Living Sermons

A BILLY GRAHAM CLASSIC SERMON

TRUE LOVE

SONG OF SOLOMON 8:6-7

"Love is not feeling. Love is doing. Love is a verb; God did something. God gave His love."

BILLY GRAHAM

St. Louis, Missouri

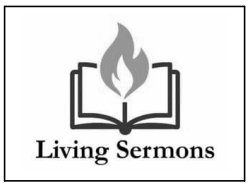
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TRUE LOVE

Preacher: Billy Graham

Publisher: LivingSermons.com

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Living Sermons

FOREWORD

What is love? It may be the most misused word in the English language. In this message, preached in St. Louis, Missouri, and spoken primarily to young people and their parents, Billy Graham opens the Song of Solomon and sets out to recover the real meaning of the word.

Dr. Graham shows that the whole Bible is a love story, God's love affair with the human race, proved once for all at the cross. Then he walks through the four Greek words for love: *storge*, the love of family; *eros*, the sacred gift of married love; *philia*, deep friendship; and *agape*, the supernatural love of God, which the Holy Spirit pours into the believer's heart and which transforms every other love.

His tone is frank, fatherly and often warmly humorous. He speaks plainly about honoring parents, praying for a future husband or wife, and keeping pure, and he never lets the listener lose sight of the cross.

In preparing this edition, we have preserved the preacher's message and wording. We removed time stamps, trimmed a few repetitions that belong to the spoken word, arranged the transcript into chapters with subheadings, and corrected punctuation and capitalization so that it reads as a book.

Whether you are young or old, single or married, may these pages show you the love that money cannot buy and that many waters cannot quench.

Wisdom Epsi
— The Chief Editor, LivingSermons.com

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

This book is a faithful transcript of a live sermon delivered by the preacher under the inspiration and unction of the Holy Spirit. Every effort has been made to preserve the preacher's exact words, tone, flow, and spiritual authority, while carefully proofreading and formatting the message into a clear and readable ebook format.

The message you are about to read was originally ministered in a live congregational setting. As such, it carries the weight, urgency, and atmosphere of that sacred gathering. Minor grammatical and structural adjustments have been made solely to enhance readability, without altering the substance, intent, or power of the original delivery.

Watch the live sermon from which this message was transcribed on YouTube

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Our standard is reverence for the Word of God. Our daily goal is to transform powerful live sermons into polished PDF and ebook editions for the edification of the Body of Christ. It is our prayer that as you read, the same grace, conviction, clarity, and impartation present in the live service will minister to you afresh.

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A Spirit-led Publishing Stewardship

MAIN MESSAGE BEGINS HERE

CHAPTER 1

THE MOST MISUSED WORD

A THRILLING LITTLE BOOK

Now tonight, I want you to turn with me to the Song of Solomon. That comes right after Ecclesiastes, if you're turning in your Bible, and just before Isaiah. It's a short book of only eight short chapters, but one of the most thrilling and one of the most interesting books in all the Bible.

This book is very explicit. It's a thrilling and wonderful story of love—of married love, and the intimacies of married love.

And tonight I want to speak primarily to young people and their parents on the subject of love, and on the subject of falling in love: your relationship with your parents, your relationship with your children, and your relationship with your neighbor, as it concerns love.

WHAT IS LOVE?

What is love? I suppose the most misused word in all the English language is the word love. And in our generation I don't think we have very much comprehension at all about what love is really all about.

You know, a young person says, "I'm in love." What do they mean? "I'm falling in love." Or, "I love this ring," or, "I love this sweater," or, "I love this dress," or, "I made love last night." We use the same word to describe all kinds of things.

It's very much like "thank you." A person can give you a lifetime of comradeship and friendship, and you say thank you. Or someone gives you a cup of coffee, and you say thank you. You don't have a stronger word in the English language.

The English language is quite a limited language in many ways in comparison to some of the other languages of the world. And the word love is one of those words that is misunderstood and misused so much today. I want to talk about that, if I might, for a few minutes tonight.

CHAPTER 2

A LOVE THAT MONEY CANNOT BUY

SOLOMON AND HIS BRIDE

In the last chapter of the Song of Solomon—I'm reading from *The Living Bible*—the young bride is speaking. It's the story of Solomon and his bride, a Shulamite woman. And, by the way, a black woman. This woman here was a black woman; she says several times that she's black. And she was considered the most beautiful woman of her day, and she was Solomon's wife.

In this book is the conversation between King Solomon and his wife as they discuss their married love together. And the ecstasy of this love—the thrill, the depth, the breadth and the height of this love—is tremendous.

A PICTURE OF GOD'S LOVE

We believe, as Christians, that it's a metaphor, or a parable, the story of the love that Christ has for the church. And the Hebrews, the Jews, believe that it's the story of God's love affair with Israel. There are differences of opinion among theologians about it, but certainly both could be true.

It's the story of God's love affair with the human race: the story of God's love for those who love Him, whether they're Jew or Christian or whoever they may be. And it goes into the very depths of love. It tells us how much God loves us and how much we are to love Him.

STRONG AS DEATH

And in this passage the bride is speaking, and she says:

> *Love is strong as death and jealousy is as cruel as hell. It flashes fire, the very flame of God. Many waters cannot quench the flame of this love, neither can the floods drown it. If a man tried to buy it with everything he owned, he couldn't do it.*
>
> **SONG OF SOLOMON 8:6-7 (THE LIVING BIBLE)**

Here was a love that money cannot buy. Here is a love that sorrows and problems and difficulties and temptations cannot destroy. Here is a love that the trials that come in every marriage could not destroy, and money couldn't buy it. That's the kind of love that Solomon and his bride had for each other.

Do you love that way?

CHAPTER 3

GOD'S LOVE AFFAIR WITH THE HUMAN RACE

THIS LITTLE PLANET

But you know, the whole Bible is a love story. It's God's love affair with the human race.

You see, God has all those billions of planets out there, all those hundreds of billions of stars, and it's all God's. But of all the planets in the whole universe, the whole universe stands in awe at the love that God showers on this little planet called the Earth.

And I imagine the people who live on other planets wonder why God doesn't sweep this planet of rebellion out into oblivion. We're the only planet, insofar as I know, that is in rebellion against God. And yet, in spite of our rebellion, in spite of our disobedience, in spite of our sins, God loves us. That's the thrilling thing about it. God loves every person in the whole world with a love that is beyond our comprehension.

LOOK AT THE CROSS

And God proved His love by giving His Son on the cross. If you ever doubt that God loves, look at the cross, because "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself." The greatest illustration of love in the whole world is the cross. Because God is saying from the cross, "I love you, I love you, I love you."

You and I were saved by the cross. Our Lord loved us so much that He gave His only Son to die on that cross.

LOVE IS A VERB

Now, love is not feeling. You say, "I feel I love him." It's not feeling. Love is doing. Love is a verb. God did something. God gave His love. "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." The apostle John, looking at that cross, said, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us."

And think about that cross. The Romans used that instrument of execution on a colossal scale. They put nails in the hands and spikes in the feet, and spat on the people, and mutilated the bodies, and broke their legs to help them die quicker, and all sorts of terrible things. The most cruel death in the whole world is the death of the cross.

And our Lord was hanging there with the mocking crowd making fun of Him. And He hung there for you, and you, and you. God was saying, "I love you." Jesus laid down His life for us.

NO OTHER WAY

And that's the reason the Scripture says there's no other way to heaven. You can't be saved any other way. You cannot find life with a capital "L" any other way. You cannot gain entrance to the kingdom of heaven without coming by the cross. Because if God could have found another way, He would have found it.

CHAPTER 4

STORGE: FAMILY LOVE

FOUR WORDS FOR LOVE

Now, the Greeks had four words for love that described different kinds of love. We have one word; they had four.

One was the word *storge*, which carries with it the idea of affection. It covers many areas, but I'm going to limit it tonight to just family love, because *storge* involves the family.

HONOR YOUR PARENTS

And I want to ask you young people tonight: What is your relationship to your parents? Is there communication between you and your parents?

Now, the Bible teaches that young people and children and young adults in the home are to obey their parents in the Lord. When you get older, after you have gone away from home and you're twenty-one or twenty-two, you don't have to obey your parents in everything. But as long as you live, you are to honor your parents—even when you're up in years.

WHEN THEY GROW OLD

And then, when they get old, you're to take care of your parents. You don't hand them over to the state and get rid of them.

You know, we have everything turned around in America from the rest of the world. If you go out to China or to Japan and places like that, they honor old age. They look forward to the day when they can take care of their elderly parents. We try to get rid of them. It's a part of our selfishness. It's one of our sins.

We are to love our parents; we are to obey our parents; we are to honor our parents. And in time, we are to take care of them.

You see, as Christians, *storge* love—family love—is affected by God's love, because God's love comes into your heart.

CHAPTER 5

PRAYING FOR YOUR FUTURE

A PRAYER MEETING ON THE MOUNTAIN

And the same is true about marriage. What about your marriage—your future marriage, I mean?

I have three daughters; they're all three married. And when they were little, as I said once, I took them down the mountain. They were ten or eleven, twelve years of age. And we came to a little place, and I said, "Do you girls ever think about the fact that someday you'll get married?" And they laughed. And they said, "Yes, we think about it sometimes."

I said, "Do you realize that your future husband is probably now alive somewhere? Do you ever pray for him?"

They said, "Daddy!" But before we finished, we had a prayer meeting for their future husbands.

(Laughter)

How about your future husband? Have you prayed for him? Maybe you're just praying, "Lord, send him."

(Laughter)

Have you prayed for your future wife?

(Applause)

NOT JUST THE FIRST ONE

You heard about the girl that went to the palm reader to see if she could find any answer to her problem about not getting a husband. And he said, "You'll be proposed to three times this next year." And she said, "No, I won't. I'm going to accept the first one."

(Laughter)

But it's not just anybody, and it's not just the first one. Because, you see, marriage is a lifelong commitment, and that's why it's so important not to be impulsive about it. Be sure that you wait on God's choice. How many young people today are rushing madly into marriage and just as madly out?

But when you're a Christian and you're able to commit your future to the Lord, and ask Him to bring the right man and the right woman into your life, what a thrilling and wonderful thing it is. And He'll do it. God's love can affect your family love.

CHAPTER 6

EROS: A SACRED GIFT

NOT THE SAME STANDARDS

And then, secondly, the Greeks had another word, the word *eros*. The word *eros* refers to sensual or sexual love. That's where we get the word erotic. And God's love affects *eros*.

Do you have the courage to listen to what the Bible says about *eros*? Do you want to hear it? The standards set forth in this Bible are not the same as the standards we now have in America. They're different standards, and you've got to decide which one you're going to accept. And I'm not going to water it down. I'm going to tell it to you like the Bible tells it.

THE BODY IS SACRED

The Bible says that immorality is sin. But the Bible also indicates that sex is not a sin. It's the wrong use of sex that's sin.

Many ancient and many modern writers have held the idea that the body is evil. George Bernard Shaw once wrote about the tyranny of the flesh. Plato thought that the body was evil. But the body is not evil. The Bible teaches that your body is sacred. The Bible teaches that for the Christian it's the temple of the Holy Spirit. And that includes your sex as well as every other part of your life.

Now, there's a distinction in the New Testament; you'll have to watch out. You'll find it, by the way, in this little book we want to send you, *The World, the Flesh and the Devil*. There's a difference between the flesh and the body in the Scriptures.

But a wrong view of the body was responsible, in my judgment, for the suppression of discussions of sex in the last century. That, I think, caused a great deal of harm. I think there's something good about what we've seen, but we've gone too far in our openness about this subject. It ought to be discussed. It ought to be preached about, and the Word of God should be proclaimed on this subject, because all the way through the Scriptures we have the teachings of God on the subject of sex.

WHY GOD GAVE SEX

The Scripture says that Adam knew his wife, and they became one flesh. That word knew carries with it the idea of sex.

Now, why did God give sex? The Bible is clear about that. First, for the propagation of the human race. We're all here because of sex. Second, for the climax and enjoyment of married love. Notice: married love. God has put a fence around marriage and says, "Thou shalt not commit immorality." And then thirdly, to express unity: the unity of the man and the wife. They become one flesh, and it becomes a type of Christ and the church. It becomes very sacred.

But when sin entered the Garden of Eden, sex, which was supposed to be sacred, became perverted, and lust came in. So that today something that was supposed to be sacred and wonderful and glorious has been perverted into lust and has become sin.

WHY GOD SAYS NO

Now, why does God say, "Thou shalt not commit immorality"? To protect your future marriage.

Secondly, to protect your body. You say, "Well, my body doesn't need protecting." Don't think it doesn't. VD is sweeping the country. Illegitimacy has doubled in the last two or three years, in spite of all the pills and in spite of all the advance in medicine. It's getting worse instead of better.

Thirdly, to protect you psychologically. Psychologists are now finding that the first experience you have outside of marriage never leaves. That guilt always remains. And guilt is one of the greatest psychological problems being faced in the world today.

And then, to protect society. If we become immoral as a society, we destroy civilization. We become decadent, as they did in Rome and other civilizations, and we're destroyed. So God says, for our own good, "Thou shalt not commit immorality."

VICTORY OVER EROS

Now, how can a young person have victory over *eros*? The Bible says to "flee fornication." And the mark of a Christian is self-control and self-discipline. There's no way to overcome this tremendous temptation except in Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote to young Timothy and said, "Keep thyself pure." You cannot live pure in 1973 or 1974 apart from Jesus Christ. He can give you the strength and the power and the victory to live a pure life. He will help you to flee fornication.

CHAPTER 7

PHILIA: FRIENDSHIP

THE CITY OF BROTHERLY LOVE

Then there's a third word the Greeks had: *philia*. That carries with it the idea of very strong friendship. We get our word philanthropy from it. We get our word philharmonic, the love of music, or Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love.

And it's the word that Peter used when Jesus asked him if he loved Him. He said, "You know that I love You, Lord." He used this word. But Jesus wanted another word. He wanted a deeper word.

A FRIEND OF GOD

You have friends, and if you have five close friends in your lifetime, you are a very fortunate person. God called Abraham the friend of God. Are you a friend of God and a friend of Christ?

And what about your friends? This means strong friendship—a friendship that endures through thick and thin, that never wavers. Give your life to Christ, and He will help you with your friendships.

CHAPTER 8

AGAPE: GOD'S SUPERNATURAL LOVE

NO WORDS CAN DESCRIBE IT

And then, fourthly, *agape* love. This is another word that the Greeks used. They invented this word for the New Testament. This is God's love.

And God's love affects the family, and God's love affects *eros*, and God's love affects *philia*. All the other loves can be influenced by *agape* love.

Agape love is a supernatural love, a love that we know nothing about apart from God. It's God's love. It's so deep and so wide and so high and so great, and has such dimensions to it, that no words in any language can describe it.

It's a love that God has for you: that in spite of the fact that you were rebelling against Him, in spite of the fact that you were a sinner, in spite of the fact that you broke His laws, He gave His Son to shed His blood. In spite of everything we've ever done, God loves. And words cannot describe it.

LOVE PRODUCED BY THE SPIRIT

And God says that the moment you receive His Son as Savior, He gives you the Spirit of God to live in your heart. And the Spirit of God produces this love in you and through you.

That's the reason Jesus said, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." It's a supernatural love for your neighbor. You may not like your neighbor, but you can love your neighbor.

WHO IS YOUR NEIGHBOR?

Who is your neighbor? In the olden days they used to interpret that literally: the person that lived next door, and that's all. But Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan. He told about the priest and the Levite that passed by when this man had been robbed and beaten. And a man of another race, another ethnic background, came by: a Samaritan, who was hated by the Jews of that day. And the Samaritans hated the Jews. And Jesus deliberately told the story about how the Good Samaritan helped this man that had been beaten and robbed.

We can't do that in the world in which we live without God's love.

CHAPTER 9

LOVE BEYOND OUR CAPACITY

BY THIS SHALL ALL MEN KNOW

But God will enable you to love beyond your capacity to love. He will help you to love your wife. He will help you to love your husband. He will help you to love your children. He will help your children to love their parents, with *agape* love dominating.

"By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples"—in that you have *agape*, God's love, for each other.

ON BROKEN GLASS

This is what helps drive us into evangelism: the love of the souls of men.

A man was on his way to the gallows in England a number of years ago. And as he was on the way to the gallows, a clergyman was beside him, telling him about Jesus Christ and what Christ could do for him, and how he needed to repent of his sins, because the judgment and hell lay ahead. And he turned to the clergyman and said, "Reverend, if I believed what you are telling me, I would be willing to crawl across England on broken glass to tell people that."

Do you love the souls of men enough that you would be willing to go next door to your neighbor, and up and down the streets, to tell them about Jesus Christ? God's love in our hearts is produced by the Holy Spirit—supernaturally produced.

FALL IN LOVE ALL OVER AGAIN

No, I cannot love everybody. But God can give me the capacity to love everybody.

And maybe your wife is irritable. Maybe you're irritable. God can take you and change you and transform you, and transform that relationship until you can fall in love all over again.

God can take you young people here tonight and forgive your past sins, every one of them. Think of it: every sin forgiven, and your heart made just as clean as it was the day you were born. He can resensitize your conscience, which is in danger of becoming hardened, and give you a new tenderness, and give you the real meaning of love.

And then, when the time comes to find the right person, it'll be the right kind of love. It won't be this impulsive, superficial affection that is sometimes mixed in with lust, that is not real and genuine love.

CHAPTER 10

THE INVITATION

IN THE COCKPIT OF YOUR LIFE

Let Jesus Christ come into your heart. Let Him forgive your past sins. Let Him change your life. And say, "From this moment on, I want Him to be in control of my life. I want Him to sit in the cockpit of my life and run it and direct it. I turn my life over to Him tonight."

COME RIGHT NOW

I'm going to ask you to get up out of your seat right now, hundreds of you, and come and stand in front of the platform. And say by coming, "I want Jesus Christ to forgive my sin. I want to know I'm going to heaven. I want Him to take over my life and be the director of my life."

We're going to wait. You'll have to go back and around; the ushers will help show you how to come. You get up and come right now.

THE INVITATION HYMN

Just as I am, and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot,

(Announcer) As hundreds are responding to Mr. Graham's invitation to make a public commitment to Jesus Christ, you can make that same commitment right where you are. Just pick up the phone and call the number you see on your screen. Special friends are waiting to talk with you and pray with you about this most important decision.

I come.

TO YOU WHO ARE WATCHING

To you that are watching by television: you can see as scores and hundreds of people are coming here in St. Louis, Missouri, to make their commitment to Jesus Christ, and to accept God's offer of love and forgiveness and mercy in Jesus Christ. You can make that same commitment where you are. God help you to make that commitment, and go to church next Sunday.

CLOSING WORDS

(Closing Announcement) If you just prayed that prayer with my father, or if you have any questions about a relationship with Jesus Christ, why don't you call the number on the screen. There will be someone there to talk with you, pray with you and answer those questions. And remember, God loves you! If you would like to commit your life to Jesus Christ, please call us right now, toll free at 1-877-772-4559. That's 1-877-772-4559. Or you can write to us at: Billy Graham, 1 Billy Graham Parkway, Department C, Charlotte, NC 28201. Or you can contact us on the web 24/7 at peacewithgod.tv. We'll get the same helps to you that we give to everyone who responds at the invitation.

On behalf of Franklin Graham and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, thank you for watching and thank you for your prayers.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Passages quoted or alluded to in this message, in order of appearance. An asterisk (*) marks a passage the preacher did not name by chapter and verse; the editors identified it.

Song of Solomon 8:6-7* — Love is strong as death; many waters cannot quench it (read from The Living Bible). (Book and chapter named, verses not.) *(Chapter 2)*

Song of Solomon 1:5-6* — The bride says that she is black. *(Chapter 2)*

Ephesians 5:25-32* — The love of Christ for the church; husband and wife as a picture of it. *(Chapter 2)*

2 Corinthians 5:19* — "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself." *(Chapter 3)*

John 3:16* — God gave His only Son. *(Chapter 3)*

Romans 5:8* — "God commendeth His love toward us." *(Chapter 3)*

1 John 3:1* — "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us." *(Chapter 3)*

John 14:6; Acts 4:12* — There is no other way to heaven. *(Chapter 3)*

Ephesians 6:1-2* — Children, obey your parents in the Lord; honor your father and mother. *(Chapter 4)*

1 Timothy 5:4, 8* — Caring for elderly parents. *(Chapter 4)*

1 Thessalonians 4:3* — Immorality is sin. *(Chapter 6)*

1 Corinthians 6:19* — The body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. *(Chapter 6)*

Galatians 5:16-17* — The distinction between the flesh and the body. *(Chapter 6)*

Genesis 4:1; 2:24* — Adam knew his wife; they become one flesh. *(Chapter 6)*

Genesis 1:28* — Be fruitful and multiply. *(Chapter 6)*

Exodus 20:14* — "Thou shalt not commit immorality" (adultery). *(Chapter 6)*

1 Corinthians 6:18* — "Flee fornication." *(Chapter 6)*

Galatians 5:22-23* — Self-control, a fruit of the Spirit. *(Chapter 6)*

1 Timothy 5:22* — "Keep thyself pure." *(Chapter 6)*

John 21:15-17* — Jesus asks Peter, "Lovest thou Me?" *(Chapter 7)*

James 2:23* — Abraham was called the friend of God. *(Chapter 7)*

Romans 5:5* — God's love shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. *(Chapter 8)*

Matthew 22:39* — "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." *(Chapter 8)*

Luke 10:25-37* — The parable of the Good Samaritan. *(Chapter 8)*

John 13:35* — "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples." *(Chapter 9)*

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

William "Billy" F. Graham Jr. (1918–2018) was raised on a dairy farm in Charlotte, North Carolina. In 1934, at age 15, he made a commitment to faith during a revival led by Mordecai Ham. He was ordained in 1939, graduated from Florida Bible Institute in 1940, and earned a B.A. from Wheaton College in 1943, where he married Ruth McCue Bell.

After pastoring in Illinois and serving as the first full-time evangelist for Youth for Christ International, Graham was vaulted into national prominence by the 1949 Los Angeles Crusade. This event launched decades of global outreach, including historic, extended crusades in London (1954), New York City (1957), Seoul (1973), and Rio de Janeiro (1974). Overall, he preached live to nearly 215 million people in over 185 countries and territories.

In 1950, he founded the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA). Through BGEA, Graham hosted the syndicated *Hour of Decision* radio program for over 60 years, published *Decision* magazine, and authored 33 books—including bestsellers such as *Angels: God's Secret Agents* (1975) and his 1997 autobiography, *Just As I Am*.

A counselor to U.S. presidents, Graham appeared on Gallup's "Ten Most Admired Men in the World" list a record 61 times. His honors include the Presidential Medal of Freedom (1983), Congressional Gold Medal (1996), and an Honorary Knighthood (2001). Following his passing in 2018 at age 99, he lay in honor in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda, and a bronze statue of him was added to the U.S. Capitol in 2024. Billy and Ruth raised five children, 19 grandchildren, 44 great-grandchildren, and nine great-great-grandchildren.

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