

Billy Graham Reflects on Life With Franklin

✖ *As we approach Father's Day, read an excerpt from Billy Graham's autobiography that shows the tender heart he has for the son who shares his name. This is an excerpt from Just As I Am:*

Whenever I had to leave [Montreat], we gathered to say good-bye. We held hands and prayed. As I boarded the train, or later the plane, my heart would be heavy, and more than once I drove down the mountain with tears in my eyes.

Maybe it was a little easier for the girls; they experienced their mother's constancy and shared so many of her interests. And of course, Dr. and Mrs. Bell, Ruth's parents, were just across the street (and later down the hill). But the boys, with four women in the house, needed their father at home. Coming as the fourth child and my namesake, Franklin especially may have craved my companionship.

During the lengthy Madison Square Garden Crusade in 1957, Franklin was 5. Back home, Ruth listened to his daily bedtime prayer before tucking him in. One night, after he thanked God for me and others of the Team in New York, he closed with, "And thank you for Mommy staying home."

The Agony and the Ecstasy

Whenever I did get home for a short stay between engagements, I would get a crash course in the agony and ecstasy of parenting. If Ruth had not been convinced that God had called her to fulfill that side of our partnership, and had not resorted constantly to God's Word for instruction and to His grace for strength, I don't see how she could have survived.

Franklin was almost 6 by the time Ned came along. With two

boys in the household, my fathering was more urgently needed than ever. Still, sometimes I was away for months at a time. What I did when I was away apparently didn't impress the children much. One time, when the mountain house was being built, I was out in the yard shoveling some dirt from one spot to another. Franklin, watching intently, suddenly piped up and said, "Daddy, you can work!"

The traveling ministry was a costly investment of my time as far as my sons were concerned. Both of them, like many of their generation in the '60s and '70s, went through severe tests of their faith and standards.

God's Perfect Plan

I tried to let all five of the children know that I loved them, no matter what they did; that I missed them when I was away; that I supported their mother's discipline of them; and that I wanted them to discover God's perfect plan for each of them.

Ruth and I were not perfect parents; and when I had to travel, Ruth sometimes felt like a single parent, with all the problems that that entailed. We tried to discipline the children fairly, but at the same time we tried not to lay down a lot of rules and regulations.

When I objected to Franklin's long hair, Ruth reminded me that it wasn't a moral issue—and I kept my mouth shut on that subject thereafter. Actually, as Ruth pointed out with a twinkle in her eye, Franklin was in the tradition of the prophets and apostles.

Only once, I think, did I directly interfere with Franklin's plans. That was when Ruth called me from France, where she was visiting Gigi and her family. I was in Tokyo to address the Baptist World Alliance. Franklin was working in Nome, Alaska, and after she talked to him on the phone, Ruth begged me to call him and lay down the law.

I was to tell him how strenuously we opposed his engagement; we were convinced they were too young and unsuited to each other. Ruth cut short her visit with Gigi and returned to Montreat, arriving when Franklin did. In two weeks' time their friendship was over, and we breathed more easily.

Rebel Years

In a radio interview not many years ago, Franklin told about his rebel years of drinking, drugs, smoking, girls and fast driving. These were things he said his mother and I knew nothing about—or so he thought. And he said he never forgot a conversation I had with him in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1974. I assured him of our love, no matter what he did, where he went or how he ended up.

He knew that he could always phone us, collect, from anywhere in the world, and that whenever he wanted to come home, the door would always be open. He also knew we would never stop praying for him. It was actually during a trip to the Middle East, while in Jerusalem, that he made his firm decision to follow Christ.

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[One] memorable occasion symbolizes for me the fulfillment of our prayers and the Lord's persistent pursuit. On Jan. 10, 1982, in a church in Tempe, Arizona, ... after preaching the sermon, I joined several other ministers in laying my hands on the head of William Franklin Graham III to ordain him for the gospel ministry.

History was repeating itself some 40 years after godly men had done the same for me in a Florida country church.

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