

Fil-Am Community Church

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“What Would Billy Graham Say to Charice Pempengco?”

Good morning! Before I start our new series this morning, let me thank you for donating to the Bohol Disaster Fund last week. We received about \$400 and translated into pesos, that’s a lot of money. But the need is still too great. The United Nations, in fact, has asked donations worldwide for Bohol in the amount of \$46.8m. They recognize the gravity of the problem. The latest death toll is 213 and thousands and thousands of people have been displaced. The good news is that a sense of normalcy is coming back to the island as some tourist spots have already been opened. Tourism is the number one source of income of Bohol. And tourists are actually arriving. You may still contribute to the fund. For the next few weeks, the donation box will be placed on the guest table and you can just drop your cash or check in that box anytime.

So, we’re starting this new series called “What would Billy Graham say?” For the next four weeks Pastor Dave and I are going to talk about fictional situations wherein Billy Graham encounters four famous celebrities and gives them a word or words of advice. These are celebrities who many people adore and look up to, especially the young. Are these people the right role models? Is their lifestyle worth copying? Are there lessons we can learn from their lives as we try to imagine what Billy Graham would say to them?

Now, it is not our intention to denigrate them or put them in a bad light. We just want to see what lessons we can learn from their lives. Each celebrity in this series, in a way, represents many people in the world today, and perhaps, some of

them are here today. By looking at these celebrities' lives and their lifestyle, we aim to address certain contemporary issues in the light of principles God set forth in his Word. People today live according to the world's standards. But Christians should live according to God's standards.

Now, by highlighting Billy Graham here some of you may complain of Billy Graham-overload. "Pastor Rolly has been talking about Billy Graham for the last two weeks and now he is going to give us four more weeks of him." Please forgive me but this man has served the cause of Christ for almost a century, he's turning 95 in November, and I hope to just pay a little tribute to him with this series. Besides, he's my hero. This morning, we're going to look at what he probably would say to Charice Pempengco if Charice ever sought his counsel.

Charice is a 21-year-old Filipino lady who shot to fame when she guested at the TV show of Ellen Degeneres six years ago. In that show, she sang her way to the hearts of many people. Her star continued to rise and she recorded a number of albums. Her songs consistently became popular and she even appeared in a movie. She is a much sought-after singer today.

Before she came to the US, she was already popular in the Philippines. At the age of 13, she placed third in a singing contest called "Little Big Star", a talent show loosely patterned after "American Idol". Then, a fan of hers posted videos of her on YouTube which became viral. It caught the attention of Ellen and she was invited to guest in her show.

Charice is a source of pride for many Filipinos, including me. Her success story continues to inspire a lot of Filipinos who are struggling to rise from mediocrity and their poor condition in life. For many years, I have also admired her and still admire her because she inspires hope. But, something happened a year ago that began to bother me. That was when Charice began to shed her sweet, innocent image and replaced it with a strong, boyish image. In short, her looks

changed. I thought she was just trying to look mature. But I and others more I know were beginning to sense something. Then, in a TV program on June 2, 2013, a few months back, she admitted that she was a lesbian.

Many were disappointed by her revelation but many more approved of her change in sexual identity. In the Philippines, it is generally accepted as quite normal and it bothers me. I think the Philippines is more “affirming” than the US and other countries.

What does the Bible say about this controversial issue? Culture changes, people change, but one thing we can be sure of is that the Bible never changes. So, let’s see what the Bible says from the lips of Billy Graham. If Billy Graham meets Charice, I believe this is what he would say:

1. Charice, You are precious in God’s sight.

That’s what he would say. He would look at her like Jesus would look at her. A person who is worthy to be loved and cared for. You see, Jesus is the most loving person who ever lived. When he was on earth, wherever he went, he sought out people, he healed them, he fed them, he encouraged them. He touched everyone’s heart as he went around doing his ministry except those, of course, who opposed him. But he cared for each person that came his way.

There was this guy who came to Jesus one time and asked, “*What must I do to inherit eternal life?*” (Matthew 19:17) and Jesus replied, “*You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'*” 20 “Teacher,” he declared, “*all these I have kept since I was a boy.*” (Matthew 19:19-20). What’s interesting is what happened next. The Bible says, “*Jesus looked at him and loved him.*” (Matthew 19:21) He looked at him and loved him. Not he looked at him with

surprise. Or He looked at him with disdain. Or simply He looked at him. No, he looked at him and loved him. Despite the guy's background. Despite the guys' protestations. Despite the guy's seeming unbelief and disobedience. When Jesus looks at you, he looks at you with love in his heart.

So, Billy Graham would look at Charice like Jesus would look at Charice – with love. Graham would not condemn her for what she had chosen to become. After all, the Lord that Graham serves didn't go about condemning anyone.

Some would argue that there are places in the Bible that says God hates homosexuality. That's true. But God hates it just like he hates idolatry, adultery, murder, theft, lying, gossip, disobedience, etc. In short, he hates it just like any sin that you can think of, whether small or big, if there is such a thing. My sin is not better than your sin.

Look at the example in John 8:1-11. Please open your Bibles and turn to this passage. Let me read this passage, *“But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. 2 At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. 3 The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group 4 and said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. 5 In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” 6 They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. 7 When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” 8 Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. 9 At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. 10 Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are*

they? Has no one condemned you?” 11 “No one, sir,” she said. “Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”

This woman committed the sin of adultery. Adultery like homosexuality is punishable by death through stoning according to Jewish law in the Old Testament.

If Jesus didn't condemn this woman because of her sin would he condemn her if she were a lesbian? I don't think so. In fact, Jesus had compassion on this woman. He rescued her from those condemning her. Jesus loved this woman like he loves anyone of us. Jesus loves Charice as well. She is precious in his sight. All of us are precious in his sight whatever our background is. As the saying goes, “God hates the sin but loves the sinner”.

I believe the second thing that Billy Graham would say to Charice is

2. Don't get your affirmation from people. Get it from Jesus.

When I was still pastoring a church in Brooklyn, New York, one lady called me on the phone. She sounded nice and said, “Hi, are you the pastor of Brooklyn Evangelical Church?” I said yes. Then, she continued, “I came across your business card that came with a quarter which you placed on my windshield.” She was talking about a 25-cent coin which I taped onto my business card which I inserted between the windshield wiper and windshield of her car. I did that for every car that was parked along the entire length of the street. The purpose was for the drivers to have an extra coin to feed the meter. That was part of our Servant Evangelism ministry. That's in New York. That's not applicable around here. Anyway, the woman asked, “Are you an affirming church?” That was the first time I heard of it. Thinking she was just asking for assurance theologically, I said, “Yes, we are. We affirm that the Bible is the Word of God, that there are three persons in one God, that Jesus was born of a virgin, that he died for the sins of the world and

so on and so forth.” Then, the woman said, “Thank you” and hung up. She never called again. I realized afterwards that she was actually asking whether the church affirms homosexuality as a normal way of life according to the Bible.

So, speaking of affirmation, I believe Billy Graham would say to Charice that her worth as a person doesn’t depend on other people’s affirmation or approval of her.

I have read testimonies of people who were former gays and lesbians and one common thread about their stories is that buried within them is a longing for real love and affection. Some of them grew up in an environment where love or intimacy was lacking. Then, they look for love and end up looking for it at the wrong places. They begin to have a relationship with someone of the same sex. And even desire to be married to that same-sex partner.

That may feel good but Billy Graham would tell you that it is wrong. Not everything that feels right is right. It must be measured against the principles of God’s Word. The Bible is our yardstick. It is our moral compass. In a world where morality is “if it feels good then it must be right” only the Bible can correct such notion. So, Graham would quote Jesus who talked about what a biblical married relationship looks like, “*‘Haven’t you read,’ he replied, ‘that at the beginning the Creator “made them male and female,” and said, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh”?* So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.’” (Matthew 19:4-6)

There’s no other place in the Bible that says that marriage can also be between a man and a man and a woman with another woman. It’s clear from Jesus’ words that it is between a man and a woman.

But Billy Graham has a tender heart for people as well. He wants to give hope to the hopeless. So, he would quote Jesus’ words from his Sermon on the

Mount, *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

(Matthew 5:3)

What does it mean to be “poor in spirit”? Poor in spirit does not refer to nice, church-going people who realize they need “more of Jesus.”

It describes people who are morally, spiritually, emotionally empty, people with zero spiritual assets, people who are spiritually bankrupt. Jesus announces the amazing news that these people are blessed.

What does “blessed” mean? It means “favored by God.” It means God loves you. And because God loves you, he has prepared a special place for you in heaven. *“The kingdom of heaven is theirs.”*

Many homosexuals who’ve shared their stories have carried a profound sense of unworthiness. They are profoundly dissatisfied with themselves. They feel spiritually empty. I remember years ago when I was actively witnessing to others about my faith and was going from house to house. I encountered this guy who confessed that he was gay. He told me that he didn’t like those feelings. He wanted to be released. He wanted to know what the Bible says. Deep inside, he knew it was wrong to give in to those feelings and wanted rescue.

If you believe homosexuals need affirmation from Jesus and not from their partners or anyone else, make sure the first word they hear from you is the amazing news that they have a place in the kingdom of heaven and that God regards them with warm affection. Tell them that God loves them and he has a place for them in his kingdom, and in his heart. He’s counting on spending eternity with them. That is what Billy Graham would say to Charice.

The third thing that Billy Graham would say to Charice is that

3. You were not born that way

Billy Graham would try to dispel the notion that homosexuality is an inborn trait. He would quote from his own web site where he says, in response to someone who asked, “Are homosexuals born that way?” these words “there is presently no generally accepted scientific evidence that the homosexual inclination is inborn.” He would also point out that some scientists have challenged several studies suggesting that homosexuality is carried by our genes.

But Billy Graham would also point out that even if a genetic link was found, that doesn't mean that indulging in homosexual behavior is acceptable before God. It's like someone who is predisposed to saying cuss words since he was a child. This person has a choice whether to keep on cussing or not. Or a married man who has a tendency to carry on an affair. This man has to choose whether to stop doing this or not. You see, God created the first man and woman perfect. All their inclinations were toward pleasing God their creator. Then, the old serpent, Satan, tempted them, they gave in, and sin entered the world. Because of sin, man's tendencies are now toward challenging the moral authority of God. In short, man has become rebellious and wants to do things his own way rather than God's way.

Billy Graham would tell Charice that she was not born to be someone other than God intended her to be. God intends for her to use her music for his glory. God gave her the talent of music in the first place. Though she experiences those feelings, she must overcome them. She must turn them over to Jesus who specializes in transforming lives of people. In fact, God has great plans for her. He promises her in Jeremiah 29:11, *“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”*

Let me tell you the story of someone who discovered God's plan for his life. First, Tita Annie, pls play the first few notes of a famous worship song. Can you

name that tune? Now, let me show you a picture. That's the composer and singer of that song. Can you name the composer?

“From my earliest memories, I felt different from other boys. I was gifted musically, and labeled “sissy” by other boys. ... I learned to play piano from my grandmother. ... Grandma was very patient with me as I practiced daily at her house, and I grew close to her.”

“I didn't feel as close to my parents. We were not an affectionate family, and I never remember receiving physical affection from my father. I found it hard to believe that he loved me. I felt worthless.”

“When I was nine years old, Jesus began calling me to Himself. On September 8, 1968, I asked my mother how to be saved. She explained that we were all sinners and ... through the death of Jesus on the cross, we could come into a relationship with God. I asked Jesus into my life that afternoon and was baptized that evening.”

“But not perceiving love from my earthly father, I couldn't receive God's acceptance and forgiveness. So I tried to earn love by being “the best” at whatever I did. ... But what people thought was so good – my outward performance – only hid the deepest hurts of my heart. Rejection permeated every part of my life, including my sexuality. As a boy I needed a role model to show me the way to manhood. I began to yearn for intimacy with other men in perverse ways. Because of this wrong thinking, I came to believe that I was a homosexual.”

... “At church I heard people say, “All homosexuals should be shipped out of the country – they deserve to go to hell!” I felt condemned by their remarks, and I had no idea where to turn for help. So I hid my same-sex desires throughout high school. In college, I discovered other students who were struggling with homosexual desires. We gravitated toward one another, and I became entrenched

in the physical and emotional aspects of homosexuality. But the more I believed homosexuality was my “real” identity, the more miserable I became.”

“During my sophomore year, I met the woman who would one day become my wife. ... but even though we dated on and off through college, I still had sexual encounters with other men on the side.”

“By my senior year, I was totally confused and frustrated. ... I broke up with Melinda and told her I never wanted to see her again.

That summer after graduation, I fully embraced my homosexuality and plunged into a three-month relationship with another man.”

““This is who I am,” I told myself. “I was born homosexual, and this kind of life is what God intended for me.” But instead of finding happiness, I became more miserable.”

“I abandoned plans for seminary and accepted this friend’s invitation to live with his family in Oklahoma City. ... Then a well-known Christian group called “Second Chapter of Acts” came to our area, and I felt an inner prompting to attend. During their concert I was captivated by their sincerity and love for God. Then, in the middle of one song, they suddenly stopped. “God has put something on my heart,” one member said. “There is somebody here who is hiding something so hurtful, so terrible, that they would be devastated if anyone found out about it. But God wants you to know that He sees it and He loves you anyway.” Then we were encouraged to lift our burdens up to the Lord as we raised our hands to Him.”

... “In that moment, I turned everything in my life over to Jesus: my thoughts, my emotions, my physical body ... and my past. For the first time, I realized that homosexuality was a sin that Jesus died for.”

“That night, many years ago, was the beginning of my incredible journey. For the first time I saw myself as forgiven and cleansed. The power of homosexuality in my life had been broken.”

... “God began to bring others into my life who were willing to love me unconditionally as I sought complete healing.”

... “Today, my wife and I have nine children. He is bringing His perfect plan for my life to pass. I have a heavenly Father who will never leave me or forsake me (Hebrews 13:5). I want to spend the rest of my life singing praise and worship to Him for all that He has done.”

Lastly, being the evangelist that he is, Billy Graham would say to Charice,

4. You must be born again.

Billy Graham is quoting Jesus’ words from John 3:7. “What does it mean to be born again?” It means to be born in the family of God. It’s a spiritual family. It means we find our identity in Jesus. Not in our parents, not in our partners, not in anyone else.

Then, he would lead her to realize that if she wants to be born again, she must believe in Jesus Christ alone for her salvation. It means believing that Jesus Christ died for her sins on the cross. It means believing also that Jesus Christ rose from the dead on the third day. The Bible says that this is good news for everyone, not only for Charice because everyone stands on a level ground at the foot of the cross. The Bible says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”. (Romans 3:23). It also says, “There is no one righteous, not even one.” (Romans 3:10).

Good works will not cut it. Good looks will not merit heaven. Good companions will not earn passage to heaven. Only what Jesus Christ did on the cross will save anyone for by dying on the cross he bridged the gap between sinful man and a holy God. By dying on the cross, he has forgiven our sins because the

Bible says that “Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” (Hebrews 9:22).

Being born again is as easy as ABC. First, admit that you’re a sinner. Second, believe in your heart that Jesus died for your sins and rose from the dead. Third, confess your sins and ask for forgiveness.

If you do this, Jesus will transform your life. The Bible says, *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”*

This is much, much better than the kind of creation you want yourself to be.

Let us Pray...