

Dwight L. Moody

Born: February 5, 1837

Died: December 22, 1899

Northfield, MA.

Dwight L. Moody was the first evangelist since Whitefield to shake two continents for God.

It was on his mother's birthday that Moody was born on a small New England farm. He was only four when his father, Edwin, a bricklayer and an alcoholic, died suddenly at 41. His mother, Betsy (Holton), was now a widow at 36 with seven children...the oldest being thirteen, and D.L. being the youngest. Twins were born one month after the death of the father bringing the total to nine. Their uncle and the local Unitarian pastor came to their aid at this time. The pastor also baptized Moody (age five) in 1842. This was undoubtedly sprinkling and his only "baptism" experience.

Six-year-old Moody never forgot seeing his brother Isaiah leave home. The reconciliation, years later, became an illustration in a sermon depicting God welcoming the wanderer home with outstretched arms. Moody's education totaled seven grades in a one-room school house and during his teenage years he worked on neighboring farms.

On his seventeenth birthday (1854), Dwight Moody went to Boston to seek employment. He became a clerk in Holton's Shoe Store, his uncle's enterprise. One of the work requirements was attendance at the Mount Vernon Congregational Church, pastored by Edward Kirk. Church seemed boring, but a faithful Sunday School teacher encouraged him along. One Saturday, April 21, 1855, the teacher, Edward Kimball, walked into the store and found Moody wrapping shoes. He said, "I want to tell you how much Christ loves you." Moody knelt down and was converted. Later he told how he felt, "I was in a new world. The birds sang sweeter, the sun shone brighter. I'd never known such peace." Not sure of his spiritual perception, it was a year before the church admitted him for membership!

On September 18, 1856, he arrived in Chicago where another uncle, Calvin, helped him obtain a position in a shoe store operated by the Wiswall brothers. His interest in church work continued as he joined the Plymouth Congregational Church. He rented four pews there to provide lonely boys like himself a place of worship. Then he joined the mission band of the First Methodist Church, visiting and distributing tracts at hotels and boarding houses. Here he met wealthy dry goods merchant John V. Farwell, who later would be a great help. He also worked out of the First Baptist Church where he was later married. The prayer revival that was sweeping the nation in 1857-59 also contributed to his enthusiasm for the things of God. Discovering a little afternoon Sunday School on the corner of Chicago and Wells he offered his help. He was told there were already nearly as many teachers as students so he began recruiting. The first week he brought in eighteen students, doubling the Sunday School! Soon his recruiting overflowed the place.

He withdrew to the shores of Lake Michigan in the summer of 1858 and taught children, using pieces of driftwood as chairs. He was dubbed "Crazy Moody" about this time, but respect came through the years as the title slowly changed to "Brother Moody," "Mr. Moody," and finally, "D.L. Moody."

In the fall of 1858, he started his own Sunday School in an abandoned freight car, then moved to an old vacant saloon on Michigan Street. A visiting preacher reported his favorable impressions...seeing Moody trying to light the building with a half-dozen candles and then with a candle in one hand, a Bible in the other, and a child on his knee teaching him about Jesus.

The school became so large that the former Mayor of Chicago gave him the hall over the city's North Market for his meetings, rent free. Farwell visited the Sunday School and became the superintendent upon Moody's insistence. The use of prizes, free pony rides and picnics along with genuine love for children soon produced the largest Sunday School in Chicago, reaching some 1,500 weekly. Moody supervised, recruited, and did the janitor work early Sunday morning, cleaning out the debris from a Saturday night dance, to get ready for the afternoon Sunday School.

It was in June, 1860, that Moody decided to abandon secular employment and go into the Lord's work full time. He was now 23 and in only five years had built his income up to \$5,000 annually and had saved \$7,000. Friends believed he could have become a millionaire had he concentrated his efforts in business. Income for the first year in his Christian ventures totaled no more than \$300.

This decision was prompted by the following incident. A dying Sunday School teacher had to return east because of his health and was greatly concerned about the salvation of the girls in his class. Moody rented a carriage for him and the teacher and went to each girl's home winning them all to Christ. The next night the girls gathered together for a farewell prayer meeting to pray for their sick teacher. This so moved Moody that soul-winning seemed to be the only important thing to do from then on. He made a vow to tell some person about the Savior each day, even though it eventually meant getting up out of bed at times.

On November 25, 1860, President-elect Abraham Lincoln visited Moody's Sunday School and gave a few remarks.

In 1861 Moody became a city missionary for the YMCA.

He married Emma Charlotte Revell on August 28, 1862 when he was 25 and she nineteen. The three Moody children were Emma (October 24, 1864), William Revell (March 25, 1869), and Paul Dwight (April 11, 1879).

With the advent of the Civil War, Moody found himself doing personal work among the soldiers. He was on battlefields on nine occasions serving with the U.S. Christian Commission. At the Battle of Murfreesboro in January, 1863, under fire, he went among the wounded and dying asking, "Are you a Christian?"

During the Civil War, he was also back at his Sunday School from time to time, where popular demand forced him to start a church. A vacant saloon was cleaned, rented and fixed up for Sunday evening services with the Sunday School continuing at North Market Hall until it burned in 1862. Then Kinzie Hall was used for a year. In 1863, when only 26, he raised \$20,000 to erect the Illinois Street Church with a seating capacity of 1,500. It began February 28, 1864 with twelve members. This was the official beginning of what is now known as Moody Church. He preached Sunday evenings until a pastor, J.H. Harwood, was called in 1866 and served until 1869, during which time Moody served as a deacon.

The Chicago Y.M.C.A. was moving ahead also, as Moody rose to its presidency from 1866 to 1869. He had a part in erecting the first Y.M.C.A. building in America when he supervised the erection of Farwell Hall in 1867, seating 3,000. That year he also held his first revival campaign in Philadelphia.

In 1867, primarily due to his wife's asthma, the couple went to England. He also wanted to meet Spurgeon and Mueller. On this trip, while they sat in a public park in Dublin, Evangelist Henry Varley remarked, "The world has yet to see what God will do with, and for, and through, and in, and by, the man who is fully consecrated to Him." John Knox allegedly originated this saying that was now to burn in Moody's soul (some historians put this Varley conversation in an 1872 trip). Moody met Henry Moorhouse also in Dublin, who said to him, "Some day I am coming to America, and when I do, I would like to preach in your church." Moody agreed to give him the pulpit when he came.

Three incidents prepared Moody for his world-famous evangelistic crusades. First, in February, 1868, Moorhouse came as promised to Moody's pulpit in Chicago. For seven nights he preached from the text, John 3:16, counselling Moody privately, "Teach what the Bible says, not your own words, and show people how much God loves them." Moody's preaching was much more effective after that.

A second incident was the meeting of Ira A. Sankey, while attending a Y.M.C.A. convention in Indianapolis in July of 1870. Moody was to speak at a 7 a.m. prayer meeting on a Sunday morning. Sankey was there. When Moody asked for a volunteer song, Sankey began to sing, There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood. Moody's reaction? "You will have to come to Chicago and help me. I've been looking for you for eight years!" Sankey left his post office job in Pennsylvania and joined Moody in Chicago in early 1871.

A third incident was the Chicago fire and the ensuing filling of the Holy Spirit. On Sunday night, October 8, 1871, while preaching at Farwell Hall, which was now being used because of the increased crowds, Moody asked his congregation to evaluate their relationships to Christ and return next week to make their decisions for Him. That crowd never regathered. While Sankey was singing a closing song, the din of fire trucks and church bells scattered them forever, for Chicago was on fire. The Y.M.C.A. building, church, and parsonage were all to be lost in the next 24 hours. The church was reopened on December 24, 1871, and it was now called the North Side Tabernacle, located on Ontario and Wells Street, close to the former building. There was no regular pastor at this church in its brief history 1871-1876.

While out east raising funds for the rebuilding of this church, Moody describes a life-changing experience he had upon locking himself in a room of a friend's house: "One day, in the city of New York, oh what a day! I cannot describe it. I seldom refer to it. It's almost too sacred an experience to name. Paul had an experience of which he never spoke for fourteen years. I can only say that God was revealed to me, and I had such an experience of His love that I had to ask Him to stay His hand."

In 1872, he returned briefly to England where he accepted an invitation to the Arundel Square Congregational Church in London. The evening service ended with nearly the entire congregation in the inquiry room. He continued on for ten days with some 400 people saved. It was learned that an invalid had been praying for two years for him to come to the church!

Three English men invited him back the following year. With their families, Moody and Sankey left June 7, 1873. Little did they know that they were going to shake England as Whitefield and Wesley had 125 years previously. Two of the sponsors had died by the time they arrived and they were fortunate to get an invitation to conduct some meetings at the York Y.M.C.A. Five weeks of meetings saw 250 won to Christ. F.B. Meyer was the principal supporter. Then they traveled on to Sunderland for five weeks with Arthur A. Rees, the host. Next came Newcastle where the meetings were gigantic with special trains bringing people in from surrounding areas. Here a novel all-day meeting was held and their first hymn book was introduced to the public.

Now being invited to Scotland, the evangelists began in Edinburgh on November 23. For hundreds of years, only Psalms had been sung here with no musical instruments. Now Sankey began "singing the Gospel" and crowds packed out the 2,000-seat auditorium. By the time the last service was over on January 20th, Moody was receiving requests from all over the British Isles. They spent two weeks in Dundee and then began the Glasgow, Scotland, crusade on February 8, 1874. These meetings soon moved into the 4,000-seat Crystal Palace and after three months climaxed with a service at the famed Botanic Gardens Palace. Moody was unable to even enter the building surrounded by 15,000 to 30,000 people, so he spoke to them from a carriage and the choir sang from the roof of a nearby shed! Later the team returned to Edinburgh for a May 24 meeting held on the slopes of "Arthur's Seat" with a crowd of 20,000. An estimated 3,500 converts were won in each of these two places.

Now Ireland was calling, so they began at Belfast on September 6, 1874. People flocked to hear them and the largest buildings of each city were used. A great climactic service was held in the Botanic Gardens on October 8, in the open air with thousands attending. One final service was held October 15 with admission by ticket only. Tickets were given only to those who wanted to be saved. Two thousand, four hundred came. Next it was Dublin (October 26-November 29,) where even the Irish Catholics were glad at the awakening amongst their Protestant neighbors. The Exhibition Hall seating 10,000 was filled night after night with an estimated 3,000 won to Christ.

Back in England on November 29, the Manchester crusade was held at the Free Trade Hall. No hall was large enough! As many as 15,000 were trying to gain admission for a single service. Next came Sheffield for two weeks beginning on December 31st, then Birmingham with untold blessing. The January 17-29, 1875 crusade noonday prayer meetings drew 3,000. Bingley Hall seated only 11,000 but crowds of 15,000 came nightly. Liverpool was next, where the 8,000-seat Victoria Hall was used from February 7 to March 7.

Finally, it was the London Crusade climaxing the tour. It was a four-month encounter from March 9 to July 11. Five weeks of preaching began in the Agricultural Hall in the northern part of the city. Then he moved to the east side in the 9,000-seat Bow Road Hall for four weeks. Next came the west side in The Royal Haymarket Opera House. Often, during this time, Moody would hold a 7:30 meeting with the poor on the east side, and then shuttle over for a 9 p.m. service with the fashionable. Then on the south side of London he spoke for several weeks in the Victoria Theatre until a special tabernacle seating 8,000 was constructed on Camberwell Green where he finished this crusade. A total of two and one-half million people attended! The awakening became world news and it was estimated that 5,000 came to Christ. A final preaching service was held in

Liverpool on August 3rd before sailing for America. He arrived home August 14 and hurried to Northfield to conduct a revival. His mother, many friends and relatives were saved there. Invitations for city-wide crusades were coming from many places in America now. His first city-wide crusade in America was in Brooklyn beginning October 31, 1875, at the Clermont Avenue Rink, seating 7,000. Only non-church members could get admission tickets as 12,000 to 20,000 crowds were turned away. Over 2,000 converts resulted.

Next came Philadelphia starting on November 21 with nightly crowds of 12,000. The Philadelphia crusade was held at the unused Pennsylvania freight depot which John Wanamaker had purchased. It was located at Tenth and Market. His ushers were very well trained, capable of seating 1,000 people per minute, and vacating the premises of some 13,000 in 4 minutes if needed. The doors were opened one and a half hours early and in 10 minutes the 12,000 seats were taken. On January 19, 1876 President Grant and some of his cabinet attended. Total attendance was 1,050,000 with 4,000 decisions for Christ.

Next it was the New York crusade running from February 7 to April 19, 1876. The meetings were held in the Great Roman Hippodrome on Madison Avenue, where the Madison Square Gardens now stands. Two large halls gave a combined seating attendance of 15,000. Moody had just turned 39 for this crusade. Some 6,000 decisions came as a result of his ten-week crusade. Three to five services a day were held with crowds up to 60,000 daily.

Back in Chicago, his beloved church was expanding. Property had been purchased on Chicago Avenue and LaSalle Street. Thousands of children contributed five cents each for a brick in the new building. The basement, roofed over, served as a meeting place for two years, then in 1876 the building was completed and opened on June 1, 1876, and formally dedicated on July 16 with Moody preaching. It was now called the Chicago Avenue Church, and W.J. Erdman was called as pastor.

The Chicago crusade started October 1, 1876 in a 10,000-seat tabernacle, closing out on January 16, 1877. The sixteen-week crusade was held with estimates being from 2,500 to 10,000 converts. Moody never kept records of numbers of decisions, hence reports vary. The meetings were held in a temporary tabernacle erected on Farwell's companies' property, located at Monroe and Franklin, which was converted to a wholesale store after the crusade.

The Boston crusade was held January 28 to May 1, 1877 in a tabernacle seating 6,000. The years 1877-78 saw many smaller towns in the New England states being reached. The years 1878-79 saw Baltimore reached in 270 preaching engagements covering seven months. In 1879-80, it was six months in St. Louis where a notorious prisoner, Valentine Burke, was saved among others. In 1880-81 it was the Pacific coast, primarily San Francisco.

Moody went back to England in September 1881, returning home for the summer of 1882. He returned for an important student crusade at Cambridge University in the fall of 1882, then back to America, and returned the following fall for a crusade in London from November 4, 1883 to January 19, 1884, where some two million heard him in various auditoriums. Wilfred Grenfell was among those saved and young C.T. Studd was also won indirectly.

From 1884 on, his crusades were smaller and limited to October to April. He spent his summer months in Northfield, Massachusetts for study, rest, family and development of his schools.

From 1884-1886 he was in many of the smaller cities of the nation, remaining about three days in each place. In 1888-1889 he was on the Pacific coast from Vancouver to San Diego. In 1890 he held his second crusade in New York, in November and December.

A last trip was taken in 1891-92 to England, Scotland (99 towns), France, Rome and Palestine, where he preached on the Mount of Olives on Easter Sunday morning. On his trip home to America, he endured a shipwreck, a dark hour of his life, but God spared him.

Peter Bilhorn, who substituted for Sankey in the 1892 Buffalo, New York, crusade, tells his amazement at Moody's personal work, observing him lead the driver of a carriage to the Lord in the midst of a violent rainstorm.

In 1893 he had the "opportunity of the century." The World's Columbian Exposition (World's Fair) was to be held in Chicago from May 7 to October 31. He had a burden to saturate Chicago with the gospel during this time. Using many means and meetings in different languages, including 125 various Sunday services, thousands were saved. Exactly 1,933,210 signed the guest register of the Bible School.

In 1895 he had a large crusade in Atlanta. That same year a roof collapsed on a crowd of 4,000 at Fort Worth, Texas. Fortunately, there were no deaths.

In 1897 he conducted another large Chicago crusade, packing out a 6,000-seat auditorium.

His church which was renamed Moody Church in 1901 (two years after his death) continued to progress with the following pastors: Erdman (1876-78), Charles M. Morton (1878-79), George C. Needham (1879-81), no regular pastor (1881-85), Charles F. Goss (1885-90), Charles A. Blanchard (1891-93), and Reuben A. Torrey, who began as pastor in 1894.

Moody's interest in schools left him a lasting ministry. The forming of the Northfield Seminary (now Northfield School for Girls) in 1879, and the Mount Hermon Massachusetts School for Boys (1881) was the beginning. The Chicago Evangelization Society (later Moody Bible Institute) was opened with the first structure completed on September 26, 1889 with R.A. Torrey in charge. The school was an outgrowth of the 1887 Chicago Crusade.

In 1880 he started the famous Northfield Bible Conferences which continued until 1902, bringing some of the best speakers from both continents to the pulpit there. The world's first student conference was held in 1885 and the Student Volunteer Movement started two years later as a natural outgrowth.

In 1898 Moody was chairman of the evangelistic department of the Army and Navy Christian Commission of the Y.M.C.A. during the Spanish-American War.

He started his last crusade in Kansas City in November, 1899. On November 16, he preached his last sermon on Excuses (Luke 14:16-24) and hundreds were won to Christ that night. He was very ill afterward, the illness thought to be fatty degeneration of the heart. Arriving home in Northfield November 19 for rest, he climbed the stairs to his bedroom--never to leave it again. He died about seven a.m. December 22, with a note of

victory. He is reported to have said such things as the following at his death: "I see earth receding; heaven is approaching (or opening). God is calling me. This is my triumph. This is my coronation day. It is glorious. God is calling and I must go. Mama, you have been a good wife...no pain...no valley...it's bliss."

The funeral was on December 26 with C.I. Scofield, local Congregational pastor, in charge. Memorial services were held in many leading cities in America and Great Britain. Moody left to the world several books, although he never wrote a book himself. His Gospel sermons, Bible characters, devotional and doctrinal studies were all compiled from his spoken word, those after 1893 by A.P. Fitt. However, he read every article and book before they were published. His innumerable converts were estimated by some as high as 1,000,000.

R.A. Torrey, one of his closest friends, writes his conclusions in his famous Why God Used D.L. Moody: (1) fully surrendered, (2) man of prayer, (3) student of the Word of God, (4) humble man, (5) freedom from love of money, (6) consuming passion for the lost, (7) definite endowment with power from on high.

Perhaps the world HAS seen what one man totally consecrated to God can do.

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