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Watering a Young Boy's Dream

By Jennifer Klitzke

Did Billy Graham realize the cup of cold water he gave to a 12-year-old boy in 1965 would influence him to grow up and be on a quest to reach one million decisions for Christ by the end of 2010?

In 1965, Billy Graham held a crusade in Minneapolis, MN. That's when young Tom Elie sensed God's call. He says, "I felt that God had put it on my heart to reach masses of people for Christ." Tom wrote Billy Graham and was surprised when Mr. Graham replied with encouraging words to pursue God's call. His legacy had an impact on Tom.

Inspired, twelve-year-old Tom wondered, "How do I win people for Christ?" Then an idea took root. He saved his allowance to purchase gospel messages from the Chicago Tract Society and then mailed those messages to people whom he randomly picked from the phone book. One time a woman wrote back and thanked Tom for sharing God's love. "I just wanted to do whatever I could do that would reach outside of the box," Tom remembers.

The horseback evangelist

The legacy in Tom's family began in 1906. A horseback evangelist rode into a northern Minnesota town to hold a gospel meeting. Someone had invited the town drunk who had also been known as a wife beater. This meeting had been the first time the

inebriated man had heard about quenching his thirsty soul with the “Living Water” of Jesus Christ. “The town drunk got gloriously saved and changed from the inside out,” says Tom. “He had become so radically changed that he became known as a “Trumpet for God.” This once “town drunk” turned “Trumpet for God” was Tom’s great grandfather who had passed the Christian legacy down to his generation. “This is the power of one decision coming Christ,” Tom says.

Teenage preparation

As a teenager Tom attended an all-church prayer meeting. He knelt on the cold ceramic floor when a hand touched his shoulder and a voice gently prayed, “Lord make this man another Billy Graham.” The affirming hand and voice had been of the visiting Bible college professor. This had been another cup of cold water that encouraged Tom to keep pursuing God’s call—to win masses of people for Jesus Christ.

At 16, Tom’s youth group returned with jubilation from a month-long mission trip at Montego Bay, Jamaica. They had walked hut to hut and introduced people to the saving grace of Jesus Christ. Tom said ecstatically, “We saw about 500 people come to know Christ!”

Years of shaping

Over the next thirty years, evangelism took many forms in shaping Tom for the coming soul harvest, including leading worship as a music pastor and planting a church as a pastor. “At 19,” Tom said, “I became part of a hippie’s church that was really reaching a lot of young people for Jesus Christ.” This Minneapolis church was called Jesus People Church. As music pastor, it’s where Tom led a hippie crowd of thousands in worship for twelve years. Then in 1984, God called Tom to plant and pastor Praise Assembly in Minneapolis. He pastored there for twenty years.

In 1996, Tom sensed God urge him to double his prayer life. He said, “God told me to seek His face; not His hand.” God had been teaching Tom about His favor through listening obedience in prayer and His Word. Tom realized, “The work He does in me is more important than the work I do for Him. And as I am in His presence, it changes me to become more efficient in being His representative.”

Divine favor

When Tom doubled his prayer time, he began to see God’s hand orchestrating his life. “God’s favor will open doors in six minutes, when it would take me six years.” He noticed, “a supernatural provision of relationships and contacts that I could not obtain on my own.”

A month later, Tom had been invited to the rich harvest fields of India. After seeing masses of people eager to hear about a loving God, he returned home and founded Oasis World Ministries, an evangelistic ministry that is bringing “Living Water” to thirsty souls. It wasn’t until 2004 that Tom passed the mantle at Praise Assembly to serve full time at Oasis.

Tom and the Oasis team have been on a quest to reach one million decisions for Christ by the end of 2010. He heard someone say, “A goal without a deadline is just a dream.” So Tom set a deadline of December 2010, and he set the bar so high that when it was reached, everyone would know that it must have been God’s grace and favor at work and not mere human effort to make it happen. As of November 2009, Oasis has reached 733,000 decisions for Christ!

Tom will go wherever people are thirsty for “Living Water.” He ventures to places where others have labored in the harvest fields preparing the soil, planting the seed, and watering the crops for a harvest of souls. Tom focuses on traveling where a major gospel crusade has never been held or hasn’t been held in decades.

Revisiting fertile ground

September 2009 marked Tom's 36th trip to India. He had been invited to travel to the mountain-tops of Kohima, Nagaland, India to hold a gospel crusade at the very grounds where Billy Graham held the last crusade in 1972. Working with pastors and local churches of many denominations, the Oasis team anticipated 5,000 attendees, but God exceeded their expectations when 22,000 people came on Sunday alone. Over 11,840 signed decision cards for Christ had been collected in those five days—many came from college-age men and women. Afterwards the local pastors reached out to those who had made decisions for Christ and invited them to learn and grow in their newly found faith.

God's multiplication of one

The legacy of Billy Graham lives on. Tom said, "We thank God for him in sustaining grace and his life and the legacy he leaves for future generations to follow."

"Millions have been won to Jesus Christ down through the years," Tom said, "and multiplied millions more, because of the effects he has had upon his audience like me, who have gone out and multiplied the efforts of the kingdom."

A cup of cold water in the form of encouraging words had confirmed what God had placed in a 12-year-old's heart and influenced him to pursue God's call, carry out His plans, and populate heaven!

"The power of legacy over time," Tom said, "is something we will all rejoice together in heaven some day."

In addition to leading gospel crusades, Oasis World Ministries supports the work of 20 full-time national evangelists who travel weekly to remote villages of India—places were few people have ever heard about a loving God. Oasis has trained over 28,000 Christian leaders of emerging nations in evangelism using the "One-Minute Witness" tool, a way to share their testimony in 60 seconds. Oasis has built over 100

churches in remote villages where there had been no Christian worship center, and they have drilled over 280 fresh-water wells in villages without a nearby clean water source. To learn more about Oasis World Ministries, visit www.oasisworldministries.org.

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