

# BILLY GRAHAM

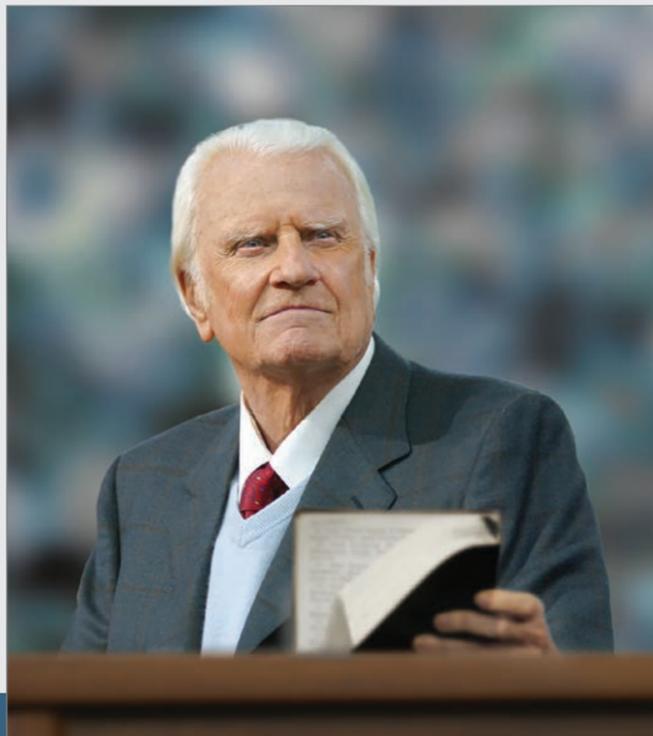
1918–2018

## THE LAST JOURNEY HOME—A NATION PAYS RESPECT TO A MAN GOD USED

Story by Carmel Palmer and Jim Culhane

“He has often said, ‘I’m just a country preacher,’ and though it may sound like a feigned humility, he is simply telling you the truth,” remarked Greg Laurie, Harvest Christian Fellowship, Riverside, CA. “Raised up by God ... to be a pastor to presidents and other world leaders [and] an evangelist to the world at large ... Billy was one of the most down-to-earth people I have ever known.”

As the last verse of “Almost Persuaded” played in the 1934 revival tent, a lanky teenager headed to the front altar, shoes scuffing the sawdust floor. Though from a Christian home, Billy had been far more interested in baseball and girls than God. At a Mordecai Ham revival in Charlotte, NC, he’d felt increasingly uncomfortable yet unable to stay away. Now he felt drawn to commit himself fully to God. Then a friend explained God’s plan of salvation. “That explanation ... did not necessarily answer every question I had,” Billy remembered, “but it set forth simply the facts I needed ... to become God’s child.”



Billy Graham was committed to serving God from that moment until his death on February 21, 2018, at the age of 99. While reaching millions across the globe with his preaching and programs, Billy strove to communicate the Gospel with the same straightforward simplicity with which he had received it.

### Called to Preach

“[He] led me to Christ. Billy Graham lived well, preached well, and ... finished well,” recalled Skip Heitzig of Calvary Albuquerque, NM. “He was gracious, compassionate, utterly humble, and always thankful and ever amazed at how God used him. We ... are even more determined to carry on his legacy of evangelism.”

While a student at Florida Bible Institute, Billy prayed, seeking God’s will for his life. All he received was a quiet certainty, but once he received the call to evangelism, he never looked back. In 1937, he was practicing his sermons for an audience of alligators on Hillsborough River’s tiny islands, and by 1938 preaching Sunday evenings at Tampa’s Tin Can Trailer Park. In 1949, he gained national prominence during his eight-week Los Angeles campaign where more than 3,000 people accepted Christ. In 1954, in London, he preached to roughly 200,000 in one afternoon—the largest religious gathering in British history—and during the three-month U.K. campaign more than 38,000 accepted Christ. In 1957, more than 100,000 people packed New York’s Yankee Stadium, with thousands more gathered outside. In 1973, more than 1.1 million South Koreans sat on the ground for hours in near silence to hear the Gospel. His campaigns crisscrossed the globe, touching each inhabited continent, from Australia’s large cities to the wilderness of war-torn Nagaland, India.

However, it was not crowds that drew him. “The great crowds themselves are meaningless. The thing that counts is what happens in the hearts of the people,” Billy

declared. “I am convinced the greatest act of love we can ever perform for people is to tell them about God’s love for them in Christ.”

One audience that touched Billy greatly was also one of the smallest—a leprosarium outside Kaduna, Nigeria. Billy preached passionately on God’s love for the villagers and the perfect bodies He would give them in heaven. At the invitation, dozens of deformed hands lifted in response. Afterward, a woman approached him, an envelope held between her stubbed arms. Inside the envelope was the equivalent of \$5.60 and a note assuring him, “We send our love and prayers with you around the world.” Choked with emotion at first, he said to his associates, “Boys, that’s the secret of our ministry.”

Billy and his wife Ruth met while attending Wheaton College. For Billy, it was love at first sight, but it wasn’t until Ruth heard him pray that he caught her attention. “I sensed [he] was a man who knew God in a very unusual way,” she remembered. The daughter of missionaries to China, Ruth intended to be a missionary to Tibet. She knew what marrying a man with Billy’s calling would mean and struggled with surrendering her own plans; but her certainty that God was calling them together eventually won out. They married after graduating in 1943, and though often physically apart, they enjoyed spiritual and emotional closeness until Ruth’s death in 2007. Whenever asked who the greatest Christian he knew was, Billy would always say, “Ruth.”

“Ruth and I were called as a team,” Billy reported. “She urged me to go, saying ... ‘I’ll back you. I’ll rear the children, and you travel and preach.’” Ruth and Billy made his coming and going seem normal to the five Graham children, always parting with a quick hug and a smile. Behind closed doors, both deeply felt the sacrifices made for Billy’s call. “Many a times,” Billy confessed, “I’ve



driven down [our] driveway with tears coming down my cheeks, not wanting to leave.”

### Onward and Upward

“[H]e’s been used of God perhaps in a greater measure than almost any man living today. ... I was totally taken back by [his] simple, beautiful attitude,” said Chuck Smith, founder of Calvary Chapel. “He has caught what it is to be a servant of God.”

While preaching is the hallmark of Billy’s legacy, he made many other contributions to modern Christianity. Through World Wide Pictures, he expanded the field of Christian film-making, producing 200-plus films which have been translated into 38 languages and are still used today. He mingled with world leaders, advised presidents, and shared the Gospel with hardened Irish terrorists. As travel began taking a toll on his body, he found new ways to hold crusades through telecasts and simulcasts.

In 2001, while receiving an honorary knighthood from Queen Elizabeth, Billy related, “I read [that] after hearing ... a sermon about Christ’s return to earth, Queen Victoria said, ‘Oh how I wish that the Lord might come during my lifetime.’ When [asked] why, she replied, ‘I should like to lay my crown at His feet.’ ... In the same way, I want to give God all the glory and ... praise for what has been accomplished in my life... I, too, look forward to the day when I can see Jesus face to face and lay at His feet any honor I’ve ever received because He deserves it all.”

*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord ... will give to me on that Day.* 2 TIMOTHY 4:7-8a