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92-112

**Pastor discovers need
for dealing with the past**

By Linda Lawson

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--A 1988 mailout announcing a sermon series on adult children of alcoholics resulted in 300 first-time visitors to Kingsland Baptist Church in Katy, Texas, during the first three Sundays of the series.

At its conclusion, pastor Tim Sledge announced the church would be starting a support group where people could talk through their childhood experiences, get in touch with the feelings and problems created by those experiences and move beyond them.

Enough people signed up for six groups.

That kind of response, Sledge believes, will be repeated in Southern Baptist churches throughout the nation that are willing to provide recovery help on a variety of issues -- divorce, addictions, eating disorders, grief and others.

"I can promise you there is a large silent group in your church waiting for this," Sledge told a group of pastors attending the July 4-10 Discipleship Training Leadership Conference at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center.

"Jesus wants us to have not only a healthy spiritual life but also a healthy emotional life," said Sledge, author of "Making Peace with Your Past," a Lay Institute for Equipping course to help people recover from problems caused by life in dysfunctional families. It is scheduled for release Oct. 1 by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's discipleship training department.

Kingsland Baptist Church is about to start its 40th support group.

"We continually have a waiting list for these groups. We've seen a lot of healing," he said.

In the process, Sledge has learned six principles about dysfunctional families:

- People from dysfunctional families feel and act in predictable ways.
- The damaging results of growing up in a dysfunctional family can block spiritual growth.
- People must face the past to overcome it.
- People can move beyond the pain of the past to spiritual and emotional wholeness.
- The journey to wholeness cannot be made alone.
- God is the ultimate source of healing on the journey.

While Sledge is now aiming to see many people helped through examining their past in support groups, his journey began five years ago out of highly personal concerns.

He had just become pastor at Kingsland and, in many ways, was seeing his ministry dream fulfilled. A student of church growth, Sledge now was pastor of a growing congregation with great potential for reaching more people.

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There was just one problem. He was having powerful panic attacks. He felt something terrible was going to happen, that he might die. Averse to taking medicine, he was now on tranquilizers while, on the surface, pretending he was in control and everything was in order.

The son of an alcoholic father, Sledge decided to preach a series of sermons on adult children of alcoholics because he felt the preparation of the sermons might help him personally. As part of his research, he went to a drug treatment center in Arizona to attend a five-day program for children of alcoholics. The experience changed his life.

One day during the program, a group leader repeatedly battered him with the question, "Who is your god?" Sledge repeatedly answered, "Jesus."

After the leader had left, Sledge turned to a recovering alcoholic in the group and asked him what the leader had tried to do to him. "Let me put it another way," the recovering alcoholic responded. "Who is in control of your life?"

At that moment, Sledge recalled, he realized he, not God, was in control.

"I got in touch with some buried pain. I knew my father's alcoholism had hurt me but I didn't know how much. My body was sounding an alarm with the panic attacks, saying you've got to get in touch with your past. That week I learned to say no to shame," Sledge said.

When he returned home and preached the sermon series, "It was like lancing a wound."

The panic attacks stopped. The journey toward wholeness had begun.

In the four years since beginning support groups for members and people in the community, the church has grown from an average of 600 in attendance to 900.

"This is only one aspect of our church program," Sledge said. "I don't think everybody is dysfunctional and has to buy into this ministry. Those who don't think they need it should give the rest of us time to get the help we need."

For some, "there is a whole series of caves beneath the surface of our religious life. Involvement in support groups can open the caves, clear them out and we can move to a higher level of effectiveness in our faith."

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Court stings pro-life movement
with Roe v. Wade reaffirmation

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
7/13/92

WASHINGTON (BP)--The Supreme Court's mixed-bag ruling in the recent Planned Parenthood v. Casey opinion provided a rude awakening for the pro-life movement.

After five appointments to the high court by pro-life presidents the last 11 years, there still are not enough votes to overturn the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision legalizing abortion. Though it upheld most of the provisions of a Pennsylvania abortion-restriction law, the Supreme Court also reaffirmed Roe as law by a 5-4 vote.

"Pro-life America's hopes that Roe will be reversed next year have been dashed by so-called pro-life justices," said Michael Whitehead, general counsel of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission. "Reversing Roe will require another, real pro-life justice to help Rehnquist, White, Scalia and Thomas, who remain committed to stopping the convenience killing of pre-born babies."

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The approval of all but one of the restrictions in the Pennsylvania Abortion Control Act was not a surprise but most observers expected it to happen without the court ruling on the constitutionality of Roe. Instead, the court, led by Ronald Reagan appointees Sandra Day O'Connor and Anthony Kennedy and George Bush appointee David Souter, specifically upheld Roe.

"Pro-life America is increasingly weary with a court that continues to do an excellent imitation of a youngster on his first trip on the high-diving board in dealing with the abortion issue," said Richard D. Land, the Christian Life Commission's executive director. "They tip-toe out to the end of the board, looking cautiously from side to side, sometimes even curling their toes over the end of the board and gingerly bouncing up and down but they just can't summon the nerve to jump. Now three justices are crawling back down the ladder. It's well past time to take the plunge."

Operation Rescue founder Randall Terry said in a written statement, "Three Reagan/Bush appointees have stabbed justice in the back. Bush had better do his homework next time."

While the CLC's Land and Whitehead voiced disappointment, a Southern Baptist ethicist said he is uncertain if Roe should be overturned and if such a decision would be more beneficial.

"Restrictions can and should be placed on the practice of abortion," said Raymond Higgins, assistant professor of Christian ethics at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

"I do think that a step-by-step approach is the way to go about this, even though it may not conform to the ideals that we strive for. I think what we are seeing is that if we will take slow, positive steps that changes actually can be made. But when we take these large steps that society is not willing to take at this point, the law gets thrown back in our face," said Higgins, an associate with the Baptist Center for Ethics.

The majority said in its opinion Roe should be reaffirmed because, among other reasons, it had not proven unworkable, women had ordered their lives the last two decades around the freedom to have abortions and the country would lose confidence in the court if it struck down the '73 decision.

Justices Harry Blackmun and John Paul Stevens joined O'Connor, Kennedy and Souter in supporting Roe. The same five also struck down the Pennsylvania law's spousal notification provision.

O'Connor, Kennedy and Souter, however, joined Chief Justice William Rehnquist and justices Byron White, Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas in upholding the other restrictions. Those provisions include parental consent for minors, with a judicial bypass procedure; information about abortion and fetal development for the woman; and reporting requirements for abortion providers. Also banned were abortions after 24 weeks and sex-selection abortions.

While Land said he was pleased with the court's support of these restrictions, he was "perplexed" by its rejection of spousal notification.

"This is an anti-marriage, anti-family decision, not to mention blatantly anti-male," Land said. "It is a mystery to me how justices, all but one of whom are married, can fail to understand how destructive this ruling is to the marriage relationship. It denigrates spousal and paternal responsibilities."

Whitehead said, "At least 73 percent of Americans believe that it is common sense to require a wife to at least inform her husband before having an abortion. The Pennsylvania law didn't require the husband to consent, just to be given notice.

"Under state laws, a wife can't even sell a used car owned with her husband without getting his signed consent," Whitehead said. "Surely state laws should be able to ask a wife to inform her husband before she takes the life of a child they co-generated."

Higgins said of spousal notification, "For me, that is a hard one to call. There are good arguments for requiring spousal notification. You know, the husband is the father of the child and should have a major role to play in any kind of decision in the unborn child's health and future. At the same time, there are some marriage relationships that are so dysfunctional it makes it very difficult to have open lines of communication" between the husband and wife.

Pro-choice leaders, meanwhile, portrayed the decision as a devastating loss for their side.

"Don't be fooled by the court's smoke screen," said Kate Michelman, president of the National Abortion Rights Action League. "George Bush's court has left Roe v. Wade an empty shell that is one Justice Thomas away from being destroyed. This decision is George Bush's triumph and America's tragedy."

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NOTE TO EDITORS: Hong Kong-based Asia correspondent Michael Chute and photographer Don Rutledge visited China to assess the work of Southern Baptist teachers there. Chute filed the following stories.

Baptist teacher's China song:
'Every day I love her more'

By Michael Chute

Baptist Press
7/13/92

HONG KONG (BP)--In the rural town of Meixian, China, Erin Thomas teaches her students a new song.

To the tune of "Every Day with Jesus," singing fills the halls of Jia Ying University: "Every day in China is sweeter than the day before. Every day in China I love her more and more. Striving hard to serve her, helping her to bless the world. Every day in China is sweeter than the day before."

Thomas, of Ponca City, Okla., lives what she sings. Nearly two years ago the Southern Baptist teacher crawled through a hole in the smoldering fuselage of a crashed plane strewn across the runway of a Chinese airport. A bungled hijacking attempt brought down the plane.

That October day in 1990, Thomas couldn't find her fellow passenger and teacher, Mary Anna Gilbert of Alabama. Gilbert, who died in the crash, sacrificed her young life for the land and people she came to serve. But after treatment for burns and a broken leg, Thomas returned last year to teach English at the southern China university.

Her song has become the theme for Southern Baptist teachers in classrooms across China. Hearing the words for the first time, many ask what Thomas loves most about China. Her answer is always the same: the people.

When Southern Baptists reflect on China, many now think of 1.1 billion people -- plus 46. The billion represents the Chinese masses. Most have never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. The 46 are Southern Baptist English teachers and language students in China sponsored by Cooperative Services International, Southern Baptists' humanitarian aid organization.

A mere 46 people can't possibly reach a billion people for Jesus Christ. But the teachers do have regular contact with about 6,000 university students each week. Students are the group most responsive to the gospel in China. Most have never met a Christian before. But observing the Cooperative Services International workers, many express interest in Christianity. Nearly all grow to understand what it means to be a Christian.

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Since its China work began in the mid-'80s, Cooperative Services International has located more than 300 Southern Baptist teachers and students in China. Only seven have been career-type personnel. The rest are long-term volunteers, two-year workers or "tentmakers" -- people who spread their faith while using their professional skills abroad. Most serve two-year stints, but many have stayed a third year.

More than 100 other volunteers have worked in various short-term educational or medical assignments in China, including summer English seminars, nursing workshops and other medical projects.

The Southern Baptists may never know the impact of their work in China, but these illustrations shed some light:

-- A Chinese student of teacher Connie Franke of Louisville, Ky., heard she did something before eating each meal and wanted to know what it was. Franke's explanation of prayer led to other questions about God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Several students gathered around to listen to her explanations.

-- Joe and Earlene Strother of Ruston, La., were discouraged when they left China following a one-year stint. They didn't know one person who had become a Christian through their work. That was three years ago. The Strothers continued contact with more than 40 of their Chinese students by mail. One-fourth of them are now Christians.

-- Chinese school administrators added a course to Grady Lackey's teaching load called "The Bible as Literature." That gave the Lubbock, Texas, native opportunities to explain principles of the Christian faith. His students asked so many questions it was often difficult for him to complete lectures.

-- Daphne Ayllon of Belleville, Ill., had openings to share her faith -- many at inopportune times. One young man asked her before class if she were a Christian. Other students heard her affirm she was. After class, the discussion continued. The man told Ayllon he too was a Christian. Another student asked for a Bible but, concerned about peer pressure, wanted her to wrap it in plain paper.

Most Cooperative Services International workers initially question the effectiveness of a "lifestyle" approach to communicating the gospel. Many aren't sure they will make a difference at all. But as one young Chinese woman told a Southern Baptist teacher: "I knew you were a Christian that first day (in class). I saw it in your eyes."

After a stint in China, every Southern Baptist worker talks about the many opportunities to share faith. They answer countless questions, privately and in small groups: what they believe, why they believe it, how they worship God, how they pray, how to live a Christian life in Chinese society. Every week Southern Baptist teachers and students worship in Chinese churches and have fellowship with Chinese Christians.

All these activities are legal in China. Answering questions about Christianity has never been illegal. Covering appropriate Christian material in class also falls within regulations. Christians can attend church and point out local churches to non-believers.

The Southern Baptist workers seek activities -- within the spirit and the letter of the law -- to involve Christians in specific programs. They work in concert with the recognized, public Christian community.

"Cooperative Services International colors within the lines," said Jack Shelby, the organization's Hong Kong-based administrator. "We respect the laws and regulations of China and are committed to working within them. So we're careful but not scared. We're friends of China who want to express that friendship through service."

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"I won't break the laws of the country," added Sue Todd of Windsor, N.C. "We're guests here and we must respect their laws. It would be un-Christian not to, because we would not be setting a good example. But all CSI teachers are a witness -- a lifestyle witness through their work and concern We live what we believe. As a teacher, be the best teacher you can, faithful and dependable to your assignment and to God."

The teaching program allows Southern Baptists to serve China and the church from a humanitarian, Christian perspective. Shelby instructs CSI personnel to serve Christ, first by being the most effective teachers and students they can be. The "lifestyle" witness begins there and branches out.

That approach has won many friends in China over the past five years. Those friends, in turn, have opened many opportunities for Southern Baptists in China.

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

China service
openings abound

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Cooperative Services International isn't looking for a few good people for work in China; it's looking for a lot.

The Southern Baptist aid agency has requested more than 100 teachers and language students for China this fall. Qualified people may serve in a number of capacities:

-- Summer teams. CSI is sending 55 volunteers for a six-week term this summer in what has become an annual event. Volunteer teams will lead training courses for English teachers from Chinese middle schools and universities.

-- Longer-term volunteers. Southern Baptists interested in working in China as long-term volunteers -- six months to three years -- may contact Glenn Prescott, International Service Corps associate director, or Pat Parrish, CSI administrative assistant, at (804) 254-9418.

-- Career personnel. CSI also has openings for people who want to work in China longer than three years. CSI's Richmond office at (804) 353-0151 has details.

CSI seeks experienced elementary, junior and senior high school teachers, university English teachers or others with degrees in English, English as a second language or English literature.

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Katie Neal: 'This eye
doesn't cry anymore'

By Michael Chute

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7/13/92

NANJING, China (BP)--Five years ago Katie Neal was a walking time bomb.

A brain tumor grew off her hearing nerve, attaching itself to facial nerves too. Doctors said she would die; it was just a matter of time. At 25 years old, she had to plan her own funeral. The plans she made as a Tulsa, Okla., teen-ager to go to China apparently would die with her.

But she didn't die and neither did her China dream.

It took Neal 12 years -- and a near-death experience -- but today she teaches at China Pharmaceutical University in Nanjing, China. She arrived there last year, the only American teacher at the school, through the auspices of Cooperative Services International, the Southern Baptist aid organization.

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Sitting with friends around a table in Nanjing's YMCA, she sings "Amazing Grace." Few people in the room know just how "sweet the sound" is to Katie Neal. They don't realize what this 31-year-old has been through. All they can see and hear are a warm smile and a beautiful singing voice.

"I'm healthy and attribute it all to God giving me everything, even the use of my facial muscles," Neal says. "There were just two things I asked the Lord to give back to me. One was my singing voice because I missed singing. I told God I'd always use it to glorify him. The other was to have my left eye blink again. If the eye doesn't blink, it dries out. I had to use salve, which meant I couldn't see."

She's deaf in her left ear. The left side of her face has slight paralysis. She can't lift her left eyebrow and that eye "still doesn't cry," she says. But tears fill the eyes of many people who hear her story.

When she was stricken with the tumor, surgeons called it inoperable but recommended surgery anyway. They gave her even odds for dying on the operating table. If she survived she probably would spend the rest of her life in a "vegetable" state.

The doctors, Neal's family and her friends counted on one thing: She's a fighter.

She came out of surgery a mess. She couldn't walk or talk or smile. Movements she retained were extremely slow. Through weeks of agonizing therapy, Neal learned to walk all over again. She learned to talk again after the life-support tube stuck down her throat had bruised the vocal cords. Her smile came back after tumor-damaged nerves on the left side of her face initially rendered it "cockeyed."

Basically, Katie Neal learned to live again. She fought back. Within four months the special education teacher returned to work in Ontario, Calif. Later she visited Tulsa to see family and friends. She attended a service at Trinity Baptist Church in Norman, Okla., and spoke. If she had to do it all over again she would because God glorified himself through her ordeal, Neal told the congregation.

Back in California the next week, Neal went for a routine post-operative checkup. Her brain was hemorrhaging; blood seeped out the escape-route hole left in her skull. Otherwise, pressure on the brain likely would have killed her. She needed more surgery to stop the bleeding.

It wasn't as serious as the first operation but it was still brain surgery in the same delicate region. She went through therapy a second time, returning to work eight weeks later. The doctor scheduled her next checkup in three years.

Today Neal is a walking miracle. Few people survive this type of surgery. Fewer still rehabilitate themselves like Neal and live such a productive life. She tells everyone who will listen that her life's a testimony to God. She still closes her Christian testimony with the same pledge: If she had to do it all over, she would.

Neal's first experience in China came two years ago through Cooperative Services International's summer linguistics program. She set a goal when she moved to California that she'd be in China within five years. Her work that summer marked the fifth year and confirmed her future was in China. Returning to the United States, she made plans for a longer commitment.

"There's no doubt I'm supposed to be here," Neal says. "Even when I walked through those first days of culture shock, I constantly was assured of God's purpose in me being here. I knew I couldn't leave because he called me."

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"Every major step of my life I've always received promises in Scripture, what I call 'life verses.' The one for China is Isaiah 42:6-7: '... I will hold you by the hand and watch over you, and I will appoint you ... as a light to the nations, to open blind eyes, to bring out ... those who dwell in darkness' I really believe he's called me to be a light to this nation."

A few years ago it looked like she wouldn't see China at all. Now Katie Neal says she's beginning to see China through God's eyes.

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

Charlie Wilson:
China 'ambassador'

By Michael Chute

Baptist Press
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SHANGHAI, China (BP)--Faint evening light shines through the Chinese passenger train window, highlighting the smile on Charlie Wilson's face.

The smile is there every time this Thomasville, N.C., native travels in China. His love affair with the country goes back nearly 10 years, when he first went there.

"Cha Li," as Chinese friends call him, moves around China as easily as he does his Hong Kong apartment -- perhaps easier, since his sparse flat has become an unofficial guest house for China travelers. This day he's on a train from Nanjing to Shanghai. Three days later he will board a plane to Shandong. Next week a night boat to Guangzhou awaits him.

As educational resources coordinator for Cooperative Services International, the Southern Baptist aid organization, Wilson spends a lot of time on Chinese university campuses. A self-styled "ambassador" building relationships with administrators and faculty, he helps negotiate slots for Southern Baptist teachers who come to China through the agency.

Wilson also offers logistical support for the teachers, whether it's teaching materials or personal supplies like warmer clothes or hard-to-get food. He often sleeps in dormitory rooms, eating cafeteria meals or his favorite "jiaozi" (steamed dumplings) in food stalls around the campuses.

For this 40-year-old bachelor, home is wherever he happens to touch down.

Wilson goes to any lengths to meet needs. He considers it all -- big tasks and mundane items -- part of his job. But Wilson didn't start out to do this job. He backed into it.

"My uncle forced me to come," he says of his first visit to China. "Uncle Joe (Kennedy) was one of the first Westerners into China after it opened back up in 1979. He kept trying to get me to come and finally just bought me a ticket and said I was going. I thought, 'If he's crazy enough to spend the money on a ticket, I'm crazy enough to take it.'"

That was December 1982, when Wilson took Christmas break away from study at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., to travel to China. A Shanghai winter for a North Carolina boy can be cold. But he saw much more of China during that three-week stay -- exotic and mystical places. He couldn't get it out of his mind and heart once he resumed seminary classes.

Wilson couldn't stay away long. The next summer he was back in China, among the first group of foreigners to attend lectures at Union Theological Seminary in Nanjing. The school had reopened two years earlier after communist radicals closed it during the Cultural Revolution. Kennedy's U.S.-China Educational Foundation arranged the lectures.

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During that summer Wilson began to understand what Chinese Christians attempt to do through the seminary and churches. Chinese ways intrigued him. He admired the Christians' tendency to put aside differences to work together, their mutual respect in matters of faith impressed him. He observed their profound need to be a presence for God in Chinese society.

"They don't have the freedom or disposition to send up satellites to broadcast these things," Wilson says. "Just through relationships, they quietly do things like they did in the Bible -- a bit of yeast in the lump quietly working until the whole lump is leavened. I felt a strong burden for these leaders who go out and serve God in a Chinese-Marxist context. I saw the challenges facing them, realizing they need prayer and encouragement."

Following that brief encounter, Wilson determined to return to China. Back in the United States, he contacted Southern Baptist agencies to see what plans were under way for working in China. He learned denominational leaders were looking at possibilities but couldn't yet commit personnel.

In a typical Wilson analogy, he reminded friends that people build a bridge from both sides of the river. Southern Baptists weren't yet ready to send workers to help China but he was going to begin work on the "bridge" from the Chinese side of the "river." How? By making friends, learning Chinese language and customs, developing relationships.

So Wilson prolonged his education. He graduated from seminary and entered China in February 1985 sponsored by Southern Baptists as a language student at Nanjing University. He served the seminary in Nanjing as an English-language resource person. He became the first foreigner to teach at Nanjing's YMCA when it reopened; communists had closed it 20 years earlier.

In August 1986 Wilson left his formal language study to teach English at Nanjing's Jiangsu Academy of Agricultural Science. That year Chinese Christians formed the Amity Foundation, headquartered at the seminary. As part of its work, the foundation recruits English teachers from abroad for Chinese universities to help the country's development efforts. Southern Baptist teachers weren't among the first Amity group sent to China, but Wilson helped the foundation orient those teachers.

Wilson helped the first Amity group settle into a hotel. A teacher with the group, from another Christian agency, discovered he is Southern Baptist. She asked him what "Southern Baptists" were doing there.

"I'm carrying your bags," Wilson told her. "If I can serve those who serve China, that's all I ask."

Now he's doing just that -- carrying the resource load for Southern Baptists who serve China.

Wilson moved to Hong Kong three years ago to help Southern Baptist teachers in China from a base in Cooperative Services International's Hong Kong office. He can look at China from both perspectives -- student and teacher -- since he's had experience as both.

"I cherish the China experience, but don't think I'm selfish with it," Wilson says. "I'd gladly share it with anybody who would come to help. There's always room for more people -- always more work to be done. There are tempting, exciting possibilities in China. We need more help out here."

After almost a decade of involvement in China, Wilson maintains he's just a learner. But Chinese know him as a trusted friend, confidant and tireless helper. They say he learned quickly.

Tattered coat begins
deep China friendship

By Michael Chute

NANJING, China (BP)--Charles came to Sue Todd's apartment in China wearing a tattered peasant's coat.

The Chinese student wanted to go to church but he hoped the Southern Baptist teacher from Windsor, N.C., wouldn't be embarrassed to be seen with him dressed like that. Todd told him God doesn't care what people wear to church; he's more concerned about what's on the inside.

But Todd pulled a blazer out of her closet. She told Charles her son had a blazer, which was true. She didn't tell him this particular blazer belonged to her.

"He was so proud," Todd recalls. "He pressed. He stretched. He'd never had one before."

Later she bought material and had a suit made for him. He had never had a decent pair of shoes either, so she bought him a pair.

The silver-haired Todd, 72, is in her third year in China where she teaches English at Southeast China University in Nanjing. The school's foreign language department named her its "outstanding teacher" two years in a row.

But "Mama Sue" is even more popular among her Chinese students for her willingness to open her small apartment -- and her heart -- to them.

"I take time to talk with anyone who comes to my room," Todd says. "The students need this. They need a sounding board with someone who cares. They tell me their problems, their goals . . . It really keeps me busy. But that's exactly why I came to China. I feel a sense of urgency because of my age. I don't know how long I can stay."

Like other Southern Baptist teachers in China, Todd shares her faith in Jesus Christ within the restrictions placed on her in China.

She developed a strong friendship with Charles, the young Chinese student, and learned more about his family life on a farm and what motivated his drive to succeed.

His mother had been disfigured, severely burned in a fire when she was 9 months old. His 16-year-old sister and 14-year-old brother had never attended school. His family didn't have the money to pay the small fee children must pay to attend village schools. The sister made 35 cents a day picking tea leaves to help the family.

The family's hope rested on Charles. He walked two hours to primary school. He went away to secondary school. Now he was a student at Southeast China University. He wanted a good job to "fix" his mother's face and send his brother and sister to school. He also wanted to tell his village about God.

"Chinese never ask for handouts," Todd explains. "He was just telling me this. We're friends and he needed to tell someone. He just wanted me to understand."

But Todd wanted to help. She paid tuition costs for Charles' brother and sister to go to school. He invited her to visit his family's home. It took 15 hours by boat, four hours by bus and a two-mile walk to reach his house.

The scene shocked Todd. The house had no floor, only dirt. Rats scurried everywhere. Charles' mother eked out a bare existence in the rice paddies. But his brother and sister had begun school the previous month. Already his sister had learned to write numbers from 1 to 10. She was so proud and wanted Todd to watch her.

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When Todd and Charles left a few days later, his mother offered the American the best gift she had: one of her five chickens. She told the woman she couldn't take a chicken because of the long distance back to Nanjing. So the woman filled a pillowcase with rice and gave it to Todd.

After two more school terms, Charles feels he can begin paying the school fees for his brother and sister.

He still meets Todd at church whenever he stays in Nanjing over the weekend. She's more than a teacher; she's a friend.

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

Course to help people combat
hopelessness, worthlessness

By Linda Lawson

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7/13/92

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Too many people in today's society -- Christians and non-Christians alike -- struggle with intense feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness.

They don't like themselves. They are quick to condemn others. They feel the only sources for feelings of worth are their own performance and the opinions of others.

To come to a place where they can like and accept themselves, Christians need to understand and integrate into their lives four biblical doctrines, Pat Springle, senior vice president for resources of Rapha Inc. told participants in a session, "Search for Significance," during the July 4-10 Discipleship Training Leadership Conference. Rapha, based in Houston, operates in-patient psychiatric and substance abuse treatment centers in 25 hospitals throughout the country.

Search for Significance also is the title of a new 12-week Lay Institute for Equipping course being released this summer by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's discipleship training department in cooperation with Rapha. The course is based on a best-selling book, "The Search for Significance" by Robert McGee, president and founder of Rapha.

"Search for Significance is foundational, entry-level material for churches to get involved in need-oriented small groups," Springle said.

Through the course, "people who have been getting their sense of self-worth from their performance come to see that. They are then able to internalize the truths of the Scriptures. They knew the truth of God's love and significance but it didn't penetrate where they live," he said.

The four doctrines which form the basis of the course counteract four lies people often come to believe, Springle said.

The doctrine of propitiation or knowledge that each person is deeply loved by God contrasts with the lie many people believe, that those who fail are unworthy of love and deserve to be blamed and condemned.

"We think we must be the agents of retribution on ourselves and others," Springle said. "God doesn't delegate the taking of vengeance."

People who dislike themselves often call themselves names, said Springle, who as a child of an alcoholic father has struggled with the problem himself.

"My name is stupid fool," he said. "We also punish ourselves through introspection. Reflection is good. The goal is to see what is true. The goal of introspection is to claw and condemn."

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The doctrine of justification which teaches that individuals are completely forgiven and fully pleasing to God stands in contrast to the idea that one must meet certain standards to feel good about him/herself.

"Some of us are afraid to fail. Some of us are afraid to succeed. We're caught in a vise. It's a feeling of hopelessness," Springle said.

The doctrine of reconciliation, that one is fully accepted by God, counteracts the common lie that people must be approved by certain others to feel good about themselves, he said.

People who don't experience acceptance in their families as children develop an unhealthy craving. They may then try to get the need for parental acceptance met from other people.

"When we demand that people meet our needs, we are setting them up for failure and ourselves for disappointment," Springle said.

Finally, the doctrine of regeneration, that people are absolutely complete in Christ, combats the lie that people cannot change and are, therefore, hopeless, he said.

Springle, who has made progress in his own journey to recovery, said: "I'm so thankful where the Lord has brought me. I still have a long way to go."

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Blended family called
unique church challenge

By Linda Lawson

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GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--By the end of the 1990s the "blended family" -- husband and his children from a previous marriage, wife and her children from a previous marriage and perhaps one or more children from their union -- may be more typical numerically than any other type of family in the United States.

Blended families represent only one of many family-related issues posing challenges for ministry to Southern Baptist churches in the remaining years of the 20th century, according to Dixie Ruth Crase, professor of child development at Memphis State University in Memphis, Tenn.

Crase, a Southern Baptist, led a session on family change in America during the July 4-10 Discipleship Training Leadership Conference at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center.

Churches need to consider ways to help couples contemplating remarriage to anticipate problems, especially those related to the children, Crase said.

"Don't expect instant love between stepparents and stepchildren or stepsiblings. Toleration is often the scenario," she said.

Parenting, discipline and sexuality may be sources of greater concern in a blended family, Crase said.

It is not unusual for a child to challenge the stepparent with, "You are not my father (or mother). I don't have to do what you want me to do." When this happens, Crase said, the "biological parent must support and/or reinforce limits."

In problem situations, a blended family lacks the longstanding emotional ties to get through the situation at hand. A traditional family, on the other hand, "can look back at other situations and see how problems were worked out," Crase said.

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In extended family gatherings, "helping people know who is related to whom can present a challenge," she said.

Regarding sexuality, Crase said one clinic specializing in incest problems reported 50 percent of its clients were stepfathers and stepdaughters.

Also, "adolescent stepsiblings (boys and girls) should not be left unattended," she said.

In another matter, quality child care will continue to be a critical issue for families.

"Child care can be looked at in terms of cost, convenience and quality," Crase said. "Ideally, quality should come first. Realistically, many first consider cost and whether it's on the way to work."

Latchkey children of single parents and dual-career marriages will continue to be an issue of concern and churches should consider innovative ways to minister before and after school, she said.

While perhaps only 10 percent of today's families fit the mold of the so-called traditional family -- mother who stays at home, father who is the sole breadwinner and children -- the percentage will continue to drop, Crase predicted.

Also, more couples will delay marriage and childbearing, more children will live in single-parent and dual-carer families, more children will experience the divorce of their parents and more parents will experience role conflicts, she said.

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Also available upon request:

-- First-person reflection by Alabama pastor Barry Howard on the death of Iraq-based Southern Baptist volunteer Chickie Hood.
