after his first term because he found the teachings too ultra-fundamentalist for his beliefs. He transferred to Florida Bible Institute in Tampa, Florida (now Trinity College) and received his BA degree from Wheaton College in Illinois in 1943. That year he married a classmate at Wheaton, Ruth Bell. Together they have had three daughters and two sons.

His first Pastorate was in Western Springs, Illinois. He served as President of Youth for Christ from 1945 to 1950. During this time he became impassioned for preaching to the masses about faith in Christ. The Los Angeles crusade in 1949 launched Graham into international prominence. Scheduled for three weeks, the meetings were extended to more than eight weeks, with overflow crowds filling a tent erected downtown each night. Many following crusades experienced the same extension - one in London lasted 12 weeks and in 1957, his New York crusade lasted 16 weeks.

In 1950 he founded Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA), Minneapolis, Minnesota, relocated to Charlotte in 2003. At the outset Billy made several rules. First he made the commitment to trust the Bible without error so there would never be a question as to what he believed or practiced. He also formed a Board of Directors to oversee the organization so there would never be a question of how he was paid or how the association was administered. This would later serve him when other televangelists experienced scandal and disgrace within their organizations.

That same year he began weekly "Hour of Decision" radio program which is heard today on more than 700 stations around the world. In 1952 he began writing his syndicated weekly column, "My Answer," where he gave spiritual advice to readers. He met with President Harry Truman and learned the ins and outs of White House protocol the hard way. After meeting with the president he spoke with reporters and told them about his conversation with President Truman. Later he found out that it is not permitted to discuss details of conversations with the President of the United States. He must have adapted well to the formalities because he has met with every successive resident of the White House and become a confidant and counsel to each.

Reverend Graham has become best known for the Crusades which have been held throughout the world. His team begins work over a year in advance setting up local meetings, training counselors, sending out press/media kits and laying the groundwork for the actual event. This spawned his Billy Graham Evangelistic School in the mountains of North Carolina, near the family home. His Crusades have been televised in prime time on tape delay averaging 6 times annually since the 1950's. They are viewed in American and Canadian homes on regular broadcast television. He has preached in remote African villages and in the heart of metropolitan cities and those to whom he has ministered have ranged from heads of state to the Aborigine bushmen of Australia and the nomadic tribes of Africa and the Middle East. He preached in every country in the former Communist Eastern Bloc, including the former Soviet Union.

Billy's film company, Worldwide Pictures has produced dozens of films that bring conversion stories and historical accounts of Christian biographies to audiences in secular settings. Most notable of the biographical films is *The Hiding Place*, the story of Corrie Ten Boom, a Dutch girl imprisoned by the Nazis in World War II for harboring Jews with her family. He has authored 24 books, printed in over 38 languages with several spending time on the New York Times Best Seller list. His most famous book, *Peace With God* (1953) has sold over 2 million copies and was revised and updated in 1984. Other notable titles include: *My Answer*, *The Jesus Generation*, *How to be Born Again* and *Just As I Am*.

Billy Graham was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease and gave up some of the day-to-day running of the BGEA to his son, Franklin Graham and other trusted advisors, but continued to speak at the crusades. Although his voice falters at times with age and physical limitations, his passion for his message can still be heard in his delivery and determination.

Among his many awards throughout his lifetime, Reverend Graham has the distinction of being one of the "Ten Most Admired Men in the World" from the Gallup Poll since 1955 a total of 47 times, including 40 consecutive -- more than any other individual in the world, placing him at the head of the overall list of those most admired by Americans for the past four decades. He has received the Gold Medal Award from the United States Congress (the highest award that can be bestowed on a private U.S. Citizen) and the Honorary Knight Commander of the order of the British Empire (KBE) for his international contribution to civic and religious life. He has been named Good Housekeeping Most Admired Men Poll, 1997, #1 for five years in a row and 16th time in top 10.

At eighty-seven, Billy Graham remains one of the most respected people in the world today. He has addressed over eighty-two million people face to face and at least one billion people through television, radio, and satellite. His life has not been without controversy, but he has been prompt to accept his mistakes and apologize for them. He is much more than an evangelist; he is a Christian statesman of with integrity whose profound influence on the growth and depth of Christianity across the world cannot be overestimated.

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