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EDITORS' NOTE: Following are parts 3 and 4 of a 4-part series on stress.

Parents, churches must unite
to help children with stress

By Frank Wm. White

F-SSB

NASHVILLE (BP)--Pressures to achieve are robbing children of their childhood as they face stresses they are not equipped to deal with, two specialists at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board agreed.

Bill Young, manager of the preschool/children's section in the discipleship training department, and Cos Davis, manager of the preschool program section in the Sunday school division, said churches and parents should join together to protect children from inappropriate pressures of society and teach them how to deal with life's stresses.

Churches should refuse to be part of the problems confronting young children and, instead, should educate parents on how to help children manage stress, Young said.

"No parent should try to raise children in a stress-free world -- that's just not possible," he said. "We need to give them inner strength to help them handle challenges of stress."

When a parent recognizes the stresses the world tends to place on a child, the parent must be available to help the child, Young explained.

"Children are more vulnerable to stress because they don't have previous experiences to rely on. They need help knowing how to understand situations they face," Young pointed out.

Stress is a positive factor that becomes negative when it is out of balance, he said. It becomes out of balance because the child does not have the developmental skills to cope.

Even preschoolers face pressure to develop skills at an earlier age, Davis said. Some educators and politicians advocate early skills development, and even the parents may push for a "super baby."

The result is undue pressure that is not sound for the child, Davis said.

Parents and church workers need to be sensitive to the symptoms of stress by taking time to listen and understand the child's situation, Young pointed out.

"Most parents are very sincere and want what is best for the child," Davis said. Because society can lead in directions that create undue pressure on the child, churches can play an important role in helping parents find what is appropriate for the child.

Churches can equip parents through seminars and materials such as "Parenting by Grace" produced by the board's family ministry and discipleship training departments, Davis said.

Many parents feel ill-equipped to deal with a child's stress, Young acknowledged. "Seek help when you need it. Many times, talking with the child will help uncover the basis for the child's concern," he said.

Also, many children's stories help the child see his or her feelings are normal or see alternative solutions to the problem, said Young.

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Young suggested parents seek the help of a church media library worker or staff member to find books for parents and children to deal with particular concerns.

When relating to the child, churches need to provide rich experiences that are appropriate for the age level, Davis pointed out.

With preschoolers, churches need to use the time to lay foundations of faith. "Trust and positive impressions developed in preschool years help develop security and strong self-image that is needed," Davis said.

Earlier is not always better, Young pointed out. "We often expect too much of our children too soon. We tend to ignore the developmental process of a child."

But even in the best circumstances, children must learn to deal with stress.

Parents should be available to listen and talk with children at times of stress. "They may not be able to tell you what they think, but they can tell you how they feel. They can tell you about butterflies in their stomach or headaches," Young explained.

"Parents often are so absorbed in their own world that they don't take time to understand the child's situation," Young said. "We must be sensitive to the child and look for signs of stress."

Signs may range from tantrums and aggression in one- to three-year-olds to increased fantasy and a need for more physical contact for older preschoolers, Young said. Older children may exhibit other abnormal behaviors.

Signs of stress vary from child to child, but prolonged or intense abnormal behavior is usually a sign the child is trying to deal with some kind of stress in his own way, he said.

"When we teach children how to deal with stress, we give them an inner strength to handle challenges they will face," Young said.

"We need to allow children to be who they need to be and love them for who they are, not who we want them to be," Davis said.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by SSB bureau of Baptist Press

Bible includes principles
for stress reduction

By Linda Lawson

F-SSB

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NASHVILLE (BP)--While the Bible does not contain warnings about the dangers of cholesterol or the need for aerobic exercise, it does include examples and guidelines for living healthy lives and coping effectively with an overload of stress.

"There are some things we ought to do -- eat properly, exercise, relax and get enough sleep -- that are biblical," said Joe Richardson, personnel counselor in the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's human resources department. He also is the author of "The Christian and Stress," an equipping center module produced by the board's discipleship training department.

He cited New Testament references to the human body as a temple and to the body as a living sacrifice which he said emphasize the importance of healthy habits.

Richardson also noted that the lifestyles of early Christians were much more conducive to good health and stress reduction. For example, he noted that during the week before his crucifixion, Jesus spent his days in Jerusalem and his nights in the village of Bethany, two miles east of Jerusalem. Therefore, Jesus walked at least four miles each day.

"Their daily existence was one of exercise," he said. "Exercise makes you better able to deal with stress."

He also cited the incident in Jesus' life when, after a day of dealing with large crowds, he got on a boat with his disciples. When a storm came up on the sea, Jesus was asleep.

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"My guess is that Jesus was exhausted from dealing with the demands of a huge crowd," said Richardson. "These incidents point up the biblical nature of good health habits. We just don't normally think of the Bible teaching us about eating, sleeping and exercise habits."

In addition to reducing stress through applying principles of good health, Richardson emphasized that Christians have the added advantage of direct access to God.

"There are times when we feel forsaken and alone when we are in the midst of problems," said Richardson. "God hasn't withdrawn from us. We have withdrawn from him. Our feelings of aloneness can be turned around if we ask his forgiveness and his presence. That is a resource non-Christians don't have."

Christians are responsible "to act Christlike in their relationships with brothers and sisters struggling with stress, to help them find peace," he noted.

"Instead, we may add to their stress by being critical," he added.

Christians will make progress toward reducing their stress levels by daily Bible study, prayer and other disciplines to grow in their understanding of the relevance of their faith to daily living, said Richardson.

"We need to understand how what we study on Sundays applies to Thursday mornings," said Richardson. "Christianity is witnessing and Bible study and prayer and ministry, but it is also parenting and working and living."

"One of the most important things Christians often have to learn in dealing with an overload of stress is how to say no," Richardson observed.

Also, they need to differentiate between situations that can be changed and those which cannot. If change is possible, actions may include reducing the noise, removing the danger or leaving the scene to move to a less stressful situation, said Richardson.

Other possible actions may include learning to better manage commitments, dealing more positively with overcommitments and improving skills in conflict management.

Signs that Christians are coping better with stress will be evident when they "begin to experience more frequent and longer times of peacefulness," said Richardson.

Their life situations will become better focused, he added. "In times of too much stress everything seems at loose ends. It becomes almost impossible to sort out priorities."

Also physical symptoms -- headaches, high blood pressure, lower back pain, inability to sleep -- will begin to disappear, said Richardson.

"Though it may be hard, people can do something about too much stress in their lives," he said.

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Nevada Baptist Convention adopts
\$1.7 million budget; elects Rochelle

N-C (Nevada)

Baptist Press
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LAS VEGAS, Nev. (BP)--Messengers to the 12th Nevada Baptist Convention annual meeting Oct. 23-24 adopted a \$1.7 budget and elected Michael Rochelle as president.

Messengers adopted without change the 1991 budget of \$1,728,265, an increase of 5.15 percent over the 1990 budget. The budget reflects an increase from 24.5 percent to 25 percent of the budget going to the Cooperative Program unified budget for mission and educational causes.

Rochelle is pastor of West Oakey Baptist Church, Nevada's largest church and largest giver through the Cooperative Program.

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Frank Lewis, pastor of Green Valley Baptist Church in Las Vegas was elected first vice president and Jim Meek, pastor of Steamboat Baptist Church in Reno was elected second vice president.

A highlight of the meeting was state missions night. The Nevada church growth plan, a concept now being developed to help Nevada churches grow, was introduced. The plan is based on the three building blocks of helping churches in reaching, assimilating and maturing. The plan will be presented in outline form during the January 1991 evangelism conference and in first draft at the key leaders suppers in May 1991.

First Southern Baptist Church of Las Vegas was named church of the year. In a resolution the church was cited as having been in the forefront of missions development in the southern Nevada area for 35 years; having been a statewide leader in Cooperative Program giving, baptisms and membership increases; and having been an encouragement to sister Southern Baptist churches in Nevada.

The 1991 Nevada Baptist Convention annual meeting will be Oct. 22-23 at First Baptist Church of Carson City.

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Land advocates political involvement by Christians

By Pat Cole

Baptist Press
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F-C (9SBTS)

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Christians should plunge into the "academic and political marketplace of ideas," said the executive director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

Many Christians incorrectly assume that the U.S. Constitution's ban on the establishment of religion means they cannot voice their moral concerns in the political arena, said Richard D. Land, in an Election Day chapel address at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

The First Amendment's prohibition on the establishment of religion is directed to Congress rather than the church, said Land: "Christians, churches, groups of believers cannot violate the First Amendment. Only the government can violate the First Amendment. All of the restrictions in the First Amendment are on the government."

Land warned against "co-mingling of the institution of the church and the institution of the state, because it will always lead to the corruption of the church." Nevertheless, he stressed that the nation's founders never intended there to be a "separation of morality and the more moral views of people of faith."

Christians were instrumental in the passage of legislation dealing with slavery, child labor and civil rights, Land noted. Christians, therefore, should not back away from involvement in the pro-life movement on the basis that it violates church/state separation, he said: "You may disagree with the pro-life movement but be honest enough to say you disagree with their views. Don't hide behind the First Amendment."

He urged Christians not to base their political participation on popular opinion. "What we need is the courage that arises in the crucible of conviction, not the caution produced by the craving for consensus," he said.

One of the nation's greatest myths is belief that morality cannot be legislated, Land said, adding that laws against murder, theft and rape legislate morality.

"We don't wipe out these crimes by having laws against them, but is there any doubt that the incidence of murder would rise if we didn't have laws against it?" he asked. Land maintained that laws cannot change attitudes, but they can change behavior.

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Foreign missions focus on Middle East
is 'miracle from God,' O'Brien says By Karen Benson

F-WMU

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--The foreign missions focus on the Middle East this fall is no coincidence or happenstance, according to Dellanna O'Brien, executive director of the Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union.

In fact, she said, "It's nothing short of a miracle from God."

The focus right now on the Middle East region "can only be attributed to the Lord," O'Brien said. "He is the one who should get all of the credit."

The theme selections, areas of focus, curriculum direction and other plans for the 1990 Foreign Mission Study, Week of Prayer for Foreign Missions and the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering were determined in the fall of 1986 through the spring of 1987 -- years before the current crisis erupted in the Persian Gulf region.

Now, O'Brien said, it is evident that "the Lord knew what he was doing four years ago when he directed our planning and led our thinking in this direction."

The 1990 plans were developed using a standard, formal process that involves input from representatives from the Foreign Mission Board, the Brotherhood Commission and WMU.

An important feature of the process, O'Brien said, is that the planning meetings are "bathed with prayer."

"We don't take lightly our responsibility for planning the churchwide emphases on home missions or foreign missions in the local churches," she said. "We are committed to preparing, with the Lord's guidance, the best plans possible for local churches during the seasons of emphasis on home and foreign missions."

The Foreign Mission Study this year focuses on "Baptist Ministries in the Arab World: Crossing Barriers with Love." Countries featured include Jordan, Cyprus, Yemen, Gaza, Egypt and Lebanon.

The Dec. 2-9 Week of Prayer for Foreign Missions focuses on the theme "Sent ... To Serve All Nations" and features a different part of the world each day of the eight-day observance. The week culminates with a focus on Jordan on the final Sunday of the week.

In addition, 100 Southern Baptist churches have been invited to participate in a pilot project in which they "adopt" Jordan, which has extensive borders with Saudi Arabia and Iraq. The churches will feature Jordanian customs, culture and religions during their fall emphasis on foreign missions. They also are considering their Lottie Moon Christmas Offering goals in light of actual financial needs in Jordan.

A promotion team comprised of representatives from the Foreign Mission Board, Brotherhood and WMU is overseeing the pilot project effort.

Jordan was chosen late last spring as the country to ask the churches to "adopt," according to Betty Merrell, a WMU representative on the team and coordinator of the pilot project.

"I continue to stand in awe of the Lord and the serendipities he has in store for us as we work with him," Merrell said. "I often feel like taking off my shoes as we walk with him on such holy ground."

There seems to be a heightened awareness and an excitement around the foreign missions emphasis this year like has not been seen in recent years, O'Brien said. "I am convinced that the Lord's hand is at work," she said.

One indication of an increased interest in foreign missions this year is the number of responses to a special video offer.

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As a way of saying "thank you," the top 2,000 churches in Lottie Moon Christmas Offering gifts last year were sent a letter in October offering them a free videotape to be used in promoting the offering this year.

According to Foreign Mission Board officials who are administering the project, by the end of the first week in November, almost 1,200 of those churches had sent in the response card asking for the videotape.

A packet of materials to help pastors promote the offering also has drawn an unusually good response, FMB officials said. Order forms contained in the packet started flowing into the FMB distribution center within a few days of that mailing.

"I am confident that this year is the year Southern Baptists will reach the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering goal," said R. Keith Parks, FMB president.

Southern Baptists have not reached or exceeded the goal since 1981, when the national goal was \$50 million. The goal this year is \$86 million.

"The Lord is offering Southern Baptists a perfect opportunity to turn our attention and our energies away from our internal conflicts and on to a world full of desperate needs," Parks said.

"The crisis in the Middle East, the emerging opportunities in Eastern Europe, the tragic situation in Liberia -- the list goes on of places throughout our world that need our prayers, our money, and our commitment to share the gospel."

Agreed O'Brien: "It doesn't make any difference how much money we give to missions if it's not accompanied by fervent prayer. We need to bathe the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering in prayer, just like we bathed the planning in prayer."

When Southern Baptists merge heartfelt prayer with sacrificial giving, she said, "God can indeed work his miracles through us."