

Graham, William 'Billy' Franklin Jr. ^[1]

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by Amy Kemp, Government and Heritage Library, 2017; updated by Kelly Agan, 2018.



Rev. Billy Graham, 1966. Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.

^[2]**7 Nov. 1918 - 21 Feb. 2018**

Billy Graham is a noted Evangelical pastor, speaker, and evangelist. He has been dubbed 'America's Pastor,' and has remained an influential voice in international Christianity and politics. He has met with 12 United States Presidents, preached to over 215 million people in 185 countries, and has been ranked by Gallup as one of the ten most admired men in the world an unprecedented 60 times.

He was born William Franklin Graham Jr in [Charlotte](#) ^[3], North Carolina, to a family of dairy farmers. Graham had a spiritual revelation in 1934 while listening to an evangelist preacher in Charlotte, and decided to dedicate his live to God. He was ordained by the Southern Baptist Church in 1939 and quickly developed a reputation as a preacher. He graduated from Florida Bible Institute (now Trinity College) with a theology degree in 1940 and earned his BA from Wheaton College in 1943.

From 1944 to 1948 Billy Graham worked with Youth for Christ, traveling the country and speaking at national rallies. His true speaking ability became apparent during a 1949 evangelist crusade in downtown Los Angeles. It was only scheduled to last three weeks, but was so popular it went on for seven. Shortly after, he founded the [Billy Graham Evangelistic Association](#) ^[4] to further his work with crusades, as well as a motion picture division of the company entitled 'World Wide Pictures.' In addition to crusades, his work in the early 1950's included the weekly Sunday night radio program 'Hour of Decision' and the daily advice column 'My Answer.'

A twelve-week crusade in London drew large crowds in 1954, but it was the 1957 Madison Square Garden crusade that truly put Graham on the international stage. The New York Crusade was held nightly for 16 weeks and drew such large crowds that it was covered by the national press.

Graham's subsequent career spanned the globe, with public speaking appearances, television programs, magazines, and the authorship of 33 books. He has formally met with or counseled every president from Truman to Obama.

Billy Graham has received numerous honors and accolades over the course of his career, including the Religious Broadcasting Hall of Fame Award (1981,) the Presidential Medal of Freedom (1983,) the National Religious Broadcaster's Award of Merit (1986,) and the Congressional Gold Medal (1996). In 1999 he was the first non-musician inducted into the Gospel Music Hall of Fame, and in 2000 he received the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation Freedom Award for lasting contributions to freedom. In 2001 he was named Honorary Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire for his international contribution of religious life.

Graham stepped down from the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association in 2000, allowing his son Franklin Graham to step into position as the company's CEO. Ready to retire, a 'last crusade' was held in Queens, New York in 2005, drawing

crowds of over 230,000 people. In 2007 the [Billy Graham Library and Museum](#) [5] was dedicated in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Graham married Ruth Bell Graham in August of 1943, and they remained together until her death in 2007. They had five children: Nelson Edman Graham, William Franklin Graham III, Ruth Bell Graham, Anne Morrow Graham Lotz, and Virginia Graham. Graham currently resides in Montreat, North Carolina.

Graham passed away at his home in Montreat, North Carolina on February 21, 2018 at the age of 99.

References:

Official Billy Graham Evangelistic Association website: <https://billygraham.org/> [6]

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