

Billy Graham: Pastor to Presidents

Billy Graham has often said, "Whether the story of Christ is told in a huge stadium, across the desk of a powerful leader or shared with a golfing companion, it satisfies a common hunger. All over the world, whenever I meet people face-to-face, I am made aware of this personal need among the famous and successful, as well as the lonely and obscure."

Every U.S. President since World War II through Barack Obama has met with Billy Graham. Here are short snippets of their stories:

Harry S. Truman: In 1950 a congressman called Graham and asked, "Would you like to meet the president?" Without any briefing on protocol, he agreed and went in with three colleagues and spoke with President Truman, who told Graham he lived by the Sermon on the Mount. Before he left, the two prayed together. Years later, Truman warmly received Billy at his home in Independence, Mo.

Dwight D. Eisenhower: "Eisenhower was the first president that really asked my counsel in depth when he was sending troops into Little Rock," said Graham. Just before Eisenhower died, Graham was invited to see him at Walter Reed Hospital. After talking again about assurance of salvation, the two men prayed. Eisenhower then said he was ready to die.

John F. Kennedy: Four days before he was inaugurated as president, Kennedy invited Graham to spend the day with him in Palm Beach. "We drove around in JFK's white Lincoln convertible," said Graham. "During our conversations, I became aware that he was concerned about the moral and spiritual condition of the nation." During Kennedy's funeral service in the Capitol rotunda, Billy stood about 30 feet from Mrs.

Kennedy and the family, and thought about the brevity of life and how people must prepare to meet God.

Lyndon B. Johnson: There was a religious side to Johnson that people did not know. Billy was probably closer to Johnson than to any other president. He was invited to the family ranch several times and spent more than 20 nights at the White House during Johnson's administration. Every time Graham would say to him, "Let's have a prayer," the president would get on his knees to pray.

Richard M. Nixon: President Nixon and Graham had been personal friends since 1950. Nixon was a private and complex person, but beneath the surface, Graham found him to be warm and compassionate, quite different from popular caricatures. He was rooted in the teachings and prayers of his Quaker faith. Often he asked Billy to pray with him and read the Bible when he would visit. In the last year of Nixon's presidency, Graham did not get to see him. Someone in the White House later relayed that Nixon said, "Don't let Billy Graham near me, I don't want him tarred with Watergate."

Gerald R. Ford: Answering critics of his relationship with Graham, Gerald Ford said, "I've heard the comments from some sources that Billy mixes politics with religion. I never felt that and I don't think that thousands and thousands of people who listen to him felt that. Billy dropped by the Oval Office on several occasions while I was president. They were get-togethers of old friends. They had no political or other significance."

Jimmy Carter: "Billy and Ruth Graham have been to visit us both in the governor's mansion in Georgia and in the White House," said Jimmy Carter. "His reputation is above reproach or suspicion." Back in 1966, Carter chaired a BGEA film crusade in Americus, Ga., and when he was governor, served as an honorary chairman of the Atlanta Crusade.

Ronald W. Reagan: Graham met Ronald Reagan a year after he married Nancy. The two remained close friends. "I remember when Reagan was president of the Screen Actors Guild, a union leader and a very strong Democrat," Billy said. On March 30, 1981, after the assassination attempt on President Reagan's life, Graham flew immediately to Washington, D.C., to comfort and pray with Mrs. Reagan, and do anything he could for the president.

George H. W. Bush: Graham has said he found George H.W. Bush easy to talk to about spiritual issues, "easier than other presidents I have met. He says straight out that he has received Christ as his Savior and that he is a born-again believer." Graham was with President and Barbara Bush at the White House in 1991, the night that the Gulf War began. "Billy Graham has been an inspiration in my life," said Bush. "It is my firm belief that no one can be president ... without understanding the power of prayer, without faith. And Billy Graham helped me understand that."

William J. Clinton: President Clinton once recalled, "When I was a small boy, about 12 years old, Billy Graham came to Little Rock, Ark., to preach a crusade." Graham would not agree to segregate the audience racially, which made an impression on the young boy. When he was governor of Arkansas, Clinton joined Graham at a Little Rock Crusade in 1989. Graham also visited Clinton in the Oval Office after he became president.

George W. Bush: In his 1999 campaign autobiography, "A Charge to Keep," George W. Bush said a turning point in his faith came during a private talk with Graham along the coast of Maine in 1985. Graham's words planted the "mustard seed in my soul" that eventually led to a decision to "recommit my heart to Jesus Christ," he wrote.

Barack Obama: President Barack Obama visited Graham at his Montreat, N.C., home at the end of his weekend mountain

vacation in April 2010. He is the first sitting president to meet with Graham at his home, where the two of them had a private prayer time and some conversation. A White House spokesman said that the president was "extraordinarily gratified that he (Graham) took the time to meet with him." Graham said he was pleased to have had the president visit his home.