



PROFILE

WILLIAM (BILLY) F. GRAHAM—*Evangelist and Chairman of the Board*

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

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Evangelist Billy Graham took Christ literally when He said in Mark 16:15, “Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.”

Mr. Graham has preached the Gospel to more people in live audiences than anyone else in history—nearly 215 million people in more than 185 countries and territories—through various meetings, including Mission World and Global Mission. Hundreds of millions more have been reached through television, video, film, and webcasts.

Since the 1949 Los Angeles Crusade vaulted Mr. Graham into the public eye, he has led hundreds of thousands of individuals to make personal decisions to live for Christ, which is the main thrust of his ministry.

Born November 7, 1918, four days before the Armistice ended World War I, Mr. Graham was reared on a dairy farm in Charlotte, North Carolina. Growing up during the Depression, he learned the value of hard work on the family farm, but he also found time to spend many hours in the hayloft reading books on a wide variety of subjects.

In the fall of 1934, at age 15, Mr. Graham made a personal commitment to Christ through the ministry of Mordecai Ham, a traveling evangelist, who visited Charlotte for a series of revival meetings.

Ordained in 1939 by a church in the Southern Baptist Convention, Mr. Graham received a solid foundation in the Scriptures at Florida Bible Institute (now Trinity College in Florida). In 1943 he graduated from Wheaton College in Illinois and married fellow student Ruth McCue Bell, daughter of a missionary surgeon, who spent the first 17 years of her life in China.

After graduating from college, Mr. Graham pastored the First Baptist Church in Western Springs, Illinois, before joining Youth for Christ, an organization founded for ministry to youth and servicemen during World War II. He preached throughout the United States and in Europe in the immediate post-war era, emerging as a rising young evangelist.

The Los Angeles Crusade in 1949 launched Mr. 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.

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Many of his subsequent early Crusades were similarly extended, including one in London which lasted 12 weeks, and a New York City Crusade in Madison Square Garden in 1957 which ran nightly for 16 weeks.

Today, at age 92, Billy Graham and his ministry are known around the globe. He has preached in remote African villages and in the heart of New York City, and those to whom he has ministered have ranged from heads of state to the simple-living bushmen of Australia and the wandering tribes of Africa and the Middle East. Since 1977, Mr. Graham has been accorded the opportunity to conduct preaching missions in virtually every country of the former Eastern bloc, including the former Soviet Union.

Mr. Graham founded the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) in 1950, headquartered in Minneapolis, Minn., until relocating to Charlotte, N.C., in 2003. He conducts his ministry through the BGEA, including:

- the weekly “Hour of Decision” radio program, broadcast around the world on Sundays for more than 50 years.
- television programs that are broadcast on national Christian networks.
- a syndicated newspaper column, “My Answer,” which is carried by newspapers both nationally and internationally.
- “Decision” magazine, the official publication of the Association, which has a circulation of more than 600,000 and is available in English and German versions, with special editions available in Braille and on cassette tape for the visually impaired.

Mr. Graham has written 30 books, many of which have become top sellers. His autobiography “Just As I Am,” published in 1997, achieved a “triple crown,” appearing simultaneously on the three top best-seller lists in one week. In it Mr. Graham reflects on his life, including more than 60 years of ministry around the world. From humble beginnings as the son of a dairy farmer in North Carolina, he shares how his unwavering faith in Christ formed and shaped his career.

Of his other books, “Approaching Hoofbeats: The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse” (1983) was listed for several weeks on The New York Times best-seller list; “How to Be Born Again” (1977) had the largest first printing in publishing history with 800,000 copies; “Angels: God’s Secret Agents” (1975) sold one million copies within 90 days; and “The Jesus Generation” (1971) sold 200,000 copies in the first two weeks.

Mr. Graham’s counsel has been sought by presidents, and his appeal in both the secular and religious arenas is evidenced by the wide range of groups that have honored him, including numerous honorary doctorates from many institutions in the U. S. and abroad.

Recognitions include the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation Freedom Award (2000) for contributions to the cause of freedom; the Congressional Gold Medal (1996); the Templeton Foundation Prize for Progress in Religion (1982); and the Big Brother Award for his work on behalf of the welfare of children (1966). In 1964 he received the Speaker of the Year Award and was cited by the George Washington Carver Memorial Institute for his contributions to race relations. He was recognized by the Anti-Defamation League of the B’nai B’rith in 1969 and the National Conference of Christians and Jews in 1971 for his efforts to foster a better understanding among all faiths. In December 2001 he was presented with an honorary knighthood, Honorary Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire (KBE), for his international contribution to civic and religious life over 60 years.

Mr. Graham is regularly listed by the Gallup organization as one of the “Ten Most Admired Men in the World,” whom it described as the dominant figure in that poll since 1948—making an unparalleled 54th appearance and 48th consecutive appearance. He has also appeared on the covers of Time, Newsweek, Life, U.S. News and World Report, Parade, and numerous other magazines and has been the subject of many newspaper and magazine feature articles and books.

Mr. Graham lost his wife of 64 years, Ruth Bell Graham, in June of 2007. Together they had three daughters, two sons, 19 grandchildren and numerous great-grandchildren. Mr. Graham resides in their home in the mountains of North Carolina.

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