THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF BILL BRIGHT

With the simple mission of win, build, and send the ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ, International has likely evangelized, won, and discipled more people than any other ministry in the history of the world. Campus Crusade, today a multi-million dollar ministry with over 25,000 staff and 500,000 trained volunteers, began humbly in the mind of one man. Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade has since been listed among the top influential evangelical leaders of the late 20th century.¹ It is Bright alone that set into motion the mission and methods of his ministry and this paper will provide a biography of Bright and a description and analysis of his methods for ministry.

Biography

Bill Bright lived such a productive life that countless books could be written about him. Countless books, however, are not to be found. In fact, only one dissertation has ever been written on Bill Bright. Only two biographies of Bright have been published. A handful of other books have Bright as their main subject. By and large, Bill Bright, one of the most influential Christian leaders of the last fifty years, remains of small significance in the academic world. Perhaps this is how Bright would want it.

William Bright was born on October 19, 1921 at home on his parent’s farm five miles

outside of Coweta, Oklahoma.² Bright’s mother had miscarried her last child so when she became pregnant with Bill she made a commitment with God. The deal was to be that if God would allow the child to be born healthy, she would commit him to God for whatever service the Lord had in mind.³ In one sense, Bill Bright was called to the ministry before he was even born. Bright grew up knowing what it meant to work hard. His family’s ranch did not have electricity throughout his early childhood and he spent his days as a ranch hand.⁴ Bright’s humble upbringing influenced him for the rest of his life. He was always known as a tireless worker and lived a modest lifestyle, especially when compared to other evangelists of his day. Bright lived at the standard he allowed for all Campus Crusade staff, did not receive any royalties from his extensive writings, and even continued to raise his own personal financial support all his life.⁵

Though Bright attended a small Methodist church growing up near Cowetta he did not consider religion to be an important part of life. Hard work and honesty were more important than attending church. In fact, Bright himself later noted that as a teenager he thought Christianity was for women and children but not for men.⁶ Bright wanted to make a name for himself but options were limited in Oklahoma in those days. After graduating from high school Bright decided to attend Northeastern State College and majored in education. Academics were not what interested the young man however and he soon became involved in as many extra curricular activities as he could. Bright pledged with the Sigma Tau Gamma fraternity and took

³Turner, Bill Bright, 13.
⁴Ibid., 14.
⁵Ibid., 5.
on leading roles in school plays. He honed his speaking skills as a member of the debate team and grew in leadership ability as class president. College was relatively uneventful otherwise and upon graduation Bright was not decided on making a career in teaching. The entrepreneurial side of him was aching to be explored. Bright wanted success and fame and moved to Los Angeles on a whim to see what business ventures he might get involved in.

The year was 1944 and the move to the West Coast was to hold more for Bill Bright than he ever imagined. Bright did not move west to look for Jesus but Jesus was already looking for Bill Bright. His landlords attended church at Hollywood Presbyterian Church, the largest church of that denomination in the United States at that time, and Bright began to attend with them. Everything Bright knew about Christianity and church life was shattered in a moment. Back in Cowetta, Oklahoma church members were unassuming and even boring in Bright’s eyes. At Hollywood Presbyterian Bright saw that famous movie stars went to church. One woman in particular caught the young man’s attention.

Henrietta Mears was a wealthy and influential leader in the church. She taught a Sunday School class that was to become the number one influencer of Bill Bright’s theology and methodology for the rest of his life. Mears, operating in a wealthy church, had access to movie stars and everything else Bill Bright was looking for to become an influential businessman. Mears was a strong woman who was already breaking many of the boundaries that Bright was not to be constrained by later in life. She was a “Baptist turned Presbyterian” but cared little for the particulars of either denomination. Bright’s biographer described Mears as a conservative

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7Turner, Bill Bright, 15.
8Ibid., 18.
9Ibid., 21.
fundamentalist though no one is the 1940s would have referred to her as such. She believed in the inerrancy of the scriptures but would invite liberal German theologians to her home to teach Bible studies. Mears wanted to expose her students to the most current scholarship available even if she did not agree with what was being taught.

Henrietta Mears was most concerned with winning people to Christ. Her Bible teaching was lengthy but entertaining and she extended the message of salvation after every session. Bill Bright saw a Christianity that he had never conceived of up until this point. Influential people worshipped with vibrancy, attended hour-long Bible studies, and strived to live fully for Christ. All of this had a profound impact on a young Bill Bright. In 1945, less than a year after moving to Los Angeles, Bill Bright was converted under the teaching of Henrietta Mears.\textsuperscript{10} Mears continued to shape Bright as she discipled him and often had him as a guest in her home.

Bright became heavily involved at Hollywood Presbyterian. His dynamic personality led to many friendships. His integrity, desire to serve others, and commitment to Christ were noticeable. Bright felt called to the ministry and was ordained as a deacon in the church in late 1945.\textsuperscript{11} He decided to seek out more formal ministry training and went to Princeton Seminary in 1946. Bright enjoyed his classes in New Testament and Old Testament but did not care for studying the biblical languages or systematic theology. This trend was to continue for the remainder of Bright’s life and he never systematically expounded his views on theology in any of his later writings. He loved the scriptures but could not see how theology classes would help him win souls so he dropped out of Princeton in less than a year and moved back to Los Angeles

\textsuperscript{10}Richardson, \textit{Amazing Faith}, 22.

\textsuperscript{11}Turner, \textit{Bill Bright}, 33.
to continue to develop his small candy business.\textsuperscript{12} Bright continued to serve as deacon at his church and witness extensively around Los Angeles. He excelled in this capacity and the Presbyterian synod recommended him for ordination as an elder. More education was required however and this posed a problem for Bright.

The year was still 1946 and a new seminary was about to be launched in Southern California. Fuller Seminary, in addition to the normal academic intellectual rigor, heavily encouraged missions and evangelism. Bill Bright decided to try seminary again and was accepted as a member of the inaugural class at Fuller.\textsuperscript{13} He excelled in witnessing and church service but earned terrible grades at Fuller and was placed on academic probation at the end of the first semester. Bright was quoted in telling a professor, “I’m not going to be sitting here studying Greek when Christ comes!”\textsuperscript{14} He dropped out of seminary number two shortly thereafter.

Bright again returned to his business and continued serving as deacon and elder in training at his church. At this time he began visiting college campuses around Los Angeles with some of his former classmates from Fuller to do evangelism. His zeal for witnessing was contagious and the Fuller faculty took note and saw great promise in Bright for effective ministry service. Though on probation for poor academic performance the faculty wooed Bright back to Fuller for one more try at attaining a degree. He returned to school in 1950, though at great expense to his future as an official minister. Bright was denied Presbyterian ordination because he was not attending a Presbyterian seminary. By this time Bright had moved away from the

\textsuperscript{12}\textit{Ibid.}, 24.

\textsuperscript{13}\textit{Ibid.}, 29.

\textsuperscript{14}\textit{Ibid.}, 31.
idea of serving the church as an official minister however. He was focusing more than ever on reaching people, especially influential student leaders on college campuses.

Back at Fuller things were no different for Bright. He spent so much time doing evangelism and tending to his small business that he gave little effort to his school work. His third attempt in seminary resulted in Bright failing both Greek and Hebrew. Bright simply could not stand to sit in a room and study theology when thousands of people right outside his window were going to hell.\textsuperscript{15} Around this time Bright received what he called a clear vision from God to start a ministry fully devoted to reaching college campuses. Bright sat in Fuller professor Wilber Smith’s office both lamenting of his avulsion to academic study but also speaking excitedly about a new college ministry he felt called to. The professor gave encouragement to Bright to pursue his dream and even came up with a catchy name for the proposed ministry. The year was 1951 and Campus Crusade for Christ was born.\textsuperscript{16}

Bright gathered a group of friends together, along with his new wife Vonette, in his kitchen and laid out his plan for the ministry, which was to begin on the campus of The University of California – Los Angeles. Bright had a deep impression from the Holy Spirit that God wanted the Great Commission to be fulfilled in his generation. He had a vivid mental picture of what that would involve and he intended to use every means of technology to get it done.\textsuperscript{17} Bright concluded that if one could reach the college campus today, one could reach the world tomorrow.\textsuperscript{18}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{15}Ibid., 38.
  \item \textsuperscript{16}Richardson, \textit{Amazing Faith}, 63.
  \item \textsuperscript{17}Bill Bright, \textit{Transferable Concepts: How You Can Pray With Confidence} (Orlando: NewLife Publications, 1998), 30.
  \item \textsuperscript{18}Richardson, \textit{Amazing Faith}, 61.
\end{itemize}
Crusade because of students’ leadership potential. The idea was to raise up, train, and send out future leaders who would then do the same wherever they ended up. Bright never let go of this initial vision. Late in Bright’s life he was asked, “What would you do differently if you had your life to live over again?” Bright responded, “I would concentrate more on winning and training men and women of God whom He has already chosen and ordained to be His spokesmen to the world.”\(^{19}\) Again, Bright says, “The key to changing the world is spiritual multiplication . . . .”\(^{20}\)

This paper will not focus on details of Bright’s life throughout the forty-five years he led Campus Crusade for Christ. It is not that these biographical details are unimportant but rather because of length constraints they must be left out. By the time Campus Crusade was launched, much of Bright’s theological and methodological influence was already established and changed little over the course of his life. The next section, focusing on Bright’s theology and methodology, will serve in some capacity to fill in the details of those years that the biographical section leaves out.

Bill Bright died July 19, 2003 after several years battling pulmonary fibrosis, a lung disease.\(^{21}\) Bright continued a rigorous schedule of writing and speaking right up until his death. When Bright’s lungs began to fail him he continued on, recording teaching messages while breathing with the help of an artificial lung. The Holy Spirit worked powerfully in the man up to his dying day as Bright continued to speak of his wonderful Savior through the tubes, wheezing, and slow and laborious breathing he was reduced to.\(^{22}\) Bill Bright was a man who lived life to


\(^{20}\)Ibid., 6.

\(^{21}\)Travis Fleming, “An Analysis of Bill Bright’s Theology and Methodology of Evangelism and Discipleship” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2006), 43-44.

\(^{22}\)The author received his welcome and challenge to the ministry with Campus Crusade via a video recording of Bright hooked up to numerous machines to aid his breathing.
Bright’s Theology

In order to properly ground Bright’s methodology one must first briefly survey his theology. The two are inextricably linked. No one person has influenced Bill Bright’s theology more than his mentor at Hollywood Presbyterian, Henrietta Mears, whom Bright often refers to in his writings.23 Bright, taking his cue from Mears, was primarily concerned with evangelism. The specifics of the theology involved are murky. When Campus Crusade for Christ began, Bright wanted to work with many different churches and groups. He came to this conclusion after spending time with and seeing Billy Graham operate his successful interdenominational crusades. Bright had become somewhat disillusioned with the Presbyterian Church because of its weakening position on sin and the need for evangelism. He did not want to be tied down to any particular denomination and its rules. A minister at Bright’s home church pressured him to operate his new ministry from within the church but Bright replied that God had impressed him to go at it alone.24

As stated above, Bright never systematically laid out his theological positions, especially not in terms common to seminarians. What follows are gleanings on various theological aspects from the many booklets Bright has written. At times Bright seems to contradict himself and he cannot be cleanly labeled in most areas. There are a handful of doctrines that Bright regularly teaches on however and these form the best patchwork of Bright’s overall theology which become the driving force behind much of his methodology.


24Turner, Bill Bright, 44.
Christ

One matter that Bright never waivered on was the exclusivity of the gospel and Jesus Christ. Bright flat out states, “Jesus is the only way to God.”\(^{25}\) He was careful to always be clear that Jesus is the only way to a relationship with God. Bright quotes John 14:6 often in his writings and once said, “Does all this [lengthy defense of the verse] sound too exclusive? No. Jesus Christ came to give His life for all people in all lands.”\(^ {26}\) Bright has written many booklets attempting to show why Jesus is God and why He is the only way.

Faith

There is no question that Bill Bright was a man who lived by faith. The whole ministry of Campus Crusade lives by faith, asking God to provide for the financial needs of the ministry and its staff. Crusade’s doctrine is driven by faith, not feeling. Reading the literature that Bright has written, one will see that Christians are expected to share the gospel by faith, even when there is no feeling of the Holy Spirit’s presence. Bright notes again and again that believers do not live according to feelings but according to faith in God and His word.\(^ {27}\) Many Crusade staff carry on life in this manner. They pray, claim God’s word, and go and do. Interestingly, the vast majority of staff are Type A, driven people who are good at accomplishing tasks. Bright’s theology and style of witnessing by faith are attractive to them because they are good at doing tasks.\(^ {28}\) Occasionally, the live by faith mentality has been criticized as being


\(^{26}\)Bright, *How to Pray*, 12.


\(^{28}\)The author’s observations after spending seven years heavily involved with Campus Crusade for Christ.
reduced to a magic formula. The formula says Success = Prayer + Faith + Doing. Such criticisms are not entirely unfounded. Bright was once teaching on racial reconciliation and loving by faith. The following excerpt from the conference illustrates the principle:

“Something wonderful happened to me tonight,” the young woman said. “I was liberated from my hatred for white people. I have hated whites since I was a little girl. I have known that as a Christian I should love white people, but I couldn’t help myself. I hated whites and wanted to get revenge. Tonight I have begun to love whites by faith, and it really works.”

The young man [standing by] added, “It worked for me, too; now my hatred for whites is gone. Thank you for telling us how to love by faith.”

Bill Bright is certainly a man of faith but as can be noted in the above examples his theology of faith is closely connected with Keswick theology.

**Keswick Influence**

Keswick theology was influential during the formative years of Bill Bright’s theological moorings. The classical language of the doctrine contains phrases like ‘living the victorious life’ and ‘claiming the promise.’ Typical Keswick theology is based on understanding some doctrine that was not previously understood and then living at a higher level as a result of the understanding. When writing about his discovery of how to love by faith Bright says, “What I discovered during the next two hours has since enriched my life.”

Prior to this understanding Bright was living in defeat, unable to love those who irritated him. After the understanding, even though he did not feel loving affection, he loved by faith until the feelings followed. How much of this transformation comes from a strong will and how much comes from true repentance is hard to discern. The same section on loving by faith speaks of a woman who hated her parents

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30 Ibid., 7.
but after discovering how to love by faith and not feeling she is able to love them.\textsuperscript{31} There is no language of repentance for sin, only discovering certain truths that enable a new victorious way of living.\textsuperscript{32} Bright believes “the average Christian is living a defeated and frustrated life.”\textsuperscript{33} His Keswick theology allows him to live a victorious and fruitful life.

Bright wrote and spoke on many more doctrines than what are listed above but his further positions are not explored here because of length constraints. Bright’s methodology is primarily driven by the aforementioned doctrines. A further understanding of Bright’s beliefs can be found by reading the whole series of \textit{Transferable Concepts}, the booklets most succinctly written on Bright’s positions.

\textbf{Methodology}

As should be the case, Bright’s theology drives his methodology. The following section will provide an overview of the vision and focus of Campus Crusade for Christ followed by insight into the main tools Bill Bright used in ministry and has passed on to Crusade staff to accomplish the vision.

\textbf{Win, Build, Send}

Campus Crusade’s mission to win disciples to Christ, build them in the faith, and send them to reproduce in others is derived from the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20. All of the energy and efforts of the agency are funneled to accomplish the three-fold task. This method of operation has been in effect from the beginning, largely because of the ministry style Bright

\textsuperscript{31}Ibid., 8.

\textsuperscript{32}Ibid., 19.

\textsuperscript{33}This statement occurs in the preface of all the \textit{Transferable Concepts} booklets, showing how prominent living the victorious life is in Bright’s theology.
saw Henrietta Mears use at Hollywood Presbyterian. Bright’s focus was much larger than Mears’ but the system, or machine, as Turner called it is strikingly similar.

**College Campuses**

From the beginning in 1951 Campus Crusade has focused primarily on college campuses around the world. While attending Fuller Seminary Bright began doing evangelism at UCLA. After receiving his vision for full time ministry, Bright launched Crusade on this campus and a pattern was established that has not since been departed from. Bright, always one for success and influence, sought to win star athletes, fraternity presidents, and other highly visible individuals on the campus. After conversion, they and other famous people were brought to campus to speak at the Campus Crusade meetings. A masculine image was promoted for the ministry because Bright thought that strong, athletic Christian men would attract good looking women who would, in turn, draw in more men.³⁴ This mentality and tactic continues today as football and basketball players, former Miss America contestants, and Olympic champions regularly grace the stage at weekly Crusade meetings.³⁵

**Reproducibility**

The concept of spiritual multiplication is widely spoken of among Crusade staff. A commonly related story is one of a Thai staff member who trained over seven hundred others who in turn trained another 90,000 people who are presently winning and discipling others.³⁶ Bright takes seriously the Great Commission and its call to make disciples rather than converts.

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³⁵These observations were made by the author at the University of Wisconsin campus between the years 2005-06 but are not unique to that campus.
In order to have maximum reproducibility Bright has produced a massive amount of training booklets for staff to use. Campus Crusade has become a ministry machine known for producing workers of a certain mold. This is Bright’s plan, as he was directly influenced by Henrietta Mears in Los Angeles. Mears wanted to make reproducing disciples at any cost and Bright became “a sparkplug in the Mears ministry machine.” In time, Bright raised up his own ministry machine and began looking for sparkplugs to keep it firing. The extensive training literature was the way to allow for immediate reproducibility.

**Bright’s Writings**

Bill Bright’s writings are the driving force in his ministry methodology. All Crusade staff read and are trained to use the dozens of booklets that originated from the pen of their founding leader. Bright has written several book length works on spiritual movements and even two fictional novels, however, the trademark works known around the world are *The 4 Spiritual Laws, Have You Discovered the Wonderful Gift of the Spirit Filled Life?, Transferable Concepts, the 10 Basic Steps Toward Christian Maturity, and the Bill Bright Signature Series.* Bright is an effective writer and employs an intentionally small vocabulary to make his work very readable. Most of his writings are in the form of short booklets designed for widespread and ease of use by new Christians. Bright thought that good spiritual follow up and discipleship material would end the cycle of empty professions of faith and failing Christians.

Materials such as the *Transferable Concepts* walk the discipler step by step through teaching the material. There are examples on every page and even mock dialogues designed to

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help the Christian steer the conversation in the desired direction.\textsuperscript{38} Every piece written by Bright contains an index and oftentimes an order form in the back for every other booklet written by Bright. This system makes it very easy to find out about and purchase the next step in the discipleship program.

Bright’s writings are very motivating and inspirational. He masterfully incorporates personal examples and stories into each booklet. For example, Bright relates the story of one staff worker who had personally shared the gospel with more than 200,000 people and saw over 20,000 come to faith in Christ.\textsuperscript{39} Such stories are meant to show the reader that anything is possible for someone committed to Christ, walking in the Spirit, and trained in evangelism and discipleship.

All the training material is designed to be mastered in a way that using it becomes second hand. Bright is very systematic in his approach to evangelism and discipleship. He states, “Remember, you can master it [a Transferable Concept] by reading it six times . . . .”\textsuperscript{40}

All Campus Crusade staff are trained to do evangelism and discipleship according to Bill Bright’s methods. One might observe that one does not even need a Bible to be a successful campus minister, just a briefcase large enough to hold all of the follow-up material Bright has written.

**Evangelism**

Bill Bright was known as an evangelist to be sure. He always looked for opportunities to witness, whether he be in a dorm room, on a plane, in a suit and tie store, or even waiting in

\textsuperscript{38}See Bright, *Making Disciples*, 25 for one example.

\textsuperscript{39}Ibid., 8.

\textsuperscript{40}Bright, *How to Pray*, 33.
line at McDonalds. The hallmark evangelism tool Bright designed is the *4 Spiritual Laws*. The impetus of the *4 Spiritual Laws* may have actually been Bright’s mentor, Henrietta Mears’ method of evangelism. Mears had led Bill Bright’s wife, Vonette to Christ by showing her that one must receive Christ because He stands at the door and knocks (Rev. 3:20) and then pointing to John 1:12, “To as many as received him he gave the right to become children of God.” The general outline of the *4 Laws* closely matches Mears’ approach to the gospel except for the way the booklet begins.

The *4 Laws* were immediately controversial because while other tracts began with stating the sinfulness of man, Bright’s tract began by declaring that God loved people and had a wonderful plan for their lives. It was not that Bright was not concerned with sin; he was a fervent fighter of sin his whole life. Bright simply thought that God was not as concerned with man’s sin as He was with loving him and sending Jesus. Once Bright decided this was how his gospel tract was to begin, evangelism changed forever. Originally the *4 Spiritual Laws* were memorized by Crusade staff and shared in a more conversational way but after 1965 the booklet began to be printed.

Initiative evangelism is the most common form of evangelism used by Campus Crusade. The strategy that has developed is to place major focus on reaching freshman in college during the first six weeks of the semester. The reasoning is that freshman are in a state of transition, are on their own for the first time, and hopefully have not become too involved in the college party scene. Dinner line surveys are a major tactic to find out who is interested in the

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41Richardson, *Amazing Faith*, 43.

42Ibid., 74.

43Ibid., 76.
gospel. Crusade staff members and student leaders will stand near the door of the dining hall and give a short spiritual survey to everyone who walks in. The key question on the survey is whether the student would like to talk more about having a relationship with Jesus.

Over the next six weeks staff members visit the dorm rooms of those students and share the gospel with them. In addition, staff will stop in any open door and attempt to build a relationship and start a spiritual conversation. Many staff and student leadership meetings involve a game where a ball is passed around and the one tossing the ball yells out a topic while the ball is in mid flight and the one receiving the ball has to immediately begin speaking on that topic and make a transition to the gospel in less than one minute. This game helps make Crusade evangelists very adept at sharing the gospel in any situation.

Bright lists four steps for personal preparation for evangelism. First, one must be sure he or she is a Christian. Next, one must be sure there is no unconfessed sin in life. This sin will hinder one’s fellowship with God and consequently one cannot be a joyful and fruitful witness for Christ. Thirdly, one must be filled with the Spirit. Bright states that being filled with the Spirit allows the Spirit to control and empower the witness, enabling him or her to live a holy, godly life, and to be fruitful. Finally, one must be prepared to communicate faith in Christ.

In line with Bright’s theology of living by faith he recommends the witness pray, go, talk about Jesus, and expect to be used by God. Bright’s definition of success in witnessing is

44This game was observed and participated in by the author on a number of occasions.


46The author remembers several instances where students were actually converted in the midst of evangelism training!

47Bright, Be a Fruitful Witness, 20-29.
not whether someone is converted but rather success “... is simply taking the initiative to share Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the results to God.”48 Thousands of Christians worldwide have found comfort in that statement which is concurrent with Bright’s continual insistence that God is sovereign over all things and Christians are only to be obedient to His commands.

**Bright and Conversion**

Bill Bright and Campus Crusade have taken considerable criticism for what is perceived as cheap grace and easy believism. The *4 Laws*, like many other gospel tracts end with the sinner’s prayer and some staff have been accused of doing anything they can to get a person to recite the prayer. Conversion is said to be reduced to a simple formula without a real heart change. This charge is not totally without warrant as Bright himself explains two conversion stories. First, someone asks him, “I want to become a Christian. How do I do this?” Bright’s answer is, “Let me show you how by going through the *4 Spiritual Laws.*”49 Another story, the 1951 testimony of UCLA All-American linebacker Donn Moomaw is quoted in full simply because it is a very common observation of how people come to faith through the witness of a Crusade staff member:

> We went back to Bill’s house . . . and he began sharing through the Scripture what would later be called the Plan of Salvation. He used Romans 3:23 . . . and we talked about that a little bit. And I said, “Yeah, I admit that I have fallen short of the glory of God.” . . . Then he read Romans 6:23. And then he went back to John 1:12 – “to as may as receive him, to them gave he power to become the children of God, even to those who believe in his name.” . . . and he said, “Is there any reason right now why you don’t first of all confess your sin and secondly receive Christ as your savior?” And I said, “Well, there’s probably a lot of reasons why I should not do it, but I’m open to doing it right now.” He said, “Then let’s kneel here on the floor.” . . . So I knelt down with Bill, and he prayed with me and then

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48Ibid., 29, italics in original.

he asked me to pray, and it wasn’t a very eloquent prayer. I just prayed from my heart and opened my heart to Christ. When I finished praying, I knew that something had happened to me.”

Bright always emphasized bringing a person to a point of decision for Christ during the gospel presentation. Where Campus Crusade excels is that follow-up on the gospel presentation and later discipleship is so regular and intensive that even if a person did not completely understand the gospel when he or she prayed to receive Christ, he or she would have a thorough understanding of that decision after several weeks of follow-up. Thorough discipleship repels the criticism that Bright and his ministry are peddlers of cheap grace.

**Prayer**

Bill Bright was known as a man of prayer, seeing the exercise as depending on God to act. At the inception of Campus Crusade for Christ in 1951 a prayer team was immediately formed. Bright had enlisted enough people so that a 24-hour prayer chain divided into ninety-six 15-minute segments would operate continuously. Bright wrote often on prayer as he related his understanding of the act along with practical instruction on why to pray and who can pray.

Bright answers the question of why to pray by simply stating, “You pray to obtain results. Genuine and biblical prayer does change things. It so changes those who pray that God is free to reveal His will to them. Prayer releases God’s power to change the course of nature, people, and nations”. Bright’s reasoning for prayer fits nicely with his productive business style approach to ministry. Bright understands that success in ministry is up to God but that prayer can help align the minister with the Master. Notice how Bright is clear to write that

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50 Turner, *Bill Bright*, 47.


52 Ibid., 16, italics in original.
prayer changes the one praying rather than changing God.

Concerning who can pray Bright states, “Anyone can pray. However, only those who walk in faith and obedience to Christ can expect to receive answers to their prayers.”53 Bright continually taught that one must practice what he calls spiritual breathing to maintain a life close to Christ and free from unconfessed sin. The topic of spiritual breathing will be discussed below. Bright, in typical fashion, provides ample anecdotal evidence for the power of prayer in his writings. One will find many stories of God’s supernatural intervention and sending of angels, especially in instances relating to the Jesus Film. One commonly retold story is that of Crusade missionaries in Kenya who were protected from terrorists by what was later described as sixteen frightening men keeping a vigil around the vehicle as the evangelists slept. The only explanation for where the protectors came from is that they were angels.54

Fasting

In Bright’s mind prayer could not be separated from the practice of fasting. Bright is well known for his yearly forty-day fast and for his writings on how to fast effectively. Fasting is part of Bright’s methodology because of his perception that it helps a Christian to walk closely with God and be more effective in ministry. Many Crusade staff practice fasting throughout the year and especially in conjunction with major conferences and summer missions efforts.55

Bright believed fasting was crucial to the success of a ministry and a personal spiritual

53Ibid., 11, italics in original.
54Ibid., 23-24.
55The author remembers dozens of Crusade staff and student leaders who have undertaken a 40-day fast with success. Fasting was a part of every Summer Project mission trip that the author knows of.
walk for the following reasons.

1. Brings revelation by the Spirit to a person’s true spiritual condition
2. A crucial means for personal revival because fasting brings the working of the Holy Spirit in an unusual and powerful way
3. Helps a Christian better understand the Word of God
4. Transforms Christian prayer but does not guarantee results
5. Can restore the loss of a Christian’s first Love

Bright so believed in fasting that he hypothetically asks what might happen if half the members of a church fasted and prayed with pure hearts and motives. He envisions big things and practiced the discipline as if his ministry depended on it.

While Bright himself often fasted he states that fasting is not biblically commanded for New Testament believers but still is a viable and valuable practice. He instructs believers to take on a short fast whenever they like but advises they should seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit for extended fasting. In conclusion, Bright places prayer and fasting in nearly the same category and stressed the importance of the disciplines often in his writings and speaking as a means for effective spiritual service.

Spiritual Breathing

Perhaps Bright’s most controversial teaching but also one of the most misunderstood is the idea of spiritual breathing. Bright describes spiritual breathing as being filled with the Spirit, meaning to be controlled and empowered for ministry by the Spirit. Bright states that one of the greatest afflictions in the body of Christ today is worldliness and carnality. Essentially,

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57 Ibid., 101.
58 Ibid., 113.
59 Ibid., 119.
60 Bill Bright, *Transferable Concepts: How You Can be Filled with the Holy Spirit* (Orlando: NewLife
spiritual breathing is the practice of relying on the power of the Spirit and not on the power of human flesh. Sin and a neglected walk with God lead to ineffective ministry. The remedy is to ensure a constant and close fellowship with the Savior and the process to accomplish the task is what Bright calls spiritual breathing.  

Bright’s understanding of worldliness or carnality stems from 1 Corinthians 3:1-3. Bright declares that a carnal Christian lives a miserable life because of unconfessed sin. The believer is apt to be more influenced by Satan and less by the Holy Spirit. A carnal Christian experiences conviction of sin and will not continue in sin indefinitely otherwise the person may not be a Christian at all. However, the carnal believer will be ineffective in witness and will not bear the fruits of the spirit or the fullness of the Christian life.

The answer to worldliness is spiritual breathing. Essentially, the process is as follows. First, the believer must desire to live a life pleasing to the Lord. Next, the believer must be willing to surrender control to the Lord Jesus. Third, all known sin must be confessed. This is modeled by exhaling or breathing out as sin is confessed. Finally, the believer must claim the promise that God promises to forgive all confessed sin. The believer inhales as he or she remembers and claims the command to be filled with the Spirit from Ephesians 5:18. Spiritual breathing is not a magical process and there is no inherent power in the physical act of breathing in and out. The process is meant to be a physical reminder of the promises of God and helps the believer to consciously confess sin, repent, and walk closely with God again. Aside from the 4 Laws spiritual breathing is the most used method Bright has developed within the ministry of

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61 Ibid., 15-16.
62 Ibid., 19.
63 Ibid., 25-29.
Campus Crusade.

Bill Bright was careful to think through his own ministry methods as well as those of his agency. Bright assembled a tightly connected ministry machine built on his teachings and carefully trained and talented staff. Decades of praying and training led to one of the most successful and impactful evangelistic ministries of all time.

**Impact of Bright’s Ministry**

It is difficult to overstate the impact of Bright’s ministry. Over 25,000 staff work for Campus Crusade worldwide and there are over half a million trained volunteers. Campus Crusade for Christ, International is a canopy for more than seventy other ministries operating in an array of contexts in the United States and abroad. Bright notes that one of Campus Crusade’s most successful projects, *The Jesus Film* has been viewed by more than 5.5 billion people in over 800 languages spanning across 235 countries and provinces. The sheer numbers associated with Bright’s ministry boggle the mind. Bright’s tract, the *4 Spiritual Laws* has been used in innumerable presentations of the gospel in hundreds of languages. For good or for bad when many people think about or are asked to explain the gospel they will resort to the four points Bright wrote over fifty years ago.

In addition to the literature and ministries of Campus Crusade the legacy of Bill Bright has resulted in college campuses changed for the good, leaders raised up for effective ministry, evangelistic training provided in churches, and encouragement to press on in faithful ministry to many downcast Christian workers. As Bright lay on his deathbed presidents and former

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64 Author’s personal notes from New Staff Training, July 2006.

presidents of the United States called to offer encouragement and thank Bright for his life of ministry. A fax arrived signed by forty-one leaders from many nations expressing gratitude for the man they dearly loved. Over 5,000 people attended the formal memorial service held for Bright after his death.66

It is clear that Bill Bright touched the lives of hundreds of thousands of people across the globe. Bright liked to talk about spiritual multiplication and the joy one can have in tracing back spiritual generations of disciples that led to more disciples being made. If one were to attempt this project beginning with Bright and tracing his influence down every successive spiritual generation the list would be unfathomably long. The Lord was pleased to use Bright, business-minded and driven as he was, to reach a multitude of people from many tribes, tongues, and nations that will undoubtedly join Bright at the marriage supper of the Lamb one day in the near future.

Conclusion

The life and ministry of Bill Bright is like no other in countless ways. Bright had abounding natural talent and zeal for business and success. He would be the first to say it was not his ability that made the ministry successful however. Bright constantly spoke of his need for and reliance on God. Bright studied the scriptures, prayed, fasted nearly continually, and sought the counsel of respected Christian leaders. Bright’s work ethic developed from his rural upbringing on a ranch in Oklahoma. Bright’s theology and ministry practices were largely shaped by Henrietta Mears at Hollywood Presbyterian. Bright’s ministry cannot be easily explained but there are perhaps a few key elements that led to the massive influence of the

66Ibid., 166-72.
Evaluation of Why the Ministry Succeeded

First, Bill Bright was a man of incredible faith and faithfulness to the Lord. Bright spent hours in study and prayer before launching any aspect of ministry. Additionally, Bright’s personality was conducive to leading a large organization. He was sociable and pleasant to be around. God blessed the man as is evident even from watching video recordings of his teachings. A sense of the Holy Spirit’s presence can often be felt when listening to Bright speak. Also, Bright had a vision for something grand. He wanted the Great Commission fulfilled in his lifetime. He thought college students were the key to that happening. Bright refused to be limited by any one denomination, language, or format of ministry. He was willing to try everything and see what worked best.

If Bright himself helped the ministry grow, his writings had an even larger impact. What other spiritual movement, cults aside, has all of its literature developed by one person? Everything Campus Crusade does is built on the teaching of its founder. All of Bright’s training materials are designed to work together. As noted above, all of his booklets have order forms in the back complete with all the other booklets available. Campus Crusade has its own publishing house. NewLife Publications is different from other publishers and resourcers such as Lifeway because nearly everything produced is from the same author. There is no competition from other authors with other visions. If another author writes material, such as current Campus Crusade president Steve Douglas, the material is still based on Bill Bright’s teachings. Everything builds on the other writings.

A final insight into the success of the ministry is that all staff go through the same
training. All staff share the gospel using the 4 Laws. All staff use the same follow up material. All staff read the *Transferable Concepts*. All staff attend the same conferences. Campus Crusade’s material is not contextualized when used around the world. It is only translated. So staff in China or Peru use the same material as staff in Colorado or California. Campus Crusade is truly a ministry machine built by Bill Bright.

People may disagree with Bright’s theology or his methodology and some criticisms are necessary. However, hundreds of thousands of lives have been changed as a result of this man and his ministry. Bright’s legacy lives on and continues to impact and influence countless people around the globe. Bright’s zeal for evangelism, prayer, and fasting are still recognizable in those who knew him and read his writings. Bright’s own wife Vonette continues to live a life shaped by fifty years with her husband.67 Bright, as an inspiration to every minister to come, continued to do what he loved, evangelism, right until his dying day.68

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67 When the author met Vonette Bright at New Staff Training in July 2006, she was in her mid-80s and on day eight of a ten day fast. She was as warm and encouraging as anyone could be with no sign of distress from fasting, exemplifying Matthew 6:16-18.

68 Heard through reports given at the national staff conference in Colorado as Bright died in the hospital during the conference in summer 2003.
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