

Billy Graham: Nearing Home With Grace

The crack of the bat. The thrill of rounding bases. The satisfaction of sliding into home on a cloud of dust—Billy Graham loved it all. As a young man, he dreamed that his passion for baseball would lead him to the major leagues: “I often pictured myself hitting a big-league grand slam into the stadium seats and hearing the crowd roar with thunder as I ran the bases,” he writes in his new book, *Nearing Home: Life, Faith and Finishing Well*.

But God had a different game plan for teen-aged Graham. After giving his heart to Jesus Christ, Billy laid down his dreams along with his bat. “As I look back,” he writes, “I see how God’s hand guided me. I sense His Spirit with me today, and most comforting is the knowledge that He will not forsake me during this last stretch as I am nearing home.”

In this context, of course, “nearing home” means approaching death—something Graham says he does not fear. Growing old? That’s another story. “All my life, I was taught how to die as a Christian,” he writes. “But no one ever taught me how I ought to live in the years before I die.” So Graham decided he would take the lessons he has learned along the way and impart that wisdom to others.

Larry Ross, Graham’s director of media and public relations for the past 30 years, says the topic of aging has been on Graham’s heart since his New York City Crusade in 2005. “The book contains personal autobiographical reflections from Mr. Graham on how he has come to view old age, including the realization that the time to prepare for one’s senior years is now regardless of where you are in life,” says Ross. “He is very transparent about the realities of later years.”

Nearing Home offers practical answers to questions such as: How can I find God's purpose as I age? How can I cope with my fears, struggles and growing limitations? How do I face the future with hope instead of despair?

"Mr. Graham reinforces time and again that the Bible is a book of hope—that is where we should be looking," says Ross. "You hear people speak about a mythical fountain of youth. Well, Mr. Graham talks about how the Bible provides an oasis for the soul. The fear of the Lord is the fountain of life."

Nearing Home is rich with scriptural examples of people God has used late in life with great impact, says Ross. These heroes of the faith demonstrate that in spite of the limitations and challenges of old age, the later years can be some of the most rewarding and fulfilling of our lives.

Knowing of Graham's own physical limitations, particularly with macular degeneration, Ross finds it "very touching" that Billy wonders "if God in His sovereignty allows the eye sight of the aged to cast a dim view of the here and now so we may focus our spiritual eyes on the ever after."

Because of his failing eyesight, Graham dictated the book to a team of assistants. His son Franklin describes the process: "He'd tell the staff, 'I want to do this, I want to say it that way,' and they'd write it. Then they would come back and read it to him. And he'd say, 'No, that doesn't sound like me.' Then they'd work on it and bring it back, and he'd respond, 'OK, that's what I want to say.'"

Growing Old With Purpose

Nearing Home, says Franklin Graham, is full of insight on practical matters like how to get your house in order "so you don't leave that for your kids to do. And my father has done that himself. He's worked with his lawyers for years on his estate. And for him, he wants to give as much of it as he can back to the Lord's work."

Another key purpose for older people is training a younger generation, he says. “My father touches on that; it’s something he talks about. I think we live in a society where we discount older people—if you’re retired that means you don’t know much anymore. What we’re doing is we’re missing a great reservoir, a great wealth of knowledge in our older generations that we need to be tapping into and listening to.”

Larry Ross agrees: “I was most encouraged that Mr. Graham included in the book Psalm 71:18—a verse he shared with me during a personal devotional time years ago. It was back in 1994 when he was beginning his signature Saturday night youth emphasis during his Crusades. Of course that continues to be a big part of what BGEA is doing today with Rock the River. The verse says, *‘When I am old and grayheaded, O God, do not forsake me, Until I declare Your strength to this generation’* (NKJV).

“Mr. Graham affirmed that verse was instrumental in his decision to take the bold step of reaching his grandchildren’s peers by combining his authentic Gospel message with great music, and answering their fundamental questions about life,” says Ross.

“It was encouraging to see that verse was again part of Mr. Graham’s inspiration for this book, in which he conveys that old age does not exempt one from fulfilling one’s purpose in life and providing hope to future generations,” Ross adds.

A Crusade Between the Covers

As readers might expect, Billy Graham shares the plan of salvation in *Nearing Home*. According to Ross, the evangelist approaches book writing from a ministry rather than a marketing perspective. “He is hoping this will be a message that is not just informational or educational, but transformational.”

Similar to many of Graham’s messages through the years, the

book will resonate on different levels, says Ross. “For the believer, there is empowerment and encouragement. For someone who isn’t of faith, there is information on how to prepare themselves for those later years, and information on overcoming the generation gap and influencing the next generation.”

Ross’ sense in talking to media and people across the country is that there is “great anticipation” for this book: “People have expressed a keen interest in either reading it for themselves or in sharing it with someone in their life who is already in their sunset years.”

Regardless of where someone is in their spiritual walk, says Ross, “*Nearing Home* is going to be a compelling read. For those who aren’t believers but may be seeking and have an interest in spiritual things, Mr. Graham talks about the foundation on which our lives can and should be built.”

Franklin Graham also believes *Nearing Home* will interest people of any age and spiritual level: “The things we can learn from this book, insights that my father gives us, we’ll be able to use in our own lives. There are valuable lessons, and I think most people want to make a contribution—especially Christians. They want to finish life well, and Daddy describes how to do that here.

“Daddy at 93 years of age—93 this year—is still a role model to us kids,” Franklin adds. “And I’m just thankful and grateful to God that he is still with us. And his mind is—he is sharp as a tack.”

Read an excerpt from *Nearing Home* »

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