

Lowering the Boom Can be Good!

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This is the second in my series of personal story-telling about interesting things which have crossed my path in life, which I believe are worth preserving to forward along to my children and my grandchildren, etc.

These events took place in 1977. It was my honor and pleasure to serve as the Director of the Christian Life Conference at the Presbyterian Conference in Montreat, North Carolina. My tenure with that conference went from about 1975 to 1982. It was a four-day conference on the weekend closest to the Fourth of July annual celebrations, with an emphasis on things for families; on evangelism and on Christian growth, development and discipleship to serve where ever the conferees were in their local churches.

On Saturday, June 25, 1977, about a week prior to the Conference, I was resting at home, preparing for the long drive from our home in Saint Louis, Missouri, over to the mountains of North Carolina. Out of the blue, the home phone rang. The calling woman identified herself as Ruth Graham! I paused for a moment, before she continued, "You know, Billy's wife!" I immediately replied with welcoming recognition and delight at hearing from such a fine lady in Christian circles!

She went on to explain that she'd called, because she had a friend travelling from Europe, and Ruth was seeking opportunities for her friend to speak at conferences, to earn some funds for her last-minute need to travel to America. She asked if her friend could speak the next weekend at our conference!

My mind began running through possible thoughts and results. Here I was, speaking to Ruth Graham who was asking me to do a special favor for her. Our conference had scheduled for six main platform speakers, and they had long been confirmed. We really did not have room to

splice in another major address for the schedule. My first response to Ruth was to ask just who was her friend? She said that her friend was Corrie ten Boom! Well, needless to say, I was almost speechless! Certainly I would consider **walking** all the way to North Carolina for the opportunity to hear from Corrie ten Boom!

The gallant sacrifices her family made under the Christian leadership of her father on behalf of protecting many, many Jewish families and refugees during World War II in Poland have been etched markedly in our minds through the book and movie, "The Hiding Place," displayed in theaters nationally and world-wide in 1975.

Quickly, I began to figure just how this could take place. First of all, our conference was somewhat of a low budget event. We charged a conference fee of \$25 per family unit, instead of passing offering plates. Reluctantly, and with a little embarrassment, I explained that to Ruth and said that we only had a \$300 honorarium budgeted, plus we would pay for some travel and meal expense domestically, but were not equipped to cover travel from Europe!

My breath was held in waiting for Ruth's reply, expecting her to say that such provision was insufficient. My blood veins rushed with excitement as Ruth's kind words reported "Oh that would be just fine!"

I told Ruth that I would be in touch with her as soon as the speaking time could be determined exactly! Obviously, it seemed that one of our scheduled six speakers, all who you'd describe mostly as tall steeple preachers, would need to be asked to step aside for Corrie ten Boom. It should not have been a problem, but I've learned that sometimes the personality of speakers have an ego attached, which does not let go easily!

Fortunately for me, one of our speakers was the Rev. Dr. Calvin Thielman, pastor of the Montreat Presbyterian Church at the time, and a close personal friend of mine. He and I had worked together on the campaign for medical missionary Dr. L. Nelson Bell to win the election the year before to be Moderator of the General Assembly, the titular head of the Presbyterian denomination for a year. A further connection was that Dr. Bell was the father-in-law of Evangelist Billy Graham, as

well as father of Ruth, the woman who started all of this! It all fit together in God's Providence.

One thing occurred to me. The private home residence of Billy and Ruth Graham is at Montreat, North Carolina. Though Billy is an ordained Baptist minister, Ruth grew up in a Presbyterian family, and was a member of the Montreat Presbyterian Church. Calvin was her pastor!

I phoned Calvin, and told him that his church member, Ruth Graham, has asked me to have Corrie ten Boom speak at the conference, and that I was asking him to step aside for her to have a place! Well, he was ecstatic with joy to hear Corrie ten Boom was coming, and he gladly gave up his speaking position!

Needless to say, the following week was filled with anticipation, not only for the expected positive results of the conference, but the occasion to be with and to hear from Corrie ten Boom. She spoke on the concluding afternoon of the conference. We met in the speaker's room backstage a half hour prior to the scheduled speaking time. It was such a pleasure to sit and chat informally with such a wonderful woman. She was loving, caring and interested in everything going on around her. It was a highlight of my life just to sit at her feet, so to speak, and to hear the lovely God-given expressions that were a natural part of her.

The audience of some 2,000 conferees received her message with joy and excitement as the close-out message for concluding the conference. Many of them reported later that it was the highlight of the conference for them. We were so blessed to the joy of the presence of Corrie ten Boom!

As it turned out, Corrie ten Boom's trip was the forerunner of making plans to move to Placentia, California later that year. The next year, she suffered a series of strokes, severely limiting her physical movement. She graduated to heaven on her 91st birthday on April 15, 1983. The passing on her birthday evokes the recollection of the Jewish traditional belief that states only specially blessed people are granted the privilege of dying on the date of their birth! Praise be to God!