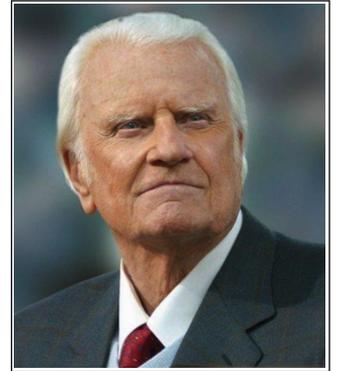


BILLY GRAHAM

(1918-2018)

A Man of God



A tribute by R. Stanley, India (22 Feb 2018)

I first heard Evangelist Billy Graham in 1957 in Palayamkottai of Tamilnadu, India. As a 10-year old boy, though I didn't understand much of what he preached, I enjoyed attending such a huge meeting. I remember how much, as a 6+ feet tall American, he had to bend to be garlanded by short Indians! I had the privilege of listening to him again in 1977 in Chennai. As a college student in the 1960s I used to regularly listen to his broadcast, *Hour of Decision*. One of my long desires was to somehow shake hands with this man of God. God caused it to happen in Amsterdam '83, the International Conference for Itinerent Evangelists in Holland. We were over 200 servants of God from India in this Conference. Late Dr. Prakash Yesudian, Late Mr. Samuel Ganesh, Late Mr. N. Jeevanandam and Mr. Sadhu Chellappa were among us who enjoyed this privilege. My fellow-worker in the Blessing Youth Mission (BYM), Mr. Michael Achary, was also a delegate. Dr. Ravi Zacharias spoke in an evening session and Dr. Sam Kamalesan sang the song, "Jesus is all to me," in Tamil to that international audience of 5000 delegates.

So many titles are awarded to Dr. Graham, but I would like to call him as "a Man of God." As a tribute to him I hereby highlight 10 of his outstanding characteristics —

1. He depended on the Grace of God.

He was once asked, "Dr. Graham, why has God used you more than anyone else?" He politely answered, "That's the first question I would ask God when I meet Him in Heaven. For now I would say, It's the sheer Grace of God!" For a similar question late in his life he answered, "I want to ask God why He chose me to be one of His followers. I don't even deserve that." Billy never forgot his humble background. He came from a farmer's family. Addressing a group of modern youngsters, he humorously said, "Dear boys and girls, if electricity fails you won't be able to do anything. But as for me, I know fishing, farming, milking, and so on, and would be busy doing something!" The hymn that has been sung after Graham's sermons in all his crusades is, "Just as I am!" That's the title of his autobiography also. His message over the last seven decades has been, "By grace we are saved through faith in Christ, and that not of ourselves; it is the gift of God!" (Eph 2:8). An African delegate in Amsterdam '83, during an open forum, asked Dr. Graham, "Could you have reached these heights if you had not been an American?" With all humility he said something like what Paul confessed, "I am what I am by the Grace of God" (1 Cor 15:10). Once he told President George W. Bush, "One should strive to be better, but we're all sinners who earn God's love not thro' our good deeds, but thro' His grace." About this George Bush later testified, "I did not fully grasp this profound concept that day. But Billy had planted a seed. His thoughtful explanation made the soil less hard, the brambles less thick!"

2. He preached the Word of God.

One of Dr. Graham's famous phrases was, "The Bible says ...". He would proudly lift his leatherbound Bible and would not be tired of thundering this any number of times. He preached

the unadulterated Gospel of Christ. He never deviated from it. The banner that was at the background above his head on the Crusade platform was, "Jesus said: I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (Jn 14:6). He never wasted his time on the pulpit by telling stories. He was not an entertainer; he was an Evangelist head to foot. The Cross of Christ was central in his message (1 Cor 2:2). Only once he failed to present the centrality of the Cross, and that sermon was a flop! His words were forceful but they would bring you only under conviction and not condemnation. He preached the same message whether it was to Oxford University students or African jungle tribes. President George W. Bush has said about Dr. Graham: "His love for Christ and his gentle soul helped open hearts to the Word of God, including mine." "*Peace with God*" is one among the earliest of Billy's 33 books, published in 1953. I understood the Gospel of Christ better through the reading of this book as a teenager.

The theme chorus of Amsterdam '83, which we sang so often during that 10-day Conference, was —

*Let's talk about Jesus,
This King of kings is He;
The Lord of lords supreme
Through all eternity.
The great I am the Way,
The Truth, the Life, the Door;
Let's talk about Jesus more and more!*

3. He stayed in the Will of God.

It is said of King David, "After he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep" (Acts 13:36). This is true of Billy Graham. A friend once offered to Dr. Graham a large stretch of land with an advice to build an University. He politely refused, saying, "God has called me to be an Evangelist and not an Educationalist!" Church history has many sad examples of mighty servants of God deviating from God's primary calling in their lives and got into trouble. Billy Graham operated on the apostolic principle: "We will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word" (Acts 6:2-4). Dr. Graham was included 61 times in "America's Most Admired" list. (Queen Elizabeth comes second with 49 appearances.) Some of his well-meaning friends once suggested that he should run for presidency, and no one would contest against him. His reply was like that of Nehemiah: "I'm doing a great work; I cannot come down!" (Neh 6:3). Dear young preacher friends, we have so much to learn from this spiritual giant!

4. He fulfilled the Purposes of God.

God down through the ages has used Prophets, the men of God, to convey to Kings His message of counsel, correction and rebuke. Prophets Elijah, Nathan, Isaiah, Daniel and John the Baptist are some examples. They reminded the Kings of God's purposes concerning the nations and the world. God used Billy Graham on these lines. He moved closely with 13 Presidents of America beginning with President Eisenhower. He was called the "Pastor to Presidents!" Many of the nation's leaders looked him for guidance and prayer. He has advised Queen Elizabeth especially on forgiveness. Once he addressed the cabinet members of the famous British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill (1874-1965). The gifts of the "Word of Wisdom" and the "Word of Knowledge" were in operation through Dr. Graham (1 Cor 12:8). King Pharaoh consulted Joseph. King Nebuchadnezzar consulted Daniel. Is there any Christian leader in India whom the national leaders consult? When will such a day dawn in Bharath? In his tribute to Dr. Graham, President Barak Obama has said, "He was a humble servant who gave hope and guidance to generations of Americans!" Though Billy was close to so many Presidents, he never sought any favour from them!

5. He respected the Servants of God.

As the largest crowd-puller in world evangelism, Dr. Graham never thought that he was superior to other servants of God around the globe. Since 1947, some 215 million people at more than 400 Crusades, including the one in Soviet Russia, have heard him! His love and appreciation for his associate evangelists in the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) is a living testimony for oneness among Christian workers. Dr. Cliff Barrows (1923-2016) and Mr. George Beverly Shea (1909-2013) had been working with him for so many decades. He treated his associates as his friends (Jn 15:15). Cliff Barrows a singer once told Billy Graham, "Billy, you won't have any job in Heaven, because there is no preaching there. But I would be fully occupied with singing!" Dr. Graham was not without critics from among preachers, Bible scholars and Church leaders. But he didn't waste his time and energy in responding to their criticism. His policy was, "No offence, No defence!" When he came to India, Brother Bakhtsingh was one of the outstanding servants of God who refused to cooperate with him. Bakhtsingh was not for sending the altar-call respondents back to "dead" Churches! But Billy Graham graciously visited him and sought his prayers! Billy Graham as the Chief Guest delivered the Dedication Address for the Oral Roberts University in April 1967. President Jimmy Carter has said, "Broad-minded, forgiving, and humble in his treatment of others, Dr. Graham exemplified the life of Jesus Christ!"

6. He edified the Family (Church) of God.

In all his evangelistic endeavours, Billy Graham was committed to strengthen the existing Churches. The forerunners of his Crusades would spend months in seeking the cooperation of the local Churches. Billy was transdenominational. Do you know that he was a Baptist and his wife, Ruth Graham (1920-2007) was a Presbyterian? An interdenominational family! Besides labouring for bringing sinners to repentance and salvation, Billy had a passion for revival in the Church. He believed that unless the Churches were revived, the fruits of evangelism could not be preserved. The International Congress on World Evangelisation in Lausanne, Switzerland, July 1974, was initiated by Billy Graham. It drew delegates from more than 150 nations. One of the slogans from the Congress was, "The whole Church must carry the whole Gospel to the whole World!" Though Billy Graham is never said to have spoken in tongues, even hard-core Pentecostals thronged to hear him, both in local Crusades and international Conferences. Though he was more an Evangelist, than a Revivalist, local Churches experienced a spiritual awakening during and after his Crusades.

7. He was filled with the Spirit of God.

Billy Graham's sermons are known for their simplicity but they did not lack power and authority. Apostle Paul's testimony suits Billy: "My speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Cor 2:4). The presence of the Holy Spirit would engulf his audience. That was unmistakable. He always stressed to Christians the necessity to "be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Eph 5:18). One of the evening talks in Amsterdam '83 was on the Holy Spirit and the speaker was Dr. Bill Bright (1921-2003), the Founder of Campus Crusade for Christ. His talk was descriptive but not prescriptive enough. Dr. Graham went to the podium after Bill Bright sat down, and this is what he said with deep brokenness: "Friends, go on your knees when you get back to your rooms. Seek God for a fresh anointing. Don't get up until you know that you've got it!" Billy was a man of prayer. He confessed so often how he could not preach without the Spirit's anointing on him. Showing his palms, wet with sweat because of his nervousness, he said that was why he depended solely on the enablement of the Holy Spirit. There was a standing ovation following this! What an encouragement to those who think they are not talented or eloquent enough to be a preacher! Jesus today does not ride on lofty horses but lowly donkeys!

8. He was devoted to the Ministry of God.

Ever since Billy Graham committed his life to Christ in 1934, as a 16-year old, in response to the altar call of the famous evangelist Mordecai Ham (1877-1961), he had a burning desire to lead others to Christ who completely transformed his own life. He was the first fulltime Evangelist of Youth For Christ (YFC) which was started in 1946. The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) was formed in 1950. He was chiefly instrumental in launching the periodical, *Christianity Today*, in 1956. John Wesley (1703-1791) told to Christians, "You have only one business on earth, and that is to win souls for Christ!" On another occasion he said, "The world is my parish." Billy Graham was consumed by the sayings of such legends. For him, a farm boy, the world became the "harvest field" (Mt 13:38). He received only a salary from BGEA. When there was so much of scandal about the love offerings received by preachers, Billy and a few others formed Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA). The BGEA is above reproach in financial matters. Its monthly, *Decision*, in its 58th year of publication, is standing tall among Christian periodicals worldwide.

Even though Dr. Graham had to spend so much time away from home for his Crusades, his entire family steadily grew in the knowledge and fear of God. The credit goes to Mrs. Ruth Graham (1920-2007) who passed away after 64 years of happy marriage. All their five children, two sons and three daughters, are in Christian ministry. The Graham's grandchildren are now nineteen and great grandchildren are numerous! As a principle, Dr. Graham and his associates would never be alone in a room with another woman. What a character! Billy's son, Franklin, 65, is now leading the BGEA as per the decision of the Board. He is also the president of *Samaritan's Purse*, a worldwide relief organisation. Ann Lutz, 69, one of Graham's daughters, is a good Bible teacher. The decision of Joshua of old was that of Billy also: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Josh 24:15).

9. He loved the World of God.

Billy Graham's most quoted Bible verse is John 3:16, "God so loved the world ..." Both Billy and Ruth regularly prayed for the world. Once Ruth was asked whether she had a prayer guide. Her reply: "Yes, the daily newspaper! I hold it on one hand and the Bible on the other!" Just like God burdened the prophets of old about various nations, Billy Graham used to break down in holy intercession before God for the aches and longings of the people around the world (Isa 13:1; 15:1; 17:1; etc.) He took time during his Chennai Crusade in 1977 to visit Andhra Pradesh which was devastated by unprecedented floods. He literally cried while listening to the pathetic plea of the affected villagers. The BGEA sent them huge funds for relief. This they have done all over the world to help the victims of natural disasters, epidemics and wars. India is one of the many nations to which Franklin Graham's *Samaritan's Purse* sends gift boxes of clothes and playthings for children year after year. The "compassion" of Jesus was behind the miracles of Jesus, especially in feeding over 5000 men with just five loaves and two fish. Billy showed his compassion in many practical ways. He had no racial prejudice. He was a friend of Martin Luther King (1929-1968), a Civil Rights activist who was assassinated. In one of his Crusades the organisers had separate seating arrangements for whites and blacks. Billy went down from the dais and personally removed the ropes of separation! In his evangelistic team he had two Indian Evangelists, Dr. Akbar Abdul Haqq and Dr. Robert Cunville. President Donald Trump in his tribute has called Billy Graham "God's Ambassador to the world!"

10. He lived for the Kingdom of God.

“Thy Kingdom come!” This was the longing and prayer of Billy Graham all through his life. The Glory of God was his sole aim. He did everything possible to encourage evangelists and missionaries, especially those who were labouring for the Kingdom of God in remote areas and hostile situations. Billy’s father-in-law, Dr. Nelson Bell (1894-1973), was a medical missionary in China. Ruth Graham as a young girl grew up in this missionary family. No wonder the entire Graham family has imbibed the missionary spirit. Dr. Ravi Zacharias in his tribute has said, “There cannot be another Billy Graham!” Yes, there cannot be another Paul, but there can be so many Timothys and Tituses. I call upon Christian youngsters, especially in India, to seek the face of God so that at least some pieces of the mantle of Billy Graham might fall on them. Our country is badly in need of evangelists with calibre, character and Spirit-given charisma to turn the millions of Indians towards the Living God. This generation of Indian Christians is responsible for this generation of Indian non-Christians.

Billy Graham was not afraid of death. In fact he was eagerly looking forward to it like D.L. Moody (1837-1899), another great American Evangelist, who said, “The earth is receding; Heaven is beckoning; This is the day of my coronation! O death, how sweet!” I would like to imagine that Jesus would have stood up in the early morning hours of Wednesday the 21st of February 2018 to welcome His servant Billy Graham with the words, “Well done, good and faithful servant ... Enter into the joy of your Lord!” (Mt 25:21,23). Billy as a simple man, who preached a simple message, is buried in a simple casket made by prisoners as per his wish.

Thank you, Billy, for giving us a definition for a man of God: “A Man of God is one who depends on the Grace of God, preaches the Word of God, stays in the Will of God, fulfills the Purposes of God, respects the Servants of God, edifies the Family of God, is filled with the Spirit of God, devotes himself to the Ministry of God, loves the World of God, and lives for the Kingdom of God!”



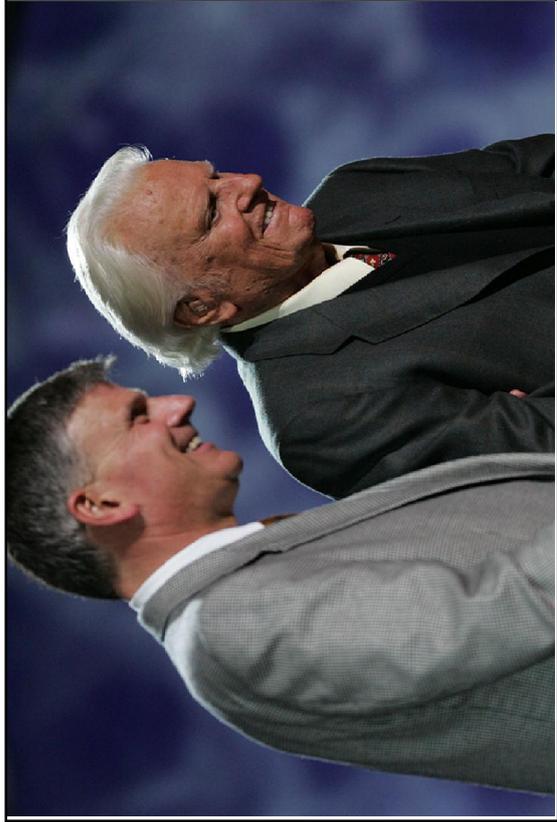
- This tribute was originally given in Tamil in a Thanksgiving Meeting held in the headquarters office of the Blessing Youth Mission in Vellore, Tamilnadu, on 22 Feb 2018.*
- This 5-page tribute is available on www.stanleyonbible.com in English and in Tamil. It's freely downloadable. Forward it to all your Christian friends worldwide.*
- Feel free to take copies of this tribute to distribute to your fellow Christians. The full text is released in Tamil also.*
- Please request your Pastor to convert one Sunday Service as a Thanksgiving Service for the Life and Ministry of Dr. Billy Graham. If that's not feasible, arrange for local gatherings of believers for this purpose. The material from this tribute can be freely used. Have a free time of praise and prayer.*
- This text can be reprinted, without any change, in periodicals and circulars. You don't need to ask for any permission.*



President John F. Kennedy watching Billy Graham preaching!



Billy with his life partner, Ruth (1920-2007)



Billy with his son, Franklin, who succeeds him.



Last journey: The casket carried by six of Billy's grandsons