

# Chattanooga Gets Growing With Ruth Graham & Friends

## *‘This Really Hits The Truth’*

As church leaders in their community, Ruth McKenzie and Darla Ryan have experienced their share of Christian-themed conferences. So it was with a critical eye that they travelled from their hometown of Charlotte, N.C. to attend the Ruth Graham & Friends “Get Growing” conference held in Chattanooga, TN on Oct. 17-18.

Their verdict: “This is exactly what we wanted...this really hits the truth.”

“I can feel the presence of God,” added Darla.

Most of the other conference attendees seemed to agree, judging by the enthusiastic responses to all of the seminars and the plenary sessions.

More than 600 people poured into the Chattanooga Convention Center for the conference, making it one of the most well-attended Get Growing conferences ever. The conference even drew at least one attendee away from another event taking place at the convention center.

One woman said she was attending the World Tae Kwon Do meet at the center when she saw that the Ruth Graham conference was also taking place and that she “just felt like she needed to be at the Get Growing conference instead.” She did attend, and she found the answers she was looking for in the workshops, she said.

Seminar attendance was well-balanced. Many of the speakers had revamped their workshop formats to allow for more interaction with the attendees – an approach that seemed to be much-favored by the attendees themselves.

## **Crowd Control A Happy Problem For ‘Illusion Of Control’ Workshop**

Steve Wiese drew an overflow crowd on Saturday morning for his seminar on “The Illusion of Control.” That topic was a major draw, according to one conference insider, precisely because the subject matter was not “controversial” in the sense of being particular to a given emotional or psychological issue.

Perhaps not surprising, given the times, Don Miles’ workshop on “Depression” was a big hit. Noting that at any given time, 14% of women and 7% of men in church congregations are thinking of taking their own lives, Don reiterated his belief that depression, for all its prevalence in modern society, is a misunderstood – and often mistreated – malady that not only sidetracks people’s lives but actually destroys them.

“We’ve gotten away from considering that suicide is a sin (self-murder),” Don said.

With depression, people often come to the point where they say they can’t live like this any longer.

“And God agrees with, that you can’t live this way,” Don said. But God does not agree that suicide is an option. Nor does He expect depressed people to increase their “prayer time” just in hopes of solving their problems.

“One mistake Christians made is to tell you to get into prayer, to pray more,” Don noted. But a one word prayer – “Help!” – may be all that’s needed to start the spiritual wheels rolling for a depressed person, he said. And such a brief plea doesn’t allow time for the enemy to counter-attack either, he said.

He urged people to consider forming and/or joining small self-help groups for depression, ideally based inside their churches or under the auspices of a Christian-based outreach program. Tal Prince’s workshop on “The Pornography Plague” drew in a more evenly-balanced mixture of men and women than in some previous conferences, perhaps in part because Tal noted in his Friday night introduction that females comprise 40% of the audience for Internet porn.

### **Pornography A Major Factor In Divorce - Tal Prince**

Porn is not a harmless after-hours diversion, Tal informed his seminar audience. “Seventy percent of Internet porn viewing happens during the workday,” he said. Pornography is also cited as a factor in 66% of divorces, he noted – and the divorce rate is higher inside the church than outside. Combating pornography and sexual sin, including pedophilia, should be a major concern for every church, he said. And to fight it, people must first admit it exists. “If your church does not look like an emergency room you need to change it,” he said. “People say, ‘But we don’t want those people in our church.’ But they’re already there.”

Ruth Graham had her hands full with a room packed full of people wanting to hear her talk about divorce, being single and loneliness. It is hard to be alone, Ruth acknowledged. “We’re not wired that way. That may not be what God made us for, but it may be what he intends for us – how are we to know?”

For those that do struggle with being alone, it’s important to remember to talk to God, she said. “He understands your loneliness, and He provides.”

Afterward April, a Christian counselor, said of the conference, “It was very meaningful, very useful. The Biblical notes (used by the speakers) could be used in (her counseling) practice,” she said. “It makes you feel like it is not just you that has the problem.”

And Beth, a Chattanooga area resident who came with others from a Living Free group, said, “It is very eye-opening. People need to be reached where they are at. Instead of shunning people, the church needs to embrace them like this.”

Gladys, also from the Chattanooga area and attending along with her friend Marie, said, “Sometimes at conferences we think the speakers are not flawed. But that wasn’t the case here – the speakers wanted to meet us where we are and not where they are. It gives me the strength to go on.”

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