

Billy Graham Remembers Chuck Colson

Evangelical Christianity lost one of its most eloquent and influential voices with the death of Charles W. Colson on April 21. The Prison Fellowship and Colson Center for Christian Worldview founder died at 3:12 p.m. ET Saturday at the age of 80.

“When I get to heaven and see Chuck again, I believe I will also see many, many people there whose lives have been transformed because of the message he shared with them,” said Billy Graham in a statement. “He will be greatly missed by many, including me. I count it a privilege to have called him friend.”

His death came just over three weeks after Colson was overcome by dizziness while speaking at a conference and rushed to a northern Virginia hospital. Surgeons operated on him for two hours for a brain hemorrhage.

“At times, Chuck showed encouraging indicators of a possible recovery, but his health took a decided turn, and he went to be with the Lord,” said a statement on his website.

“For more than 35 years, Chuck Colson, a former prisoner himself, has had a tremendous ministry reaching into prisons and jails with the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ,” said Billy Graham today in a statement. “When I get to heaven and see Chuck again, I believe I will also see many, many people there whose lives have been transformed because of the message he shared with them.

“He will be greatly missed by many, including me. I count it a privilege to have called him friend,” Graham added.

Franklin Graham said in a statement: “Chuck Colson was one of

the great Christian statesmen of our generation. His life and testimony impacted my life. I was in my early 20s when his book *Born Again* was released. It was one of the first Christian books I ever read and was a powerful and life-changing influence.

“Over the years we had the opportunity to work together from time to time. Not only was he a statesman, but a role model and example to thousands. He will be missed and cannot be replaced. His courageous voice that spoke the truth of Jesus Christ to the hearts of so many, will impact lives for years to come.”

Colson was led to Christ on a hot, humid August night in 1973 when Tom Phillips, then the president of the Raytheon Company, witnessed to him in his home. Phillips had accepted Christ at a Billy Graham Crusade at Madison Square Garden in 1968.

“This is how the gospel spreads, from Graham to Phillips to Colson,” said Colson in the book *Billy Graham: A Tribute from Friends* by Vernon K. McLellan.

Colson further described his relationship with Graham: “So it is that I am Billy Graham disciple one step removed, but my debt to Graham goes far beyond that. ... After my conversion ... Billy reached out to me and befriended me, guided me and counseled me. He has served as a role model, a person I could emulate.”

Colson wrote that he had many rich memories with Graham, but none as meaningful as the day both men toured Memphis Federal Prison.

After speaking to 1,000 inmates outside the prison walls, Graham visited the maximum security segregation unit to see men who weren't permitted to hear him preach.

Colson was amazed to see Graham—“clearly the greatest evangelist of the 20th century—as he sat on the floor talking

through the grate in a cell door to lead an inmate to Christ.”

In 1981, Colson shared his testimony at the Billy Graham Crusade in Baltimore. He also spoke at the 1993 Pittsburgh Crusade and again in 2001, at the Central Valley Billy Graham Crusade in Fresno, Calif.

Colson gave the keynote address for Amsterdam 2000 on August 2, 2000.

On Easter 2000, Colson, Franklin Graham and a coalition of evangelists and prison ministries launched Operation Starting Line, a campaign to establish Christian programs in 1,800 prisons holding 2 million inmates across the United States.

No stranger to prison life, it was in 1974 that Colson entered Alabama’s Maxwell Prison as the first member of the Nixon administration to be incarcerated for Watergate-related charges. He served seven months of a one -to three-year sentence before being released.

But Colson never really left prison. Haunted by the desperation and hopelessness he saw behind bars, Colson knew he had to do something to help the men he left behind. In fact, he had a promise to keep.

So in 1976, Colson founded Prison Fellowship, which, together with churches of all confessions and denominations, has become the world’s largest outreach to prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families, with ministry taking place in 113 countries around the globe.

Franklin Graham spoke at a Prison Fellowship Ministry Briefing, “Changed Lives Changed Communities,” in Naples, Fla. on April 18, 2008.

Colson was the author of more than 30 books, which have collectively sold more than 5 million copies. His autobiographical book *Born Again* was one of the nation’s best-

selling books of all genres in 1976 and was made into a feature-length film.

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