



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Billy Graham: The Man I Knew- Part 1

Guest(s): Greg Laurie

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Dr. James Dobson: Well, hello everyone. I'm James Dobson and you're listening to Family Talk, a listener supported ministry. In fact, thank you so much for being part of that support for James Dobson Family Institute.

Roger Marsh: Well, hello, and welcome to this Monday edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. Family Talk is the listener supported broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.

There are few people in history, if any, who have had more influence on Christendom than the late Reverend Billy Graham. His crusades were seen by millions worldwide, and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association is still spreading the good news of the Gospel, as well as meeting the physical needs of people around the globe via their various ministries. Our guest today here on Family Talk is pastor Greg Laurie, who knew Mr. Graham personally and had the opportunity to work alongside him in many different endeavors. His close friendship with Billy Graham inspired him to write a book on Billy's life entitled *Billy Graham: The Man I Knew*.

Greg Laurie is the senior pastor of Harvest Christian Fellowship in Riverside, California. He hosts a weekly television program on the Trinity Broadcasting Network and is the featured speaker on the nationally syndicated radio program *A New Beginning*. Greg Laurie is also the author of over 70 books, including biographies of Johnny Cash, Steve McQueen, and his latest on Billy Graham. Greg has been married to his wife, Cathe, for more than 40 years. They have two sons and five grandchildren. Our own Dr. Tim Clinton, President of the American Association of Christian Counselors, recently sat down with Greg Laurie to talk about his new book and about his personal relationship and interactions with Billy Graham. Let's go there right now.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Greg, you're also a great friend of Dr. Dobson's, and I know he has the utmost of respect and love for you. You've been a guest on Family Talk many times, and Dr. Dobson has also aired many of your sermons. Thank you again so much for joining us on Family Talk.

Greg Laurie: Tim, great to be with you again. Thanks for having me.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Hey Greg, we're going to talk about your most recent book. You've written about your heroes before, but if I were to guess, I would say that the subject of this book is the person you hold in highest regard, the late Reverend Billy Graham.

Greg Laurie: Yeah, without question, Tim. I've had the opportunity over the years to meet a lot of famous people and meet a lot of well-known pastors and Christian leaders. And I would say getting to know Billy Graham and spending time with him, I found him to be the most interesting, the most intriguing, and the most real of any of the Christian leaders I've met. And I would say he is also the godliest man I have ever met. There weren't two Billy Graham's. In other words, we all know Billy from television, or maybe we saw him on a crusade or heard him on radio. But the private Billy was as impressive as the public Billy. He was everything you hoped he would be and maybe a little bit more. Very humble, very approachable, very friendly, and just a wonderful person to be with.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Greg, you started a trilogy, I think, a little series of books. You wrote about Steve McQueen, Johnny Cash. The third book in that little series was on Billy Graham. But you took a unique approach, Greg, to this work, a little different than you did with McQueen and Cash. Tell us why this little diversion.

Greg Laurie: Well, I think Billy is actually the glue that holds those other two stories together. I didn't set out to write a trilogy, but I ended up doing it. Steve McQueen, I wanted to explore his conversion, which I'd heard about for years. He was called the King of Cool, by the way. And then Johnny Cash, he was actually called the Godfather of Cool. And Billy Graham, I think he, Tim, may have been the coolest guy of all. Because I define cool as authenticity, real, approachable, an original. And that's who Billy was. He was an absolute original, and he played a role in both McQueen and Cash's life.

Of course, when McQueen was toward the end of his life fighting cancer, he wanted to meet Billy Graham. Billy went to meet Steve, had prayer with him. And Steve was on his way to Juarez, Mexico to have surgery to remove the cancer because the American doctors weren't able to do much for him. And Steve misplaced his Bible, and Billy gave to Steve his bible, his personal Bible. Unfortunately, McQueen did not make it. And they found him in the recovery room clutching that Bible that Billy gave him. And then Johnny Cash, he was good friends with Billy. They went fishing together, their wives were friends, they went on vacations together. And of course, Johnny played in many of Billy's crusades on the stage. And so Billy was the glue in the two stories.

But when I wrote this book, *Billy Graham: The Man I Knew...* And by the way, Franklin Graham gave me that title. I was originally going to title it, *Billy Graham: The Making of an American Icon*. And Franklin said, "I don't think daddy would be comfortable with the title American icon. You should just call it *Billy Graham: The Man I Knew*." So that became the new title. But I wanted to explore the younger Billy Graham. Most of us know of the elder statesman Billy Graham, the Lion in Winter, the face that could have been chiseled on Mount

Rushmore. But they don't know the younger, risk-taking, adventurous, fun-loving Billy Graham. And I wanted to introduce him because he was so innovative and so ahead of his time in so many ways. And I think you really understand him so much better when you look at his roots and his beginnings and some of the setbacks that he faced.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Greg, as I got started into the book, I got mesmerized with the story. The writing, the narrative was unbelievable. Greg, a spokesman for God, but a man who had very ordinary beginnings. Grew up outside of Charlotte, North Carolina. Take us back. You described him as a character as a kid. I was just enthralled by this story.

Greg Laurie: Well, this one reads like a Bible story, Tim. Plucked out of obscurity to become the greatest evangelist in human history. Billy was raised on a dairy farm. And he would get up very early in the morning, he would milk the cows. He had aspirations to one day be a professional baseball player. He was tall. He was full of energy. In fact, if he went to a doctor today, Tim, you might describe him as hyperactive. He had nervous energy flowing through him. He loved the girls. He was just an all American country boy.

And so, he was raised in a Christian home. He believed in God. He believed the Bible was God's word. But he didn't really have a relationship with Christ. And so when an evangelist showed up in his town named Mordecai Ham, Billy Frank, as he was known then, wanted nothing to do with that. But he started hearing about this evangelist and how this evangelist, Mordecai Ham, was a bit unorthodox, and would even get in confrontations with people and call people out for their sin. He was described sometimes as the "fighting preacher." So that intrigued Billy. So Billy had a friend who was a Christian said, "I'll tell you what, Billy Frank. I'll let you drive my truck if you come to the crusade with me. And we'll pick up that girl that you're sweet on." So that was enough to get Billy to go to the meeting.

And Billy did not accept Christ straight away. He went multiple times and even joined the choir. Not because he could sing, but because he didn't want to be in the place where the preacher could see him, because he came under conviction when Mordecai Ham would look in his direction. But finally, Billy just was convicted by God's Holy Spirit and gave his life to Christ and filled out this little decision card, which is actually there at the "Billy Graham Library" in Charlotte, North Carolina. It's really a historical document. And that was the day that changed young Billy Graham's life, and a day that would change the course of history as well.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Greg, as I was reading through that section of the book, I was moved the statement, "there's a great sinner in here tonight.", and how it gripped his heart. He was hearing that from that evangelist, that fiery evangelist. And the thrust of the evening, or all the way up to a song called "Just As I Am." Do you think that laid the foundation, Greg, for a lot of how Billy approached people with the Gospel message?

Greg Laurie:

Yeah, I think so. Well, that song, "Just As I Am," was a song that Billy Graham himself used throughout his crusade ministry and the choir would sing it. We all remember, all of us who watched Billy Graham on TV or went to his crusades, we remember when the choir stood up and sang "Just As I Am." That was the moment when people would flow down toward the stage and make that commitment to follow Christ. It's just a part of our memory as Americans who grew up watching him. But yeah, that became a template for Billy.

But Billy was a very different man than Mordecai Ham. Mordecai Ham was a fiery, aggressive, confrontive person. And in his beginning, Billy too was very fiery and aggressive and that's what caught the attention of William Randolph Hearst. Billy preached a lot against communism and the need for revival in America. Not that I'm critical of those things, but I'm saying he became a different man with the passing of time. You might say he mellowed. I would say in a good way, he became more compassionate.

And Billy was a great bridge builder. Billy had a heart for people. He loved people. So Tim, when you would sit down with Billy Graham for a meal, he would usually say something along the lines of, "Tell me about yourself." He loved to listen. And if you told him your life story, as I did when I first met him, you might hear him telling somebody else your story, and it was line by line perfect. He really listened well. And I think that people were drawn to him. That's why he became a counselor to presidents. That's why he became a person that was sought out by people from around the world. They knew he could be trusted. He was not a judgmental person. He was a very loving person. Sometimes he was criticized for how he built bridges to certain people. But now as we look back in retrospect, we see he was just a very gifted evangelist. An evangelist builds bridges, he doesn't burn them. He's trying to build a bridge to culture, build a bridge to his listener. And Billy did that so beautifully.

Dr. Tim Clinton:

His message, "God loves you." That's what resonated with the hearts of people. And you know what? Billy believed that. Greg, you had mentioned the decision card that is now in the library. That card was significant because at the moment when he committed his life to Christ, when he went forward, Greg, didn't necessarily feel different. But there was something about also filling in that card that cemented this in his heart and in his mind, didn't it?

Greg Laurie:

Yeah. It's interesting because when I read that, it reminded me of the day I accepted Christ. I walked forward. It was at my high school campus and a few people walk forward with me. A girl on my right was weeping, another person on my left was laughing with joy, and I felt nothing. That resonated with me. Billy felt absolutely nothing emotionally. But that was the day that Christ came into his life, and he immediately began to see changes in his attitude and his outlook. Changes, a desire to read the Bible, a desire to pray. And before you know, it, he was also sharing his faith as well.

But Billy did not aspire to be a preacher. This was something that came later. I think he cut his teeth, really, as a Fuller Brush man. And that helped him

overcome his shyness. And how to get his foot in the door, if you will, and start a conversation. On one occasion, a lady didn't want to hear from him and dumped a pail of water on his head from the second floor. So he had to put up with a lot of craziness. But as he said, they would sell the Fuller Brushes, but they would offer the Gospel for free.

So, he, along with his two buddies, T.W. Wilson and Grady, who also were at that Mordecai Ham meeting, went on to serve with Billy for many years when his crusade ministry started. Billy once said to me, "I'm just a country preacher." And that wasn't a false humility. He was simply describing how he perceived himself. And even said to me, once, "Greg, I don't think I'm a very good preacher, but I think God has given me the gift of giving the invitation." I said, "Well, Billy, I have to disagree with you on that. Yes, he's given you the gift to give the invitation, but you're an incredible preacher." But he wasn't an arrogant, self-confident person. I think he was as surprised as anyone by the response he got around the world.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You're listening to Family Talk, a division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton. Our special guest today, best-selling author, Senior Pastor of the Harvest Christian Fellowship, one of the largest churches in America. He's written more than 70 books. Our friend, Greg Laurie.

Greg, as we're talking about Billy, here's this young man, new in the faith, on fire for God, wanting to share the message that's transformed his life. And then he's out there trying to sell in this business world. And he's learning things. He's becoming deeper spiritually and he's learning this, if you will, street smart sense about him that was unique to Billy Graham.

Greg Laurie: It really was. Everything in life is preparation for something else. So everything that Billy went through in his youth and in his early days were really preparing him for what would ultimately be his calling. But he understood that God had put a call on this life. He originally went to Bob Jones University, and at first he liked it, but it was a very restrictive environment with a lot of heavy rules and regulations. And Billy eventually moved on to the Florida Bible Institute, and ultimately to Wheaton College as he got his education. And that was all orchestrated by the Lord because at Wheaton College, he met Ruth, who would become his wife and the love of his life. Honestly, there wouldn't have been a Billy Graham without a Ruth Graham. She was in every way his equal. I said Billy was the godliest man I'd ever met. Ruth was the godliest woman I ever met. Billy was more serious, especially later in life. Ruth had a twinkle in our eye. She was more fun loving. She loved jokes and humor. And they were just the perfect combination for each other.

But God was getting Billy ready. Honestly, if he had gone into business, I think it would have been very successful. If he would have gone into politics, I think he could have become a senator or a congressman, a governor, even the president. In fact, as his popularity was beginning to build, he was approached about running for the White House. And also, Hollywood came knocking and asked

him if he would be interested in a screen test for a film. I think he could have succeeded wherever he went, but he knew he had a calling on his life. And when he was approached by folks who wanted him to get more involved in politics, he said, "I have a higher calling." Considering the fact that Billy Graham was on the world's most admired men list more than any man in human history, including presidents, including the popes and others, that shows that his impact was greater than a world leader, greater than a president, greater than a prime minister. Because he wasn't just an evangelist to America, he was an ambassador for Christ to the whole world.

Dr. Tim Clinton: He was. Greg, he had what some would call the "it" factor. But what's interesting about this was before Ruth, for example, go back to Florida Bible college, he was starting to preach, but it didn't go so well early on. As a matter of fact, he was nerved up a lot. His first couple of messages, Greg, he was all over the place. He wasn't really sure that that was the gift that he had. And then you also have a little bit of romance with someone else where he thought he was actually going to be engaged to be married, and broke his heart. Left him devastated. But God used that, I think this is a good word right here, to "cleanse," if you will, his life. And commit himself or surrender his life wholly as a result of that. Greg, explain that for us.

Greg Laurie: Well, I think that God was preparing Billy for what was ahead. I think of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They were faithful to the Lord in the little things. When you start the book of Daniel, you see they wouldn't eat from the king's table. We don't know why exactly. Maybe the food was offered to idols. But we all remember the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refusing to bow before the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar erected. So the stand they made in little things help them to make the stand they would make later in the larger things.

So, Billy was making principled stands early in life. He had his heart broken. This girl that he was in love with didn't think he was going to amount to anything. But that was not the girl that God had for Billy. And also, when he first began preaching, he ran through his entire repertoire of sermons in about 12 minutes. And it just takes time. And like I said, he wasn't the kind of guy who would get in front of a bunch of people and speak. It was a gift that God gave to him.

I think of another Bible story, Gideon. Gideon was hiding from his enemies when the Lord called him to lead the troops into battle, and it's funny. The Angel of the Lord said, "Hey there, Gideon, you mighty man of valor and courage." If there's one thing Gideon wasn't at that moment, it was a mighty man of valor and courage. But Billy was going to be molded into this man God would make him, but it would take some time. It would take some missteps.

But I think even through his missteps... And by missteps, I mean he became the president of a Bible college when that was not what God had called him to be. He became the pastor of a church, and God had not called him to be that either. But those were even preparation, because I think he learned things in both of

those environments that would play into the man he would become when he formed an organization that I don't really know of anything else that has ever been out there quite like the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. I've had the privilege of serving as a board member, at Billy's request, on that organization for over 25 years.

But Billy Graham was the real king of all media long before Howard Stern claimed the title. Billy was an innovator in radio, he was an innovator in television, and even had a film studio in Hollywood that was producing feature films that were released in theaters. So he took a lot of risks and went into a lot of areas that no one had gone into before. And frankly, though it seems strange now, some of that was controversial. "Oh, you shouldn't be doing that. You shouldn't be in this medium." But Billy just saw these as opportunities, like we're using this platform right now to reach many new people. And so he also used satellite technology in a live crusade experience long before people were doing multi-site churches and the kind of thing that's commonplace now. He was an absolute pioneer in so many areas, and he also ran an organization with the greatest financial integrity.

Dr. Tim Clinton: There's so much more to talk about. The stories are just amazing. But Greg, I'd like to end today's broadcast by honing in. We're going to do another piece tomorrow on *Billy Graham: The Man I Knew*, your new book. But Ecclesiastes 3:11 says "He has set eternity in our hearts." In other words, we're hardwired for a relationship with the transcendent one. For Billy, it was all about the Gospel, Greg. It's the Gospel. God loves you. And it's the message of the love of God in and through Christ.

Greg, you cite a study out of the Pew Research team out there. I think a 2018 study on Millennials and Gen Z saying 56% of those, when asked about a personal religion, they say they have none. Greg, you're worried about that generation, and you're also concerned about losing contact with great men of God like Billy Graham and the influence they had. Close us out on, why is that the heart of what you're driving for here? When we close this book, last page in the book, the take away, Tim, is this?

Greg Laurie: I think the takeaway is God can use anybody. That's why I focused more on the youth of Billy Graham, because I wanted to introduce him to a generation that may not know who he is. They've perhaps heard his name, but many of those Millennials and Gen Z kids have not even heard his name at this point. But he was more than just a historical figure, he was a flesh and blood guy. He was a young man full of energy that had the hand of God placed upon him. And so I would hope that when someone reads us, they would say, "Lord, I would like to be used by you as well."

I saw Billy give his last sermon. He looked to the crowd and he was weak at this point physically. He needed help to even get up to the pulpit. He turned to that crowd and he said, "God loves you." And he turned to another section of the crowd and says, "God loves you." And he turned to even another section and

said, "God loves you." Now, that's obvious God loves you. But there was something about this life that he had lived all these years that caused that message to resonate with so much authority and power.

Billy understood that there was a God who loved him and he wanted other people to know God in a personal way. Because it was never about a religious thing with Billy. It was about a personal relationship with Jesus. In fact, he was asked in an interview if he had any regrets in life. And he said, "My regret is I took too many speaking engagements and I should've spent more time praying and telling the Lord how much I loved Him." So when it began and when it ended for Billy, it was about a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You've been listening to Pastor Greg Laurie. Our subject today is *Billy Graham: The Man I Knew*. It's actually a new book by Greg, written with Marshall Terrill, and a fascinating story. We're going to be going into more on Billy Graham tomorrow here on Family Talk. Greg, thank you for joining us.

Greg Laurie: Thanks, Tim. Good to be with you.

Roger Marsh: You're listening to Family Talk. That was the first half of Dr. Tim Clinton's conversation with Pastor Greg Laurie on the topic of Greg's new book called *Billy Graham: The Man I Knew*. Billy Graham made a tremendous impact on the world. In the 99 years before his death in 2018, he delivered the Gospel to millions of people. He was a confidant, a counselor, and a friend of world leaders. He was known and loved by an entire nation but what he valued most was spending time with the Lord.

To learn more about Pastor Greg Laurie, his ministry, or his books, visit our broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org. That web address is drjamesdobson.org/broadcast. Or give us a call at (877) 732-6825. Again, that number is (877) 732-6825.

Well, that's all the time we have for today. I'm Roger Marsh, thanking you so much for joining us. Make sure you listen again tomorrow to hear the conclusion of Dr. Tim Clinton's conversation with Pastor Greg Laurie right here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Announcer: This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.