



28 February, 2018

News:

**'No other preacher could compare with him'**

**Tributes have been pouring in for Billy Graham, Baptist minister and evangelist, who has died aged 99**

'Few Christian leaders will ever rival the impact Billy Graham has made for the sake of the Kingdom,' said Lynn Green, General Secretary of our Baptist Union, as she sought to honour Billy Graham's life and ministry on the announcement of his death (21 February).

*'I am deeply grateful for the way that this anointed man has been faithful to God's call,' she continued, 'His personal integrity, his dedication to nurturing the gifts that God had given him and his harnessing of innovation in communications have meant that individuals and communities right around the world have been transformed by Jesus.*

*'Yet Billy Graham describes himself as but one link in a glorious chain of God's people sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ.*

*'As we give thanks for Billy, we also need embrace our own ongoing call, here and now, to fulfil our own part as a link in that same glorious chain.'*

'No other preacher could compare with him,' wrote Baptist minister Derek Tidball, former principal of London Bible College (now the London School of Theology) in an obituary for this website.

However Billy Graham was 'much more than an evangelist', Dr Tidball added. He praised his 'strategic thinking' which led to the revival of evangelicalism in the United States in the second half of the 20th Century; and how he grasped the importance of using modern communication technology for the gospel. He also wrote of his integrity and compassion.

*'Although Billy Graham preached a simple gospel he modelled the wholeness of it in his actions.*

*'Always motivated by the Bible, he believed that all people were equal in God's sight, and he could not escape the more than a thousand verses that commanded people to help their neighbours in their time of need.'*

David Coffey, former General Secretary of our Baptist Union, has written to the Graham family. He recounted the excitement generated by Billy's visit to his church in Bournemouth in 1946 (his father late father, Arthur Coffey, was among the group of young British Youth for Christ pastors who invited him to Britain), and how he made his first public commitment to Christ in the landmark Harringay crusade in 1954. Indeed, David continued, 'I could recount stories from every decade of my life when I was spiritually blessed under the influence of Dr Graham's ministry.'

He added,

*I count myself in the vast global multitude of those who claim Billy as one of their spiritual mentors in the spirit of Hebrews 13:7-8. Billy was a faithful preacher of God's Word; I have through many years considered the outcome of his pattern of life; and I am drawn to imitate his faith in Jesus Christ who is eternally the same-yesterday, today and for ever.*

David has been invited to the funeral, which takes place on Friday (2 March) in Charlotte, North Carolina and will be live streamed.

Phil Jump, regional minister team leader North Western Baptist Association, said there are many Christians across Merseyside, West Lancashire and the North West whose lives have been deeply impacted by the ministry of Billy Graham.

*'I am one of many who took part in the famed Anfield campaign in 1984, and it was during this crusade that my wife Jan found faith. As North West Regional Minister, I had the privilege of visiting his home in North Carolina during a visit to the States and met his grandson Will, who along with his wife is an avid Liverpool supporter. Perhaps the Anfield event left its mark on the Graham family too!*

*'Billy Graham had a particularly straightforward and at times fundamentalist view of the Christian faith that might not be shared by everyone, but anyone who met and knew him had no doubt of his integrity and authenticity. Graham himself often spoke of his surprise at the impact his ministry had, describing his daughter Ruth once as "The best preacher in the family". My own experience of hearing him at Anfield bore this out – he was clear, measured and articulate in what he had to say, but was no great barnstormer and the hundreds who responded to his message were not drawn onto the pitch in some great wave of emotion and hype, but by a simple and understated invitation to become followers of Jesus. It was perhaps this uncompromising simplicity that accounts for the effectiveness of his ministry.'*

Phil added that Billy's visit to Liverpool in 1984, as part of the accompanying "Mission England" initiative, was 'one of the key catalysts in the journey to unity and

co-operation' between the different Christian traditions that is such a valued feature of the city and region today.

Other Baptists have been sharing their tributes on social media. On Facebook Wayne Clarke, minister of Trinity Baptist Church in Manchester, wrote,

*'Billy Graham has died, aged 99. He was the greatest preacher and Christian of our generation. A Baptist minister whose wise words and humble character will be remembered forever, he affected several generations of the Church in Britain.'*

*'Many thousands came to faith in Christ through his ministry, backed up by the work and prayers of Christians serving in unity in our cities and communities.'*

Seidel Abel Boanerges, tutor in Christian Mission and Theology at Spurgeon's College, simply wrote, 'Thank you, Billy Graham!'

He followed this by posting one of Billy Graham's quotes:

*'One day you will hear that Billy Graham has died. Don't believe a word of it. On that day, I will be more alive than I ever will be. I will just have changed my address. I will have gone into the presence of God.'*

On Twitter Dr Krish Kandiah, author, founder of Home For Good and member of Cornerstone Church, a cafe-style Baptist church in Thame, said:

*'So grateful for the life and witness of #BillyGraham He was a devoted follower of Jesus and a dignified and graceful statesman for the kingdom of God.'*

In a piece about attending two Billy Graham rallies, Baptist minister Mark Woods, editor of Christian Today, wrote,

*'Billy Graham has been honoured throughout the world for his ministry. He was the kind of person God sends only once in several generations.'*

*To argue, as some will, that his kind of evangelism has had its day is to miss the point; in its day, it was a powerful instrument of God's grace and in Billy Graham it found its finest and most devoted servant.*

Elsewhere, Steve Clifford, general director of the Evangelical Alliance, which facilitated an organising committee for the 1954 Haringay Crusades, commented,

*'History will recall that Billy Graham was one of the most influential men of his generation. I was profoundly influenced by his life and ministry from afar. Beside a lake, in large auditoriums and through broadcasts, or watching him on TV – one could not help but be impacted by his passion for God, his commitment to the truth of the gospel and his life of integrity lived under intense media scrutiny.'*

*'The ministry of Billy Graham in the UK and the Evangelical Alliance have been uniquely intertwined in the second half of the 20th century, since the events at Harringay arena in 1954. I am sure that his legacy will live on.'*

### **'Creating a fresh momentum for change'**

**Our figures hide a background of embedded resistance to women's ministry: the Baptists Together Gender Justice Hub is exploring ways of loosening some of the barriers.**

On 6 February, 1918, the British Parliament passed the Representation of People Act which extended the vote to all men and to many women over 30. It was the culmination of the campaign for women's votes that had been running since before the turn of the century.

At a moment when women's rights are prominent in the media, both commemorating past history and looking at current scandals, members of the Baptists Together Gender Justice Hub met the previous week (Monday 29 January) in Birmingham with other friends who share a vision to see much more progress within our own Baptist life.

Over many years there has been a succession of amazing groups within our Baptist Union who have worked to highlight the need for equality within Baptist life as well as in our wider society. These groups have worked to support women become all that God has called them to be. That Baptists believe that women are equally able to exercise the full range of gifts and offices in the church has been affirmed by Baptist Union Council in February 1926 and then nearly 100 years later in March 2010: it has therefore been the official policy of our Union and our collective understanding of Scripture for a long time.

The most recent group to work together in this way is the Gender Justice Hub. Its vision is to focus on promoting a just culture for women and men. Working alongside the Racial Justice and Disability Justice Hub, we work with a common agenda for enabling and supporting all people to share their gifts equally within the body of Christ whilst understanding the complexities which arise as different aspects of justice intersect.

So, what does the picture look like now? A snapshot of women in Baptist ministry shows that of fully accredited ministers, 16 per cent are women. For those in training and those who are newly-accredited the figures rise to 38 per cent and 34 per cent, so there is movement in good directions.

But the figures hide a background of embedded resistance to women's ministry, often unconscious but sometimes overtly expressed in theological terms. For those just beginning to explore using their gifts for God or sensing a call to leadership there can be a gender barrier which prevents young women being identified, apprenticed or recognised. A survey by the Sophia Network of women and church life yields many anecdotes of unconscious or active inequality as well statistical evidence. It will be published in March.

Jenni Entrican, reporting from her experience within the European Baptist Federation, mentioned influential teaching in some countries which promotes a theology of male-only leadership and of complementarianism. A theology of equality does not always have the strongest voice. The purpose of gathering a wider group was to explore ways to change this message, especially by action from men alongside women, intentionally identifying and encouraging women with gifting, engaging in biblical and theological teaching that is broader in focus than the 'problem passages', and creating a fresh momentum for change.

Looking back to some significant centenaries we want the whole Baptist family to celebrate the pioneering women who pursued their clear call from God and entered ministry and training as pioneers 100 years ago: Edith Gates (1918), Violet Hedger (1919) and Maria Living Taylor (1920).

We also want to spur the Baptist family on to reflect and where necessary repent of the barriers that are still in place for women wanting to exercise fully their gifts and calling in the church.

A number of actions and activities will be promoted on the Baptists Together website: get together, get passionate and get involved. Next up is a conference in June for women in or exploring Baptist ministry.

The Gender Justice Hub meets next on 1 May. If you want to find out more please get in touch. Mary Taylor (Convenor) [mary.taylor@yba.org.uk](mailto:mary.taylor@yba.org.uk)

**'I hope people will encounter Jesus again'**

**A Baptist minister has memorised all 13,726 words of the Gospel of Mark - and will bring it to life in a fast-paced and punchy solo performance**

Howard Jones has memorised all 13,726 words of the gospel, and will bring its characters to life in a series of performances at Christ Church in Cobridge, Stoke-on-Trent (28 February – 3 March).

Howard, Urban Expression Cobridge team co leader, has spent the last two years learning the story by heart, firstly as a personal challenge.

‘It started with my own devotional life. I’d got a bit stuck and wanted to do something different. And it was just one of those little thoughts which said – ‘why don’t you learn Mark’s Gospel?’

Howard is a natural story teller who loves to perform, and as he began to memorise and live with the gospel, the idea of a live performance began to form.

‘Sadly, we have often taken this incredible story about a dynamic and amazing man and made it sound religious and boring,’ Howard said. ‘This is real shame, because so few get to really experience it as a story.’

He shared his idea with Frank McGregor, a Stoke on Trent based actor and artist, who offered to direct. Together they have crafted what they hope will be a thought-provoking and enjoyable show.

The audience will experience Jesus in a way they might not expect, Howard explained. ‘I decided quite early on to give Jesus a ‘Northern’ accent. This wasn’t just a whim; Jesus was a working-class bloke from a small village in Galilee – “up north” in Israel – and I wanted to reflect that.

‘For centuries church art and culture has tended to “poshify” Jesus, so I think it’s nice to hear him as an earthy, common man – that’s how his first followers would have heard him.’

Frank said, ‘We took the text and started by thinking of it not as Holy Scripture but as a theatrical script waiting to be brought to life in a stage performance. Howard has risen magnificently to the challenge of the solo performance, moving effortlessly between the many characters we meet along the way.

‘We are convinced that as people watch, something of the awe which struck all who heard and met Jesus will be experienced by our audiences – and perhaps some will go away asking the same question many asked at the time – just who is this Jesus?’

Howard says the experience of immersing himself in Mark’s gospel has helped him to think more like Jesus.

‘When different situations come up, I automatically go to the stories in Mark. It’s made the story of Jesus much more immediate.

‘Normally when people hear the stories of Jesus, they just get a little chunk. But those stories flow together, and getting the sweep of the stories has been great. To have someone tell them with passion and humour and pathos and movement – I hope people will have fun and just encounter Jesus as a real person again.’

## **First female President for JBU**

### **The Jamaica Baptist Union (JBU) witnessed a moment of history when it welcomed its first female President on Sunday (25 February)**

The Revd Karen Kirlew assumed the role during the 168th JBU General Assembly after being elected the previous year.

‘Never before have we seen such excitement, such enthusiasm and such expectation for an incoming President,’ said her predecessor the Revd Devon Dick as he led the act of installation (pictured).

Karen is the pastor of the St. Ann’s Bay Circuit of Baptist Churches. She became a Christian aged 14 and spent 10 months in Britain as part of a mission team in 1994-5. On her return her then pastor, the Revd Dr Neville Callam, suggested pastoral ministry to her.

‘He was convinced this was my calling and helped me to realise that God had a particular calling upon my life,’ she told the Jamaica Observer.

‘It set me on a different path and allowed me to think in a different way — one I had not considered before.

‘Things took off from there, and by the time I applied for ministry I got the feeling this was it, because the support was there from the church community as they have to recommend you as well.

‘It was a matter of doing what I was doing for the love of the Lord and God’s people.’

This has continued to this day. Despite some initial apprehension her new role, she said ‘God knows what he’s doing.’

‘It was uncontested, and the constituents were very elated and overjoyed. People are excited, people are on the edge, and it has a lot to do with being part of history.

‘But together the leaders of the church discern what approach to take as God instructs us, and whatever vision is to be realised we will do it together.’

Along with a new executive, she will lead the 40,000 strong denomination for the next two years, under the decade-long thematic banner and new sub-theme: Being God’s People in God’s World: Living in Partnership.

In an interview with the Jamaica Gleaner, she said restoring 'dignity' to the nation is one of her goals, and hopes there will be a renewed focus on how the Church can facilitate new expressions of dignity in social interactions.

JBU General Secretary the Revd Karl B Johnson described Karen becoming President as 'an historic and exciting moment for all Baptists in Jamaica.'

She was also welcomed by the Revd Lynn Green, General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain.

'British Baptists rejoice with our Jamaican Baptist sisters and brothers in Christ at the appointment of the Revd Karen Kirlew as their first female President,' Lynn said.

'We are praying with you that the Lord who pours out His Holy Spirit on all people, will be anointing and empowering Karen for this ministry at this time.

'I hope that I will be able to meet Karen in person this year and I look forward to all that she might contribute to the richness of the relationship we share as the JBU and the BUGB.'

### **New Hope Baptist Church**

**A reimagined, re-envisioned and revitalised Church in the heart of Eastbourne's seaside community**

We give thanks for...

- Home Mission and are really grateful that we have been granted its finances for another year and especially to all who support Home Mission through financial giving and prayer.
- Our first Baptismal service. We held it in the entrance lobby enabling the passing local folk to see what was happening
- NewHopeOutsideThe recently opened Community Café - open currently on Wednesday and Saturday mornings. The plan is to have it open each morning.
- The fact that some of the local folk have come into the building and that other committed Christians have joined, thus strengthening us in our task.

We still need prayer for...

- Practical needs: ie workers in administration, staff to start mothers & toddlers, Messy Church, musicians and worship leaders, more folk to enable the café to be open more often
- Church growth through conversion – clear strategy to reach out to the 800 homes in the immediate area.
- The plans to call a Student Pastor this September as Freddie plans to work half-time having reached retirement age
- For fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit for continued vision, renewal, inspiration and encouragement.



Freddie Brookes - Pastor, New Hope Baptist Church

## Opinion

### **After the action, a time for reflection?**

**Churches are increasingly defined by their social action. It's time our thinking caught up, argues a Baptist minister Trevor Neill**

Among the many delights brought to us by the internet is its capacity to enhance our memories of the past, to sharpen the detail of the reminiscences we might have of prior events. Sometimes, to unwind at the end of the day, my wife and I will head on to i-Player and watch Top of the Pops from the '80s or '90s, enjoying old songs and the recollections they evoke. As the saying goes, 'Nostalgia ain't what it used to be.'

I took the same sort of trip down memory lane a few days ago when I watched some clips of another musical event from the past, the time in 1997 when we joined a large crowd at Wembley Stadium to declare that Jesus was 'Champion of the World,' a song by Noel Richards which had been written specially for the occasion.

A group of us had travelled by coach from our church in Exeter and we were all very excited about what had happened. We went home and sang again about Jesus being Champion of the World. There were other songs with a similar vibe, 'walking the land with hearts on fire' and so forth.

Even though that event took place only 20 years ago it seems, to me, to reflect a completely different kind of mindset with regard to mission and the local church. The '90s had been designated a decade of evangelism and our church was one of many planted in that period. And, I can assure you, it was most definitely a church. Phrases like 'living missionally' and 'being incarnational' were yet to be added to the evangelical lexicon. Evangelism was something which we understood to be primarily about proclamation.

And if, back then, someone had asked us what a foodbank was, or a CAP Centre, we would probably have shrugged our shoulders in a nonplussed manner.

How times change. We now find ourselves in a context where, in my experience, most churches now define themselves, or get a sense of who they are, as much by the social projects they run as by the manner in which they worship on a Sunday morning. Offering some kind of social justice ministry has become de rigeur for most Baptist congregations, a trend driven by a reawakening of Evangelicals' social conscience and also by dramatic political changes such as austerity and localism which have created new needs and opportunities in almost every community.

However, I often wonder if our thinking and belief has kept pace with our activity on the ground.

Psychologists use the term 'cognitive dissonance' to describe the stress we experience when we try to hold in tension contradictory beliefs and behaviour in our lives. For example, we loathe ourselves because we continue to smoke in spite of our knowledge of the harm we're doing to our bodies. Or we continue to drive a gas-guzzling car even though to do so is at odds with a genuine concern we feel for the environment.

Could it be that the same kind of dissonance is now bubbling under the surface of many of our churches? We're busier than ever, spending much of our time doing work which demonstrates the values of the kingdom, providing food to the hungry or a shelter to the homeless.

However, we struggle to understand the significance of our activity when our beliefs consist mainly of a gospel which is about individuals pledging their belief in Jesus in order to go to heaven when they die. If we think of sin in terms of the faults and bad habits which plague individual lives over and above the structural injustices we collude with, and if we conceive of salvation as what happens beyond this life rather than a present liberation from the many ways sin brings brokenness and distortion into the experience of life, then we will struggle to realise fully the value of many new ministries?

This reorientation of our activities towards the social and local has probably been the biggest change in our churches over the last ten years. Could it be that this season of projects now needs to give way to a time of reflection on our practice, to allow our thinking to catch up with our doing?

The response of some leaders is to call for a greater 'confidence in the Gospel,' a plea which inevitably raises the question of what we understand the scope of the Gospel to be. Many new organisations have grown in recent years offering us help in the running of new initiatives. Who will provide the support we need for this increasingly urgent task of expressing what we believe God to be doing in this season, and how it can be understood as good news?

**The Revd Trevor Neill is minister of Yardley Wood Baptist Church, Birmingham. This is the first in a series of three reflections.**