



News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

---FEATURES

produced by Baptist Press

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July 5, 1973

**Billy Graham--A Look
At The Man in His Prime**

By Jack U. Harwell
Editor, The Christian Index

Billy Graham is far more fascinating on the personal side than he is on his public side.

And his public life is one of the most exciting in the world.

The world-renowned Baptist evangelist was in Atlanta for a one-week crusade in Atlanta Stadium. He came to Atlanta from Korea where he had experienced probably the greatest single crusade in his 25-year evangelistic career.

He drew over a half-million people to nightly services in Korea, and spoke to more than one-million people crowding a milelong airfield in the closing service. It may have been the largest crowd ever to gather in one place to hear the Christian gospel.

In Atlanta, Dr. Graham spoke to an average of over 38,000 people every night, with almost 10,000 persons making public decisions for Jesus Christ.

Dr. Graham told his Atlanta followers that the next six months are the busiest of his entire career. In the last half of the year he has crusades in Minneapolis, St. Louis, Raleigh-Durham and other places.

The world's most famous Southern Baptist preacher seems to be--at age 54--at the peak of an unparalleled career as a preacher.

I wanted to know how he handled all the publicity, adulation and near-worship which he draws 24 hours per day, everywhere he goes.

So I asked him.

"I never even think about adulation, praise or publicity," he said in what appeared to be utter sincerity. "Early in my career I admit that I had a problem of pride and vanity. I did enjoy the travel, the publicity, the friendships with world leaders, etc.

"But, the Lord has a way of dealing with sinful pride. And he dealt with me. He made me study His Word more. He afflicted me with a whole series of rare illnesses. He surrounded me with invaluable associates who keep knocking my ego back down to earth. And he gave me a back-breaking schedule which keeps me so eternally busy that I honestly don't have time to think about the peripheral activities related to my main ministry."

I saw a brief example of what he meant as we were playing golf at a small public course near the Atlanta airport. Two men were plowing a corn field adjacent to the golf course, the plow being an ancient one pulled by a mule.

We stood on the tee a long time and watched those two men behind that mule. Grady Wilson, Billy Graham's lifelong friend and teammate, turned to Dr. Graham, stuck his finger in his face and said, "Billy, that's where you came from. And don't you forget it."

Dr. Graham told us that he never plays golf at a private country club during one of his crusades.

"Early in my ministry I was accused of mixing with the rich folks at exclusive places, and not being available to the average man," he said. "So I always play at a public course if I get to play at all during a crusade."

Always a Southern Baptist and proud of that label, Dr. Graham wanted to know every detail of what took place at the Southern Baptist Convention's meeting in Portland.

"I dearly love my convention," he said. "I want to go to the convention every year if at all possible. But I had to miss Portland because of the Korean crusade. The fellowship with my own denominational brothers is precious and necessary for me."

Dr. Graham went to offices of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution the day after his crusade ended, to personally thank the editors and reporters for their news coverage.

"I wound up staying there three hours," he told me. "I shook hands with every person in the entire building--typesetters, pressmen, floor-sweepers, everybody. It was a great personal joy to me to meet so many down-to-earth people."

Dr. Graham also requested "permission" to visit offices of the Georgia Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board in Atlanta.

He went to each place expecting to stay 30 minutes and stayed more than one hour at each.

During a private "coffee break" he shared with news reporters, Dr. Graham's mother came by to say goodbye as she returned to her home in Charlotte.

Dr. Graham jumped up to hug her, kiss her and introduce her to every reporter there. The pride and tenderness he spontaneously lavished on his 80-year-old mother visibly touched every one of those hard-bitten newshounds.

I asked Billy about the many offers he has had from Hollywood, the White House, and other places to make movies, be a news commentator, be an Ambassador, or do other things that would make him a wealthy man.

"Yes, I have had many such offers," he said with clear modesty. "But my answer has been the same in every case. God called me to preach the redeeming gospel of Jesus Christ and until that call is revoked I can do nothing else."

He added: "I would rather be a preacher of the Christian gospel than be the President of the United States or the king of any country."

Dr. Graham said that one of the most meaningful moments in his own life had come once in the White House when he met black baseball star Hank Aaron in the presence of President Richard M. Nixon.

"I was startled when Hank shook the President's hand, then grabbed me around the neck, kissed me on the cheek and said he would rather meet me than the President," Dr. Graham said. "I was embarrassed, but so deeply flattered. Hank and I have been close friends ever since."

Throughout his 10 days in Atlanta, newsmen repeatedly asked Dr. Graham about his relationship to Mr. Nixon and about the Watergate scandal.

Dr. Graham consistently replied: "I am not a political advisor to the President. I am always available for any moral or spiritual counsel I might give."

"I talked to Mr. Nixon by phone last week, but it was only about our crusade in Korea."

"I did send him a letter, a pastoral type letter, assuring him of my prayers and suggesting some Bible verses he might read--verses of comfort, by the way."

Personal security is always a problem for people in the public spotlight such as Dr. Graham. Plain clothes policemen were all over Atlanta Stadium throughout his crusade.

One high-powered rifle with telescopic sights was confiscated, as was a pistol whose owner had claimed, "this is the gun that will kill Billy Graham."

Dr. Graham also volunteered another insight related to his personal philosophy.

He said: "I pray I will never embarrass my Jesus nor my profession by entanglements with women. I have the best wife God ever made, five lovely children and six grandchildren.

"This is why you never--and I repeat never--see me in public anywhere without one of my associates beside me. No one should ever be able to accuse me of indiscretion or infidelity in any form or fashion."

I wondered how long a 54-year-old preacher could go on living under this kind of pressure.

"Well, Jack, a preacher of the gospel can never retire," Dr. Graham replied. "I will never stop preaching. But I am 54 years old.

"I get weary. I have to rest more now. I stayed in bed from 2-5 every afternoon during my Atlanta crusade, conserving my strength for the night services.

"Though I will never retire, I expect to make a shift of gears toward a slightly different direction very soon.

"After this busy year of 1973, the busiest of my career, I am going to take some time to evaluate things and make some changes.

"I know we will move away from big stadium crusades such as we had in Korea and Birmingham and Atlanta. We will concentrate on indoor areas, seating 15,000 or 2,000 people.

"It takes about one-fifth the energy and stamina to hold an indoor meeting as it does to conduct a stadium crusade.

"We will also move more and more toward a television ministry as our major vehicle for the gospel. Television is the best tool now available to Christians for spreading the gospel. I can reach millions at one time, around the world, through television.

"There might even be a day when I will do nothing but television and radio preaching. I am not sure about that, but it's possible."

Dr. Graham conceded that he has standing invitations from around the world to preach crusades, invitations which could keep him busy every week for the rest of his life.

"God has blessed me far beyond anything I could ever dream," he said. "If I had my personal choice, I would be a pastor of a small church in the mountains, serving my own little congregation as best I know how.

"But, God keeps opening the doors around the world and He keeps telling me to go through those doors with His word. Until He changes His mandate to me and my associates, that little church in the mountains will just have to wait."

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(Photo mailed to Baptist state papers.)

Texas Youth Choir Named
Best at SBC Festival

7/5/73

RIDGECREST, N. C. (BP)--First Baptist Church Youth Choir of Richardson, Tex., was chosen as the most outstanding choir in the first Southern Baptist Convention Youth Choir Festival, June 28-30, at Ridgecrest (N. C.) Baptist Conference Center.

Fifty choirs from 15 states attended the festival to share the fellowship and inspiration of hearing other choirs and participate in the 2,600 voice massed choir singing under the direction of James D. Woodward from Oklahoma Baptist University, Shawnee.

Choir directors attending the three day festival also selected the most outstanding ensemble, Handbell Choir from Myrtle Grove Baptist Church, Pensacola, Fla.

First Baptist Church, Bartlesville, Okla.; Calvary Baptist Church, Jackson, Miss.; and First Baptist Church, Toccoa, Ga., were the other finalists from which the most outstanding choir was selected. Griewood Baptist Church, Nashville, Tenn., was second in the ensemble

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voting.

The church music department of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board sponsored the festival, and is planning a similar one next year at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center, June 1-7, 1974.

Ridgecrest and Glorieta Baptist Conference Centers are year-round religious centers owned and operated by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, Nashville, Tenn.

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Patsy Driggers Joins
Sunday School Board

7/5/73

NASHVILLE (BP)--Patsy Driggers has come to the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board as Sunday School and church training consultant in preschool work from Richmond, Va.

For the past 11 years she has been a consultant in the children's division, department of teaching and training for the Baptist General Association of Virginia. She also has worked as elementary director for Bellevue Baptist Church, Memphis, and elementary and kindergarten director in Istrouma Baptist Church, Baton Rouge, La.

A native of DuBach, La., Miss Driggers received the bachelor of science degree from Louisiana Polytechnic University, Ruston, La., and has attended Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, where she received the master of religious education degree.

She is a co-author of "Kindergarten Resource Book" published by Broadman Press.

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