

Billy Graham from Gill

Like many families of my parents generation, we shook hands with Christianity rather than embracing it. I had been baptised as an infant, I knew my Bible stories, the Lord's Prayer, and when to sit or stand on the rare occasions we attended a service. School assemblies were very Christian based back then and I did have a belief of sorts. It was part of our culture.

When Billy Graham started his London mission, in 1966, I had seen his arrival on the news. My parents were dismissive, why did we need an American coming here to frighten people with hellfire and take their money? Being fourteen, I argued with them. Had they ever heard him? How could they judge him? etc.

The next day, I asked my R.E. teacher for his opinion of Dr Graham. Wisely, he said, 'I have a spare ticket, why don't you go and make up your own mind?'. I realised this 'called my bluff' after my confrontation with my parents, but it was also a great opportunity to show them how open minded I could be, so, a bit of fourteen year old point scoring - and they were gracious enough to allow me to go!

I went with my parents' attitude I felt out of my comfort zone and wondered why I was on a coach with my teacher's wife and a load of old people. Earls Court is vast, and it was packed. The huge choir sang loads of hymns and Bev Shea sang solos. I didn't like the sentimental music, or the set up. It was going to be a boring evening. Switched off from the music, I was reduced to doing maths! As I watched the buckets being passed around for the collection, I started estimating how much money they were getting if everyone put a pound in. Dad was obviously right, it was lot.

Then Billy Graham took the floor. I could see some would find him handsome, but he wasn't my type. He strutted about and thumped the Bible and the pulpit with passion and conviction. I was watching his performance rather than listening. He was a good salesman but he certainly believed in his product. He didn't really say anything I hadn't heard before but he stated it all clearly, and simply.

At last he drew to a close and invited people to 'Get up out of their seats'. I watched, passively, as a few, then several, then many people started to go forward. Then, suddenly, an inner conviction, a 'voice' in my core, somehow called to me 'this is for you, I love you - will you come?' I was shaking, I had a great sense of urgency and I had to ask my teacher's wife to come with me and we had to hurry down escalators and rush to the front.

There was a prayer of commitment and then we were teamed up with a mentor. Mrs Dales was a great support over the months that followed helping me with Bible study notes and encouraging letters.

When I arrived home singing hymns, my father said 'I thought you'd come home like this'. I think they hoped I'd settle down and grow out of it. 'Fourteen is that sort of age'. But I joined a great church with good teaching and a strong youth group.

All this happened over fifty years ago and it proved to be a life changing moment. The most important moment and my biggest decision.