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NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

## YOU TOO CAN BE AN EVANGELIST LIKE BILLY GRAHAM

JOEL S. WOODRUFF, ED.D.

PRESIDENT, C.S. LEWIS INSTITUTE



When I learned recently that Billy Graham had entered the presence of our Lord, I had feelings of sorrow mixed with joy. He has been one of my heroes. I watched his television broadcasts with my grandmother, attended one of his crusades in Kansas City as a boy, attended his

alma mater, graduated from a seminary he helped establish, and was inspired by his global vision a few years ago while visiting the Billy Graham Library. He preached the Good News of Jesus Christ to more people and in more countries than anyone else in human history. What an amazing saint and what an incredible life!

In recent days, I've heard many ask the question somewhat despondently, "Who will be the next Billy Graham?" After all, who could ever reach the lost like Dr. Graham? As I've reflected upon this question, I've come up with a hopeful answer.

Although you and I probably will never preach to millions of people in our lifetime as Billy Graham did, you and I can emulate the personal evangelistic traits and principles that he practiced. We can find the same kind of joy that he experienced in sharing the gospel with others. These are some things I learned from Dr. Graham that I hope to live out.

### **1. Confess daily that I'm a sinner saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ and His work on the cross.**

Billy Graham's proclamation of the gospel came out of his own saving relationship with Jesus Christ. He had experienced the

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freedom and joy that comes from the forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life. He didn't want to keep this amazing secret to himself, but rather wanted others to experience God's love, truth, and grace.

He began each day in prayer. He praised the Lord, confessed his sins, and asked the Lord to accomplish His purposes through his daily life. As a result, Dr. Graham, who preferred to be called "Billy," was known for his humility and kindness toward others. He wasn't full of himself despite his great success and fame. He had a confidence in his identity as an adopted child in the family of the King of kings, yet realized that he was just as much a sinner as the next person. This freed Dr. Graham to speak graciously and boldly to others about his faith in Jesus Christ. He was not ashamed of the gospel that had been entrusted him as he had experienced its saving power.

**2. By faith, put my trust in God's Word, the Bible, and call upon the Holy Spirit to fill and empower me.**

Billy Graham reached a crossroads around the age of thirty when he began to read books that questioned the reliability, authority, and inspiration of the Bible. He was troubled and knew that if he didn't have confidence in the Holy Scriptures he could no longer preach with conviction. Graham recalled a walk in the woods when his doubts and questions came to a crisis point. He held up his Bible in the palm of his hand and cried out, "O God! There are many things in this book I do not understand. There are many problems with it for which I have no solution. There are many seeming contradictions. There are some areas in it that do not seem to correlate with modern science. I can't answer some of the philosophical and psychological questions others are raising."

And then he fell to his knees and sensed the power of the Holy Spirit fall upon him as he proclaimed, "Father, I am going to accept this as Thy Word — by faith! I'm going to allow faith to go beyond my intellectual questions and doubts, and I will believe this to be Your inspired Word!"<sup>1</sup>



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Graham immediately knew that he'd crossed a major bridge. From that point on, he never doubted that the Bible was God's revelation to humankind. Shortly after this, in 1949, he led an evangelistic crusade in Los Angeles, which would be a turning point in his ministry. As he preached with confidence in the message of salvation as found in the Bible, he received a fresh anointing of the Holy Spirit. Thousands came nightly to hear the gospel as Graham preached under a large circus tent. Many gave their lives to Christ, including Louis Zamperini, whose story is recorded in the best-selling book and movie *Unbroken*.

As the Los Angeles Crusade continued to attract thousands daily, Graham was soon running out of fresh sermons. Helpful friends passed him potential outlines and illustrations. But he finally realized that if he was to continue, he would need the wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit to help him. This led him to fall on his knees again and ask the Holy Spirit to provide him with new messages to preach each night. His prayer was answered; he found that as he relied upon the Holy Spirit to fill and empower him, he was given a fresh, new message each night. He had learned the importance of Paul's exhortation in Ephesians 5:18, "Be filled with the Holy Spirit."

### **3. Listen well to others and share the gospel.**

One might assume that, being an evangelist with a gift for preaching and storytelling, in person Billy Graham would immediately take over a room. This assumption would prove to be wrong.

The journalist Diane Sawyer in an interview stated, "When Billy Graham entered your presence he didn't take the air out of the room. Rather he took an interest in you, asked you questions and listened to you."

Former presidents of the United States have shared how much comfort and pastoral care they received from Graham. He didn't come giving advice, but rather provided them with a safe place to share their struggles and concerns as he listened well to them. He



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also prayed with them and, when asked, shared the truth of God's Word without reservation.

Countless others have shared how gracious, humble, and kind Graham was in person.

Graham was reflecting the counsel of James 1:19, "Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger" (ESV). By being a good listener and showing authentic concern for the well-being of others, hearts were opened so that he could share the Good News of Jesus Christ with others.

I believe that if each of us were to follow these three simple biblical principles as exemplified in the life of Billy Graham, we too would be given opportunities to become evangelists as we share the hope we have as sinners saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Interestingly, in 1974 at the International Congress on World Evangelization in Lausanne, Switzerland, someone asked Billy Graham the question, "Who will be the next Billy Graham?" He answered by pointing to the crowd of people from more than 150 different countries, "They will."

May God use you and me to be the next evangelist in the lives of those desperately in need of a Savior. ■

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Billy Graham, *Just As I Am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), 146.

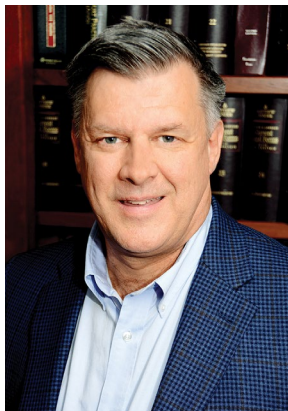


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PRESIDENT'S NOTE

WOULD YOU TAKE THIS JOB?

## JOEL S. WOODRUFF, ED.D



Joel Woodruff, President, C.S. Lewis Institute, has worked in higher education, “tent-making,” nonprofit administration, and pastoral ministries in Alaska, Israel, Hungary, France, and Northern Virginia. He served as Dean of Students, Chaplain, and Professor of Bible & Theology at European Bible Institute, where he helped train Europeans both for professional ministry and to be Christian leaders in the marketplace. Prior to joining the Institute, he was on the leadership

team of Oakwood Services International, a nonprofit educational and humanitarian organization. He is a graduate of Wheaton College, earned his M.Div. from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and has a doctorate in Organizational Leadership from Nova Southeastern University.

As a Parish-Pulpit Fellow, he studied Biblical Backgrounds & Archaeology in Israel for a year.