

Billy Graham 'My Hope' Training Program Teaches Everyday Evangelists

Margaret Thompson has followed Christ with a fervent passion since she was 16. Now 27, the North Carolina mother of two finds that passion waning.

"I feel bottled up," she said after attending her local worship service. "Other than going to church, I am at home all the time with the kids and never have a chance to talk about my faith with an adult."

Although she lives in a large apartment complex in a suburb of Charlotte, she seldom interacts with her neighbors. "Frankly," she admitted, "I am afraid. I just don't know how to witness."

When Thompson heard about an approach to **evangelism** that seems tailor-made for her life situation, she broke into a huge grin. "That sounds perfect," she exclaimed.

"That" is *My Hope with **Billy Graham***, a grass-roots effort to share Christ through personal relationships that will culminate on Nov. 7, 2013, with a special broadcast featuring popular music, real-life stories and a message from Billy Graham.

Believers who want to open their homes for *My Hope* will receive training to help them better know what they believe, how to deepen their daily walk with God, and how to share their faith with others.

After the broadcast, the hosts—called Matthews, after the apostle who invited people to his home to meet Jesus over a meal—will receive special resources to help them follow up with new Christians.

All of the training will take place in local churches across the United States and Canada over the next 13 months.

In preparation, nearly 300 pastors and denominational leaders gathered Oct. 8-10 at the Billy Graham Training Center at The Cove in Asheville, N.C., to catch the vision for *My Hope* and take the first step in committing to the outreach.

Those who attended were just as excited as Margaret Thompson, especially about the value placed on relationships and reaching those who live just across the street.

Be Christ to Your Neighbors

Lee Taylor, the minister of outreach at Johnson Ferry Baptist Church in Atlanta, said he is eager to empower his church members to do **personal evangelism**. "They don't feel equipped," said Taylor. "In America, going across the street and being Christ to your neighbors is the scariest thing. We need to ask Christ for the faith to be used."

God has put people around us for a reason, Taylor added. "Who is in your life? Only you can reach the guy at your gym. *My Hope* gives me hope that people will build relationships with their neighbors, their boss, their nanny."

Don Riley, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Knoxville, Tenn., called the *My Hope* concept brilliant in its simplicity: "It fits in the rhythm of everyday life."

Ministering in a neighborhood with 26,000 students that borders an affluent community on one end and public housing on the other, Riley likes that *My Hope* can be tailored for different demographics.

"You can use your personality in hosting a *My Hope* outreach," said Riley. Maybe students can do the outreach in their dorm or frat house. Families can hold a cookout or block party. "So many of the beautiful things that happened in the life of Jesus happened in homes, around meals," said Riley.

Brian Doyle, national president of Iron Sharpens Iron, is excited about training people to evangelize in their sphere of influence. As the leader of an organization that mobilizes **men's ministries**, Doyle feels strongly that *My Hope* will help men build relationships with other men.

"This is a massive outreach that will get the attention of men. It will give them the opportunity to get involved in something far bigger than they've ever imagined—something bigger than themselves.

"Men are wired for significance," Doyle added. "*My Hope* will help a man be part of a team of men across the nation. It is out of the box."

Each Person Has Influence

Curtis Jenkins, the pastor of New Life Church in Valdosta, Ga., serves a congregation that is primarily rural. He wants to be sure people in rural areas—who might find it difficult to attend church—are reached.

During *My Hope*, Jenkins envisions men reaching out to each other and building relationships on fishing trips, or women sharing their hearts over a cup of coffee. "Each person has influence in a certain part of life," he said. "I don't go the gym. I don't shop. I visit the Senior Center."

Jenkins is concerned because in Valdosta, the **spiritual climate** is "partly cloudy with a big storm coming. People need the hope that is found in Jesus Christ alone. *My Hope* will help people in our community to tell their neighbors, 'I want you to have the same hope I have.'

"If you don't evangelize, you die," said Jenkins.

Mike Crump, assistant pastor of The Bridge in Kernersville, N.C., called *My Hope with Billy Grahama* breath of fresh air. "Why not use your home and your TV—the resources that God gave you—to bless people?"

Too often, said Crump, we put our gifts in a box. But we are all called to share the gospel. “People need to step out in faith, then step back and see what God will do. We’ve lost the personal touch in ministry. *My Hopereaches* into homes. It is personal.”

The Easiest Way

Everett Womack, a retired international vice president with The Coca-Cola Company, and his wife, Linda, expressed great enthusiasm for *My Hope*. Now living in Sevierville, Tenn., the couple volunteers at Wears Valley Ranch for abused and neglected children.

“There is a lot of hurt right now in the United States,” said Everett. “And God is the only solution, which gives us a huge opportunity to spread the Word and the truth.”

Linda believes that the personal approach to evangelism is best—forming relationships, making friends. “It is the easiest way to reach people,” she said.

Knocking on doors is ineffective in this day and age, Everett added. People are afraid to open their door to a stranger.

Both Linda and Everett have friends they plan to invite into their home: some are close, some are acquaintances. “We each have personal testimonies that will be strong in reaching others,” said Everett.

Asa and Debbie Dockery, the senior pastors of World Harvest Church North in Blairsville, Ga., agree that North America lacks hope. “The Bible says hope deferred makes the heart sick,” said Asa. “I believe our nation needs hope.”

My Hope training will give people confidence in evangelizing, equip them and offer accountability, said Debbie, who has a personal connection with Billy Graham’s ministry.

Her grandfather sat her down to watch Billy Graham specials on

TV when she was a child: "I credit Billy with my salvation," Debbie said with tears welling up in her eyes. "It is very emotional for me to be here at his Training Center.

"Now, through *My Hope*, people will sit together in front of a television again to hear Billy Graham preach the gospel."

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