

# Billy Graham Film Debuts Friday

*The film dubbed Billy: The Early Years—about the genesis of Billy Graham's ministry—opened on 282 screens in the Southeast and Texas Friday.*



[] *Billy: The Early Years*—about the genesis of Billy Graham's ministry—hit 282 screens in the Southeast and Texas Friday. Directed by Robby Benson, the film stars Armie Hammer (*Veronica Mars*, *Flicka*) as the young evangelist and takes viewers through Graham's early years, as he meets his future wife, Ruth, and forms a friendship with Charles Templeton. In addition, the film features performances by Martin Landau, Stefanie Butler, Lindsay Wagner and country singer Josh Turner as George Beverly Shea.

Rated PG for thematic material—including some disturbing images, brief language and smoking—*Billy* has received lukewarm reviews.

“Hot on the heels of *Fireproof*—a Christian drama that briefly cracked the box office top 10—comes this earnest, sometimes amateurish biography,” *The St. Petersburg Times* observed. “*Billy* has the shallow look of a TV movie and performances smacking of ham.”

The *Orlando Sentinel* said that Hammer “has so little of the evangelist's fire. He lacks those scary-intense eyes that made you believe he

believed your very soul hung in the balance. ... A bland leading man in a movie without much of a biographical spark to it makes for a dull sermon indeed."

Barry Landis, founder of the film's marketing company Landis Entertainment & Media Partners, said the movie producers had no official input from the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA). However, he added that Graham's family members do have copies of the film and that Graham's eldest daughter, Gigi, has expressed her support and enthusiasm. BGEA President Franklin Graham, though, recently criticized the film.

To coincide with the movie, Thomas Nelson will release the film's adaptation—*Billy: The Untold Story of a Young Billy Graham and the Test of Faith That Almost Changed Everything* by William Paul McKay and Ken

Abraham—on Oct. 28. The film's soundtrack released Oct. 7.-  
**Christian Retailing**

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Watch the trailer.