

Surprised by the Spirit

Ned Graham, the youngest son of evangelist Billy Graham, discovered a new direction for his ministry when he was filled with the Holy Spirit's power.

Hues of yellow, orange and red cast a soft blanket of color across the mountaintops behind the log home where Nelson Edman "Ned" Graham grew up as the youngest child of the Rev. Billy and Ruth Graham. Having returned to the family home in Montreat, North Carolina, where he makes periodic visits to oversee the care of his aging parents, Ned has many happy childhood memories of growing up on this mountain.

"I'm definitely at home in the mountains," he admits. "There's a perspective of depth and contrast the mountains offer, as well as a sense of permanence and beauty."

And like the mountains he loves, Ned has been marked by a few deep crevices and dark hollows. Emotional and spiritual forces shaped them, but through God's mercy and deliverance he has escaped their lingering shadows of despair, depression, addiction and demonic oppression. He has emerged with a new understanding of the Holy Spirit and God's love. Being the youngest of his four siblings by six years, Ned says that in some ways he was like an only child.

"Because my brothers and sisters were all older and my sisters got married at an early age, I got to spend more one-on-one time with my parents," he says.

"Growing up, my dad and I always had a very special bond. Dad always hugged me and told me he loved me no matter what. Even when I felt like a failure, he told me how proud he was of

me.”

Ned says one of his fondest memories of early childhood was going back to his father’s bedroom, knocking on the door and peeking in to find him on the telephone with some important person, such as the president.

“He’d say, ‘Just a moment, Lyndon,’ put the phone on his chest, and then motion for me to come in,” Ned recalls. “To me, that said I was more important than the president of the United States! I’d crawl up on his bed, content just to lie there with my head on his chest.”

“Ned will never admit it, but he’s my mother’s favorite child,” insists Anne Graham Lotz, one of Ned’s three sisters. “Mother just doted on him. He was the center of her life—after Daddy, of course—and I think it’s God’s blessing that Ned would be the one to come back and look after them.”

Ned and Anne both say that when they were growing up there was no sibling rivalry among the five Graham children—Virginia “Gigi” Graham Tchividjian, 61, author and speaker; Anne Graham Lotz, 58, founder of AnGeL Ministries; Ruth “Bunny” Graham McIntyre, 56, author and speaker; William Franklin Graham III, 54, president and CEO of both the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and Samaritan’s Purse; and Ned, 49, president of East Gates International.

Like his brother, Franklin, Ned suffered through tumultuous teen years, displaying his rebellion through a love for fast cars, drinking and girls. But unlike Franklin, who abandoned his rebellion early, Ned struggled for 30 years with his before he came face to face with the issues that had

contributed to it.

Darkness Invades

“When I was a little boy, I had a very pure, unadulterated relationship with God,” Ned says. “But when I was 11 and 12 years old, I experienced two childhood sexual-abuse traumas that opened the door for demonic affliction.”

He suspected in his mid-20s that he was demonically afflicted, but he chose not to deal with it because he didn’t know enough about it. He was also too ashamed to bring it to the attention of anyone in the evangelical community.

Ned says he doesn’t believe he was demonically possessed from the trauma because Jesus still lived in his soul. “There was a dissonance in my life between what I refer to as ‘Big Ned,’ who was demonically oppressed, and ‘Little Ned,’ who was still very spiritually sharp,” he explains.

“When someone is demonically afflicted it doesn’t mean they are spiritually incapacitated,” he stresses. “I believe there are many good Christians today serving in churches, and even in leadership positions, who are demonically afflicted. All you have to do is look at the pornographic and sexual addiction rate among pastors and the substance-abuse statistics of Christian leaders to see it.”

Though Ned’s family didn’t know the source of his pain, it was obvious to them that he was struggling spiritually.

“I remember watching him as a little boy,” Anne says. “He was

very precious and angelic, but as I watched him grow into his teens he became very selfish and manipulative. ... There was not that love or surrender to the Lord.”

After high school, Ned entered Judson College in Elgin, Illinois. He stayed there one year, and then took a year off to teach rock climbing and outdoor survival skills in western North Carolina. During a climb, he fell and suffered serious injuries. He was taken to Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, where he met his first wife.

“I was 20, and she was 26,” Ned says. “At the time I was very rebellious and into marijuana and alcohol, and I naively thought that I knew what love was and that it would take care of everything.”

After recovering from his injuries, Ned attended the University of Minnesota as a pre-med student but later transferred to Pacific Lutheran University in Seattle, where he graduated in 1986 with a degree in communications.

After graduation, he entered Fuller Theological Seminary and earned a master’s degree in theology. While studying at Fuller, he took a position as an intern of adult ministries at Bible Baptist Church. This led to a pastorate, where he served for six years before God called him in 1992 to establish East Gates International.

When his first wife filed for divorce in 1998 after 20 years of marriage, Ned says he pushed past the pain. “I’m a rock climber and a mountaineer, and I’d always pushed past pain in my life through sheer strength and willpower.”

Among those who were a support to Ned during his divorce was Christina "Tina" Kuo, who had joined the East Gates International staff a year before as director of training. "Christina had a great heart for China, and she became a great fit with our indigenous Chinese team. We became very good friends as we traveled with our team throughout China."

Back home, Ned says he would often take his two sons, Alex and Sam (then 13 and 10), and his dog, Pugsley, into the East Gates office with him. "Sam and Pugsley would somehow always end up in Christina's office," he says. "One day Sam asked me, 'Dad, if you ever decide to remarry, would you ever consider Tina?'"

"That was the last thing on my mind at the time, but I ended up falling in love with her and even traveled back home to North Carolina to seek my mother's counsel. Mom said: 'Ned, if you love her ... follow your heart. Just make sure your heart is following God's.'"

In February 2001, Sam's request was fulfilled and Ned and Tina were married by his father in his parents' Montreat home. One year later, at his father's request, Ned and Tina returned to the North Carolina mountains to care for Ned's mother, who was hospitalized and said to be dying.

Having worked as a certified nursing assistant throughout his educational pursuits, Ned was well-qualified to assist in the physical care of his mother. What he wasn't prepared for was the spiritual warfare taking place on the mountain. "When you think about it, Satan would love nothing better than to attack Billy Graham and his family, as evidenced by his attack on me very early in life."

Although Ned dedicated himself to caring for his mom during the two years he was at Montreat, he says he was still struggling with his own physical and spiritual issues. “I had torn my thigh muscle playing tennis, and I remember Anne telling me I was like Jacob wrestling with God.”

When Ned and Tina returned to Seattle in 2004, Ned’s depression deepened. “I came to a point where I gave up everything,” he says. “I stopped caring. I no longer feared death or life. I no longer feared failure or success. It was at that point that God could interact with me.”

Although Ned knew nothing about deliverance, he agreed to see a well-known deliverance minister after a friend suggested it. The attempt to free him from his demonic affliction failed, Ned says, and caused even more damage to his psyche.

Tina says she didn’t feel comfortable with the idea in the first place. “And things got much worse afterwards,” she says. “When you stimulate the dark side in a person and don’t resolve it, it worsens.”

Anne recalls: “I was in Seattle around this time doing a Just Give Me Jesus conference. When I saw Ned, he was barely hanging in there. I thought he was having a complete inner breakdown, emotionally, spiritually and mentally. It was very scary.”

Deliverance and Freedom

Through Tina’s urging, Ned began meeting with inner-healing minister Rita Bennett, who led him through about 15 sessions of soul-healing prayer. Ned says he let go of bitterness,

anger and resentment, and allowed Jesus to bring healing.

Then one morning he knew the time had come for him to be fully delivered. He called two friends, who had been present during his healing sessions with Bennett, and arranged to meet them at a church. While traveling the freeway to meet the men, he had to pull over to vomit several times, almost wrecking his car.

"The deliverance was difficult because what afflicted me since childhood was extremely powerful and there was an apparent hierarchy [of demons]," he says. But several hours later, he says he was laughing and giggling and praising God. "I was a totally different man," he confesses.

Ned says he was also immediately delivered from the addictions that had plagued him for years, as well as some long-term health problems. Anne says she immediately sensed the change when he called to tell her of his deliverance.

"His voice was calm and strong and clear," she recalls. "And when I next saw him, I knew I had seen a miracle. Everything that he was as that sweet little boy was shining through with maturity, character, grace and strength."

At the time, Tina was on a trip to China, so Ned spent the next several weeks alone, reading God's Word and studying about the Holy Spirit and spiritual warfare. About the third week into his study, he says he was praying when God suddenly gave him a prayer language that has strengthened him in his prayer life.

"Ned now has a straight pipeline to the Lord," Tina says, "and

he listens a lot more. When he was tormented, it was too painful to listen to the Lord. Now when he faces challenges he doesn't try to escape them. He hunkers down, gets into the Word, and uses his prayer language," a gift which Tina says she has also received.

"My parents couldn't help but notice the positive changes in me," Ned adds. "My mother totally understands what I've been through." When asked about the changes she has seen in her son, Ruth Graham told Charisma: "Ned has been so much more thoughtful and attentive, and he exhibits more of the Spirit of God."

Although Ned describes this period of his spiritual journey as "coming out of evangelicalism and recognizing and accepting the power of the Holy Spirit," he told Charisma he does not call himself a "charismatic Christian"; rather, he sees himself as "a simple follower of Jesus."

"Ephesians 3:14-4:16 tells us that the gifts are to be used to glorify God, build up the body of Christ, and to unite us, not to separate or draw distinctions between us," Ned says. "God did not create denominations. Man did."

Reflecting on how God has worked in His life, Ned stresses that there are no cookie-cutter relationships with God. "Each person's relationship with God is unique. I know, because Jesus and the Holy Spirit have uniquely worked in my heart and soul to heal and weld together the little boy that I was into the man that I am now, and into the man that I'm still becoming."

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contributor to Charisma. She lives in Wilmington, North Carolina.

Answering China's Cry

Ned Graham's ministry, East Gates International, continues his family's longstanding legacy of missions work across China.

When Ned Graham began East Gates International in 1992 as a ministry to China, he was continuing in the footsteps of his mother, Ruth Bell Graham—who was born in China of missionary parents—and his grandfather Lemuel Nelson Bell, who served in China as a medical missionary for 25 years.

Graham was sitting around a table with Chinese house-church leaders in Shanghai, China, when they asked if his family would consider forming a ministry to help them.

“At that time the house churches were becoming increasingly frustrated by outside ministries focusing on the persecution, dramatic stories and the smuggling of Bibles, which put them in jeopardy,” Graham says. “Through a lot of diplomatic work and building relationships, we were able to build bridges and open communication on behalf of the house churches in China.”

East Gates International became the first Christian organization to print and distribute Bibles legally to house-church believers in the country. Since then, it has been responsible for printing and distributing more than 3 million Bibles in every province of China and in Tibet.

"We have never smuggled a single Bible [into China]," Graham stresses. "Chinese can readily obtain Bibles legally through any number of channels. This accessibility now negates the need for Bible smuggling that endangers local believers."

Today East Gates International is an indigenous ministry with a very small staff and overhead. Graham does most of the diplomatic work and the day-to-day operations at home. His wife, Christina "Tina" Kuo Graham, an American-born Chinese and East Gates' director of operations, does most of the training and traveling.

The ministry has offices in the U.S., Hong Kong and Australia and has established 250 mini-libraries and distribution points across China for Bibles and a variety of evangelical literature. Its other goals include teaching and encouraging pastors and helping to build churches.

Graham admits that at the first meeting 15 years ago in Shanghai he thought that creating a organization to work legally in China was quite impossible.

Expressing his doubts to the group, Graham still remembers their response: "One of the Chinese leaders simply looked at me with a twinkle in his eyes and quoted Mark 10:27: 'With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible.'"

For more information about East Gates International, log on at .