

Billy Graham: Pastor to Presidents

“I do believe [Billy Graham] is America’s pastor—a man who
has been a constant radiant of light, a light of truth in a world
often cloaked in darkness and shrouded in deceit.”

—Former President George H.W. Bush

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President Kennedy (left) listened intently as Billy Graham addressed the 1963 National Prayer Breakfast.

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GRADE LEVEL

2nd–5th

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- List the presidents whom Billy Graham counseled.
- Create a simple timeline of Billy Graham's work with U.S. presidents.
- Understand some of the difficulties, privileges, and responsibilities of having a personal relationship with a U.S. president.

NORTH CAROLINA STANDARD COURSE OF STUDY

- **3H.1-3:** Understand how individuals, events, and ideas influenced the history of local and regional communities. Explain key historical events that occurred in the local community and regions over time. Analyze the impact of contributions made by diverse historical figures in local communities and regions over time.
- **2H.1:** Understand how various sources provide information about the past. Use timelines to show sequencing of events. Identify contributions of historical figures (community, state, nation, and world) through various genres.

"Every president, truth be told, is mostly grateful to [Billy Graham] for that personal kindness. When he prays with you in the Oval Office, or upstairs in the White House, you feel like he is praying for you, not the president."

—Former President Bill Clinton

Pre-Visit Activities

- Read the attached documents with/to the class. Ask students to consider the following questions:
 - Where did Billy Graham deliver this speech?
 - What was the occasion?
 - What kinds of freedom does he mention in the speech?
 - What does Mr. Graham say the president will "hold in his hands"?
- Ask students to compile a list of questions about Billy Graham's relationships with the presidents. Some specific questions for consideration may include:
 - Where did he meet with different presidents?
 - What topics did they discuss?
 - Did they ever enjoy recreational activities together?

Visit to the Library

- Students may enjoy *The Journey of Faith* tour in groups predetermined by teacher.
- The gallery of focus will be The Man.
 - Ask students to carefully examine each piece of memorabilia in the gallery and point out items that reflect Billy Graham's relationship with presidents.
 - Students and teacher(s) may gather around the video monitor in the right-hand corner of the room to enjoy a brief film that recounts Mr. Graham's relationship with the presidents.
 - Ask students if they can find a photo of each president listed in the document on the front wall of The Man gallery.

Post-Visit Activities

- Students may create a list of topics that one of the presidents and Billy Graham might have discussed. For example, what might have been some of the events or issues that Mr. Graham and President George W. Bush discussed, and why?
- Students may compare and contrast Billy Graham's relationship with the president to another major figure. For example, how might a particular president's relationship with Mr. Graham have differed from the president's relationship with his vice president, secretary of state, or other advisers?
- For further research, students may read the following:
 - *God's Ambassador*, pages 160–190
 - Blog Post: Billy Graham and Dwight D. Eisenhower:
<https://billygrahamlibrary.org/blog-pastor-to-presidents-billygraham-dwight-d-eisenhower/>
 - President Clinton's remarks during Billy Graham Library dedication, found here at 48:00 mark: www.c-span.org/video/?198399-1/billy-graham-library-dedication
 - Billy Graham: God's Ambassador to World Leaders:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s4-uDa_Ht-g

Billy Graham: Pastor to Presidents

"I could tell Billy Graham anything in confidence and it would never make the public print. ... We were two people who could, in effect, let our hair down."

—Former President Richard Nixon

NATIONAL CURRICULUM STANDARDS FOR SOCIAL STUDIES

- **Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions**—Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of interactions among individuals groups and institutions.
- **Theme 6: Power, Authority, and Governance**—Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people create, interact with, and change structures of power, authority, and governance.
- **Theme 10: Civic Ideals and Practices**—Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship in a democratic republic.

NATIONAL CENTER FOR HISTORY IN THE SCHOOLS

- **Standard 2—Historical Comprehension**
 - **D:** Appreciate historical perspectives
- **Standard 3—Historical Analysis and Interpretation**
 - **A:** Formulate questions to focus inquiry or analysis.
 - **B:** Identify the author or source of the historical document or narrative.
 - **C:** Compare and contrast differing sets of ideas, values, personalities, and institutions.
 - **H:** Consider multiple perspectives.

Pre-Visit Reading: Overview

Billy Graham was often called “the pastor to presidents” for good reason—every U.S. president since World War II through Barack Obama met with Mr. Graham. In 2010, Obama became the first sitting president to visit him in his home in Montreat, North Carolina. Throughout Graham’s more than 60 years of ministry, the preacher offered friendship, counsel, and a listening ear to each sitting president.

Mr. Graham always made it clear that he did not have an interest in the political affiliation of any president; he was only concerned for each one as a private individual. He once said of his time with the presidents, “When a president of the United States wept in my presence, or knelt with me to pray, or privately unburdened his concerns about his family, I was not thinking about his political philosophy or his personality, but about his need for God’s help.”

Here are four examples of Billy Graham’s history with presidents:



Dwight D. Eisenhower—“Eisenhower was the first president that really asked my counsel in depth when he was sending [National Guard] troops into Little Rock, Arkansas,” said Billy Graham. Just before Eisenhower died, Mr. Graham was invited to see him at Walter Reed hospital. After talking again about spiritual matters, the two men prayed. Eisenhower then said he was ready to die. “Billy Graham is one of the best ambassadors our country has, but he told me, ‘I am an ambassador of heaven,’” President Eisenhower once said.



Lyndon B. Johnson—Billy Graham probably had a closer friendship with Lyndon Johnson than any other president. The preacher was invited to the Johnson family ranch several times and spent more than 20 nights at the White House during Johnson’s presidency. Every time Mr. Graham would say to him “Let’s have a prayer,” the president would get on his knees to pray. In a letter to Billy Graham, Johnson once wrote, “My mind went back to those lonely occasions at the White House when your friendship helped to sustain a president in an hour of trial.”



Jimmy Carter—Five years before Jimmy Carter became the governor of Georgia, he hosted a Billy Graham film outreach in Americus, Ga., and while he was governor, he served as an honorary chairman of Graham’s Atlanta Crusade. Billy and Ruth Graham visited the Carter family both in the governor’s mansion in Georgia and in the White House. “Who has been most influential in [my] spiritual life? ... Billy Graham. I’m just one of tens of millions of people whose spiritual lives have been shaped by [him],” said Jimmy Carter.

Billy Graham: Pastor to Presidents

NATIONAL CENTER FOR
HISTORY IN THE SCHOOLS
(cont.)

- **Standard 4—Historical Research Capabilities**
 - **A:** *Formulate historical questions.*
- **Standard 5—Historical Issues: Analysis and Decision Making**
 - **B:** *Compare the values and interests of the various people involved.*



Ronald W. Reagan—Billy Graham and Hollywood actor Ronald Reagan became friends 27 years before Reagan became president. On March 30, 1981, after the assassination attempt on President Reagan's life, Mr. Graham flew immediately to Washington, D.C., to comfort and pray with Mrs. Reagan and do anything he could for the president. "It was through Billy Graham that I found myself praying even more than on a daily basis," said Ronald Reagan, "... and that in the position I held, that my prayers more and more were to give me the wisdom to make decisions that would serve God and be pleasing to Him."

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Billy Graham gave a memorable address during the 1985 National Prayer Service at the Washington Cathedral, which was attended by President Reagan, Vice President Bush, and many national leaders.

Pre-Visit Reading: Excerpts from Billy Graham's sermon on January 20, 1985, at the National Prayer Service before the second inauguration of President Reagan

... We are gathered here today because our nation and its leaders need the help of God. ...

We have a constitution that guarantees to all of us human freedoms, of which religious freedom is foremost. In America, any and all religions have a right to exist and to propagate what they stand for. We enjoy the separation of church and state, and no sectarian religion has ever and, pray God, will ever be imposed upon us. ...

Today we face new challenges that previous generations could never have dreamed of. Some are unparalleled opportunities. Some of these challenges, however, are unparalleled dangers which threaten the continued existence of civilization on this planet. ...

It is possible for us to live in peace with ourselves, our families, in our communities and between nations. Confucius in his *Analects* gave us the Silver Rule. The Bible gives us the Golden Rule. However stated, it means I will love my neighbor as I love myself. ...

During the next four years, many of you here today will have to make decisions of state, perhaps greater than those made by any of your predecessors. Because of modern technology, you will hold in your hands the destiny not only of America, but the entire world. Christ said, "What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?" (cf. Mark 8:36). I believe that that applies to nations as well as individuals, for a nation that loses its spiritual courage will grow old before its time. Even if we gain all our material and social objectives and lose our souls, it would be a disaster.

As you work to lead this nation and our world to new heights of social justice, peace, and economic prosperity, you also have the opportunity to lead the nation to its greatest moral and

Billy Graham: Pastor to Presidents

spiritual heights. This is a tremendous opportunity and an awesome responsibility. Jesus once said, "Unto whom much is given, of him much shall be required" (cf. Luke 12:48). Those who have the greatest power always need the greatest guidance.

In less than two hours, President Reagan and Vice President Bush will place their hands upon a Bible and take their oath of office ... , they will be putting their hands on the book from which we have received our ideas of freedom and justice and our morals and value system. ...

On this solemn occasion, as a great nation goes forward under its chosen leaders, may all of us, citizens and leaders alike, go in the strength and the wisdom and the courage which we can only receive from God. Our first president, George Washington, said, "It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible." And he was right. This is what has helped make America great. God bless President and Mrs. Reagan and Vice President and Mrs. Bush and all of those in this administration during the next four years.