

D.L. Moody – American Evangelist

“The first meeting I ever saw him at was in a little old shanty abandoned by a saloon-keeper. Mr. Moody had got the place to hold meetings in at night. I went there a little late; and the first thing I saw was a man standing up with a few tallow candles around him, holding a negro boy, and trying to read to him the story of the Prodigal Son, and a great many words he could not read out, and had to skip. I thought, ‘If the Lord can ever use such an instrument as that for his honor and glory, it will astonish me.’”

Mr. Reynolds (a friend of Moody)

“God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence.”

1 Corinthians 1:27-29

His Early Years and Conversion:

1) **Dwight Lyman Moody was born to Edwin and Betsy Moody on February 5, 1837 in Northfield, Massachusetts. He was the sixth of nine children. He had five older brothers, one younger sister, and one month following the death of his father, his mother gave birth to twins, a boy and a girl. His father, who was a farmer and stone mason, was also an alcoholic and died when Moody was only four years old. Betsy struggled to support the family after the death of her husband and even had to send the older children out to work in order to help the family financially. His mother saw too it that the children attended church every Sunday, and thus, throughout his childhood, he attended the local Unitarian Church.**

2) **Dwight’s formal education ended in the fifth grade. At the age of seventeen, he left home and moved to Boston to work in his uncle’s shoe store. One of his uncle’s conditions of employment was that he attend the Mount Vernon Congregational Church. It was at Mount Vernon that Moody entered into the Sunday school class taught by a young teacher named Edward Kimball. Kimball became deeply burdened over the soul of Moody and that burden led him on Saturday, April 21, 1855 to leave his home and make his way to the shoe shop where Moody worked. Arriving at the shop, he found Moody in the stockroom, and confronted him concerning his standing before God. With what he later referred to as “a weak plea and tears in his eyes”, Kimball challenged Moody to give serious consideration to the condition of his soul. That afternoon, in the stockroom of his uncle’s shoe shop, D.L. Moody was brought to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.**

His Life’s Work and Ministry:

1) **Moody left Boston and moved to Chicago in September 1856 where he was hired by a boot store. Selling shoes however was no longer his passion as it had been replaced by a desire to see the lost converted to Christ. Moody joined the Plymouth Congregational Church and was active in witnessing to people about the Lord. After joining the church, he purposed to fill four of the pews in the building with children, which he did. In the spring of 1857 he began ministering to the sailors in Chicago’s port and to the men who frequented the saloons of the city handing out New Testaments and tracts. Moody began to search for a place where Sunday school services could be held in order to reach “the lost youth of the city”, children with little or no education, less than ideal family situations, and poor economic circumstances. He rented an old beer hall on North Market Street in an area known as “Little Hell.” Each Sunday, the hall was filled with more than 500 people. The children loved Moody and sung the hymns with great enjoyment.**

2) **Word of Moody’s Mission Sunday school continued to spread and even reached the ears of Abraham Lincoln. On November 25, 1860 as he was on his way from Springfield to Washington D.C. for his first inauguration, Lincoln stopped in at the place where Moody was holding services. As he was leaving, Lincoln told the children, “put into practice what you learn from your teachers, some day you also may become president of the United States.”**

3) **With the onset of the civil war, the Union Army mobilized soldiers across the north. Camp Douglas, located just outside of Chicago, was where troops of the 72nd Illinois Volunteer Regiment were stationed. Moody saw this as a great evangelistic opportunity which was the beginning of his outreach to both Union soldiers and**

Confederate prisoners of war, of whom ten thousand were confined in Camp Douglas. From 1861 to 1865 he was a volunteer chaplain, ministering on battlefields and was present during the conflicts of Shiloh, Murfreesboro, and Chattanooga and was with the army of General Grant when they entered Richmond.

4) During the war he married Emma Revell on August 28, 1862 and together they had a daughter and two sons. While he was rough, without formal education and lacking in social graces, Emma was cultured and refined. Under her influence, he quickly picked up on these social graces which would serve him well in the years ahead. She handled all of his correspondence, took care of the finances and raised their three children. She was referred to as the backbone for Moody's success.

5) With attendance at the Sunday school being 1500 and no more room in the present meeting place, associates of Moody encouraged him to build a larger and more permanent one. Construction of this building began and for the most part was completed in 1863. On February 28, 1864, the Illinois Street Independent Church opened its own building, with an auditorium that could accommodate 1500 people. This event marked the birth of what is known today as the Moody Church. On Sunday mornings, Moody would preach to his own congregation; in the afternoon he superintended the Sunday school where there were a thousand in attendance and in the evening; preach in the hall of the Local YMCA.

6) In 1867, due to health problems that his wife had, they were advised by her physician to take a sea voyage, which they did, and visited Great Britain for the first time. There, he heard Spurgeon preach and had the opportunity to visit George Muller who operated the large orphanages at Bristol.

7) In October 8, 1871, as Moody came to the end of his sermon for the evening, the city fire bell began to ring. At first no one thought much about it as the bell rang frequently. But this night would be different as it marked the beginning of the great Chicago fire. In this fire the church building, Moody's home and the homes of most of the church members would be destroyed. Within weeks, contributions came in from contacts in the east and within three months a large frame tabernacle was constructed at a nearby location and named "The Chicago Avenue Church" where services resumed. This structure was also served as a storehouse of supplies for the impoverished area to feed and provide clothing for thousands of people who had lost their homes.

8) In June of 1873, Moody and his song leader, Ira Sankey went to Great Britain to preach evangelistically. Their campaign covered about two years and he preached in England, Scotland and Ireland. One day in Scotland he preached to over fifty thousand people from a buggy. Toward the end of the campaign, in London, it was estimated that close to 2.5 million people came to hear the message of the gospel in the meetings that were held there. Moody said that the people seemed as grasshoppers and as he preached he felt such a consciousness of the presence of God. Being encouraged by the blessing of God upon their labors in the British Isles, Moody returned to America in October of 1875 and preached to thousands in New York, Brooklyn, Philadelphia, Chicago, Boston, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Richmond Denver, Colorado Springs, St Louis and San Francisco. During these meetings, thousands had come to know the Lord in both Britain and America. In 1881 they again returned to Great Britain and conducted more evangelistic services to large gatherings.

9) Moody was instrumental in establishing Bible schools in Northfield and Chicago. In 1879, he founded the Northfield Seminary for Young Women which trained girls for college whose courses were permeated with religious instruction. In 1881 the Mount Hermon School for Young Men was started with the same intent as the Women's College. The most famous school that he established was the Institute for Home and Foreign Missions in Chicago (now Moody Bible Institute).

10) During the world's fair in Chicago in 1893, he conducted meetings in the largest halls and circus tents in the city where millions heard the gospel preached.

11) Moody was a man of great discernment. He possessed an unusual ability to find capable, godly individuals and put them into positions of leadership whereby his ideas would be brought to fruition. This enabled him to continue his evangelistic outreach ministry and ensuring that the other interests that he had would continue to flourish. Moody continued his evangelistic campaigns until his death in 1899. His last series of meetings were held in Kansas City. On November 16 during the Kansas City meetings, his heart gave out and he was brought home by train to Northfield, Massachusetts. He died shortly after his arrival on December 22nd and was buried in the place of his birth. Moody once said, "Someday you will read in the papers that D.L. Moody of East Northfield is dead. Don't you believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now; I shall have gone up higher, that is all, out of this old clay tenement into a house that is immortal - a body that death cannot touch, that sin cannot taint; a body fashioned like unto his glorious body." It is estimated that no less than one hundred million heard the gospel preached from the lips of Moody, and in addition, the schools that he was instrumental in establishing have sent thousands of more witnesses to the ends of the earth carrying the gospel message with them.