

“Courage to Share”

“Billy Graham Is in Heaven. His Funeral Guests Got a Glimpse of It.” These were the headlines posted in Christianity Today on March 2, 2018. America’s Pastor, the most influential preacher of the 20th century, died peacefully at his home in Montreat, N.C. on February 21st at the age of 99. More than 2,000 guests, including Christian leaders from 50 countries, attended the services in Charlotte, North Carolina.

From 1947 to 2005, more than 2 billion people in over 185 countries and territories on six continents have either attended or watched the Crusades on television, video, webcast, or listened to his “Hour of Decision” radio show. When Graham issued the invitation to come forward, more than 3 million people walked to the Cross to receive Jesus Christ as their Savior. That’s amazing. One of my many thoughts when this hero died was, “Who will take his place to influence so many for Christ?”



Then something amazing happened. One day after Graham went home to be with the Lord, I received a random text out of nowhere. It said, “I wanted to celebrate with you. Ten years ago today, I accepted Christ and I wanted to say thank you for your part in leading me to Christ.” I remember like it was yesterday. At a moment of desperation in this young man’s life, he repented of his sin and surrendered his life to Christ. “Who will take Billy Graham’s place to influence so many for Christ?”

As I was contemplating my own need to share more of Christ, the Lord gave me a memory of a personal experience. It was the spring of 2000 and I was sitting in my office, minding my own business. The night before on the local news, I heard about a man from the area that was arrested in Rochester, MN for kidnapping and rape. It was terrible. The Lord spoke to me, “Call the Sheriff’s office to get permission to meet with this man. I want you to share the Gospel because he is desperate.” Really Lord? So I went to the jail and shared Christ with this rapist. You guessed it. He prayed for forgiveness and asked Christ into his life. When I came back to do some discipleship follow-up, he said to me, “There are many more here in the jail that need Christ, so will you come back and tell them about this Gospel? After proper clearance and training, I came back as a chaplain to share the Gospel with murderers, drug lords, burglars, sex offenders, child molesters and even prostitutes. By the grace of God over 50 felons came to faith in Christ in over a two-year period. “Who will take the place of Billy Graham to share the Gospel and influence many for Christ?” The answer is simply, you and me. Matthew 9:36-38 says, *“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”*

Anointed evangelists like Billy Graham and others make a tremendous difference in sharing the grace of Jesus Christ with lost people all over the world. We need them, but the primary responsibility of sharing the Gospel falls upon us personally as pastors and the people in our churches.

Because the days were evil, the apostle Paul wanted the church at Ephesus to make the most of their time and walk wisely (Ephesians 5:15-16). Thirty years later after Paul wrote this letter, the apostle John wrote more to the Ephesians saying, *“You have left your first love . . . (Revelation 2:4-5)”*. They were asked to

do the good deeds they did at first when they came to Christ. But when they did not repent, the lampstand was removed. Their church fell prey to the evil time in which they lived. Not SENSING THE URGENCY to return to its first love, they lost their impact in a society that needed Christ. Friends, people are dying without Christ in communities surrounding our churches every second of the day and I just do not see the church having a SENSE OF URGENCY to share the Gospel. I am not necessarily asking that the church go through persecution, but with a heart like Billy Graham, let's take the Good News to those that need Jesus.

Sixty-four years ago, while serving at the 1954 Billy Graham London Crusade, Charlie Riggs developed four remarkable steps in sharing the Gospel and titled them "Steps to Peace with God." Devoted to sharing Christ with others and to discipling Christians, Riggs saw this tract as a natural overflow from the Billy Graham crusades. It is a great tool and I have used it many times. Will you courageously take this message that was given to us by the Lord Jesus and share how people can have peace with God?

"I haven't written my epitaph and I am not sure I should. Whatever it is, I hope it will be simple and that it will point people not to me, but to the One I served." -Billy Graham

*Pat Phinney
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