

Roots in Ripon

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Chuck Roots

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The Ripon Bulletin

Well Done, Billy

If ever there was a person to emulate, it would have been Billy Graham. This past week, Reverend Graham breathed his last on this side of heaven, leaving the cares of this mortal life behind at age 99.

There are few names that are known world-wide, but Billy Graham is among those few. His ministry has been, by any measure, phenomenal. His compassionate delivery of the Gospel message of Jesus Christ to millions around the globe through his crusades are the stuff of legends.

Billy Graham was truly an inspiration to those of us who lived through the many decades of his ministry. Whether or not you believe in the Gospel which Billy Graham preached, it cannot be denied that he faithfully proclaimed the Good News right to the end of his life. There was nothing phony about him. He is the real deal.

How many people of every race, tongue, and tribe around the world have accepted Jesus as their Savior because of this man's ministry? Year after year his Billy Graham Crusades filled stadiums and arenas around the world. At the end of each sermon, an invitation would be offered to anyone desiring to accept Jesus. Having attended a couple of crusades, and even working in one in San Jose in the early 1980s, I was impressed with the simplicity of his delivery, while at the same time the winsomeness of Christ was unmistakable in his appeal to sinners.

We Christians often get excited about what it will be like when we get to heaven. A verse from a song by a Christian singer known as Honeytree several decades ago rings in my mind. She wrote, "*Heaven is a wonderful place, filled with glory and grace! I wanna see my Savior's face, 'cause Heaven is a wonderful place! I wanna go there!*" Well, Billy Graham must have experienced that wonderful reception when he stepped across that great divide between here and eternity. I suspect that after he has seen Jesus face-to-face for the first time, he will then begin the time of being greeted by those who accepted Jesus at his crusades. He may be busy for a while!

I never had any personal contact with Rev. Graham other than he walked within an arm's length of where I was serving in the San Jose Crusade. My mother attended the Oakland Crusade in 1972 where she committed her life to Jesus. The Lord must have been working on both my mother and me at the same time. I was overseas then, totally unaware of my mother's decision. A few months later I gave

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my life to Christ at a Christian Serviceman's Center (the ministry known today as "Cadence") in Yokosuka, Japan.

Over the years my wife, Isaura, has told me how when she and her family immigrated to the United States from the Azores, Portugal in 1966, she needed to learn to speak English so she could fit in in this new language and culture. She studied hard, picking up on the language quickly.

What amazed her was after only being in America six months, listening to Billy Graham on the radio or television, she found that his speech delivery was so basic that she could understand what he was saying, bringing her great comfort and hope as she acclimated to her new home in America.

Wanting to learn all I could about living for Jesus, I naturally looked to Billy Graham shortly after receiving Christ as my Savior. I learned some valuable lessons about his life which I still adhere to to this day. One of those is Billy would never meet with a woman who needed counseling with the door to his office closed. His secretary could always look in through the partially open door to confirm nothing untoward was taking place. This protected the reputations of both Mr. Graham and the woman. I have held to the same practice throughout my years of pastoral ministry and military chaplaincy.

Another stroke of wisdom which Billy insisted upon was during his many travels, he would often be staying in hotels. As he became increasingly popular world-wide the concern for someone wanting to sully his reputation would increase. So, before he would walk into his hotel room, his staff would check it out from top to bottom to ensure that there were no surprises which could wind up on the front page of the tabloids.

When it came to Scripture he would read through the Book of Psalms, the book of Proverbs, and the Four Gospels each month. This way he covers the vast array of life experiences as portrayed in the 150 Psalms; the wisdom found in the 31 chapters in Proverbs; and the life, ministry and words of Jesus in the combined 89 chapters of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. I have found this practice to be immensely helpful in my own life, and in ministering to others in their time of need.

And then there's this final action he insisted upon from the inception of his ministry in 1949. So as to be sure his ministry could never be proven to have mishandled funds in any way, he had the IRS audit the books of the Billy Graham Association every single year.

In my estimation, Billy Graham was without peer. We're not likely to see someone like him again for quite some time, if ever.

And now he has heard God say to him over in glory, "*Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into your rest.*"

Well done, indeed, Billy! Thank you for your faithfulness. See you in glory!