

Franklin Graham Paving the Way for Religious Freedom

"We could be on a beach where it's nice and sunny and warm, but we want to be here."

Elaine Taylor and her husband, Leonard, could have traveled anywhere Tuesday, but chose to drive the two and a half hours north of their home in Marshfield, Massachusetts, to be part of a prayer rally in 18-degree Concord, New Hampshire, where the wind chill made it feel much colder.

But since when has a little cold kept New Englanders from staying in?

The couple joined about 1,500 others in front of the State House to be part of Franklin Graham's 50-state Decision America Tour as he encourages Christians to pray for America and live out their faith—at home, in public and at the polls.

The Taylors heard about the tour during a trip to the Charlotte-based Billy Graham Library last month. They wanted to see what it's all about and take back the excitement to Massachusetts, where Franklin Graham will visit later this year.

"We live about 10 miles from Plymouth," Leonard said, the Pilgrims' first stop when they came to America seeking religious freedom. Today, however, Leonard said the country seems to be "corroding" spiritually and wants to see it "set on a godly track again."

Gathering with other like-minded Christians may just be the first step.

"We love Jesus, and we're happy to hear Franklin Graham ... and be united as Christians," said Jennie Chisholm, a resident of

Salem, New Hampshire, who came with her parents and four boys.

The boys, ages 5 to 10, stood with scarves tight around their necks, their hats covering their ears and their noses turning pink. But all four wore smiles and seemed happy to be there.

"I want them to see that there are other Christians around us, even though it doesn't always seem like it," Jennie said, adding that she also wants to teach them the importance of prayer.

Franklin Graham re-enforced her thinking when he took the stage moments later: "The best thing we can do on your Capitol steps today is pray," he said.

He spoke about America's emphasis on political correctness, in which people are afraid to stand up for their beliefs at the risk of offending someone.

But now isn't the time to be silent or ashamed of Almighty God.

What we need, Franklin Graham said, is revival *now*. And he's confident that it's possible.

So is Gayle Lamm, who came to the prayer rally with her 20-year-old son, Jordan.

"We need help to bring people together ... people of all denominations," Gayle said, explaining her gratefulness for the Decision America Tour. "I've been praying for the country for years."

Gayle was at the State House in Concord just a couple years ago for the National Day of Prayer. So when her husband read about Decision America in the newspaper, she cut it out and put it on the fridge as a reminder.

But why not just pray at home and avoid the freezing temperatures?

"You can pray by yourself ... but praying with others who feel the same as you and think the same as you can make a big difference," Jordan said.

Many people Jordan's age are drifting from God, distracted by their phones, media and material things, he said, and the further people get from God, the more the nation will suffer.

"Before our nation can be healed, our individual hearts must be healed," Franklin Graham said from the stage.

He led a time of prayer not only for the nation, but for each person there to ask Jesus Christ for forgiveness in their own lives. And it doesn't end when people leave the prayer rally.

Franklin Graham encouraged people to start community prayer groups and to encourage other believers to run for office at all levels.

"Let's just see what God can do," he said. "Let's become a nation that can once again say 'In God we Trust.'"

Judging by the affirming amens, the spontaneous hallelujahs and sustained applause at every mention of Christ, an out-of-towner might never know that New Hampshire has the second highest percentage of people in the country who claim no religion or faith.

But with people enveloped head to toe in blankets, ski pants, face masks and anything they could find to keep warm, all to be present for a prayer rally, it's evident that many still care about where their state stands with God.

Jim Madden of Derry, New Hampshire, stood out in the crowd with a red, white and blue USA fleece and two small American flags in hand. He said he's been praying for each stop on the tour using his Decision America prayer journal.

"I just feel like there's not much time left," he said about the country turning back to God. "How much more is God going

to put up with?"

Jim accepted Jesus around 30 years old, and a tear rolled down his face as he talked about what God has done in his life. His hope is that many more will come to know Christ and live out their faith. And it all starts with prayer.

"I wish we could do this every day," he said.