

BIBLICAL  
WISDOM  
FOR GRADUATES



A MESSAGE FROM

BILLY  
GRAHAM

## Dear Friends,

I still remember that Saturday in May 1997—a lifetime ago now. I was a young man, proudly wearing my cap and gown as I prepared to graduate from Liberty University. My whole life lay before me.



I was doubly-blessed because my grandfather Billy Graham was asked to speak at the commencement, much to the delight of many of my peers and their families. This was a big deal. The world-traveling evangelist who addressed millions in stadiums around the world—the man I affectionately called Daddy Bill—was going to



speaking a lifetime of wisdom to our relatively small graduating class.

What he told us that day was both sobering and encouraging.

Sure, he could have gone the easy route and told our assembled class that we were destined for greatness—that we would change the world. He could have congratulated us with a proverbial slap on the back and sent us out with a cheer. That's what many would have done.

But my grandfather—engaging, introspective and humble as always—took a different path. He spoke about time and the brevity of life. And he encouraged us to invest this fleeting resource wisely, by pouring into people with the hope of the Savior, “*redeeming the time, because the days are evil*” (Ephesians 5:16, NKJV).

That message has stuck with me for nearly 30 years, as I've been blessed to travel the world sharing the same truth of the Gospel that he preached over his lifetime of ministry.

As you read this message, I pray that you will also receive the important wisdom my grandfather offers and make every God-given day that you have count for Him and His glory.

God bless you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Will Graham', written in a cursive style.

Will Graham

# THE BREVITY OF LIFE

## Billy Graham

Commencement Address at Liberty University  
Lynchburg, Virginia, May 3, 1997

*Billy Graham:* After that introduction by Chancellor Jerry Falwell, I hardly know how to begin. I was in Philadelphia one time, and I was coming down on an elevator and a man got on board about the fourth floor and he said, “I hear Billy Graham is on here.” And a man pointed in my direction and said, “Yeah, there he is.” And he looked me up and down for about two seconds and he said, “My, what an anticlimax.” And after all the gracious and kind and wonderful words that have been spoken, I’m a tremendous anticlimax, and I don’t reach anywhere near the hem of the garment of the men who have been called today or the man who even introduced me today.

And I’m very honored and privileged to be here for the first time at Liberty University. I’ve flown over it, I’ve seen it, I’ve driven by, and I have a grandson here—two of them, I think—and maybe more on the way. We seem to keep having them.

I cannot tell you the emotion that my wife and I feel as we are here and we sense the presence of God in this place and that’s the primary thing, because we are servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. I’ve never heard a service from Thomas Road or from here or anywhere that didn’t glorify the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so it’s a privilege for me to be here and stand in this place, and I would like to say

that to Chancellor Jerry Falwell and President Gillman and Chairman of the Board Dr. Varnes and the Board of Trustees, to the Class of '97, to the faculty, to the administration, to the parents and the friends that are here. When I got up this morning and saw the rain, I never dreamed we would be out here today.

Only God could have brought us here, because I think if they'd have asked my opinion, I would have said, "Let's go inside." But my thoughts were overruled by the Lord and here you are, twice or maybe three times as many as you could have gotten inside.

Once I was in England, we've had the election in England that has caused such a big stir around the world in the last few days, and I suppose that the most left-wing college in the whole world has been the School of Economics at the University of London in London, and I was invited there to address the students at that school. And the place was packed and they were laughing and jeering and making fun of me and one of them burst out on the stage while I spoke, scratching himself like an ape. And I determined that that was a salute to his ancestors. And I told him that he did remind me of my ancestors and they all roared with laughter. And then I added, of course, my ancestors came from Brighton and from that point on, they listened a little more attentively.

So for me, being at a Christian university is like a refreshing spiritual oasis in the world's academic wasteland of secularism and skepticism. Many years ago, I was about to give a commencement address like this at Wheaton

College, and I turned to the president as we were standing in line in our gowns and ready to go, and I said to Dr. Edman, “How long do you think I ought to speak?” And he said, “Well, if you take 12 minutes that’ll be two minutes too long.” And I never forgot that.

And I never forgot when I graduated from school, the speaker went on and on and on and must have taken at least 12 minutes. My wife and I were graduating in the same class, and what a wonderful day that was—and it’s a wonderful day here today.

I’m aware today that many of you are concerned about the future, finding God’s will for your life. You’ve been here, and I’m assuming that most of you know Christ as your Lord and Savior. But some of you are concerned about getting a job and getting on with life and what you’re going to do to support yourself—and maybe the girlfriend that you have and hope to marry. So I want to share some thoughts with you about economics today, especially on the subject of investments.

Unless things have changed since I was a student, you haven’t managed to save much money during your college years. But you do possess something of great value, greater than money. A nonrenewable resource that is moving inevitably toward total depletion and there’s nothing you can do about it. And that resource is time.

In a few minutes, you’ll be scattering in different places, you graduates, and you’ll have a diploma perhaps in your hand and you’ll have a life of uncertain length ahead of you. For some of

“Teach us to  
number our  
days that we  
may get a heart  
of wisdom.”

—*PSALM 90:12, ESV*

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you, it will be a life that will be long. For others, it will be surprisingly short, and if you reach my age, you will wonder where the time has gone.

A student of a university asked me some time ago, “What is the greatest surprise in your life?” And I said, “The greatest surprise in life to me is the brevity of life.” So let me urge you to consider three things as you decide how to invest your life.

First, time is our investment capital. Your only choice is to use it or to lose it. Either invest it or let it dribble like sand through your fingers. Jesus told the story in Luke—the 19<sup>th</sup> chapter—of a nobleman who, before going on a journey, commanded his stewards, “Put this money to work until I come back.” Invest it. The Lord expects us to use what He’s given us—whether in money, time, or talents—in profitable ways. And He promises His personal audit of our lives when He returns. Can you imagine getting your life audited? All of your thoughts, all of your dreams, all of your work—everything audited by the angels of Heaven.

The second thing, time is an equal opportunity

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employer. Each human being has exactly the same number of hours and minutes in every day: 1,440 minutes; it adds up to 168 hours per week. In Psalm 90:10, the Bible indicates that our allotted time on Earth may be 70 years or possibly an extension to 80, or maybe a few more even. The psalmist therefore goes on to say, teach us to number our days aright that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

Let's think about that a moment: the number in a lifetime. Our first 15 years are childhood and adolescence. We spend a total of 20 years sleeping.

In our final years, physical limitations may curtail our activities, so we have only 30 best years left. And part of that time must be spent eating meals, building family and social relationships, working at our jobs, and sleeping, and figuring out our income tax. And rich people cannot buy more hours than the rest of us.

It allows for that each day has 86,400 seconds to invest. That's how much you have every day. And it allows for no balances, no overdrafts. If you fail to use each day's deposits, your loss cannot be

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recovered. You cannot hoard time and use it on another day.

Paul tells the Ephesians to redeem the time because the days are evil, and if ever we lived in evil days we live in them now. And if ever there was a time to redeem every minute, every second, it's now.

Redeem is a word from the business world; it means “to buy.” Redeeming the time means making the most of every opportunity. Depth is a better measurement of life than length. Our natural tendency is to count the days. God tells us to make every day count. Will this be that kind of commencement for you? Time is the capital we've been given by God to invest wisely.

Thirdly, so the question is, where do we invest it? God calls us to invest our time capital, our very lives, primarily in people—not in projects or possessions. God invested His only begotten in us sinners—not because we were prospects to give Him a good payoff, but because His heart is overflowing with love for us. And when the Lord Jesus Christ was dying on that cross, He was dying because He loved us so much that He took our sins and He became sin for us.

People in our world are suffering desperately from the consequences of ignoring God and His love. We read the stories in the paper this week about Zaire and all the suffering and all the killing that's going on. That's just one part of the world. It seems like the whole world is beginning to explode. Sometimes this is open and glaring, like the hatred in civil wars that are going on all over the world.

“Look carefully then  
how you walk, not  
as unwise but as  
wise, making the  
best use of the time,  
because the days  
are evil.”

—EPHESIANS 5:15-16, ESV

Also, we see people throwing rocks and stones in the Holy Land, in Jerusalem, even in Bethlehem and in many other troubled places around the world. But sometimes our errors and terrors are more subtle, equally frightening but in a different way. Physical beauty or brawn, for example, may conceal a bewildered mind or a battered spirit, even on a college campus like this. As you graduate today, I can hear even some of you saying, “I wish I knew the Lord’s will for my life. I’ve prayed about it, I’ve struggled with it, I’ve done all I can, I still don’t know.”

All of us occasionally grapple with discovering the guidance of God in specific matters that concern us. I struggle with that problem every day.

At your age, I knew I didn’t want to be an undertaker and I didn’t want to be a preacher, and the first of those never opened up for me. The second put me in a real wrestling match with the Holy Spirit, and one midnight 59 years ago on the 18<sup>th</sup> green of a golf course that surrounded our little Bible school in Florida, I got on my knees weeping before God and I said, “O God, I’ll go where You want me to go and I’ll be what You want me to be,” not knowing what that would mean or where it would lead. Apart from our career, God’s will first and foremost for all of us is that you love Him with all your heart, your soul, your mind, your strength; then God’s will for you is that you live a holy life.

We are to behave like Jesus. He’s our example; He lived and died for others. Jesus told His disciples, “Lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven.” He said invest in Heaven. What are

those treasures and investments? They are people who need to know God. People are the stocks in which we are to invest our time; time is the capital God has given us to invest.

We constantly hear people talk about the year 2000. But the bright millennium that has been presented to us by some politicians does not seem to exist in the minds and hearts of millions. For

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many, there is hopelessness and discouragement and uncertainty and fear as they look into the future. From my own experience, may I say to you young people today facing your careers and the uncertainties of life that the best of all investments that you can make is to help people come to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. We call that evangelism.

At this commencement, this beginning of a new phase of your life, you can make that

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commitment to love God and your neighbors right here and now. Do it today. You may not have tomorrow.

Your generation will bear the brunt of the future's uncertainties. Not one of us at any age has a clue as to how long we will live. That's why the Bible says, "Now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation." You can't count your days, but with Jesus Christ as your Lord, you can make your days count. You can invest whatever time is yours for high-yield return in the lives of people you introduce to Jesus Christ.

You've attended this great university, one of the great new universities in this country and in the world. And you have learned here what it means to put God first in your life. You've had examples set for you; you have mentors that you shouldn't trade anything in the world for. What a privilege to be in a place like this. Right now, you can decide to invest the rest of your life in such a way that someday you will hear God say to you, "Well done, good and faithful servant, come and share your master's happiness."

I'm asking you today not to graduate, but to commence a new life following the will of God every step of the way. God bless you, and thank you. ☀

“Lay up for  
yourselves treasures  
in heaven, where  
neither moth  
nor rust destroys  
and where thieves  
do not break  
in and steal.”

—MATTHEW 6:20, *ESV*

BILLY  
GRAHAM  
Evangelistic Association  
*Always Good News.*