

Billy Graham Publishes Devotional on YouVersion

Billy Graham is no stranger to the latest technology.

As one of the first to leverage radio and television to spread the gospel message around the globe, Graham was somewhat of a technological trailblazer.

So it only makes sense that his devotions are now available on the most widely distributed biblical mobile application—YouVersion.

“My grandfather has always been on the cutting edge when it comes to technology,” says Will Graham, grandson of Billy Graham and associate evangelist and vice president of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA). “He pioneered the use of radio, television and motion pictures in evangelism, and we are seeing a tremendous impact today through the Internet and reaching people on mobile devices.”

Mr. Graham’s one-year reading plan, from his popular devotion *Day by Day*, is now available on YouVersion, which celebrated 100 million downloads on July 7.

Thousands across the world have been engaging in Mr. Graham’s devotional content for years on the free BGEA app, where in addition to devotional content you’ll find Billy Graham’s sermons, television specials and classic *Hour of Decision* programs.

Making it available on YouVersion opens up an entirely new audience of believers eager to engage in God’s Word.

“We hope making this content available via YouVersion will help people around the world grow closer in their relationship with God,” Will Graham says.

Adam Bouse, one of the team leaders at YouVersion, is excited about adding *Day by Day* to its reading plan lineup, which includes Focus on the Family, John Piper, James McDonald and Our Daily Bread, among others.

“Billy Graham is one of the most trusted, well-known Christian leaders of our time,” Bouse says. “The teaching and wisdom that Billy Graham brings to the table will help people connect with Scripture and become a daily habit. We don’t want people just to read the Bible on Sunday.”

“A Legend”

Engagement in Scripture has always been a big deal at YouVersion, the ministry founded by . And in a recent survey, YouVersion found that 77 percent of its users report they read the Bible more frequently because they have it on their mobile devices.

“Our goal is for people to engage in God’s Word,” says Lori Bailey, director of communications at . “And Billy Graham is a legend. To be able to offer his content to people in a digital format is thrilling. We definitely see people responding in a big way.”

Bouse estimates between 40,000 to 50,000 people will initially sign up for Billy Graham’s reading plan, and within a year’s time he sees more than 100,000 engaging with *Day by Day*.

“When people come to the Bible, they have questions—how do they read it, how do they apply it to [their] life,” Bouse says. “We know that trusted leaders help people engage in the Bible.”

Bailey thinks the Billy Graham devotional may “stretch [their] demographics a bit,” while also “introducing this content to a new generation.”

“With a household name like Billy Graham, there’s not too much

doubt there will be many subscribers,” she says.

“Last-Ditch Effort”

The YouVersion app also celebrated its five-year anniversary on July 10. But as Bailey, Bouse and others at YouVersion will attest, the fact that they’re even around in 2013 is a testament to God’s sovereignty.

And the fact that every second, 66,000 users are using YouVersion and that you can find more than 500 versions and 300 languages on the mobile site is beyond their wildest dreams.

“It’s pretty easy to step back and say God is clearly doing something special,” says Bouse, who joined the team about three years ago when the app’s numbers were hovering around 8 million users. “We don’t want to take any credit for it. In an instant, God could take it and move it somewhere else.”

Bailey couldn’t agree more.

“The easy answer is it’s because God’s behind it, but it’s true,” says Bailey about the app that was launched as one of about 200 free apps when Apple opened its iTunes store in 2008. “Being first probably helped. But we were in a unique situation to give it a try because we had already created an online Bible.”

But like many success stories, YouVersion had a rocky start. Things were so bleak in the early days, according to Bailey, “[they] were just a couple weeks from turning the YouVersion website off.”

Launched as a traditional website, YouVersion began in 2007, and by early 2008 the traffic numbers had only climbed to the 20,000 range for the first year—far below projections.

“[The leaders] were in a big room, with all these Post-its on the wall,” Bailey says. “And they decided to try this one

last-ditch effort.”

Most everyone in the room was on their Blackberry phones at the time, and they decided to try out a mobile version. And then the game-changer happened in March, when Apple announced it was opening an iTunes store.

Nobody realized the possible impact.

“We had a young 19-year-old kid who loved Apple and jumped in and did it as sort of a side project,” Bailey says.

’s innovation pastor and YouVersion’s founder Bobby Gruenewald set a lofty goal at the time of 80,000 downloads from iTunes over the first six months.

“It hit 80,000 installs in the first weekend,” Bailey says.

By May of 2012, YouVersion hit 50 million installs, and just 14 months later—at precisely 3:46 p.m. on July 7—it celebrated its 100 millionth download.

“People are reading the Bible in the car, waiting to pick up the kids, [in] line in the grocery store, while they’re at the airport,” Bouse says. “We hear stories about people all the time, people who have tried for years to read the Bible all the way through in a year, who are finally doing it.”

Big Year for Billy Graham

The YouVersion announcement comes at a significant time in Mr. Graham’s ministry. He is praying and preparing for the biggest North America evangelism outreach, My Hope With Billy Graham, which culminates in November in both the United States and Canada.

More than 16,000 churches have registered to participate in My Hope America, which also includes an Oct. 15 release of his newest book, *The Reason for My Hope: Salvation*.

At the same time, Capitol Christian Group will release a music project entitled *My Hope: Songs Inspired by the Message and Mission of Billy Graham*. Among the platinum- and gold-selling artists on the CD are Newsboys, Michael W. Smith, Matthew West, Israel Houghton, Lacey Sturm, Kari Jobe, Darlene Zschech, Nicole Nordeman, Amy Grant and Vince Gill.

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