

18 July
1957

Invocation Delivered at Billy Graham Evangelistic Association Crusade

[18 July 1957]
[New York, N.Y.]

On the night of 15 May, Billy Graham began his "summer-long crusade for souls" at Madison Square Garden in New York City.¹ Despite Graham's belief that attracting crowds to his crusade would be a "supreme challenge," eighteen thousand people attended the first evangelical meeting.² Following a telephone conversation between King and Graham, associate evangelist Leighton Ford wired King on 5 July inviting him to speak at the crusade; King replied affirmatively three days later.³ This transcript is taken from an audio recording.

Let us pray. O God, our Heavenly Father, out of whose mind this great cosmic universe has been created, toward whom the weary and perplexed of all generations turn for consolation and direction, we come before Thy presence this evening thanking Thee for the many blessings of life. We come recognizing our dependence on Thee. We also come, O God, with an awareness. The fact that we have not always given our lives to that which is high and noble. In the midst of all of the high and noble aspects of justice, we followed injustice. We stand amid the forces of truth and yet we deliberately lie. We stand amid the compelling urgency of the Lord of Love, as exemplified in the life of Jesus Christ, and yet we live our lives so often in the dungeons of hate. For all of these sins, O God forgive.

And in these days of emotional tension, when the problems of the world are gigantic in extent and chaotic in detail, give us penetrating vision, broad understanding, power of endurance and abiding faith, and save us from the paralysis of crippling fear. And O God, we ask Thee to help us to work with renewed vigor for a warless world and for a brotherhood that transcends race or color.

We thank Thee this evening for the marvelous things which have been done in this city, and through the dynamic preachings of this great evangelist. And we ask Thee, O God, to continue blessing him. Give him continued power and authority. And as we look into him tonight, grant that our hearts and spirit will be opened to the divine inflow. All of these things we ask, in the name of Him who taught us to pray. Our Father [*audience also begins to pray*], who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. . . . [*Audience continues prayer without King.*]

At. BGEA-IWW-BG.

1. William Franklin Graham (1918–), born on a farm near Charlotte, North Carolina, attended Bob Jones University and Florida Bible Institute before receiving his B.A. (1943) from Wheaton College. Ordained in 1939, Graham served as pastor of First Baptist Church in Western Springs, Illinois, before embarking on his career as a world-renowned evangelist.

2. George Dugan, "Billy Graham Opens His Crusade Here," *New York Times*, 16 May 1957. Initially intended to last just six weeks, the crusade was extended an additional ten weeks.

3. In a 15 February 1957 letter, Robert Forsberg, a Connecticut minister who had spoken with Graham, suggested to King that the evangelist "may be able to be an ally in this struggle." He added, "I even dare to dream, beyond this present day of crisis in Montgomery, of a time when you might appear with Billy Graham in a number of cities, North and South."