



Links Players

Golf and Billy Graham

...I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne...“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty. (Isaiah 6:1-5)

I imagine you are familiar with the name Billy Graham. I grew up listening to his radio broadcasts and attending several stadium crusades. I could tell you numerous stories of friends impacted by his ministry.

So, when I read his autobiography, *Just As I Am*, I was surprised to learn how passionate he was about golf. Golf is mentioned on 39 different pages of the book. On one of them, he recounts how, in 1938, he was on a golf course, Temple Terrace CC, outside Tampa, Fla., when he committed his life to the ministry.

Graham had a high calling, but he also had a low handicap. He traveled the world sharing the Gospel and often with golf clubs in tow. Graham was featured in *Golf Digest's* “60 Most Famous Golfers” for the magazine’s 60th anniversary edition.

It read in part: “Graham started out playing golf cross-handed, but once he switched to a conventional grip, he became a decent player who often shot in the 70s. He has been a spiritual adviser and golf buddy to leading power brokers, including presidents Eisenhower, Nixon, and Ford. He played with John Kennedy right before JFK’s inauguration, and he was playing golf when he heard the news of Kennedy’s assassination.

“Golf can turn an extrovert into an introvert, and vice versa; it brings out the boy in a man and the man in a boy. For me, a golf course is an island of peace in a world often full of confusion and turmoil,” wrote Graham in an article for *Golf Digest* in 1961.

In his 1968 Golfer's Association Dinner speech, he talked about learning to take a stand, getting a proper grip on your life, focusing on Christ, and following through in your walk with God. You can listen to it here: <https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/resources/lessons-for-life-from-god-and-golf/>

Author R.C. Sproul recalled a story about Billy Graham playing in a celebrity golf tournament. “A well-known professional golfer was playing with President Gerald Ford, fellow pro-Jack Nicklaus, and Billy Graham. After the round, one of the other pros on the tour asked, ‘Hey, what was it like playing with the President and Billy Graham?’ The pro said with disgust, ‘I don’t need Billy Graham stuffing religion down my throat!’ With that, he headed for the practice tee.

His friend followed, and after the golfer had pounded out his fury on a bucket of golf balls, he asked, 'Was Billy a little rough on you out there?' The pro sighed and said with embarrassment, 'No, he didn't even mention religion.' Billy Graham had said nothing about God, Jesus, or religion, yet the pro stomped off after the game, accusing Billy of trying to ram religion down his throat."

What had happened? Perhaps Graham had so reflected Christ-likeness that his presence brought the same feeling to the pro as experienced by Isaiah. He knew he was lost, a man of unclean lips. Perhaps in the life of Billy Graham, the pro had sensed the presence of our Holy God.

Light has an interesting characteristic. It exposes the darkness. Graham's mere presence was light. If you are a Christ-follower, the same Holy Spirit in Billy Graham is also in you! Jesus said that when you light a candle, you don't put it under a bushel but put it out for all to see. Let your light shine!

Prayer: Let the light of Jesus shine brightly within me. I want to be that person, Lord, who others can see and know Christ lives in me.

—

Bill Crawford

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