

Will Graham Keeping Vision of 'Granddaddy'

In a world ruled by technology, it's the perfect getaway.

The mountaintop retreat known as The Billy Graham Training Center at The Cove is one of those rare places you can go and completely disconnect from life.

And reconnect with God.

Somewhere in that tension where the speed of technology meets the screeching halt of unwinding is the challenge that's in front of its new director, Will Graham, grandson of The Cove's founders, Billy and Ruth Graham.

"It was always (Billy Graham's) vision to be a place to get away and get into God's Word," Will Graham said to a roomful of local and Christian media outlets recently. "I want to continue what my granddaddy started. And use technology to further that."

Currently, the Billy Graham Training Center in Asheville, N.C., founded in 1988, has extended its reach by streaming sessions to a worldwide audience. Cove visitors can use GPS units to find one of 315 prayer pillars, which are scattered around the 1,200-acre campus.

Flanked with an iPad and iPhone and a well-worn black leather Bible, Will Graham is armed and ready for whatever life brings his way.

He'll be the first to tell you he's not an Apple pitchman—quickly interjecting, "I wish I had bought their stock"—but he's seen the power of new innovations while traveling the world preaching the gospel.

Keeping in touch with his wife, Kendra, and his three kids,

CJ, Rachel and Quinn, has never been so easy—even when he's delivering the Good News on the other side of the globe. "I don't know who the man was who invited Skype, but it's amazing," Graham said.

Throw in updates on Twitter, Facetime and Apple TV... "I can send them a picture: 'Hey, look kids, I'm riding on a kangaroo,'" Graham quips. "You can take a picture with your phone and it shows up on your TV at home."

And in no time, Graham is back at home, playing Wii with his son or watching the stars with his daughter's new telescope. Graham recently returned from preaching to nearly 10,000 at Celebrations—his version of a Billy Graham Crusade—on back-to-back weekends in Texas. Before that he was sharing Christ in the Seven Sister States of India. Next month, he'll be evangelizing in Australia.

It's hard for Graham not to feel homesick.

"I tell you, I love being around my wife," Graham said about the hardest part of being an international evangelist. "If I put God first when I'm gone for two weeks or three weeks, I believe God is going to make that one week I'm home feel like a month."

And when he's home, he regularly visits his famous "granddaddy" just up the road, at his Montreat, N.C., home often times on Sunday after attending the early service.

"By the time I get there, I can usually sit with him and watch his pastor on TV," said Will Graham, son of Franklin Graham, the president and CEO of both the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and Samaritan's Purse.

Growing up, Graham remembers aspiring to follow in the evangelistic footsteps of his father and grandfather: "I wanted to be someone who flew around and told people about Jesus."

And now that he's doing just that at age 37, he still looks for advice on how to effectively minister the gospel.

His "granddaddy" has dispensed a few pearls of wisdom over the years, including the three most important parts of ministry: "Pray, pray and pray"—long with his biggest regret: "I wish I would've taken less speaking engagements. And studied the Bible more."

There is an unusual mix of familiarity and reverence when Will Graham talks about his grandfather.

"People tell me, 'You sound like your granddaddy,' " said Graham, featured in last month's *People* magazine article. "I don't try to sound like my granddaddy, but when you grow up 60 miles apart in the same neck of the woods, you end up sounding alike."

The obvious comparison is that both are evangelists, but many see similarities in the heart they have for people. Before joining The Cove as assistant director, Graham was a pastor for six years at Wakefield Baptist Church in Wake Forest, N.C.

"I love my granddaddy," Graham said. "Anytime I can be associated with him in the same sentence, it's an honor."

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