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# LEAVING A LEGACY OF LEVEL 5 LEADERSHIP

10 LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS  
FROM THE LIFE OF BILLY GRAHAM

**BOBBY HARRINGTON**

FOREWORD BY ROBERT COLEMAN

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A [Discipleship.org](https://www.Discipleship.org) Resource

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**Leaving a Legacy of Level 5 Multiplication: 10 Leadership Lessons from the Life of Billy Graham**

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Leaving a Legacy of Level 5 Leadership

# Leaving a Legacy of Level 5 Leadership

10 Leadership Lessons from the Life of Billy Graham

Bobby Harrington

Foreword by Dr. Robert Coleman

# Dedication

*This book is dedicated to Billy Graham,  
a man whose life was full of legacy principles  
for all of us to follow.*

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# Foreword

By Dr. Robert Coleman

This book by Bobby Harrington is a helpful and inspired description of Billy Graham's legacy for leaders—what Exponential refers to as Level 5 leadership or hero making.

I cannot find words to describe my admiration for Billy Graham. From the first time we met in the 1950s, he encouraged me in ministry. He was able to make a nobody feel like a somebody. He loved and honored people; he loved the world with a view of how much God loved the world.

Billy wanted everyone to do the best they could for the cause of Christ and to rise to a higher level by the grace of God. He inspired people to fulfill God's call on their lives. There was no distinction in his mind between rich or poor, small or great. He was not only the greatest evangelist of our generation, he also had a great desire to train others to proclaim the gospel and make disciples. It is not possible to fully appreciate Billy Graham without understanding all that he did to develop other leaders. In the leadership terms of today, he was a hero maker.

Billy had no ego or self-centeredness for his own recognition. He preferred the role of building up people and helping them rise to a higher level. He listened to people, even those he didn't agree with, and was a good judge of people. Time and again, he showed me this amazing ability to compel people to work with him, joining him in the vision God gave him to reach the world for Christ.

People continually asked Billy Graham, "What is the secret of your ministry?" He always gave three reasons: "The first is prayer, the second is prayer, and the third is prayer." The secret of Billy Graham's success as a hero maker lies in the fact that he didn't know he was Billy Graham.

No man in our generation had more positive influence in reaching the nations of the world for Christ than Billy Graham. May God help us all—that we could be hero makers like Billy Graham in the same ways he was like his (and our) Savior Jesus Christ.

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*Editor's Note: Billy Graham asked Robert Coleman to work with him to help develop the follow-up process from his crusades and to help train pastors around the world. From 1989-2001, Dr. Coleman led the Institute of Evangelism in the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College and served as dean of the Billy Graham International School of Evangelism. The basis of Dr. Coleman's ministry is his belief that Jesus' method of discipleship is the perfect one. Robert Coleman told me (Bobby) that he believes the reason his seminal work, The Master Plan of Evangelism, sold so many copies (over 3.5 million in 100 languages) and became the discipleship standard is because Billy Graham promoted it. He promoted it because he believed in a focus on its discipleship principles.*

# Introduction

By Todd Wilson, Co-Founder of Exponential

Pause for a minute and think about the specific ways you personally get to know Jesus. I don't just mean knowing more about Him. I'm talking about really, intimately knowing the person of Jesus Christ! Not the teacher and wise man Jesus, but the Savior and Lord you want to model and become more like.

Sometimes the best way for us to know Jesus is to see His love and character modeled in action through others. I've found it pure joy when God puts just the right person in my life at just the right time to model and show me Jesus! Each of us has those people. Consider it a blessing when God gives you people not just to tell you *about* Jesus, but also to *show* you Jesus modeled in bodily form!

When our two boys were growing up, there was one prayer I prayed more than any other. I prayed nearly every day for God to put just the right people, at just the right time, with just the right words, in their paths. Why? Because I know the power and the blessing of God's gift of putting fully surrendered Jesus followers in my path. I know that one of the best ways my family members and I get to know Jesus is to see Him modeled through other people.

I never had the privilege of knowing Dr. Billy Graham personally. I wish I had. But I did have the second-best thing—something better than any book, seminar or tribute written about him. Even better than a book, sermon or article he wrote. I know people who were either mentored or directly impacted by having a front-row seat to Dr. Graham.

Among them are the two leaders involved in writing this book: Bobby Harrington and Robert Coleman. I know and trust each of these leaders. Dr. Graham impacted each of them, including modeling the “10 Leadership Lessons” highlighted in this book. Robert Coleman had a front-row mentoring relationship and agrees these are trustworthy lessons from Dr. Graham's life.

Yes, Dr. Graham was a sinner just like the rest of us. But, we can know Jesus better by seeing how he lived his life, and by learning from his journey. We can see that the 10 Leadership Lessons described in this book were things Dr. Graham tried to live out because of his faith in Jesus and his desire to live as Jesus did.

Dr. Graham was faithfully married to one woman for his whole life. He and Ruth raised five children who know and pursue Jesus. He shared his faith with millions of people. He discovered and remained true to his calling. He led a quiet and humble life of obedience in spite of his celebrity status. And he was an amazing encourager, always looking for a way to lift up others.

### **The Impact of a Hero Maker**

Like me, you may not have known Dr. Graham personally, but you've almost certainly been impacted by him. That's because he was what we call a "Hero Maker." He spent a lifetime investing in and encouraging others. Without you knowing it, many of the people Dr. Graham mentored and impacted have, in turn, impacted you. That's what hero makers do. They leave a ripple effect, rubbing off on others to the third and fourth generation into the future.

It's clear that Dr. Graham's scorecard of success was not measured by what he did and accomplished, but instead by what Jesus did through him to impact and invest in other people.

My mentor Bob Buford captures the essence of how Dr. Billy Graham lived as a hero maker in several of his simple life sayings. Bob frequently said to me:

- "My fruit grows on other people's trees!"
- "You can do it; how can I help?"
- "I want to do for other people what my mentor has done for me!"
- "I want to be a catapult for other people!"

You see, Bob's approach is profoundly different than the world's wisdom and it's actually infectious. It lets us get off the treadmill of pursuing success in all the wrong ways. It positions us to be the disciple makers we were made to be. And it allows us to take our eyes off ourselves and fix them on Jesus and sharing Him with others.

Because my hero makers have modeled Jesus for me in such life-changing ways, I'm inspired to do the same thing for others. The legacy of hero makers is built not by what they accomplish themselves, but rather by the impact they catalyze and release through others.

While the measure of a hero maker's success is their relentless commitment to making heroes of others, the underlying secret to their success is difficult in our culture. You see, we must obey what Jesus commanded and die to ourselves. We must move from being heroes at the center of our own stories to becoming hero makers of others at the center of God's bigger story.

I love what Dr. Coleman wrote in his foreword, specifically that "the secret of Billy Graham's success as a hero maker lies in the fact that he didn't know he was Billy Graham."

We could also say that the secret of Billy Graham's success lies in the fact he didn't see himself as a hero at the center of his story. Instead, he saw himself as an ambassador of Jesus, the ultimate hero maker, at the center of God's bigger story. He understood well what it means to have your fruit growing on other people's trees.

In a world where the normal measure of success is to aspire to be the hero of the story with an ever-increasing platform and influence, Dr. Graham lived a faithful life of hero making.

As you read this book and digest the 10 lessons from Billy Graham's life, I encourage you to



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filter what you read through the lens of a new scorecard—one that requires you to see success not through your own accomplishments, but rather how you invest in others. Celebrate the great things Dr. Graham has done, but don't miss the fact that his greatest legacy comes through the impact he made on millions of people like Bobby Harrington and Robert Coleman. They represent the living legacy of Dr. Graham's life. As hero makers, we can mobilize a movement of people for the cause of Christ! The potential lies inside each of us.

### **Completely a God Thing**

This book is a total blessing to me for many reasons. Not the least of which is the way that God has intersected so many different people and threads in my life to produce this book in a seemingly miraculous way. Exponential has published more than 100 different books and worked with over 800 different national leaders. In our 13-year history, I've never seen a project come together in the way this book has.

From start to finish, we produced this resource in less than five days. I'm talking from conception, to manuscript, to cover design, to foreword by Robert Coleman to publishing. It's completely a God thing, and only His sovereign hand could have orchestrated this work. On our very best day of strategic planning, we could not have made this happen the way it did.

Robert Coleman and Bobby Harrington are two of my favorite people in the world. This book has caused me to reflect on why that is. Here's one common thread. Both of these men are seeking to live out the 10 lessons highlighted in this book. They are encouragers who see their fruit growing on other people's trees. Both have continued the cycle of becoming hero makers themselves.

Look inside Dr. Coleman's Bible, and you'll find hundreds of names of young leaders he has mentored. These leaders are now serving on every continent in the world. Dr. Coleman blessed me by writing the foreword for my book, *More: Find Your Personal Calling and Live Life to the Fullest Measure*. He was an amazing encourager to me through that process. His investment in me helped shaped how I understand personal calling. He called me several times, unsolicited, to help me make the book better. He is a hero maker to me and has impacted who I am.

Bobby Harrington has become one of my closest and trusted friends. Bobby was the answer to that prayer I prayed for God to put just the right person, at just the right place, at just the right time, in the path of my youngest son. Bobby took him under his wing and has personally disciplined him for several years. He and I co-founded discipleship.org together a few years ago, and I've seen firsthand how Bobby lives out the hero-maker practice of investing in other people. He is one of the greatest champions of biblical disciple making Jesus' way that I know in the U.S.

### **The Fruit of Hero Making**

Finally, imagine the impact of embracing a scorecard of success rooted in hero making? At Exponential, we're passionate about what we call our "4 to 10 mission." Specifically, we want to

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see the percentage of U.S. churches that ever reproduce increase from less than 4 percent to greater than 10 percent.

To see churches reproduce and multiply into God-breathed movements, we must witness a transformation in the personal scorecards of our leaders. We must see disciple making—not just leaders who make disciples, but leaders who make disciple makers to the third generation—become the new normal. We need leaders who surrender the leading role of being heroes and diligently pursue what it looks like to become hero makers to others.

The fruit of making disciple makers and becoming hero makers is multiplication.

If you're serious about any of these priorities, the 10 lessons from Billy Graham's life will help propel you forward. Let's get started!

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*Editor's Note: Todd Wilson is the co-founder and CEO of Exponential (exponential.org). Exponential exists to equip future movement makers with resources like this book. Exponential champions church multiplication and is passionate about seeing the percentage of U.S. churches that ever reproduce increase from less than 4 percent to greater than 10 percent. The 10 leadership lessons from the life of Billy Graham are strong, practical examples of the HeroMaker theme elements from Exponential.*

## Leaving a Legacy of Level 5 Leadership

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A promotional poster for the 2018 National Disciple Making Forum. The background features a city skyline at sunset with people sitting on a grassy area in the foreground. At the top, the year '2018' is displayed in large, light grey numbers. A central graphic shows a wooden stool on a grey cube with '20 18' written on its side. Below this, the text 'NATIONAL DISCIPLE MAKING FORUM' is written in bold black letters, followed by 'FORUM THEME:' in smaller yellow letters. A yellow horizontal bar contains the word 'DISCIPLING' in white capital letters. Overlaid on this is the word 'Relationships' in a large, white, handwritten-style font. At the bottom, the location 'NASHVILLE, TN' and 'CHURCH OF THE CITY (FRANKLIN CAMPUS)' are listed in white. The dates 'OCTOBER 25-26, 2018' are prominently displayed in large white letters. At the very bottom, the website 'DISCIPLESHIP.ORG' is shown with a left-pointing arrow, and a 'Register' button with a striped background is on the right.

2018

NATIONAL DISCIPLE MAKING FORUM

FORUM THEME:

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# Chapter 1

## Legacy and Leadership

In the early 2000s, Billy Graham described what it would be like when he died: “Someday you will read or hear that Billy Graham is dead. Don’t you believe a word of it! I shall be more alive than I am now. I will just have changed my address. I will have gone into the presence of God.”<sup>1</sup>

About 17 years ago, I was a Doctor of Ministry student under Dr. Thom Rainer at Southern Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. To help us take an in-depth view of what evangelism leadership looks like, he assigned us biographies of historic figures known for their evangelism effectiveness. We were to study their life and their ministry. Before I knew what had happened, he had assigned me Billy Graham. I don’t mind telling you I didn’t like it—not one bit. I hardly knew anything about Billy Graham at that time, other than I did not like him. I had several reasons.

The biggest reason was personal. When I became a follower of Jesus at the University of Calgary (in Canada) about 20 years earlier, my girlfriend’s atheist family wasn’t pleased (and that’s an understatement). They had effectively discouraged her from also following Jesus, using negative stereotypes of the primary Christian figure they knew: Billy Graham. To them, this man who impacted the lives of millions for eternity was an “evangelist” (they said with disgust) and a “Southern American fundamentalist.”

“You better watch it,” they told her, “Bobby is going to be just like Billy Graham.”

When I came to her house to pick her up, I could hear them disparagingly saying, “Here comes Billy Graham.” It broke my heart, and a short while later we broke up.

Without knowing much about Billy Graham, I was definitely aware of the criticism against him. He had been overly political, even a friend of the impeached President Richard Nixon. And in my eyes, he didn’t do enough on racial issues. Some even thought of him as racist. Also, he didn’t teach baptism at the point of conversion like the early Christians did in Acts 2. All these things mattered to me.

In hindsight, it was actually a long list of perceived concerns about a man that, in reality, I knew little about and had never met personally.

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*Editor’s Note: Bobby Harrington is the co-founder (with Todd Wilson) and executive director of Discipleship.org, a national forum and ministry that advocates for Jesus’ style of disciple making. He is the founding and lead pastor of Harpeth Christian Church (by the Harpeth River, just outside of Nashville, in Franklin, Tennessee).*

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So, when Dr. Rainer wouldn't budge on the assignment, I dove in and studied Billy Graham's life and ministry. My research changed my mind. Completely.

In fact, I ended up really liking and respecting this evangelist I had so many beefs with. Yes, he, like all of us, had his faults. But I was so impressed with what I learned that I distilled and wrote down my Top 10 lessons from his life as a paper for Dr. Rainer. That was 17 years ago. I put away the paper and never saw it again until this hero maker went Home to be with Jesus. Yet over the last 17 years, the learnings from his life have stayed with me and influenced my ministry in important ways.

That's why I'm pleased to be sharing the lessons I wrote back in seminary in this book today. Here's what's ironic about my story. I now hope that the family of my girlfriend from years ago got it right. I hope and pray that I am like Billy Graham in what I learned from him. I have sought to follow the 10 principles I discovered from his life, especially through the national disciple-making movement we launched, [discipleship.org](http://discipleship.org), and our national disciple-making forums. A simple research paper about this giant of our faith changed my life and how I serve God.

Billy Graham is part of the impact that we're making through [discipleship.org](http://discipleship.org) and our national ministry. Through this good work and his inspiring legacy, Billy continues to live on, influencing others as an exemplary hero maker. I hope this book helps you learn from his teachings and his life—in the same ways I and so many others have learned from him. And I pray that these leadership lessons will set you on the path to being a leader who invests in others, making disciples who make disciple makers—and ultimately being a Kingdom-building hero maker.

### The Marks of a Hero Maker

Before you can pursue hero making, you need to know some of the characteristics of this multiplication essential. I think you'll see that the life and teaching of Billy Graham exemplify each of these traits.

Let me unpack what it means to be a true hero maker and why we need to aspire to make heroes. Bottom line, Jesus is the ultimate hero maker. If we want to be more like Him, we'll make heroes. And Jesus is the ultimate example who through His life and ministry modeled and showed us how to make heroes. Jesus invested in others through life-on-life apprenticeship. A hero maker recognizes that, as author and philanthropist Bob Buford (also a hero maker to thousands) says, "My fruit grows on other people's trees." A hero maker shifts from being the hero of their own story to becoming the hero maker in God's unfolding story. Briefly, I'll share five specific characteristics of hero makers that we see in Jesus:

**A hero maker thinks about and values multiplication as the fruit of faithfulness**, realizing that the best way to maximize ministry happens through developing the leadership of others. We see this in the life of Jesus in Acts 1:8 when He casts a vision for taking the gospel to the ends of the earth and explains to His followers that He's going to do it through them: "... and you will be my witnesses." Jesus didn't think the mission would happen just through Him during His time on

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this earth. Acts shows us that He knew it would happen through others who would multiply others who would, in turn, multiply still others. Jesus thought about multiplication.

**A hero maker gives permission to others to see in themselves what they don't see**, engaging the leadership potential in the people all around them. Looking for and identifying leadership potential in the people around you will cause you to begin to lead with a bias to “yes” and give people permission to fully join in the mission. We see this in the life of Jesus when He says to a group of rag-tag working class fellows, “Come follow Me.” They never expected a rabbi to see them as worthy of teaching and leading. But Jesus saw in them a group that could change the world. He not only gave them permission; He also told them they could change the world!

**A hero maker multiplies disciple-makers to the third generation and beyond**, sharing not just what you know to help others follow Jesus, but to also share your life and invest in the development of leaders who do the same for other leaders. We see this in the life of Jesus as He spent three years with primarily 12 people. The way Jesus did apprenticeship is best explained by the *koine* Greek word *diatribo* meaning, “to spend time with.” Jesus spent time with the Twelve and shared His life with them, and they, in turn, multiplied themselves into a movement of Jesus followers.

**A hero maker identifies and activates the gifts in others to multiply their impact far beyond themselves.** Not only do hero makers ask God to bless the gifts He has given you, they also ask God to bless the leaders they've developed and send out at the end of their apprenticeship. The most obvious example of this is in Matthew 28. Jesus turns over the leadership of the movement to His closest followers and tells them, in effect, “I have all authority, and will work through you as you go!” Jesus activated their leadership gifts by giving them His blessing to “go.”

**A hero maker chooses each day to build and advance God's Kingdom instead of their own empire.** Hero makers are no longer only concerned with who's showing up at *your* thing; you also count who's doing God's thing! Jesus told His followers in simple terms, “Seek first the Kingdom of God.” They followed this admonition, and all that mattered was that God was keeping track of how the Jesus mission was being advanced around the world.

In the next chapters, we'll continue to look at Billy Graham as a Level 5 hero maker as we trace the turning points and milestones of a life and ministry that has impacted millions of eternities around the world. Throughout 60 years of faithfulness to his Savior, Billy Graham gave us a beautiful example of how God uses a surrendered heart ...



## **Chapter 2**

# **The Life of Billy Graham: Turning Points and Milestones**

On November 7, 1918 William Franklin Graham Jr. entered the world. The son of William and Morrow Graham, Billy (as he liked to be called) grew up in Charlotte, North Carolina, in a typical Presbyterian farming family in the South.<sup>2</sup>

Although Billy was actively involved in family Bible study, prayer, and church (his family held nightly devotions), he didn't make the decision to personally and completely surrender to Christ until, fittingly, at age 16 in the September fall of 1934 he was touched by the preaching of Kentucky-born traveling evangelist Mordechai Fowler Ham at a Charlotte revival/crusade.

This truly transforming conversion propelled Graham to a life of surrender and service. His impact is tangible evidence of the truth that hero makers die to self—and in that surrender God immeasurably uses us. Over 60 years of ministry, Graham presented Jesus Christ and his work on the cross to more people in live audiences than any other person in history—more than 210 million in more than 185 countries and territories.

And through his words on radio, television, video, film, books, articles, and the Internet, hundreds of millions of more people were exposed to Jesus' gospel.<sup>3</sup> Without a doubt, Billy Graham was the most significant and influential Christian figure of the 20th century. Through his live crusades around the world, God used him to reach an estimated 3 million people who turned over their hearts and lives to Jesus.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Ministry of a Hero Maker**

After graduating from high school in 1936, the son of a dairy farmer went off to study the Bible at Bob Jones College in Cleveland, Tennessee. Due to recurring illness and an oppressed environment at the fundamentalist school, he transferred to Florida Bible Institute in January 1937.<sup>5</sup>

In 1939, to help his emerging ministry as an evangelist, Billy switched from the Presbyterian church of his youth, requested baptism by immersion, and joined the Peniel Baptist Church near

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the Florida Bible Institute. At this church, he was ordained as a Baptist minister and held his first revival in a Baptist church.

In 1940, Billy transferred a second time to Wheaton College, where he received a bachelor's degree in anthropology and married Ruth Bell in 1943. Shortly after they married, he became the pastor of Village Baptist Church in Western Springs, Illinois, just outside Chicago. He served this church for less than two years before becoming Youth for Christ's first field representative in 1945. The move would be a significant catalyst for what was to come.

In the four years that Graham spent as an evangelist with Youth for Christ, he preached throughout the United States and in England. In his first year alone, he preached in 47 states and to large crowds of up to 20,000 people, while setting an airline record traveling 200,000 miles.

He learned how to gather crowds for rallies, what made them effective, and how to preach the gospel in ways that made sense to the youth of the day. It was the perfect training ground for a man who would go on to preach to hundreds of millions of people.

During his time with Youth for Christ, Northwest Schools in Minneapolis tapped him for their president. Under his charge, enrollment grew from 800 to 1,200 students. There, he gained valuable experience in finances, promotion, delegating and building a team of dedicated people who desired to serve God with him.

Shortly after leaving Youth for Christ in 1949, Graham became a national figure when he held a highly successful crusade in Los Angeles. That event would be the turning point. Buoyed by the response, Billy prayed a specific prayer: Should he extend the length of the crusade?

He soon got his answer when Stuart Hamblen, a well-known and flamboyant radio personality in Los Angeles, decided to personally promote the crusade on his popular radio show. On air, Hamblen shared that he had found Jesus at the crusade, saying, "I've quit smoking, and I've quit drinking." The Los Angeles crusade was eventually extended from three to eight weeks and saw other famous personalities attend and publicly moved to accept Christ.

He garnered widespread attention when newspaper mogul William Randolph Hearst told his reporters to "puff Graham." Overnight, the crusade made front-page news in Hearst's *Los Angeles Examiner* and *Herald Express*, followed by national headlines when the Associated Press picked up an article and ran with it.<sup>6</sup> In the end, more than 300,000 people came to hear him in Los Angeles with 6,000 people reportedly giving their lives to Christ.

The success of the revival and his newfound national status led Graham to establish the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and a radio program in 1950 followed by other equally successful crusades, including the highly publicized Washington, D.C. event in 1952.

Two years later, Billy Graham made his international foray. He went to England where, to everyone's surprise, the crusade saw the same kind of response the Los Angeles event had generated. He preached to record crowds in London in such landmark venues as Harringay Arena, Trafalgar Square, and Hyde Park. The three-month crusade was an international

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sensation, widely covered in the press. It even led to special meetings with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Queen Elizabeth, and Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill. Graham ended his time in London with a sermon in the rain to 122,000 people at Wembley Stadium, with an estimated 10,000 people reportedly responding.

In a very short period of time, Billy Graham had become the national spokesman for evangelical Christianity. In 1956, he led the way in establishing *Christianity Today*, which emerged as the leading magazine for pastors in America followed by *Decision* magazine, an inspirational publication for average Christians, which soon became the most popular one of its kind with a circulation 5 million.

One year later, Graham led another highly publicized four-month crusade in New York City's Madison Square Garden. In total, attendance numbered 2 million people, with an unprecedented 60,000 coming forward to commit their lives to Christ.

It would be during the New York crusade that Graham would make the life-changing decision that would bring his name and the gospel into households across America. He would bring his crusades to television. Each Saturday evening, he preached to an estimated 7 million people, including 30,000 who professed newfound faith in Christ and notified the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association of their decision by mail. By the late 1950s, most Americans had not only heard about Billy Graham, they had also heard something of his teaching, either on radio or on television.

From that point on, Billy Graham went on to hold crusades in more than 185 countries, with ongoing record-smashing gatherings everywhere he went. In Brazil's Rio de Janeiro, 143,000 people in one day showed up to hear him preach (and another one-day record of 225,000 in 1974). In 1973, he preached to approximately 1.1 million people in Seoul South Korea. Four years later, he was the first evangelist to almost miraculously break through the Iron Curtain of communism, holding crusades first in Hungary, and then 19 years later in 1992, he led a three-day crusade in Moscow, where 3.2 million of the city's residents received invitations mailed to their homes.

During the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Billy Graham held an additional 11 crusades in major American cities. Despite a 25-year battle with Parkinson's disease (officially revealed by his son, Franklin Graham, on his father's 97th birthday), he continued to display the heart of "America's Pastor" in his later years.

Three days after the September 11 attacks in 2001, he preached at the Washington National Cathedral service. Four years later, he held his last crusade in New York City before a crowd of 90,000 and one year after that in March 2006, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, he came out of retirement to lift the spirits of New Orleans area pastors and residents, delivering a sermon to an overflow crowd of 17,800 at New Orleans Arena. The size and influence of his crusades, preaching and teaching—and how God used him through each one—is simply awe-inspiring and difficult to fathom.

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Moreover, Billy Graham's focus on the global Church also led to permanent impact through world congresses, such as the landmark gathering in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1974, where he brought together 2,400 Protestant leaders from 150 countries and Amsterdam.

Or in 2000, when he mobilized approximately 10,000 people to focus on a global vision of evangelism. This is hero making on a grand scale—using your influence to pour into others and empowering them for the purpose of making disciples throughout the world, or as Jesus says in Acts 1:8, “my witnesses...to the ends of the earth.”

For more than half of the 20th century and into the 21st, Graham served as an adviser to the nation's top leaders, including 12 consecutive presidents. From Harry Truman through Barack Obama, he offered counsel when asked, often establishing intimate relationships that lasted for decades. In an interview with CNN, President George W. Bush recounted how Graham “helped him to quit drinking and led him to Jesus.”<sup>7</sup>

In sum, from 1949 until the day of his death in 2017, Billy Graham became the most influential Christian on the planet. He regularly appeared on the list of the 10 most admired people in America and the world and even appeared on the covers of *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Life*, *U.S. News and World Report* and *Parade*. Graham received countless recognitions—from the Templeton Foundation Prize for Progress in Religion and the Presidential Medal of Freedom Award (1983) to the Congressional Gold Medal Award (1996), the highest honors available in both religious and government branches.

And his leadership legacy includes the remarkable distinction of having appeared 61 times on Gallup's annual Top 10 poll listing called the “Most Admired Man and Woman”—more than any other man since the listing debuted in 1948.

Though many smarter men and women than me have tried, properly describing and quantifying the influence and impact of Billy Graham's life and ministry goes beyond our human abilities.

God used his surrender and investment in others in ways we can write about—and in far more ways we'll never see or hear about this side of Heaven. I'm incredibly thankful that Billy Graham gave his heart, mind and soul to God that fall in 1934 and grateful for the privilege of sharing with you over the next two chapters the specific lessons I learned from the life and Level 5 leadership of this hero maker.

# Chapter 3

## 10 Leadership Lessons (Part 1)

*The life, influence and ministry of Billy Graham give us numerous leadership lessons to learn from and practice. Over the next two chapters, I share with you my top 10. I hope you'll take in these insights and use them—both in your life and ministry—as you press on toward discovering your role as a hero maker in God's story.*

### 1. Pray earnest prayers.

Billy Graham is known for being a man of prayer. And for good reason. Story after story paints vivid pictures of his close-knit communion with his Savior.

The most significant decisions in his life were formed in times of intimate prayer. In fact, his calling to be an evangelist was born out of a wrestling match with God after his first fiancé, Emily Cavanaugh, dropped him for a man that seemed to have better potential for ministry. In the spring of 1938, the 20-year-old Graham spent many sleepless nights walking and praying for three or four hours. Biographer William Martin describes the evening when Graham finally and firmly committed to ministry:

“Around midnight one evening, as he returned to the campus from one of his brooding walks, he knelt alongside the 18th green of the golf course and said, ‘All right, Lord, if You want me, you’ve got me. I’ll be what you want me to be, and I’ll go where you want me to go.’ And that was it ... Having set his hand to the plow, Billy Graham never looked back.”<sup>8</sup>

Earnest prayer was also at the root of his life leading up to the success of the Los Angeles crusade that propelled him into the public eye in 1949. Martin shares a story from Roy Gustafson, longtime evangelist with Graham, about a prayer time together:

“When Billy’s turn came, his friends heard not his customary clear resonance but a muffled groaning. When Gustafson cocked open an eye to discover the cause of the unusual sounds, he saw that Billy, still wearing his suit and tie and far away from any crowd that might acclaim his piety and humility, had thrown himself face forward onto the ground in abject prostration and was beseeching God for an opportunity to serve him more fully.”<sup>9</sup>

Again, before making the decision to develop a national radio program, Graham committed the matter to prayer. Fred Dienert, a key figure instrumental in getting his radio venture going, describes to Martin how Graham prayed about it:

“Billy knelt at the one chair and started to pray. I can’t tell you all that was in the prayer, but I know this: The pipeline was open. I knew he was talking to the Lord, and I knew the

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Lord was listening. He said, ‘Lord, I’ve got this little house in Montreat. I’ll be glad to put a mortgage on it. I’ll do whatever You want me to do. You know my heart. We don’t have the money, but I would like to do it.’ It was a great prayer, a really terrific prayer! Then Billy said, ‘Lord, I want to put out a fleece. I want \$25,000 by midnight.’”<sup>10</sup>

The answered prayer confirmed God’s leading. Two last-minute gifts came in and brought the total to exactly \$25,000. Soon, Graham and Dienert launched the national radio program.

From the very beginning, his earnest prayer mindset was formative in both his character as a leader and as a hero maker—as well as the crusades themselves. Martin describes Graham’s personal practice:

“In sermons and articles and interviews and printed excerpts from his diaries, he often spoke of long stretches of prayer, or praying immediately upon arising, of an entire afternoon spent pouring his heart to the Lord, of walking out under the starry sky to pray, or delightful prayer time with a close circle of friends, and of dropping to his knees again and again as he wrestled with some decision or difficulty.”<sup>11</sup>

### **2. Be Confident in the Trustworthiness of Scripture**

Billy Graham was known for his deep and sincere convictions about the Bible and its central message. He was so convinced of the Bible’s inerrancy and divinely inspired trustworthiness that others were naturally drawn to believe what he believed about the Word. The defining characteristic of his belief and preaching was forged through a life-changing moment with God in prayer. In the late 1940s, Billy was at a conference with several other ministry friends in California. Among the young theologians were some who were wrestling with their doubts about the trustworthiness and authority of Scripture.

“Suddenly, I wondered if the Bible could be trusted completely,” Graham recalled. Biographer Russ Busby describes the whole evening:

“Billy then recalled the moment that changed him forever. ‘That night, I walked out in the moonlight, my heart heavy and burdened. I dropped to my knees and opened my Bible on a tree stump. If the issue were not settled soon, I knew I could not go on. ‘Oh God,’ I prayed, ‘there are many things in this Book as Your Word of faith. I’m going to allow my faith to go beyond my intellect and believe that this is Your Inspired Word.’ From that moment on, I have never doubted God’s Word. When I quote the Bible, I believe I am quoting the very Word of God and there’s an extra power in it. One month later, we began the Los Angeles crusade.’”<sup>12</sup>

The resolve was a key turning point that led, no doubt, to the effectiveness of the Los Angeles crusade and Billy’s entire ministry going forward. The key young theologian who expressed his doubt that night was Charles Templeton. Leading up to that turning-point night for each man, both he and Graham were part of Youth For Christ; many thought Templeton was a better preacher than Billy and was likely to achieve more in the Kingdom of God. Graham went one

way, and Templeton went the other. Before long, Templeton had abandoned orthodox beliefs and left the ministry.

Graham's absolute certainty about the teachings and power of the Bible led to a life and ministry filled with great power. As Martin points out, "His own belief was final and unshakable, if not fully explicable, and because he had no doubts, he was able to convey in his voice, his gestures, and his absolute forthrightness a personal authority that bolstered and exemplified the authority of Scripture."<sup>13</sup>

### 3. Focus on the Basics

One of this hero maker's most important strengths was his ability to focus on and share a simple explanation of the gospel, as he understood it. This simple but powerful practice allowed him to be very effective at making the basic saving message of the Bible clear. And it enabled him to bring believers together by omitting the things that divide them. The seeds of this focus were sown during his early years at Florida Bible Institute where he met people from various Protestant traditions—as well as from his early ministry as a traveling evangelist for the interdenominational group Youth for Christ.

Martin puts it, "In keeping with his modest aspiration to know nothing 'save Jesus Christ and him crucified,' Billy Graham's theology was anything but abstruse. The heart of his preaching was and would ever remain a short list of straightforward affirmations."<sup>14</sup>

Focusing on the basics meant that Graham seldom developed biblical teaching that adequately covered the breadth of discipleship. And he regretted that fact. He was once asked if he were to just be a preacher of a local church, what would he do?

"I would gather about 12 men and meet with them regularly and disciple them," he said. He believed this life-on-life discipleship was Jesus' way and the best way to build a church. But Graham felt, as a traveling evangelist, he could not do what Jesus did. So he focused on encouraging people to listen to Robert Coleman's teaching on discipleship for the local church. He also sought to personally ensure there were programs to build up leaders established around the world.

Graham's simple approach allowed him to reach people from vastly diverse Christian traditions. Graham stuck to the basics, rarely pushing teachings that alienated people. This truth defined his ability to develop crusades that united the vast majority of Protestant groups and even Roman Catholic and Orthodox believers. And it was the reason he could initiate and lead Protestants into such great projects, such as starting *Christianity Today* and *Decision* magazines, founding Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and organizing landmark gatherings, such as Lausanne I and Lausanne II, Amsterdam 2000, etc.

His focus on the basics helped him lower and break down the walls to the simple message he preached.<sup>15</sup> Martin describes Graham's attitude, based upon Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 9: 19-27.

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“‘The Apostle Paul’s experience has been a key to my decisions on this sort of thing,’ he explained. ‘When he had a doubt as to where he should go and how he should handle himself, he said, ‘I have, in short, been all things to all sorts of men that by every possible means I might win some to God. I do all this for the sake of the gospel; I want to play my part in it properly’ . . . ‘Those verses have been the key to a great deal of what I have done in my life.’”<sup>16</sup>

### **4. Live Graciously**

Simply put, Graham saw good in everyone and in every situation. Those who listened to him speak at crusades and other live events or hear how he responded when he was attacked on radio or television, quickly noticed how kind and gracious he was to everyone in his path, especially those who declared themselves as his enemies. He could truthfully (and winsomely) help people be less judgmental about such diverse issues as Richard Nixon’s lies, Bill Clinton’s scandalous affair, religious freedom under communist rule, and the practice of Native American religion. Significantly, he did it all in a credible way, while at the same time holding to the sinful and corrupt nature of human beings.

Both publicly and privately, he showed remarkable grace and indefatigable patience. When his enemies wrote to criticize him, Graham always wrote back, “Thank you for your letter, I’ve noted its comments and God bless you!”

A conversation between Graham and one of his chief critics, Dr. Bob Jones, gives us insight into Graham’s gracious *modus operandi*. Toward the end of Jones’ life, Billy went out of his way to meet with him. He came to Dr. Bob’s room and greeted him warmly. Jones went on the attack. And Billy simply turned the other cheek, telling Jones he would leave the matter in God’s hands. At first, Graham’s self-effacing responses fell on stony ground, but eventually Jones softened. Describing the scene, Martin notes that, “eventually the men in the room shook hands and prayed together, but the reconciliation did not occur.”<sup>17</sup> God used Graham’s resolve to be gracious in every situation to show Christ’s unconditional love to countless people—even his critics.

### **5. Adhere to High Ethical Standards**

For many people, Billy Graham’s single most important attribute is his financial and moral integrity. Over 60 years of ministry, he managed to avoid any scandal, both sexually and financially. From his earliest days of childhood and into his teenage years, personal integrity was important to Billy Graham. He never even kissed Ruth Bell, the woman who would become his wife, until after they were formally engaged. Yet he wasn’t labeled a prude or moralistic. He just always wanted to live rightly and be perceived that way.

Unlike many of the traveling evangelists of his day, Graham never took a percentage of the offerings for himself. Instead, he made himself accountable to the board of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, which paid him a set salary comparable to that of a large church pastor. We all know he could’ve made millions for himself through his crusades, books, tapes and countless other resources. But that wasn’t his interest or his goal. In his description of three things that can trap a man, Graham summed up his views on integrity:



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“First – Pride: How subtle the devil is, and how he uses pride in our lives. God says in the Bible to humble yourselves (James 4:10). Second – Money: How many have been tripped up on money! Dwight L. Moody, the American evangelist of the 1800s, said, ‘God will let thousands of dollars flow through your hands if you do not let much stick.’ Third – Morals: Christ and Self are perfectly incompatible. To have the one, we must be prepared to surrender the other. The heart subtly schemes to hold both, but it does not deceive Christ.’”<sup>18</sup>

# Chapter 4

## 10 Leadership Lessons (Part 2)

*In the last chapter (Part 1), we looked at character-building traits Billy Graham exemplified and modeled for us. In Part 2, we pick up where we left off to look at the last five insights, focusing on how he related to others and the culture around him. I think you'll see that this Level 5 hero maker was always thinking Kingdom and multiplication.*

### **6. Recruit and Surround Yourself with Great People**

Not only was Billy Graham personally perceived as an outstanding person, but also throughout his life, he surrounded himself with other outstanding Christians who stayed with him and helped him carry out his calling.

His wife Ruth was primary in this group. A missionary's daughter who grew up in China, Ruth struggled with her final decision to marry Billy because she, personally, felt a call to missions; she knew he wanted to be an evangelist. She didn't realize that God would use her to support an evangelist whose influence would impact the whole world. Ruth Bell preceded Billy in Heaven 11 years before his homecoming. She was a godly, bright, hardworking, spirited, and beautiful woman, who excelled both as Billy Graham's most important support person and the mother to their five children. Billy Graham spent half of his adult life on the road, away from his family—a fact he publicly admitted and expressed regret over. Still, those closest to the family believe that Ruth's attention and care for their family helped fill that void.

At just the right time, Billy Graham was able to add men and women to form an evangelist's dream team of leaders who invested in him while he invested in them, people like Cliff Barrows, Tedd Smith, George Beverly Shea, T.W. and Grady Wilson. William Martin described the decision process that successful West Coast evangelist Cliff Barrows went through as he considered joining the Billy Graham Association. Barrows knew this would mean leaving behind his own ministry. He and his wife made the decision and went to Graham's hotel room to share it.

“‘Bill,’ Cliff said, ‘God has given us peace in our hearts. As long as you want us to, from now till the Lord returns, or wherever, I’ll be content to be your song leader, carry your bag, go anywhere, do anything you want me to do.’ It was a notable surrender of self, all the more so because it was volunteered rather than demanded. Forty years later . . . Barrows reflected on the sacrifice of ego he had made and said in a quiet tone, utterly free of dissimulation, ‘I still have that same peace of mind and heart. I think Bill knows that.’”<sup>19</sup>

Billy surrounded himself with outstanding men and women who were destined to have successful lives apart from him. When they joined him, they lifted up Graham—and the gospel message—to unprecedented, modern-day impact.

## 7. Let the Day of Judgment Drive Your Life and Mission

Billy Graham's life and life mission provide good examples of what happens when we keep our eyes focused on the prize—the day when God will judge each human being. He believed that he and others would be saved by God's grace, but the hero maker also had a passion to stand before God on that day and be joined by countless saved people—what he saw as “trophies of gratitude to God” for his atonement in Christ.

As he told friends just before the Los Angeles crusade in 1949, “I want the Lord to come, but I sure would like to do something great for Him before he does.”<sup>20</sup> Billy was known for saying, “I am convinced that the greatest act of love we can ever perform for people is to tell them about God's love for them in Jesus Christ.”<sup>21</sup>

Throughout history, those who have effectively reached people for Christ focused on the end of life like Billy did. Evangelist D.L. Moody once said, “I look upon this world as a wrecked vessel. God has given me a lifeboat and said to me, ‘Moody, save all you can.’” Charles Spurgeon said, “If you think you are going to win souls, you must throw your soul into your work, just as a warrior must throw his soul into a battle, or victory will not be yours . . . Indeed, it is a race. As such, nobody wins unless he strains every muscle and sinew.”

Billy Graham summed up his life's intent in a few simple words: “My one purpose in life is to help people find a personal relationship with God.”<sup>22</sup>

## 8. Stay Relevant

From his earliest days at Youth for Christ, Graham was committed to using contemporary methods, forms, and means to communicate the gospel, which greatly helped him connect with unchurched people and emerging generations. Martin describes the early days of Graham's ministry.

“To underline their announcement that Christianity did not have to be drab and dismal but could provide ‘Old-fashioned Truth for Up-to-date Youth’ and be ‘Geared to the Times, but Anchored to the Rock,’ YFC leaders wore colorful suits and sports coats, neon ‘glo-sox,’ garish hand-painted ties, and gaudy bow ties, some of which lit up. The rallies themselves were a sort of evangelical vaudeville, with usherettes, youth choirs and quartets and trios and soloists, ‘smooth melodies from a consecrated saxophone, Bible quizzes, patriotic and spiritual testimonies by famous and semi-famous preachers, athletes, entertainers, military heroes, business and civic leaders and such specialty acts as magicians, ventriloquists . . . The sermon of course was the climax toward which all the preliminaries pointed. As Billy Graham observed, ‘we used every modern means to catch the attention of the unconverted – and then we punched them right between the eyes with the gospel.’”<sup>23</sup>

From the earliest days, Graham was a pioneer in the effective use of radio, television, movies, and other media. He sought to communicate the contemporary message through all useful

contemporary means. This is where we see Billy Graham in full hero-making action. To communicate the gospel in the most relevant ways possible, Graham often shared his giant platform with younger leaders, including speakers and contemporary rock groups or Christian music groups like dc Talk, Newsboys or Jars of Clay. He knew younger people could talk to and influence younger people, and as a hero maker, he gave the spotlight to them, recognizing and engaging their gifts.

### **9. Address the Concerns and Needs of People**

One of the many reasons Billy Graham was so evangelistically effective was his intentional resolve to discover and relate to the concerns and needs of his audience. In the 1950s, he seemed to know just what people thought and just what needed to be said with conviction. He saw moral decline and was able to describe it in ways that avoided moral dogmatism yet tapped into the concerns over how people were living. He was always able to bring conviction without repelling people or overdoing it. People just liked what he said and how he said it; they felt like he represented their thoughts, and they wanted to embrace his beliefs. In the late '50s and into the '60s, Graham tapped into his audience's fears over nuclear war and communism in ways that drew people to God—without panic.

In the '70s and '80s, he identified the angst the common man felt about divorce, loneliness, and emptiness. Think about it. For over 60 years, Billy Graham was able to communicate the gospel in each new decade against a backdrop of changing social, cultural and economic conditions and in light of constantly shifting concerns and needs.

After September 11, it was Billy Graham that President Bush turned to and asked to address a shocked and hurting nation. Graham and his words were effective, kind, truthful, and calming as he carefully described radical Islam while, in the same sermon, drawing people to Jesus.

### **10. Pray, Then Plan Strategically**

Billy Graham stands in a long line of effective evangelists in American history. He learned from and adapted the methods of Charles Finney, D.L. Moody and others. In fact, in the early days, the crews that helped evangelist Billy Sunday with his revivals also helped Billy Graham with his crusades.

Graham strategically started his ministry with the help of these men he organized around him. He believed in prayer, strategy, and planning—in that order. And it was those practices that came together to pull off the huge, complex and challenging live adventures. The average person has no idea how much behind-the-scenes organization was necessary for a Billy Graham crusade.

At no point in his ministry did he see a dichotomy between prayer and planning. Prayer, strategy, planning, organization, preaching—in his eyes, they all worked together. Martin points out, “As with any Billy Graham Evangelistic Association project, little was left to chance. Planning in every area was extensive and meticulous, but no aspect received more attention than the program itself.”<sup>24</sup>

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Many times, strategy and planning came into play in major ways. In 1954 as Graham's crusade team prepared to head to London, reports circulated that the British team was astonished the marketing was so expensive (50,000 pounds), utilizing 10,000 press announcements and 30,000 posters. But Graham knew they needed an extensive and full-force strategy to reach the community. In 1957, team members produced 40,000 bumper stickers, 35,000 window posters and 650 strategic billboards for the New York crusade. Then again in the 1990s, more than 3 million invitations were created and mailed, inviting Moscow residents to hear the gospel. Graham also purposefully and strategically cultivated key contacts with politicians and media because he knew they were essential for the crusades' success.

He was smart and savvy about strategy and planning, believing that wise, godly leaders avail themselves of all reasonable human means to help share the life-changing message of the gospel. He was always thinking multiplication and Kingdom—because that's what effective hero makers do!

### **Level 5 Impact**

Superlatives and adjectives just don't properly describe the worldwide impact of a simple farm boy from Charlotte, North Carolina. Surrendering his will and life to God, He used Graham to impact the world with a multiplication ministry that has far surpassed and exceeded anything anyone else has accomplished in the last 100 years. In Graham's words, he believed that Heaven didn't make this life less important; it made it more important.

And yet this hero maker built his life and ministry on proclaiming the Kingdom message and the ultimate presence of Jesus: "The most thrilling thing about Heaven," he often said, "is that Jesus Christ will be there. I will see Him face to face."



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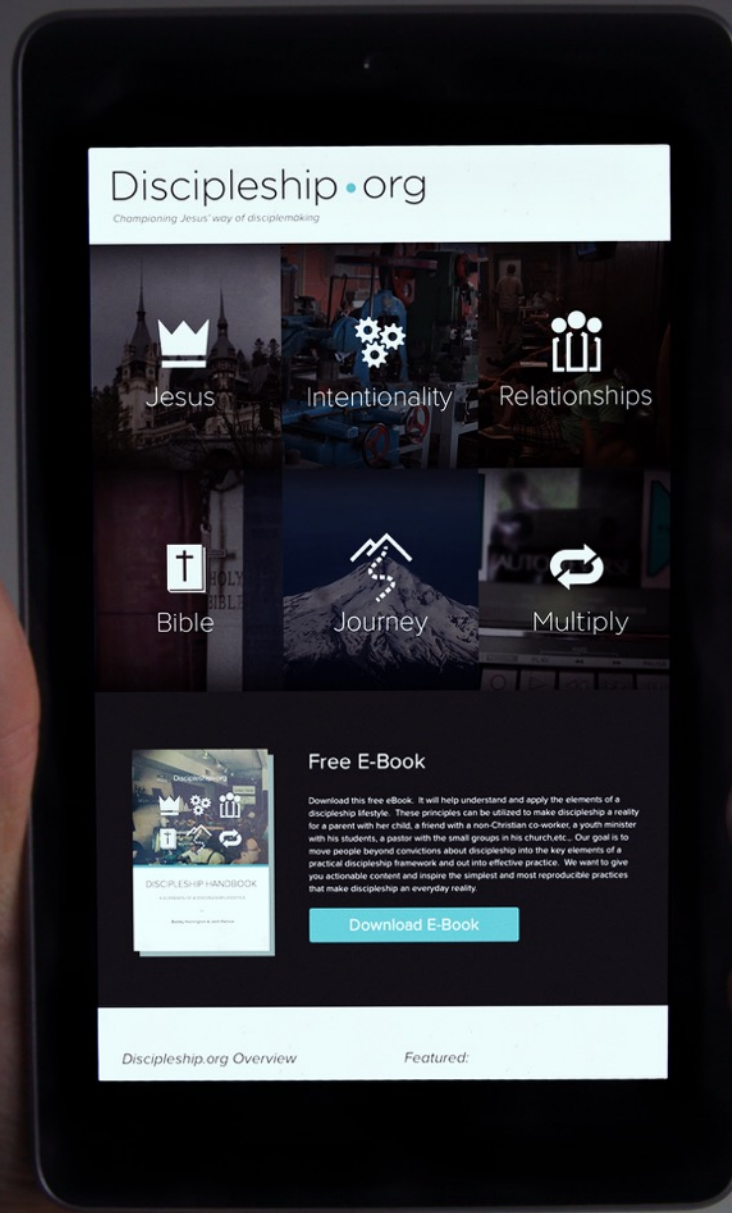
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## About Bobby Harrington

Bobby Harrington is the co-founder (with Todd Wilson) and executive director of Discipleship.org, a national forum and ministry that advocates for Jesus' style of disciple making. He is the founding and lead pastor of Harpeth Christian Church (by the Harpeth River, just outside of Nashville, in Franklin, Tennessee). He is a Bible teacher, an experienced church planter, coach of church leaders and the author of several books on discipleship, including the popular title DiscipleShift (with Jim Putman) and the recently released book, The Disciple Maker's Handbook (with Josh Patrick).

Bobby has studied at such places as the University of Calgary and Regent College (in Canada), Asbury Seminary, Harding School of Theology, and Princeton Theological Seminary. He has won camel races in Jordan, cliff-dived in competitions near Fish Creek, Alberta, played in chess tournaments in Russia, and he has talked to those who have talked to Elvis (all this may not be true). He has a Doctor of Ministry degree from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

He and his lovely wife Cindy (that IS true) treasure spending time with their friends, their grown children and their families, and their grandchild.



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Russ Busby, *Billy Graham: God's Ambassador* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, 1999), 279.

<sup>2</sup> The biographical material available on Billy Graham is almost limitless. For the sake of this book, I drew upon various material, but I heavily utilized two primary sources: William Martin, *A Prophet With Honor: The Billy Graham Story* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1991) and Russ Busby, *Billy Graham: God's Ambassador* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Billy Graham, Billy Graham and Team Bios, sec. 1 [online] accessed June 9, 2002, <http://www.billygraham.org/about/billygraham.asp>.

<sup>4</sup> William Martin, Billy Graham, *Christian History* (Winter 2000) [online] accessed June 9, 2002 <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/2000/001/1.12.html>.

<sup>5</sup> The details are described in Billy Graham, *Just As I Am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), pp 39-42.

<sup>6</sup> Lewis A. Drummond provides a succinct summary of these event in *The Evangelist: The Worldwide Impact of Billy Graham* (Nashville, Tennessee: Word Publishing, 2001), pp. 1-13.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2018/02/22/587981078/the-rev-billy-grahams-casket-will-lie-in-honor-at-the-capitol>

<sup>8</sup> Martin, *Prophet With Honor*, p. 74.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 109.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 135.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 157-158.

<sup>12</sup> Busby, *God's Ambassador*, p.45.

<sup>13</sup> Martin, *Prophet With Honor*, p. 164.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p.155.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, pp 342-343 for some unhealthy ambiguity on Graham's part.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 501.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 240.

<sup>18</sup> Busby, *God's Ambassador*, p. 65.

<sup>19</sup> Martin, *Prophet With Honor*, p. 104.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 109.

<sup>21</sup> Busby, *God's Ambassador*, p. 129.

<sup>22</sup> Russ Busby, *Billy Graham: God's Ambassador* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, 1999), p. 1

<sup>23</sup> Martin, *Prophet With Honor*, p. 93.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 443.