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“From the Pastor’s Desk”

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BILLY GRAHAM, A SERVANT OF CHRIST

This week, the daily news captured our attention with the announcement of America’s beloved servant of Christ, Dr. Billy Graham’s passing. While I never had the privilege of meeting Dr. Graham personally, like so many of you, we have over the years attended several of his many Crusades.

It has been my privilege however to have the opportunity of knowing a couple of his ministerial associates, who not only have worked with him over the years, but knew him on a first name basis. One of which preached in our pulpit in one of the churches we pastored in Canada several years ago. His name was John Wesley White. In fact he worked so closely with Billy that he helped him with research on current events which Billy often used in his sermons.

John Wesley White who had the kind of opportunity to see him and his family up close always confirmed that what we saw from afar was exactly the same up close. They gave testimony to his integrity, devotion to Christ, a man of prayer, faithful in his discharge of the Gospel, possessed high godly standards for his team, and was most faithful to his wife and family.

I have admired Dr. Billy Graham from afar ever since I was a young child. And I dare say that there were times, along the way, in which I am sure I have been guilty of trying to imitate some of his mannerism in my delivery of a sermon. I don’t know who wrote it but someone has said that “imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.” Of course wisdom would advise us that such behavior should be restricted to following Christ’s pattern rather than some man. However, Paul did tell the Corinthians, “*Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.*” (1 Cor.11:1 ESV)

WILL THERE EVER BE ANOTHER BILLY GRAHAM

Each time God has found a need to advance up such an instrument as a Dr. Billy Graham for world evangelism and spiritual awakening, history has shown that certain conditions needed first to exist before such an event to take place. Most often times these kinds of events take place because of several factors, not necessarily because of a particular person, charisma, or an organization of churches who have called for such an event. In order for such a real spiritual awakening it must be God ordained, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and requires the obedience of faithful servants coming together in unity trusting God for His leadership in such an enterprise.

I am sure that there are many ministers who have envied and even prayed that God would grant them such a ministry to reach millions for Christ. But I believe that men like Billy Graham are an exception to the rule. Even Dr. Graham has confessed that he was surprised by what has happened in his ministry. It seemed throughout the years when Billy Graham had reached his zenith in ministry God would enable him to break another record. To which he has said time and time again that he gave God all the glory.

Back in the 60s when Ginny and I were working as Assistant Pastors, at Faith Tabernacle in Los Angeles, under Dr. R.H. Harms, our church became one of the sponsoring churches in the Los Angeles area. In that Crusade alone he filled the Los Angeles Coliseum with 100,000 people and we were amazed. But later in 1973 Dr. Graham would take his team to South Korea, and they would witness 1.1 million people travel by foot to attend his Crusade and it was reported that 75,000 people made their decision to follow Christ. That was a God event.

THE BILLY GRAHAM TEAM

I believe that in our awe of such a man as Dr. Graham we should not lose sight of the fact that he was only one man, and that such a ministry could not have happened alone. In order for his ministry to be effective it was necessary for God to grant him favor with those who became a part of the team.

Who can forget George Beverly Shea singing "*How Great Thou Art*" or that Crusade Choir led by Cliff Barrows? On the other hand, what about the organization of churches united to help make such a success? Then there was the team that flew to each city in which a Crusade was to be held and they would many times work as much as a whole year in putting together, prayer warriors, ushers, traffic coordinators, advertisements and prayer meetings as well as choir practice, etc. It took work, prayer, blood, sweat, and tears as well as cooperation among the body of Christ in a given community to make such a thing possible.

WHERE THE RESULTS LASTING

There is always that question in the minds of some throughout those Crusades as to whether the conversions were real and lasting? Well I have met many people who were saved in a Billy Graham Crusade or while they were listening to him on television or radio. Yes, they were lasting. Some who were in the entertainment world came to Christ during Billy Graham Crusade. The man who wrote, "*It Is No Secret What God Can Do*" was one of them by the name of Stuart Hamblen. Johnny Cash was another well-known personality that was influenced by Billy Graham. I believe many of our National leaders were influenced by Dr. Graham's ministry.

The Los Angeles Crusade of 1949 marked the turning point for Billy Graham from being an ordinary minister of the Gospel to a world renown personality. The meetings were scheduled for three weeks but ended up lasting eight. Approximately 350,000 attended the meetings over that eight week period. In the following years Graham held crusades in over 600 cities and 185 different countries. That wears me out just thinking about it. Which tells me that God had endued Dr. Graham with abundant strength to enable him to stand up under such a heavy schedule as that and then to live 99 years.

What is interesting to me is the fact that while he was busy conducting all these Crusades over the years he was able to write 33 books. (I will be blessed to get ten done before I die.) All the time he was doing Crusades and writing books, he has been the guest of every US President since Dwight Eisenhower. Last year I read that he was included on America's "*most admired*" list for a record of 61 times. His organization created a film studio, which has produced movies that has led to two million decisions for Christ. Yes, there have been lasting results. Nevertheless, even if there had been only one, it would have been worth it all.

SUCH GREATNESS, BUT WHAT ABOUT US

I do not believe we, children of God, should be intimidated by the greatness of such a man as Billy Graham. We should be thankful that he came along and became obedient to the call of God upon his life and what a difference that has made all around the world. God has not called us to be Billy Graham. He has given to each of us our own uniqueness and we are called to be faithful to Him in the calling to which we have been called.

The greater the call, and wider our sphere of influence the greater is our responsibility for such a calling. I personally like privacy even though I do live a public life. But the better known one is the less private is his and his family's life. You cannot go about with "*normal family freedom*" as those who are not known when your face is recognizable as an icon or celebrity, etc. Often times the Graham team has had to disguise themselves in order to be with their family on an outing...this is something that is not easy to do. So with this kind of ministry there is a big price one must pay of which the general public has no idea. And God help the person who is renown if they fall, stumble along the way. Thank God Billy Graham stayed true and faithful and never embarrassed the Church or the cause of Christ. We will miss such a Spiritual father and Statesmen who remained faithful to the end. May God reward him abundantly for his faithful stewardship. Amen.