



1995

Beyond the stadium walls, Billy Graham's crusades reach billions of TV viewers via satellite. He stands here at the transmission site for his 1995 San Juan, Puerto Rico, crusade, which reached more than one billion people in some 185 countries.

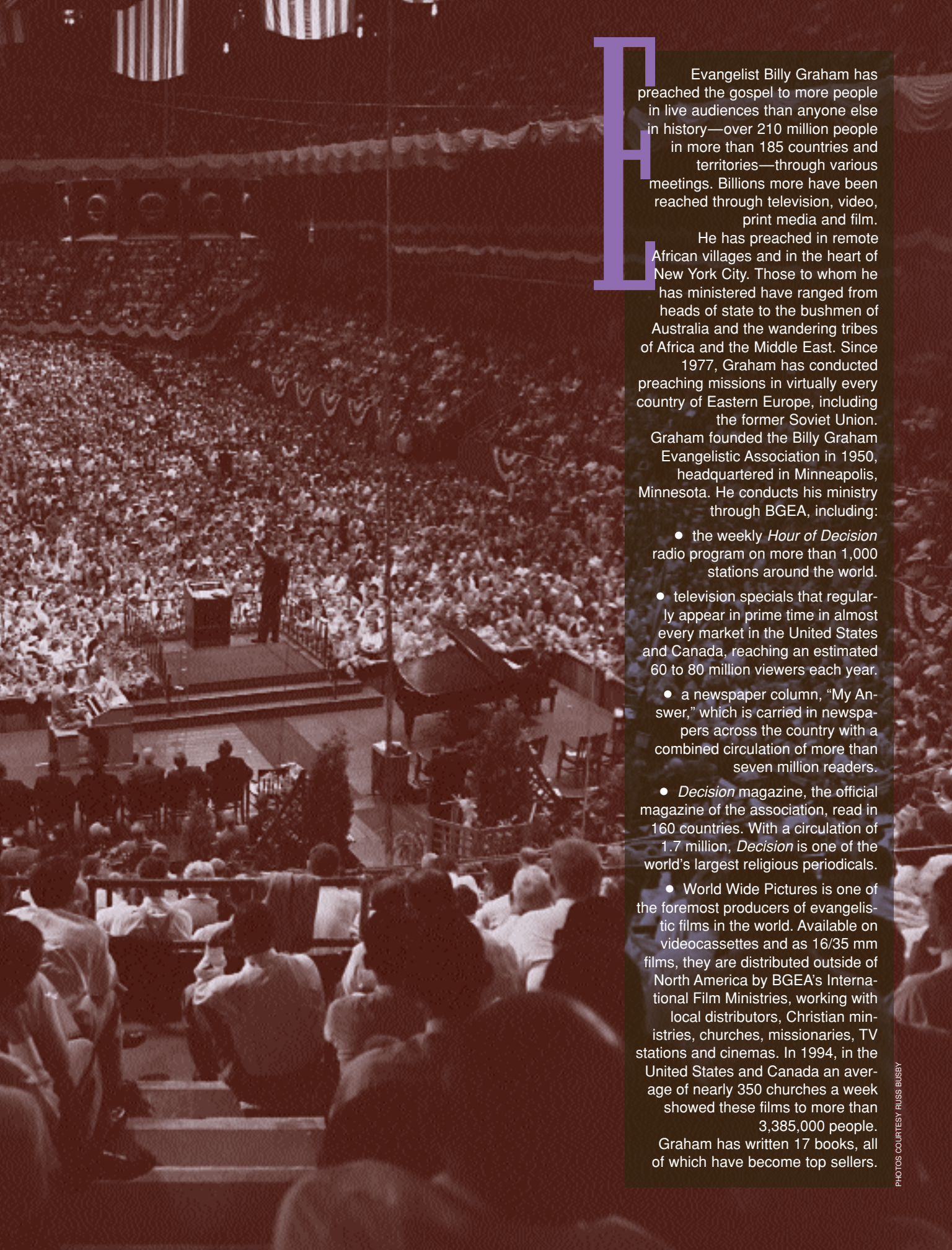


# “Just As I Am”

by Dan Wooding

1957

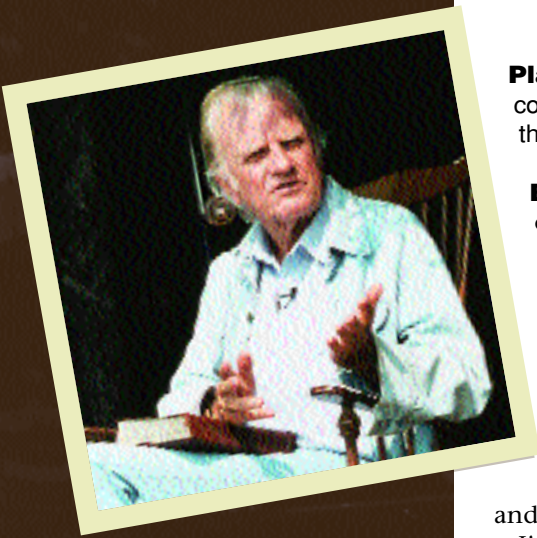
At Madison Square Garden in New York City, a young Billy Graham packed a crowd every night for 16 straight weeks. The crusade was televised coast to coast on ABC.



**E**vangelist Billy Graham has preached the gospel to more people in live audiences than anyone else in history—over 210 million people in more than 185 countries and territories—through various meetings. Billions more have been reached through television, video, print media and film.

He has preached in remote African villages and in the heart of New York City. Those to whom he has ministered have ranged from heads of state to the bushmen of Australia and the wandering tribes of Africa and the Middle East. Since 1977, Graham has conducted preaching missions in virtually every country of Eastern Europe, including the former Soviet Union. Graham founded the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association in 1950, headquartered in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He conducts his ministry through BGEA, including:

- the weekly *Hour of Decision* radio program on more than 1,000 stations around the world.
- television specials that regularly appear in prime time in almost every market in the United States and Canada, reaching an estimated 60 to 80 million viewers each year.
- a newspaper column, "My Answer," which is carried in newspapers across the country with a combined circulation of more than seven million readers.
- *Decision* magazine, the official magazine of the association, read in 160 countries. With a circulation of 1.7 million, *Decision* is one of the world's largest religious periodicals.
- World Wide Pictures is one of the foremost producers of evangelistic films in the world. Available on videocassettes and as 16/35 mm films, they are distributed outside of North America by BGEA's International Film Ministries, working with local distributors, Christian ministries, churches, missionaries, TV stations and cinemas. In 1994, in the United States and Canada an average of nearly 350 churches a week showed these films to more than 3,385,000 people. Graham has written 17 books, all of which have become top sellers.



*At 78, an age when most people have retired, Billy Graham, battling the debilitating ravages of Parkinson's disease, refuses to slow down. For more than 50 years, he has been a man with a mission—to introduce the world to Jesus Christ.*

*Using crusades, television, radio, films and his syndicated "My Answer" newspaper column, Graham continues to reach out with the gospel message. He has preached the gospel to more people in live audiences than anyone else in history.*

*This son of a humble farmer has been one of Gallup Poll's Ten Most Admired Men in the World a total of 37 times since 1955. He has been a friend to popes, Queen Elizabeth II, several prime ministers and 10 presidents. But who is the man behind the message and what is the secret to his success?*

*After all, a Ladies' Home Journal survey once ranked the famed preacher second only to God in the "Achievements in Religion" category.*

*Sitting in a chair on the front porch of his home in Montreat, North Carolina, and wearing a blue denim jacket given to him some 20 years ago by singer Johnny Cash, Graham talked openly about his life, his marriage of more than 53 years to Ruth, his children and his message.*

**Plain Truth:** What do you consider to be the "plain truth" of the gospel?

**Billy Graham:** I believe the overwhelming message is the grace and the love and the mercy of God, and that's what I emphasize a lot more than I did in the earlier years.

I think the Lord just gradually changed me as I began to study the Scriptures. I began to see how much of the emphasis is on God's love and mercy and grace.

I'm not going to heaven because I'm good. I'm not going to heaven because I've preached to a lot of people. I'm going to heaven because of God's grace and mercy in Christ at the cross.

And grace means unmerited favor. Something I didn't deserve. I haven't worked for. It's a free gift from God to me, and I emphasize that in my preaching.

I try to start out in my sermons in something that's in the newspaper maybe that day and try to catch the ear of the people and make an application of the gospel to it.

**Q.** Has there ever been a moment that you questioned your faith?

**A.** Ever since I received Christ as my Savior in 1934 in Charlotte, North Carolina, I have never had a doubt about my faith in God. I don't go out to preach because of the need as much as I go out to fulfill the command of Christ.

He said, "Go," and we are to witness for Christ by the way we live and by our verbal witness about the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ and about the need to repent and to believe, and so I've never had any doubts about my call.

**Q.** Your humble lifestyle and personal modesty is

a testimony. How have you been able to avoid human pitfalls?

**A.** Because I've had the full cooperation of my wife and family. Because the Lord laid it upon my heart. From the very beginning, we decided on how we were going to handle money, and how we were going to handle the temptations for sex and things like that.

As a group—Cliff Barrows and George Beverly Shea, who lives a mile from here, and T.W. Wilson and people who were with me from the very beginning—we all got together and decided we were going to be very careful about those things because we had seen other people fall as a result of that.

**Q.** Share with our readers what prayer means to you.

**A.** I know that prayer works if one prays according to the will of God in the name of Christ.

When I go to pray for a sick person, I always say: "Lord, your will be done. If it is your will, raise this man or this woman up." Because God has a plan for that person and sometimes we don't take that into account and we say, "Oh God, heal this person." That's not the way I felt God led me in prayer. I pray and say, "Lord, your will be done."

Many times I've gone to the pulpit and didn't know what I was going to say that evening. I didn't know what my first words were going to be.

I went there nervous and frightened, and many times that happens. I'm always nervous and very tense for the first five minutes.

I have prayed, "Now Lord, you take over this service and give me the words to say," and I've sensed the presence and power of God. I believe that's an answer to prayer.



**Q.** Your personal struggle with Parkinson's disease is well known. Will you give us some insights into this part of your life?

**A.** It's a very strange sort of disease because one day you feel fine, then the next day you feel way down. You feel like staying in bed all day. Then you have trouble walking and can't even write a letter.

I think God sent it to me at this age to show me that I am totally dependent on him. When I go to the pulpit to preach, I may have to have a little bit of help getting to the pulpit, but when I get there I can sense the presence and power of the Lord, and he helps me in my preaching.

I don't think there has been any change as far as my physical stamina and preaching.

**Q.** Is it difficult to be a role model for so many people?

**A.** It's a pressure and it's humbling, and it keeps me and my wife frightened that we will say something that will mislead someone in the wrong direction. We try to be careful in what we say and how we live. We try to live in such a way that people will know that we are Christians and living by Christian standards.

**Q.** Tell us about your secrets of your happy and enduring marriage to your wife, Ruth.

**A.** It's her [he said this simply, pointing to his wife who had recently been released from a local hospital after a serious battle with spinal meningitis, and was sitting to the side of him in the garden].

Ruth's been a marvelous person to be able to stay here and raise five children, 19 grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren. She's been the one who's done the work, kept up with them, talked to them, loved them and taught them the Scriptures. She let me travel all over the world preaching the gospel.

If there is any secret in our mar-

riage, it's Ruth. There are very few women I've ever known like her.

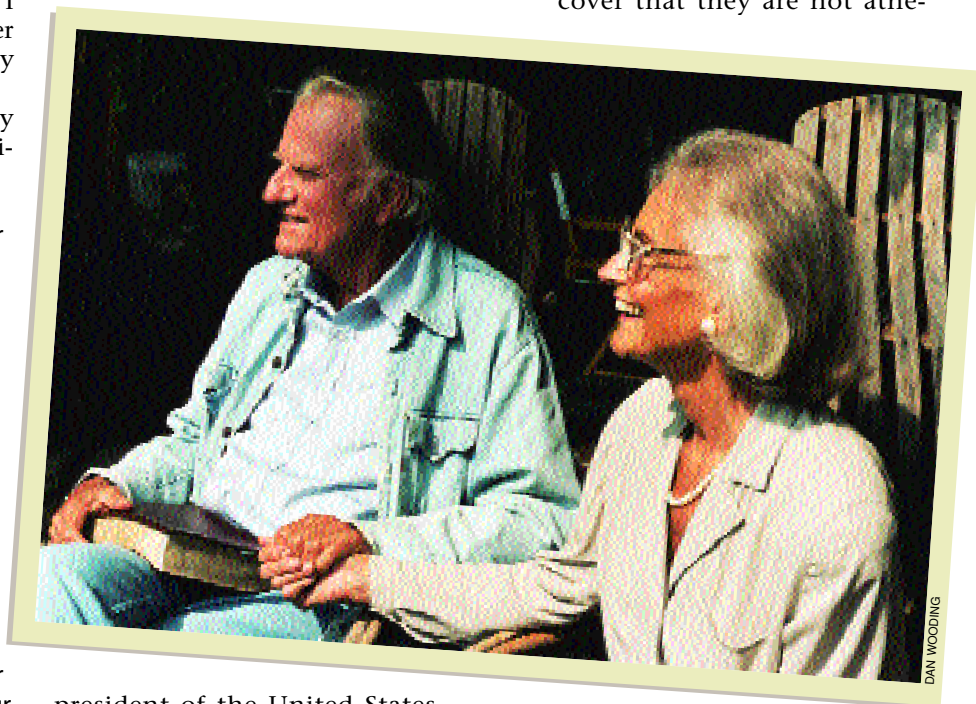
She was born and reared in China. She went to school in North Korea. That's been one of the reasons I've been going to North Korea.

When Kim Il Sung found out that my wife had studied for four years in North Korea in high school, he invited me to come. I have been to North Korea twice. I had long talks with him and carried messages to him from the president of the United States. He sent a message back to the

well, and I said: "Mr. Ambassador, I notice that I'm to sit next to Mrs. Gorbachev. What shall I talk to her about? What would she be interested in?"

He said: "Give her the gospel. Give the same thing that you preach because that's what she's really interested in. She's interested in religion." I hadn't been sitting there very long when I discovered that was true, and we had a real discussion about spiritual things.

All those people who claim to be atheists, when you get down to a long discussion with them you discover that they are not athe-



president of the United States and the pope. The pope sent messages for me to get through because the Catholic Church had no way to get into North Korea. It's been a tremendous thing to go to North Korea.

**Q.** You once had an extraordinary opportunity to share the gospel at the White House with Raisa Gorbachev.

**A.** Yes. I remember when Mr. and Mrs. Gorbachev were guests of the Reagans at the White House I was invited to come, and they put me next to Mrs. Gorbachev at the table. I went to Mr. Dobrynin, the then Soviet ambassador to the United States, whom I knew very

ists. In fact, there's a real hunger in their hearts for reality and truth and purpose in life.

**Q.** Does the recent discovery of an asteroid from Mars with a possible fossil of an organism raise any theological questions in your mind?

**A.** I believe there is life on other planets. We have this galaxy, the Milky Way, and they now speculate that we have millions and millions of galaxies and in each galaxy are trillions of stars and planets.

I can't imagine that we're the only one that has life. That would be a terrible, egotistic thing for us to say.

I think there is life on other planets.

I believe that God is the God over all of it, and that's why he is so awesome and so tremendous and why when I come into his presence, I feel that I am not worthy to come into the presence of the King of kings and Lord of lords.

gave them some encouragement that there is life on Mars.

**Q.** Your board has made a momentous decision.

When you are unable to continue with the reigns of your ministry, your son Franklin, who is already president of the international Christian relief and evangelism

Franklin is much stronger physically than I am. He's more like his grandfather Bell than he is like me. If you see pictures of us together, you can see the resemblances.

We also have another son named Ned, who does a great work for God in China. He has an open door in China that nobody else has. In fact, many missions depend on his contact with the leaders of China. He's developed friendships with the leadership in China.

He lives near Seattle and goes back and forth to China constantly. It's called East Gates Ministries.

Franklin is the oldest son, but he's not the oldest in the family. We have three daughters who came first [Virginia, born in 1945; Anne Morrow, 1948; and Ruth Bell, 1950].

I often wondered if we were going to have a son. Franklin is wonderful at spending time with his family. He has a remarkable family.

**Q.** What advice would you give Franklin?

**A.** Study the Scriptures and make the Bible the one thing in your life. Spend time with your family.

I regret that I didn't spend more time with my family. I traveled all over the world. I took too many engagements that I shouldn't have taken. I accepted too many invitations to do various things that, when I look back, had little meaning in my permanent work.

But Franklin doesn't need too much advice. He can give me advice and he does give me advice, for which I am very grateful.

**Q.** What do you consider to be the greatest accomplishment of your life?

**A.** The thing I am most proud of is my family. They made it in spite of me. □

*Dan Wooding is the author of 33 books and the founder and international director of ASSIST (Aid to Special Saints in Strategic Times), based in Garden Grove, California.*

## The Greatest Message Ever Told

To Billy Graham, Easter Sunday is the most triumphant day in the calendar of the Christian church. What does the resurrection event mean for us?

"The resurrection of Jesus Christ is symbolized by new Easter clothes, the bright color of laughing daffodils, and beautiful white Easter lilies," Graham has written. "But most of all, the wonder of his resurrection is symbolized in the hope that beats in the hearts of believers everywhere as they sing triumphantly: 'Christ the Lord is risen today.'

"It is the message 'Jesus is alive!' that lifts Christianity out of the category of dead superstitions and archaic religions and makes it the abiding faith of millions. When the glorious truth of the empty tomb and the risen Christ was told in the streets of Jerusalem, and then spread to the marketplaces of Corinth and Antioch,

it came as a shock. It awakened devout people in every quarter of the world to the fact that Jesus is indeed the Lord Christ, the Savior of the world.

"The resurrection quickly became the central theme of the apostles' preaching. Within 50 days of the death of Christ and of the apparent collapse of his cause, the city of Jerusalem rang with the cries of those who with all boldness declared that God had raised Jesus from the dead and that they were his witnesses. Hundreds had seen him after his resurrection! On the day of Pentecost craven cowards were changed into courageous confessors. Fishermen from Galilee became heralds of the King. All who saw and heard them were compelled to acknowledge that something had happened which had utterly transformed their lives. When questioned by their critics, the apostles had no hesitancy in making reply. They accounted for their own boldness by attributing everything to the risen Christ."

Graham added: "Today, give him your life. Trust him as your Savior. Surrender your will to him; know the thrill and the joy and the security of the resurrected Christ living in you."

**Q.** Does Jesus Christ need to be preached on other planets?

**A.** That's up to the Lord. I don't think I can make it in my lifetime. I'd love to, but nobody's invited me to be an astronaut, and if I got there I don't think I could speak their language (whoever they are).

They haven't found life yet, except for that little thing they found with some bacteria on it, which

organization Samaritan's Purse, is to take the leadership.

**A.** I have no plans to retire. The Lord may have plans, however, and if he has plans, he'll retire me—through illness or some other reasons—but I have no plans because God told me to preach, and I intend to preach as long as I have strength and as long as the board will support me.