

Billy Graham's Final Surviving Sibling, Jean Graham Ford, Dead at 91

Jean Graham Ford, wife of evangelist Leighton Ford and the only remaining sibling of renowned evangelist Billy Graham, died on Feb. 29 at age 91.

Her nephew Franklin Graham shared the news on Facebook, noting that his father, "sought her counsel on many issues during his lifetime" and that "We are thankful for her life that impacted so many when she would share her testimony, saying, 'Sometimes it's so difficult to trust our lives to the Lord Jesus Christ, and yet to me, there's no option. That happened to be ingrained in my, my trust in what He promises; my trust in who I know Him to be.'"

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Despite the nearly 14 years that separated them, Billy Graham, who died in 2018 at the age of 99, had a special relationship with Jean, who called him "Billy Frank." "[With Billy Frank] being so much older, it was sort of like having a second parent," she said in 2010. "I've always just adored him and still do."

Jean contracted polio at age 11, and doctors told her parents she probably would not live through the night. "I do remember this very clearly," she said in 2020. "If I died that night, at that age, that would not have bothered me so much because I knew then I was going to heaven."

She did recover, however, and followed in her oldest brother's footsteps to attend Wheaton College in Illinois. Leighton Ford, then a Youth for Christ Leader, invited Billy Graham to

speak at an evangelistic rally in Canada. Graham, in turn, encouraged Leighton to apply at Wheaton and told him about his little sister. The two met, fell in love and were married on Dec. 19, 1953. Leighton went on to serve as an associate evangelist with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association for three decades.

Their faith carried the Fords through the death of their oldest son, Sandy, at age 21. "God is good. ... even when we weren't feeling that way," Jean said of their decision to cling to the Lord despite the tragic loss.

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Jean "lived a life devoted to studying God's Word and telling others about His free gift of salvation through His Son Jesus Christ," per the BGEA. "For many years, she taught Bible studies and spoke at engagements around the world.

When she spoke at her brother's 2018 funeral, Jean said the news of his death brought to mind an old hymn, "Heaven Came Down and Glory Filled My Soul."

"On February the 21st, heaven came down and took my brother from me," she told the funeral guests. "One day, heaven will come down and take me. And I know what [my brother] would want me to say today is, 'Heaven is coming again and would like to take you also.'"

She is survived by her husband of 70 years, her son, Kevin; and her daughter, Debbie.{eoa}

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