

AN EXTRA-ORDINARY WOMAN

RUTH GRAHAM VISITS
THE SANDHILLS
TO ENCOURAGE WOMEN
TO FIND PEACE,
GRACE & FAITH
IN SPITE OF LIFE'S
CHALLENGES.

By Christa Gala

Ruth Graham, daughter of renowned minister Billy Graham, is an ordinary woman in many ways—but she is also extraordinary. In one ten-year span, she weathered hardships identifiable to many women: divorce and depression for herself, not to mention issues with her children, including her son's drug abuse and daughter's unplanned pregnancies. Graham never envisioned herself in a ministerial position like her father, but that's exactly what she's doing now, imparting the recovery lessons she's learned through life's challenges.

Ruth Graham Ministries has “evolved slowly,” says Graham, increasing in intensity over the past 7 years as word spread and organizations and churches began calling to ask her to speak.

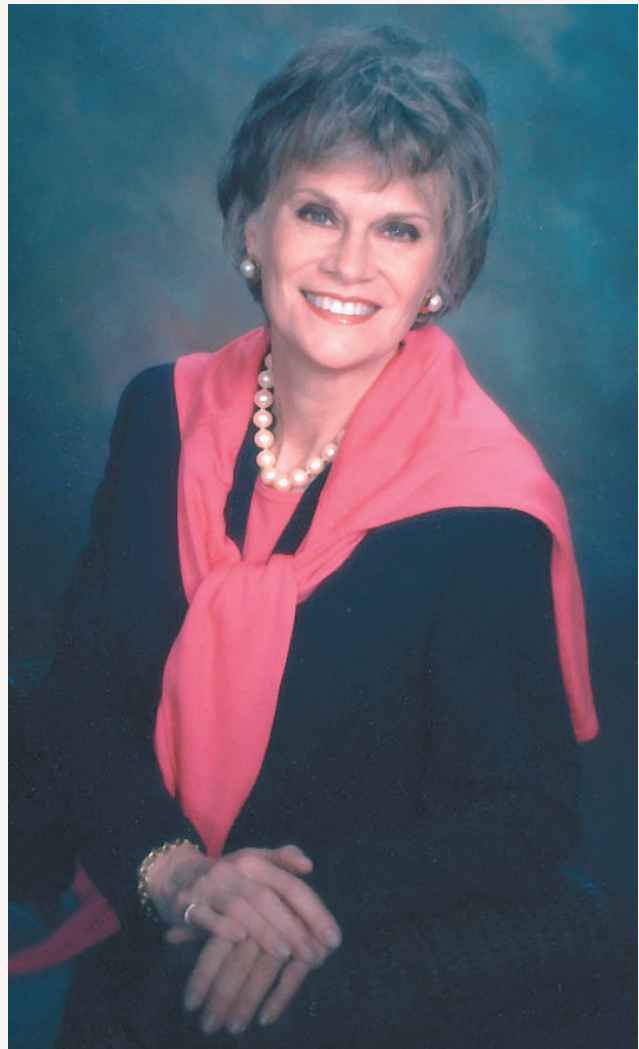
GRAHAM SPEAKS TO LIFE'S DISAPPOINTMENTS

Graham plans to bring her message to the Sandhills Saturday, January 21 as the luncheon speaker of the Women's Retreat at The Country Club of Whispering Pines, sponsored by local churches and individuals. The retreat is for women who are suffering from life's disappointments and betrayals.

Graham likens this suffering to having a ‘broken heart,’ and incorporated the phrase into the title of her recent book *In Every Pew Sits a Broken Heart...Help for the Hurting*. In fact, helping those who are suffering is the key mission of her ministry, which she formed to give her speaking activities and interests some “focus.”

“It's a ministry geared toward those who are broken and hurting,” says Graham. “We seek to minister God's mercy, grace, restoration and healing to those who are hurting, often alone and in silence. We believe that Jesus Christ is the only son of God and provides us with the means for this redemption and journey into wholeness.”

June Vetter, events coordinator for The Country Club of Whispering Pines, says she has already been flooded with calls



from women planning to attend. In addition to Graham's luncheon presentation, the retreat will offer six workshops to help women deal with the mental, emotional and physical health issues that affect the spiritual life.

“Our goal for this retreat is to show there is comfort, guidance and healing that is available through Jesus Christ,” says Vetter. “We also want to let the registrants know that there are resources in our churches and the community to help those who are going through difficult circumstances. In fact, we will have exhibit tables with resource materials they can take home with them.” The retreat costs \$35, due with the registration form where participants will select the workshops they would like to attend. Luncheon-only tickets are not available.

HOPE FOR THE HURTING

With some time still to plan, Graham hasn't composed her luncheon presentation just yet. But she says she will address the brokenness many often feel in life. At the core of her message are several tenets.



Ruth Graham and her family enjoying Pawley's Island.

"God is in control, he's sovereign, and he loves us. He will ultimately bring about good if we give the pieces to him. That really is hope, when we know that our suffering is not in vain—that God can use it," Graham says.

But she acknowledges that giving up control is difficult for most. "When we're hurting and in turmoil, very often we keep jumping ahead, and we want to move through it. But God would have us be still and quiet ourselves. I got into a lot of trouble because I didn't. My mother says, 'No one's useless; they can always serve as a bad example.' So I use my story, really, as what not to do—because I made a lot of mistakes."

Graham also hopes to get across that suffering doesn't mean a person has wasted years of their life: "God doesn't waste anything," she says.

NO ONE HAS ALL THE ANSWERS

Graham also plans to pass along activities that have helped her in the past when she's felt overwhelmed.

"One of the things that has really been a strength in my life is that I make praise lists—things that I can thank God for and praise him for," she says. "I find that when I do that, and I do it very regularly, that my focus is not on myself. My focus then is on the greatness of God, the goodness of God so that I'm not just concentrating on the problem or the overwhelming sense of failure or guilt, but I'm focusing on God's greatness. He's big enough to handle my anger, my questions and my hurts—if I would just turn it over to him. My problem, and I think most women's problem, is to turn it over. We want to be in control."

Ruth Graham is careful to acknowledge that many life events are beyond our understanding. "People who have all the answers don't have a clue what the questions are," she says. Recently Graham was asked if God had a hand in Hurricane Katrina's destruction, rendering thousands homeless.

"People are always asking why, and sometimes we don't know why," Graham admits. "I would certainly hope that God will get our attention. I think between 9/11 and this, certainly we've got to take a look and ask, 'What does God want to say to us through this?'"

THE DETAILS

What: Ruth Graham Women's Retreat
Where: The Country Club of Whispering Pines
When: Saturday, January 21, 2006
Schedule: Six workshops geared toward overcoming brokenness.
Cost: \$35 (includes lunch at which Graham will speak).
Sponsors: (in Pinehurst, Southern Pines and Aberdeen) The Village Chapel, Grace Church, First Baptist Church, Sacred Heart, Community Evangelical Free Church, Sandhills Presbyterian Church, Linda Covington of Covington House, The Country Club of Whispering Pines and community individuals.
For more information: Contact June Vetter at 910-949-3000, ext. 367 or visit one of the church sponsors above for a brochure.

Although Graham hasn't yet visited the Gulf region ravaged by the hurricane at the end of August, she has spent time with evacuees and a minister friend in Mississippi struggling to provide housing in his church for more than one hundred homeless. "It's wonderful to see what God is doing through this, as tragic as it is."

Individual tragedies seldom receive the attention and resources of national disasters like Hurricane Katrina, but the experiences are painful just the same, leaving many damaged and in despair.

"I pointed out to a family member recently: All of us have Katrinas in our lives," says Graham. "Some are devastating like the storm, and we've lost everything. Or maybe it's an illness or divorce or bankruptcy that's getting ready to wipe you out. We all have storms in our lives and the same principles apply. We don't know why, and I think that people who try to give that answer are out of their league. I think the thing to do is to concentrate on who God is—that God is in control, that God is good and He's wise. Let's count on His character; we know that His character is good. We have to fall back on that and trust Him."

"FAILURE NEED NOT BE FINAL"

Graham reports that her father, Billy Graham, nearly 87, is in relatively good health and living in North Carolina. He's writing a book and is also very involved in the recovery efforts for Hurricane Katrina victims. Undoubtedly, he's proud of his daughter Ruth.

What started out as a slowly evolving ministry is now exploding, with Ruth Graham's calendar booked nearly to the end of 2006. Graham plans to work with churches nationwide regarding issues that aren't often talked about, including homosexuality, pornography and eating disorders. "We want to come alongside the churches and really help them."

For retreat participants, Graham wants to say life's challenges don't have to be permanent obstacles. She points out that God has done pretty good things with chaos in the past, which allows for people to have hope for the future, even when their lives are a mess.

"God began to create out of chaos back in Genesis 1:1," says Graham. "He still loves to create out of chaos, if we just give it to him. He can restore and rebuild in the ruin, and that's the hope. Failure need not be final, and we move forward in God's grace."