

Billy Graham and the Cold War

*"You know what's been in the press about you going to Russia.
I believe that God works in mysterious ways. I'll be praying
for you every mile of the way."*

—President Reagan to Billy Graham just before Graham's
1982 trip to the Soviet Union

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An East German officer walks with Billy Graham near the Brandenburg Gate on March 10, 1990—four months after the opening of the Berlin Wall.

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GRADE LEVEL

12th–College Sophomore

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- Understand the unique role Billy Graham played in the relationship between the U.S. and the Communist bloc during the Cold War.
- Explain Graham’s motivation to bring the Gospel behind the Iron Curtain.
- Analyze primary source documents from Graham’s Cold War experiences, including sermons, interviews, and excerpts from his autobiography, *Just As I Am*.

NCSCOS OBJECTIVES

12C and 12H: *Analyze the beliefs and decisions of U.S. presidents, from Truman to George H.W. Bush, and their administrations in terms of their influence on Cold War events. Analyze multiple perspectives of the Cold War by leaders, participants, and spectators of the moment. Analyze primary sources in terms of the creator’s perspective, purpose, the historical context in which each was produced, and their significance.*

NATIONAL CURRICULUM STANDARDS FOR SOCIAL STUDIES

- **Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions**
- **Theme 9: Global Connections**

“There’s no doubt that Billy Graham on his many visits to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union lighted or reignited the flame of religious belief and conviction. And that, in turn, had a political impact on what took place in these Communist-dominated nations ... and it was helpful in bringing about the change from what it was 60 or 70 years ago.”

—President Gerald Ford

Pre-Visit Activities

- Read the attached information and review.
- Review the causes and consequences of the Cold War.
- Review vocabulary, themes, and major figures associated with the Cold War.
- Make copies of Billy Graham’s message “The Cross” and Cliff Barrows’ 1989 interview excerpts (both included) for students.
- Choose one of the following:
 - Watch the 1985 program *Billy Graham’s Romanian Journal* to get a closer look at his time in Romania during the last years of the Cold War: [youtube.com/watch?v=mRm9bi2UKzc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mRm9bi2UKzc)
 - Read further in *Just As I Am*, especially chapters 20, 26, and 30.
 - Read *God’s Ambassador*, pages 138–149.

Visit to the Library

- Students should walk through the galleries in groups predetermined by the teacher.
- Ask students to take notes on memorabilia and video clips in the galleries that pertain to the Cold War and Billy Graham’s efforts in response to it.
- Have students gather in the Piercing the Wall gallery to watch the films in the room and listen to the audio clips.

Post-Visit Activities

- Students may write a brief essay comparing and contrasting Billy Graham’s approach to breaking through the Iron Curtain with the approaches taken by world leaders. Questions to consider may include:
 - What advantages do you think Billy Graham had because he wasn’t a political figure? Disadvantages?
 - What concerns do you think Billy Graham and his team might have faced as they planned trips behind the Iron Curtain?
 - What criticisms might the team have received for their efforts?
- Students may create a timeline of Billy Graham’s trips to the Communist bloc. This will help analyze the progression of the Cold War, including its eventual end.

References

- *Just As I Am*
 - “First Steps Behind the Iron Curtain”
 - “Openings in the Curtain”
 - “A New Day Dawning”
- *Billy Graham: God’s Ambassador*

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NOTES

"Billy Graham was saying, 'Spirituality is alive in the Marxist, Leninist, Stalinist states ... It's there, and I know it's there.' Frankly, there were all those years when I thought he was wrong or that he didn't know what he was talking about, but it turns out he was right."
 —Dan Rather, broadcast journalist

Pre-Visit Reading: Overview

Billy Graham first traveled behind the Iron Curtain not as “God’s Ambassador,” but rather as a tourist, following an invitation from a close friend—Bill Jones—who worked as a businessman in Los Angeles. Jones had been to the Soviet Union repeatedly to secretly meet with Christians and distribute Bibles. Graham traveled with Jones to Moscow in 1959, accompanied by longtime friend and team member Grady Wilson.

The brief trip had a powerful impact on Graham. He encountered multiple “silent believers,” as he called them, including a man who approached him during a wreath-laying ceremony at the USSR’s Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. The man simply scratched a cross in the dirt beneath Graham’s feet. Graham also attended church services that were permitted by the Kremlin, but he was not allowed to preach at any of these services. In his autobiography, *Just As I Am*, Graham writes that he “left Moscow in 1959 with a dream, a hope, and prayer that someday I, along with others, might proclaim the Gospel throughout that vast country.”

In 1982, that prayer was answered when Graham received an invitation to take part in an unusual symposium sponsored by the Russian Orthodox Church. Called the World Conference of Religious Workers for Saving the Sacred Gift of Life from Nuclear Catastrophe, it included representatives from Christian denominations and other religions. Initially, Graham was hesitant to play any part in it because he was concerned that he might unwittingly be used as a tool of communist propaganda. He ultimately decided to participate, though not accept the position of full delegate. As a participant, Graham was able to preach on a topic of his choosing at the conference. The title of his sermon was “The Christian Faith and Peace in a Nuclear Age,” in which he spoke about the peace offered by God through Jesus Christ.

During his trip, Graham was also able to preach at two Moscow churches—one Baptist and one Orthodox. “The steadfastness of Russia’s Orthodox believers even in the worst of times remains one of the great examples of courage in the history of the church,” Graham said of those he encountered in the Soviet Union.

Billy Graham saw many doors open across the Eastern bloc, for his and other voices. During the Cold War, he was eventually able to visit and preach in Hungary, Romania, Poland, and the former republics of Czechoslovakia and East Germany, reaching hundreds of thousands with the hope of the Gospel. God used the humble preacher to help bring peace to Eastern Europe, and soon the Iron Curtain came crashing down.



In September 1985, a crowd estimated at 150,000 greeted Billy Graham in the public square outside the Orthodox Cathedral in Timisoara, Romania.

Pre-Visit Reading: Billy Graham's message "The Cross"

Leningrad Holy Trinity Cathedral

Leningrad, U.S.S.R. (now St. Petersburg, Russia)

September 12, 1984

I am honored and overwhelmed at the gracious words of Metropolitan Anthony, and I greet you in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ—and those believers in America worship the same Christ. We've heard today a wonderful message about Christ, and especially about the cross and the importance of it. I'm honored to be here on this very special day that we remember Alexander Nevsky, ... who accomplished so much, ... the great hero of the nation.

I came to the Soviet Union the first time in the late 1950s, and then again in 1982 to Moscow, and now in one of the most beautiful, famous cities in all of the world. And everywhere I go, I see a cross on the churches. I remember when I went to London, England, in 1946, just at the conclusion of the great war. London had been destroyed, almost, by Nazi bombs. But there was one church that you could see from the long distance, and towering over that church was a cross: St. Paul's Cathedral. And then I remember when the Coventry Cathedral, which was restored after the Nazi bombing—the cross was lowered on top of the cathedral by helicopter. And there's a concentration camp I saw in Germany where people suffered, and high above it stands a wooden cross. And if you go to India, on top of Mount Everest—the highest mountain in the world—you will see a cross placed there by Sir Edmund Hillary. And we wear crosses around our necks. And in America, at least, and perhaps here as well, we have crosses on our Bibles.

Why did the Apostle Paul say, "I glory in the cross"? He could have gloried in many things. His education—he was one of the most educated men of his day. He could have even gloried in his religion. He could have gloried in his ability to speak many languages. He could have gloried in certain things about our Lord Jesus Christ—His virgin birth; His great teaching, which we've heard this morning; His compassion for the poor and the needy; His concern for the hungry;

His future kingdom. But he did not. He said, “I glory in the cross.” Why? I want to ask you that question, and I want to try to answer.

People ask me constantly, “Is there any hope for me? Can Christ save me?” Robbers, murderers, prisoners, prostitutes, all kinds of people—they write me letters, or they ask me in person, “Can Christ help me?” That’s why He died on the cross; that’s why He shed His blood.

Isaiah the prophet said, “*The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all*” (53:6). Jesus said, “*My God, why hast thou forsaken me?*” (Matthew 27:46). In that mysterious moment, God took your sins and mine and laid them on Christ. So the blood that was shed on the cross that we celebrate in holy communion can cleanse us from all sin, if we put our faith in Him.

It’s not easy to be a real, true Christian in America in 1984. It may not be easy in the Soviet Union. It’s not easy anywhere to really live for Christ. And Jesus said only a few find their way through the narrow gate. He said in the seventh chapter again, “*Not every one that [says to] me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that [does] the will of my Father*” (v. 21). Many people will come in that day and say, “But, Lord, Lord, I did all these wonderful things. I did good things.” But He said, “I don’t know you,” because we didn’t come by the way of the cross.

The cross also motivates us for service to Jesus Christ ... to help others, as we read in the Beatitudes from Luke. And the cross motivates us toward peace. We are to live peaceably with each other. We are all individuals, and we have different ideas and ideologies. We come from different cultures. But our world has changed. We now have technology that has developed great weapons of destruction. We must learn to live at peace with one another. I say that to my American friends and to my Soviet friends.

I’m proud today to have the privilege of saying I’m a believer. Jesus said, “*What shall it profit a man, if he ... gain the whole world, and lose his ... soul?*” (Mark 8:36). Have you made your peace with God? If not, you can today, standing where you are or quietly in your home. Say yes to Christ and live for Christ. God bless you in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.



In Arad, Romania, people crowded an apartment building next to a church in September 1985 to hear Billy Graham's message by loudspeakers.

Pre-Visit Reading: Excerpts from 1989 interview with Cliff Barrows, music and program director for the Billy Graham team

“You know, this is just an incredible time on the television to see what’s taking place in Eastern Europe and to see people on the wall, celebrating ... that the wall is coming down. And then to see them chipping away—I couldn’t help but to remember when we first were in Berlin: They were being stopped going through the Brandenburg Gate to come to the meeting, to be checked. Some of them had difficulty getting back home.”

“It’s wonderful to be a part of the ministry where Bill has been able to go to all these points of the world; and yet to come, there will still be greater opportunities.”

“Bridges of understanding and communication have [their] effect on all of us through our life. And I think with Mr. Graham—as well as all of us on the team—as we met people in other nations, under other ideologies, we realized there’s only one basic, unifying point of communication, and that’s our mutual understanding and love and appreciation of one another as a human being created by God.”

“I hope we are [peacemakers]. Jesus said, ‘*Blessed are the peacemakers*’ (Matthew 5:9, NKJV). And Bill has felt that. ... I think that the Gospel, it is a Gospel of peace. ... There’s not [a] greater ... privilege that we have as a team [than] to preach the Gospel—and in that Gospel, assuring people that there’s personal peace, there’s peace with God, there’s peace of God in our relationships with one another.”

“Some of these countries in Eastern Europe, we visited three, four, five times. And it takes a long time for that process of understanding, that process of acceptance, that process of openness—that [Billy Graham] isn’t going to betray the confidence that was given to him, that he is going to be true to the message that he has to give.”