

East Texas evangelist marks 1,000 revivals and still counting

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GILMER—Billy Foote believes in the power of revival meetings. Some of the most important milestones in his spiritual life have been linked to revivals, and last month another occurred when he conducted his 1,000th revival.

Every meeting has been chronicled in date books going back to his first, more than 50 years ago.

“It all started at the Bagwell Baptist Church in Bagwell. We were back there this past year—50 years later. While we were there, the church voted and approved to have us come again in another 50 years,” he said with a laugh.



Evangelist Billy Foote and his wife, Winky, have served together in ministry more than 45 years. Foote recently conducted his 1,000th revival meeting.

Laughter comes naturally to Foote as he recalls the joy that has been his through his service to God, but so do tears—also from joy—as he thinks back on people who invested so much in him and his pilgrimage with Christ.

A native of Commerce, Foote will turn 70 years old later this year. "I used to think that was old, but I've changed my mind about that," Foote said.

He grew up shy and retiring, but after a protracted series of invitations began attending Shiloh Terrace Baptist Church in Dallas as a high school sophomore.

In April 1956, evangelist Holland London preached a revival at Shiloh Terrace, Foote surrendered his life to Christ and "suddenly everything changed," he said. "I've found something so wonderful and life-changing, I'm caught up in it."

It wasn't long until Foote sensed a new direction for his life.

"I'm feeling God's call on life," he said.

The summer after he graduated from high school, Sam Jones, a friend a year older, asked Foote if he would lead the music for a revival Jones was to conduct.

Foote had a question: "Would I have to wave my arms?"

"Well, I think that would be best," Jones replied.

At that point, Foote said he didn't know if he could do it.

"He told me, 'I've heard you quote many times, 'I can do all things through Christ.' Is that something you just say or do you believe it?' Sam was direct like that, but I heard his heart more than his voice," said Foote, who went home and started practicing waving his arms in front of a mirror.

"So, we rode this bus up to the church, and all these people were waiting to meet us. We had an enormous crowd that night. There must have been 30 people," he said with a grin.

“I came back home feeling like I had been at a Billy Graham crusade, and on that bus ride home, I had a definite conviction that God had a call on my life.”

While Foote spent 12 years on three church staffs, most notably at Calvary Baptist Church in Longview, he found his calling conducting revivals.

He has been asked often about why he chose to lead revivals rather than serve on a church staff, and said that while it’s certain it’s his calling, it’s harder to explain.

“I was saved by a revival meeting, Sam Jones asked me to lead music at a revival where God confirmed his calling on my life, and I’ve just always been drawn to it,” he said. “I know the power that is in them.”

One important milestone in his life did not, however, happen at a revival—meeting his wife of 45 years, Winky. But Foote readily acknowledges she has played a pivotal role in his ministry.

“There would not be a list of 1,000 revivals without the support and encouragement I have received from her. I could not have done it without the wife I have,” he said.

For her part, Mrs. Foote said she felt a call to ministry at age 11, and she has found the fulfillment of that call through their ministry.

From 1958 until 1971, Foote led the music for revivals. In 1971, he felt the call to begin preaching them. While he still leads revival choirs, his wife performs the special music for the revivals he conducts.

Many of the revivals he has conducted have been in the churches of the young people to whom he ministered at Calvary Baptist Church in Longview who later felt their own call to ministry.

Gary Orr, pastor of many years at Trinity Baptist Church in Longview, falls

into that category, he noted.

In honor of the impact Foote has had on so many lives, his alma mater, East Texas Baptist University, conferred on him an honorary doctor of divinity degree recently.

While Foote has achieved 1,000 revivals, he is not finished preaching or singing. His 1,001st already is scheduled for later this month.

And, of course, he has an appointment to keep in Bagwell in 2058.