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Introduction

Billy Graham is known as the most famous evangelist in the twenty and twenty first centuries who has preached the gospel of Jesus Christ and salvation through Him in more than 185 countries and territories around the globe by traveling and using the latest available technologies. He has personally met and preached the gospel to more than two billion people in countless cultural settings.

Between 1946 and 2013 Billy Graham was known as one of the ten most admired men who appeared in this status fifty seven times, outpacing Ronald Reagan, the fortieth President of the United States who appeared merely thirty times in the “Ten Most Admired Men” status, and Pope John Paul II who appeared in this status only twenty seven times¹. How could it happen that the single evangelist, Billy Graham, could reach not only the United States and its leaders for Jesus Christ but almost the entire world, countries and leaders, as well? How could it be that a single evangelist could build the vitality of mass evangelism from its decline after the death of Billy Sunday in the early twenty century?

Billy Graham’s background

Billy Franklin Graham, the oldest son of his family, was born on November 7, 1918 near Charlotte, North Carolina to his parents father Frank Graham and mother Morrow Coffey who were not only farmland keepers but strict, Godly Presbyterian parents who tried to bring up their children in a Godly way.² As Billy Graham noted, his parents were strong-willed people who accepted hardships and discipline in their own lives, and they never hesitated to discipline or punish their children when they were deserved it. Billy Graham learned from his parents how to

¹ Gallup Politics, “Most Top 10 Finishes for Most Admired Men 1943-2013 ” accessed 22 March 2014; available from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/166646/obama-clinton-continue-reign-admired-man-woman.aspx>. HTML; internet

² J. Keith Hardman, *Seasons of Refreshing, Evangelism and Revivals in America* (Eugene: Wipit & Stock 2006), 249

obey without questioning. He was taught by his parents that laziness is one of the worst evils, and that there is dignity and honor in labor. Also, Billy Graham mentions that lying, cheating, stealing, and property destruction were foreign to him. His parents not only taught their children how to survive in the world in the honest way, but also they taught them in the word of God and prayed together with them. Billy Graham writes, “When they read the family Bible in our home, they were not simply going through a pious ritual. Mother told us that that they had established a family altar with daily Bible reading the very first day they were married. They accepted that book as the very Word of God, seeking and getting heavenly help to keep the family together. Every time, my parents prayed for their sons and daughters that they might come into the kingdom of God.”³ Billy Graham’s parents’ desire and prayer request at least about Billy Graham came true.

Billy Graham came to know Jesus Christ as his personal savior at age sixteen in an evangelist crusade in September of 1934 under the preaching of evangelist Mordecai Fowler Ham who was one of the worldwide evangelistic movement idea initiators.⁴ Billy Graham describes his salvation as “the 180 degree turn.” The process of his salvation happened gradually. The first step that drew him closer to Jesus Christ was his parents’ testimony about their salvation. The second step that drew him closer to Jesus Christ was his parents’ enthusiasm in encouraging Billy Graham to attend the evangelism meeting led by the “scandalous” evangelist Mordecai Fowler Ham whose ministry was criticized by local newspapers. The one thing blocking these attempts to draw Billy Graham’s attention to salvation was simply his attitude of refusal, and nothing else. He said that he was not interested in this preacher.

³ Billy Graham, *Just As I Am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham* (HarpenSanfrancisco: Zondervan 1997), 17-20

⁴ Lewis A. Drummond, *The Canvas Cathedral: Billy Graham’s Ministry History Seen Through the History of Evangelism* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publisher 2003), 3

Despite of Billy Graham's attitude of refusal, God still was doing His eternal work in Billy Graham's heart. It happened that Billy's curiosity was stirred up by reading a story in the *Charlotte News* about Mordecai Fowler Ham's charge regarding immoral conditions at Central High School in Charlotte. This accusation made some students from this school angry. As Billy Graham was heading toward the evangelistic meeting with his peers to find out whether the students would fight against the preacher's message about immoral condition at the local school, his attention was driven by the Holy Spirit in a completely different direction. Instead of paying attention to the school situation that was raised by the evangelist, his mind was directed toward his own problem. As Mordecai Fowler Ham was preaching on the subject of God's judgment and hell, Billy Graham's mind was grabbed and heart gripped, and he had no peace. Through Ham's preaching, Billy Graham was deeply convicted about his sinfulness and rebellious attitude against God. Mordecai Fowler Ham was preaching and after a little while inviting to come forward, confess and repent sin, and accept Jesus Christ as personal Savior. That invitation drew Billy Graham to the stage where he understood that he was not right with God, and he stood up, went forward to make that decision for Jesus Christ. Being urged to make a decision for Christ and having the meaning of salvation explained to him by his family friend J.D Prevatt, Billy Graham accepted Jesus Christ as his personal Savior which changed Billy Graham's life completely to the "one hundred eighty degrees."⁵

His parents all during that time while they were bringing Billy up and praying for his salvation had no clue whatsoever about the kind of future God had in store for their son Billy. Probably they had never thought that one day their son, Billy Franklin Graham, would one of the most influential evangelists to be the reaching the world for the kingdom of God.

⁵ Billy Graham, *Just As I Am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham* (HarpenSanfrancisco: Zondervan 1997), 27-31

Billy Graham did not receive the most excellent education in his early years of schooling.. As John Pollock, a Christian author of the book *The Apostle, A Life of Paul* writes that Billy Graham's early education was almost poor as Abraham's Lincoln's because of the low level of teaching at Sharon High School where the three teachers had no college degree.⁶ Billy Graham graduated high school in 1936. In the same year he went to Bob Jones College, but he left there in the spring semester of 1937 and transferred to the Bible Institute in the state of Florida and city Trinity which is known today as Trinity College. Billy Graham graduated from the Bible Institute in Florida in 1940 and enrolled in fall of the same the year in Wheaton College, near Chicago, and where, in 1943, he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in anthropology. While at Wheaton College, he met his future wife, Ruth, a medical missionary's daughter. They were married in the same year.⁷

Billy Graham's role in revivals and awakenings

In Billy Graham's early life, high school and university years, he dreamed of becoming a famous baseball player and had never thought that God had in store for him much better things than just playing baseball and becoming a famous baseball player. As Billy Graham writes in his autobiography, *Nearing Home: Life, Faith, and Finishing Well*, as a young man he dedicated himself to the sport and hoped that his passion for the game would lead him straight to the major leagues. His goal was simple: to stand at home plate, with bat in hand, immersed in an important game. He often pictured himself hitting a big league grand slam into the stadium seats and hearing the crowd roar with thunder as he ran the bases – *nearing home*.

⁶ John Pollock, *The Authorized Biography of Billy Graham* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company 1966), 4

⁷ James E. Kilgore, *Billy Graham, the Preacher: A Study of the Ministry of an American Evangelist* (New York: Exposition Press 1968), 14

He never would have guessed what really lay in store. After giving his heart to the Lord Jesus Christ – repenting of his sin and putting his entire life into God's hands – he laid down all of his dreams, along with his bat, and by faith fully embraced God's plan, trusting that God would lead him all the way. Baseball was not God's plan for him. Even if he did not play baseball, God still taught him how to integrate many of its important components into service for His glory.⁸ Instead of playing baseball for his personal fame in the major league, he preached the gospel around the globe, which brought glory to God by leading many, many souls, through the power of the Holy Spirit and the name of Jesus Christ, into God's kingdom.

In order to understand Billy Graham's ministry, this question should be asked: where and how did Billy Graham start his preaching ministry. The life ministry of Billy Graham cannot be imagined without the other people whom God sent in his life. The first person who saw a great potential in Billy Graham as a preacher was John Minder, a dean of the Florida Bible Institute, who arranged for and encouraged Billy Graham to preach at a country church during the Easter vacation of 1937. John Minder not only encouraged him to preach at a local church in Florida, but furthermore to preach for young people at Tampa Gospel Tabernacle where he became, in time, part time pastor while he was a student of Wheaton College.

The turning point in Billy Graham's ministry began in 1943, after being married to Ruth Bell and taking over the pastorate of a struggling Baptist church, when Torrey M Johnson, Wheaton College professor of New Testament Greek and one of the founders of the National Association of Evangelicals, offered to Billy Graham's church the opportunity to take over his radio broadcast "Songs in the Night", which was broadcast by one of the most powerful radio stations of Chicago. In 1944, as Professor Johnson realized that Billy Graham was a gifted preacher and had an instinctive grasp of the needs and aspirations of that time's generation,

⁸ Billy Graham, *Nearing Home: Life, Faith, and Finishing Well* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson 2011), 1-2

invited Billy Graham to come and preach at his organized Chicagoland's Youth for Christ," meeting for the thousands of servicemen who roamed Chicago each weekend on leave, looking for amusement, alcohol and sex. Here Billy Graham made his first public invitation to these soldiers to come and profess Jesus Christ as their personal Savior.

As Billy Graham was growing in his ministry experience by traveling and preaching both in the United States but outside of it, he met important leaders who advanced his ministry. Also he met long term teammates such as Cliff Borrow, the future music leader of Billy Graham's crusades, Grady Wilson, George Beverly Shea and Charles Templeton. These persons were those who performed the background tasks of Billy Graham's crusades.

One of the most pivotal opportunities, in 1949 for Billy Graham to preach the gospel came from the Christian Businessmen's Committee of Los Angeles, who invited Billy Graham to preach at their annual three-week evangelistic campaign or crusade. The meeting was held in a strategic location, a well known intersection where large crowds were going or coming.

The most important role in this crusade outside of Billy Graham and his teammates, was played by one unsaved person, Stuart Hamblen, who was one of American radio's first singing cowboys in 1926, and later became a Christian songwriter, temperance supporter and a recurring candidate for political office as well. In addition, he was one of the most popular radio stars on the West Coast. His radio program was the most listened to radio broadcast in California by tens of thousands of people who turned in to his program every day.

As Billy Graham's crusade began in September of 1949, Stuart Hamblen was urged by his Godly wife to go hear Billy Graham's preaching. She also urged him to arrive to this crusade one hour early before its actual start time, and that is where and when he met Billy Graham face to face, and made Billy Graham an offer to come and be on his radio show. Stuart Hamblen

made a promise to Billy Graham that if he would come and be on his radio show then he, Stuart Hamblen, would help him to fill his tent with thousands and thousands of people. Billy Graham accepted his offer and went to that radio show for an interview. This radio appearance did, indeed, help Billy Graham to fill the tent not only with 6100 people, as he reported in his letter to one of his friends, but with hundreds of thousands of people.

The further attention to Billy Graham's crusade brought Stuart Hamblen's announcement to his radio audience that he had given his life to Christ, and have quit smoking and drinking brought further attention to Billy Graham's crusade, caught the notice of Los Angeles *Hearst Newspaper*, who publicized Billy Graham's name and reputation national wide.⁹ The crusade of Los Angeles was held for almost three months and was the foundation for Billy Graham's national wide ministry. As David Aikman, the former *Time Magazine* senior correspondent noted, the Los Angeles revival of late September 1949 brought a completely different direction to Billy Graham's ministry.¹⁰

If the Los Angeles crusade in 1949 helped launch Billy Graham's national career of preaching the gospel, then crusade he led in England in 1954 helped him launch his international career. As Keith J. Hardman noticed, Billy Graham came to world attention in 1954 with the greater London Crusade, a crusade in a place which had not been effectively challenged spiritually since the revivals of Dwight L. Moody in the nineteenth century. The London Crusade took place in England in 1954 during that country's spiritual lukewarm condition: church membership in England was just five to fifteen percent, compared to that of the United States which had more than sixty percent church membership. England apparently had almost no interest in spiritual matters at all at the time. Billy Graham's crusade during that time was a

⁹ Lewis A. Drummond, *The Evangelist: The Worldwide Impact of Billy Graham* (Nashville: Word Publishing 2001), 5-9

¹⁰ David Aikman, *Billy Graham: His Life and Influence* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson 2007), 65

revival and a spiritual awakening as well. This 1954 crusade woke up the Christians of England and brought spiritual awakening to those who were spiritually dead. The spiritual awakening and revival was so powerful that the Prime Minister of England, who watched Billy Graham's crusade on TV, was moved to invite him to a private conversation, a conversation that brought newspaper attention worldwide.¹¹ These two crusades were the foundations of Billy Graham's future ministry or crusades nationally and worldwide.

Part of this success was due to the secret of Billy Graham's philosophy and practices in preparing for each crusade. Eye witnesses of Billy Graham's early ministry noticed that Billy Graham's formula for his successful campaign was rooted in three things: first the prayers of God's people, second the power of the Holy Spirit, and finally the power of the word of God. Those witnesses wrote that prayer meetings in behalf of the campaign began a full eighteen months before even one public service was held.¹²

Billy Graham has held countless crusades with his physical presence, and his media presence on television, satellite, or other media, which were very well attended, helped send his messages around the globe. Nevertheless, he also was ministering as a pastor to the Presidents of THE United States and presidents and leaders of the rest of the world. In which case, Billy Graham was named not only as the "world's evangelist", but also known as the "pastor to Presidents."¹³ The success of Billy Graham's ministry over almost six decades was grounded in his integrity, humility and his faithfulness to his family and his calling to preach the gospel. As Mark. A. Noll noted, Billy Graham has remained popular over more than a half-century because

¹¹ J. Keith Hardman, *Seasons of Refreshing, Evangelism and Revivals in America* (Eugene: Wipit & Stock 2006), 259

¹² Charles E. Fuller, Harold Ockenage, C. Wade Freeman, J. Edwin Orr, Mel Larson, Don Hoke, Jerry Beavan, Cliff Borrows, *Revival in Our Time, the Story of the Billy Graham's Evangelistic Campaigns, Including Six of His Sermons* (Wheaton: Van Kampen Press 1950), 17

¹³ Steve Rabey and Monte Unger, *Milestones: 50 Events of the 20th Century that Shaped Evangelicals in America* (Nashville: Broadman and Holmans Publishers 2002), 47

he has aged well – the fiery young evangelist became the distinguished senior evangelist. In addition, Billy Graham remains popular because he does not have extra marital affairs, nor does he exploit the sums of money contributed by his followers for lavish personal consumption.¹⁴

Billy Graham's methods of evangelism

Billy Graham has been not only a successful minister, but also a target of criticism from religious scholars and secular journalists. As Grant Wacker, a professor of Christian history and director of the Graduate Program in Religious at Duke University, pointed out, some critics of Billy Graham's ministry were fair and thoughtful, but many of them were unfair and thoughtless. He writes that Billy Graham was criticized for his multiple public identities or multiple public faces such as: the simple preacher or the savvy CEO, the humble servant of the church or the name dropping servant of the White House, the tight-lipped confidant of Presidents or the loquacious subject of press conferences and talk shows.¹⁵ Gerald J. Russello, the editor of *The University Bookman* and a Fellow of the Chesterton Institute at Seaton Hall University, based on his research, has grouped the negative criticism of Billy Graham's ministry into three categories. The first criticism is of Billy Graham's identification as a Christian minister because he seemed weak in his grasp of Christian theology. The second criticism is a set of charges which question Graham's role in the nation's political life: Graham seemed to avoid urging national spiritual change when addressing political leaders. The third criticism is that Billy Graham's message did not fulfill what his critics see as the working out of the Christian message in the modern world in

¹⁴ Mark. A. Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity, An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 45

¹⁵ Grant Wacker, "Billy Graham's America," *Journal of American Society of Church History* 494-495 (2009), [journal on-line]; accessed 22 March 2014; available from <http://eds.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.ngu.edu/ehost/detail?vid=3&sid=c72b7067-f30f-4fc1-a36f-8eca6b77e591%40sessionmgr4001&hid=4210&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWVhc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=rth&AN=ATL A0001741838>. HTML; internet

a “prophetic” emphasis on “social justice.” His critics felt that he should have used his influence with Southern whites, for example, to promote racial equality.¹⁶ Based on many Bible scholars’ research on Billy Graham’s preaching some have concluded that there is not any indication that Billy Graham has preached hermeneutically. Bob Jones, the former president and founder of Bob Jones University, judged Billy Graham in 1956 and complained that Billy Graham was doing more harm to the cause of Jesus Christ than any other living man because he seemed to be seeking the sponsorship of moderns and liberals who do not believe that in the Bible everything that is written is inspired by God and is completely true, and that could affect Billy Graham’s message of Jesus Christ. Dr. Bob Jones wrote that by doing such a thing, Billy Graham was going to wreck evangelism and leave even orthodox churches, if they cooperated, spineless and emasculated.¹⁷ The another religious scholar who does not agree with the way that Billy Graham preached his sermons is Michael G. Long, a professor of religious studies at Elizabethtown College. He argues that Billy Graham’s messages or sermons do not show evidence of significant interpretation of the Biblical text at all, but that they “shoehorn” Biblical exegesis into “the die-cut sin-to-salvation” theological template that dominates almost every sermon. He also argues that Billy Graham does not have much time for modern Biblical scholarship, preferring to use Biblical texts as illustrations of straightforward, uncomplicated narrative.¹⁸

Even though Billy Graham has not left any notable theological contributions, based on many Bible and religious scholars’ researches, he has left wonderful methods of evangelism. Billy Graham understood and applied the effectiveness of mass media in order to proclaim the

¹⁶ Gerald J. Russello, “Just As He was not, *Touchstone, Journal of Mere Christianity* 33-34 (2008), [journal on-line]; accessed 6 March 2014; available from <http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=21-09-033-b.html>; internet.

¹⁷ Mark Taylor Dalhouse, *An Island in the Lake of Fire: Bob Jones University, Fundamentalists and the Separatist Movement* (Athens: University of Georgia Press 1996), 82

¹⁸ Michael G. Long, *The Legacy of Billy Graham* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press 2008), 155

gospel. He also understood the importance of teamwork in his crusades. In order to proclaim the gospel and train new evangelists and church leaders for revivals and spiritual awakenings, he founded the Billy Graham Association which is the largest Christian organization in United States. Also, Billy Billy Graham founded *Christianity Today* magazine whose purpose was to discuss 20th century matters of Christianity. Further, Billy Graham wrote many books in order not only to proclaim the gospel, but also to minister or influence Christians. The use of film was introduced by Billy Graham who saw their effectiveness in proclaiming the gospel through the creation and worldwide distribution of Christian films. All of these methods, and many other methods as well, Billy Graham has left for future generations to use as tools in order to advance the gospel.

In addition to Graham's notable accomplishments and lasting influence shown by his organizational skills and many sermons and publications, there are others which should be noted. The first accomplishment of Billy Graham as a Christian that should be mentioned is that Billy Graham has attracted by his ministry and his preaching many, many writers' attention to write books on Billy Graham's life, his ministry and his successes. Second, Billy Graham has influenced many believers around the globe, world leaders whether saved or unsaved, and vast numbers of unsaved persons by preaching and writing books. Third, based on my research, there can be written a multi-volume encyclopedias on Billy Graham's ministry due to the fact that there were many, many eyewitnesses who were working with Billy Graham together and others as well who experienced Billy Graham's ministry from outside of his team for many decades. Finally, and never less is the fact that Billy Graham has preached the gospel more than two billion people in 185 countries in 65 five languages.

Throughout his very long ministry, Billy Graham has had a huge, huge responsibility before God and the rest of the world. The world has always been watching how Billy Graham has handled God's gifts of time, strength, wisdom and other resources, including his charge over the people who were working in his team and the money which was donated to advance the gospel. Billy Graham has handled this God-given responsibility very well. There are no any arguments from the world that would argue that Billy Graham has been a greedy man. There are no any arguments that Billy Graham has lived a lifestyle unworthy of Jesus Christ's the gospel. Billy Graham may not have been a great theologian, but he has been a great spiritual leader who encourages the other spiritual leaders to live their lives in such way that their examples do not interfere with the preaching of the gospel nationally and internationally. Billy Graham's successful ministry has been and is as encouragement for the future generations of spiritual leaders who will go and proclaim the gospel worldwide and beyond.

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