

Evangelism Through Technology

“For two years in the mid-fifties, more newspaper and magazine copy was devoted to Billy Graham than to any other person in the United States, including President Eisenhower.”

—William Martin, *Texas Monthly*

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In 1951, Billy Graham pioneered network television evangelism. Here he addresses ABC viewers during an early telecast of *The Hour of Decision* TV program.

GRADE LEVEL7th–12th**OBJECTIVES**

Students will be able to:

- Understand the different modes of technology used by Billy Graham and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association to communicate the message of the Gospel.
- Compare and contrast the effectiveness of each form of communication.
- Understand the place each form of communication had in its corresponding time period.

NCSCOS OBJECTIVES

8H.1-3: Explain how individuals have influenced economic, political, and social change in North Carolina and the U.S.

NATIONAL CURRICULUM STANDARDS FOR SOCIAL STUDIES

US, Era 10 (1968 to present), Standard 2C, specifically

- Explain the growth of the Christian evangelical movement (grades 7–12)
- Analyze how religious organizations use modern telecommunications to promote their faiths (grades 7–12)

REFERENCE AND FURTHER READING

- *Just As I Am*, chapters 11, 16, 23

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"No man could be so continually surrounded for so many years with so much adulation and criticism, and still remain the plainly decent, good-humored, thoughtfully kind man [Billy Graham] is, without being of quality timber."

—George Cornell, Associated Press

Pre-Visit Activities

- Review the following pages. Ask students to consider these questions:
 - What are some of the methods Billy Graham used to preach the Gospel?
 - What made his messages unique? Describe the invitation at the end of each message.
 - Did these methods change over time?
- Play clips from the radio program *The Hour of Decision* in class using the following link: BillyGraham.org/tv-and-radio/radio/hour-of-decision-online. Ask students the following questions:
 - Can they tell which decade, or even year, the clip is from?
 - Does Graham mention any current events that they immediately recognize as being from a certain time period?

Visit to the Library

- Students should walk through the galleries in groups predetermined by the teacher.
- The entire class will gather in the My Answer room to watch the video.
- Students should be prepared to take notes in this room and listen for key words, phrases, and ideas.

Post-Visit Activities

- Students may read or listen to one or more of the following items:
 - BGEA videos “Let’s Get Digital” or “Search for Jesus Whiteboard”
youtube.com/watch?v=Zf8bXTURhNc; youtube.com/watch?v=yEHZP7GSX7E
 - BGEA video “Youth Lead the Way With Billy Graham’s *My Hope America*”
youtube.com/watch?v=cNTcIW7eB1Q
 - Billy Graham My Answer columns (included)
 - Billy Graham’s message from 1975:
BillyGraham.org/audio/hopeless-yet-there-is-hope
- Ask students to summarize what they learned from the resource and then analyze it using the following questions:
 - 1) What kind of technology is being used or discussed?
 - 2) Compare and contrast the technology being used with another method. For example, how do you think the *My Answer* columns differ from *The Hour of Decision*? In audience? In content? Both?



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"Billy Graham has no hidden agendas. He's not an emissary for any government. He's not an emissary for any organization; he's only an emissary for God."

—Sir David Frost, British television interviewer

Pre-Visit Reading: Overview

Billy Graham's commitment to sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ was exemplified in his revolutionary use of technology to take the message of God's love to all corners of the globe. Although it's easy to overlook the impact of technology and to take it for granted in today's world, it's important to remember that mass communication only became simple and easy in the latter part of the 20th century.

Graham began his ministry during a time of great strides in technological advancement and made sure he used that advancement to the advantage of his mission. In 1944, he started his first radio ministry, preaching on a program called *Songs in the Night* broadcast out of Chicago. It was during this time that he met longtime friend and team member George Beverly Shea. He asked Shea to sing on the program. The following year, Graham accepted a position as a full-time evangelist with Youth For Christ. This eventually led him to begin preaching on his own, and he started to hold his evangelistic campaigns, now known as Crusades.

In 1949, during his first campaign in Los Angeles, Billy Graham became a national story. When newspaper tycoon William Randolph Hearst made Graham's Crusade front-page news, magazines such as *Time*, *LIFE*, and *Newsweek* followed suit.

The following year, Graham began using mass communication to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ with his own national radio program called *The Hour of Decision*. The first episode aired November 5, 1950, from Atlanta, Georgia, and was broadcast across the country by the ABC radio network. The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) was founded the same year. In the months following, the ministry began producing movies with evangelistic themes through its film company, World Wide Pictures. Christian motion pictures were virtually unheard of at the time, and now Graham could reach many thousands of people who would never go to hear a preacher—but would come to see a dramatic film. The first movies were shown in churches, schools, prisons, and military camps, but eventually Graham's films were made for theater showings.

Two years later, in 1952, Graham's *My Answer* newspaper column was launched with a daily circulation that quickly exceeded 20 million readers. Soon, he saw the need for a publication on a deep theological level to encourage Christian leaders and founded *Christianity Today* magazine for that purpose in 1956. Graham also wanted a publication to address issues confronting the larger Christian community, so three years later, BGEA's magazine, *Decision*, went into circulation.



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One of the most historic moments came in 1951 when Billy Graham pioneered the use of network television for evangelism as *The Hour of Decision* began airing on ABC. In 1957, Graham's New York Crusade became the first to be broadcast coast-to-coast on ABC's television network. The salvation message of love, hope, and forgiveness through faith in Christ Jesus preached during Graham's Crusades began reaching millions more through television. In addition, Graham also relied on other network programming to share God's love over the decades, including popular television talk shows hosted by Woody Allen, Phil Donahue, and Larry King, as well as national news programs anchored by Greta Van Susteren and others.

Another milestone came in 1980, when BGEA developed its TV Telephone Ministry (then called the Telephone Counseling Ministry). There was a need for people watching Crusades on TV to be able to speak with someone directly about becoming a follower of Christ. The ministry provided volunteers to take calls from these viewers 24 hours a day and enabled them to make a personal connection during a televised message.

Graham's Crusade ministry was further propelled when BGEA began using satellite television technology in 1985. This eventually made it possible for millions of people to hear him by satellite in any part of the world, almost as if they were hearing him in person. Thanks to simultaneous translation, viewers learned about God's love for them in their own language.

Around the turn of the 21st century, Billy Graham's preaching outreach expanded through the World Evangelism Through Television project, *My Hope*. Since *My Hope*'s launch, many of Graham's sermons have been dubbed in local languages and then shown on DVD in host homes across more than 55 countries. Over 4.5 million people have served as *My Hope* hosts.

Beginning in 2009, BGEA also began using cutting-edge portable projectors—the size of a cell phone—so that many of its representatives could hike or travel by motorcycle, bicycle, or boat to remote villages and display the *My Hope* program with an excellent picture. Afterward, they would often use solar panels to recharge the mini projectors.

During the week of Billy Graham's 95th birthday—November 7, 2014—his new *My Hope* sermon titled *The Cross* was broadcast across the United States and Canada. In addition to airing on national television networks and hundreds of local affiliates, *The Cross* was also prominently featured on social media, including YouTube's home page for the day, and widely shared on Facebook.

Pre-Visit Reading: Timeline

1944

Billy Graham begins his first radio ministry on a program called *Songs in the Night*, broadcast from Chicago, Illinois. Graham meets lifelong friend and team member George Beverly Shea at this time, recruiting him to sing on the program.

1947

Billy Graham and his team hold their first Crusades—still called Campaigns at this time—in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and his hometown of Charlotte, North Carolina.

1950

The Hour of Decision radio program first airs from Atlanta, Georgia, on ABC Radio. Worldwide Pictures, Graham's film ministry, is incorporated. Its aim is to create dramatic movies with an evangelistic theme.

1957

Graham's Crusades are forever changed, as his New York Crusade is telecast from Madison Square Garden in June 1957. Graham's sermons can now reach millions via national television.

1980

Telephone Counseling Ministry created for people to call in during telecasts of Crusades.

2013

My Hope America is viewed in homes, churches, prisons, rescue missions, auditoriums, and other venues across North America, and Graham's message *The Cross* is aired the week of his birthday, November 7.

1945

Billy Graham begins his evangelistic career as a full-time evangelist for Youth for Christ.

1949

Publishing tycoon William Randolph Hearst thrusts Graham and his 1949 Los Angeles Crusade into the national spotlight when he features it in his newspapers across the country.

1952

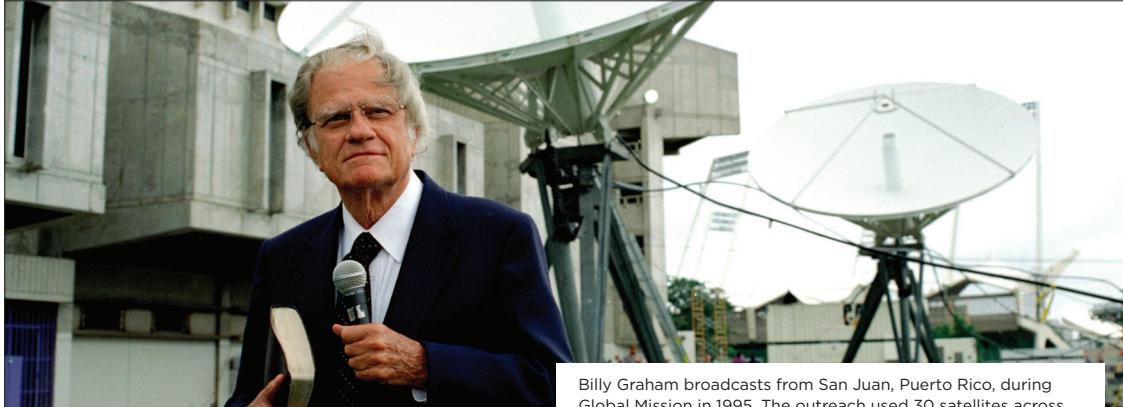
My Answer newspaper column is born, and its daily circulation soon exceeds 20 million readers.

1959

The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association's magazine, *Decision*, goes into publication.

2002

The World Evangelism Through Television project, *My Hope*, begins in Central and South America and by 2012 covers 57 countries around the world.



Billy Graham broadcasts from San Juan, Puerto Rico, during Global Mission in 1995. The outreach used 30 satellites across every time zone to transmit to venues in 185 countries and territories in 48 different languages.

Pre-Visit Reading: *My Answer Columns*

Encourage friend to consider a life of faith
by Billy Graham, March 25, 2015

Q: I've tried to talk to a friend of mine about God and Jesus, but she's never shown any interest. I finally got up enough courage to ask her why, and she admitted it was because she doesn't want God to mess with her life. What can I say to her? —Mrs. J.D.

A: The most important thing you can do is to talk first to God about your friend. Only the Holy Spirit can convict her of her sins, and only the Holy Spirit can convince her of the truth of the Gospel. Before we ever talk with a person about Christ, we should first talk with Christ about that person.

What can you say to her? First, I suggest you commend her for being honest about herself. Yes, she's on the wrong road in life, but at least she's finally honest enough to admit which road she's on. Then encourage her to have the same honesty about the life she's living, and the consequences she'll face if she continues with it. Right now, she wants to run her own life, but where will that lead her? The Bible warns, "*The way of the unfaithful leads to their destruction*" (Proverbs 13:15).

Then ask God to help your friend see Christ in you. She may argue with your words, but she can't argue with your life, as you demonstrate Christ's patience and love and peace. Eventually she'll realize (if she's honest) that you have something she doesn't have—and that "something" is Christ.

In addition, ask God to help you know when to speak with her about your faith in Christ. She needs to know that God loves her, and He wants what is best for her. Thank God for the opportunity He is giving you to share His love with her.



God can forgive every sin, if we repent and trust in Him

by Billy Graham, January 21, 2015

Q: *Is there a list anywhere in the Bible of all the sins God won't forgive? I know I've probably crossed the line with some of them, and God will never forgive me. I never used to worry about things like this, but I do now. Maybe it's too late.* —Z.S.

A: No, there's no such list in the Bible, and the reason is because God is willing to forgive every sin we've ever committed, if we'll only turn to Him in repentance and faith, and put our trust in Jesus Christ for our salvation. The Bible says, "*He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge ... which stood against us and condemned us*" (Colossians 2:13-14).

How is this possible? It is possible solely because of God's love for us! We have sinned against God, turning our backs on Him and choosing to go our own way. As a result, we deserve only God's judgment, for He is absolutely holy and pure, and even one sin would be enough to condemn us. As the Bible says, "*There is no one righteous, not even one*" (Romans 3:10).

But God still loves us, in spite of our sin, and because He loves us, He has provided the way for us to be forgiven and cleansed of all our sins. That way is Jesus Christ. He was God in human flesh, and as such, He was perfect and without sin. But on the cross all our sins were placed on Him, and He took upon Himself the judgment and hell that we deserved.

There's only one sin that God cannot forgive, and that is the sin of unbelief. Don't carry the burden of your sins any longer, but by faith turn to Christ and trust Him alone for your salvation.

My Answer columns ©Billy Graham Literary Trust

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