

Pastor to the Presidents

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Evangelist Billy Graham has affected the lives of millions of people across the world. But last Friday he was featured on ABC's 20/20 for his unique role in the lives of the last 11 U.S. presidents. In addition to the current President George W. Bush, Graham has been personal confidant and friend to former Presidents Bill Clinton, George Bush Sr., Ronald Reagan, Jimmy Carter, Gerald Ford, Richard Nixon, Lyndon B. Johnson, John F. Kennedy, Dwight Eisenhower and Harry Truman, and to their wives as well. "Each one I've known long before they ever became president, been in their homes many times, always called them by their first names, until they became president," Graham told 20/20. During the segment, living presidents shared how Graham helped with everything from marriage counseling to war to alcohol addictions. "It was just a conversation," said President George W. Bush, recalling a discussion with Graham during the 1980s when he told the pastor, "Billy, I'm longing for something," and Graham gave him a Bible (that the president still has). "All I can tell you is that as a result of being inspired by Billy Graham I started reading the Bible and shortly after, I quit drinking," said President Bush. The Baptist preacher's influence over the years didn't stop with the presidents but extended to the first ladies of the White House as well. Barbra Bush remembers being stunned by her first meeting with Graham because of his "penetrating" eyes. Sen. Hillary Clinton told 20/20 that Graham was her personal counselor during her husband's impeachment scandal. "[Graham] is one of the people who made a real difference to me personally," she said, adding that Graham encouraged her to do what was best for her and her

marriage despite what the critics said. Although Graham is considered one the most influential preachers in history it was not his celebrity that drew the presidents to him, said former President Bill Clinton. "I doubt that many presidents wanted to be around him because they thought it would help them politically," he said. "I think they really felt and hoped that by being with Billy Graham, they might have more strength for the work at hand."