

Bible reading shaped life, decisions, Bush writes

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WASHINGTON (RNS)—Former President George W. Bush made no secret his politics were tinged by his religious faith, but now says he never would have made it to the White House without a fateful—and faith-filled—decision to quit drinking in 1986.

President Bush marks a National Day of Prayer in the East Room of the White House. (RNS FILE PHOTO/Joyce N. Boghosian/White House)

“I could not have quit drinking without faith,” Bush writes in his recently released memoir, [*Decision Points*](#). “I also don’t think my faith would be as strong if I hadn’t quit drinking.”

Across 497 pages, Bush recounts the ways religious faith shaped his life and his politics. While religion is not a central thrust of the book, it’s nonetheless a constant theme.

Attending Presbyterian and Methodist churches in Midland, Bush writes that “religion had always been a part of my life, but I really wasn’t a believer.”

That changed with his decision to quit drinking a year after evangelist Billy Graham visited the Bush vacation home in Maine in 1985.

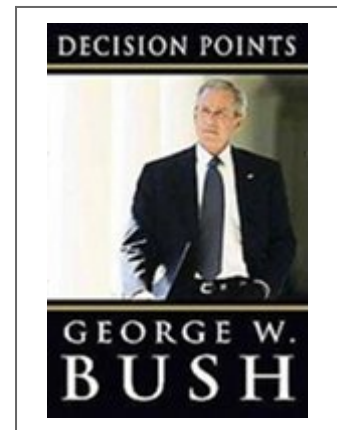
At that time, Bush said, he was an occasional reader of the Bible, which he viewed as “a kind of self-improvement course.” During that well-known walk with Graham, the evangelist said the point of the Scriptures was to follow Christ, not just to improve himself.

“Billy had planted a seed,” Bush wrote.

Months after returning to Texas, Bush joined a weekly Bible study.

He soon started reading the Bible every morning, a practice he continued throughout his time at the White House.

While Graham helped Bush overcome alcohol, a Texas pastor inspired him to pursue the presidency. At a service to mark his second inauguration as Texas governor, Bush heard Mark Craig, pastor of [First United Methodist Church in Austin](#), recount the biblical story of a once-hesitant Moses leading the Israelites into the Promised Land.



“We have the opportunity, each and every one of us, to do the right thing, and for the right reason,” Bush recalled Craig preaching. At the other end of the pew, Barbara Bush mouthed to her son, “He is talking to you.”

Once in the White House, Bush’s faith played a role in both presidential and personal decisions. His push for global AIDS relief was fueled by his visit to a Ugandan clinic, where he left feeling challenged by the biblical admonition: “To whom much is given, much is required.”

His moral views also contributed to his decision to limit federal funding of embryonic stem cell research. When he decided in 2001 to try to bar the

use of federal funds “to support the destruction of life for medical gain,” Bush said he was struck by the personal nature of the criticism.

“They mocked my appearance, my accent and my religious beliefs,” he wrote. “I was labeled a Nazi, a war criminal, and Satan himself,” but Bush says the “shrill debate” never prompted him to second-guess his decision.

Bush also defends his [Office of Faith-based and Community Initiatives](#), which he said helped more than 5,000 charities receive federal grants.

As president, his reliance on faith continued through his last day in the White House.

“I began Tuesday, January 20, 2009, the same way I had started every day for the past eight years: I read the Bible,” he wrote in his epilogue.