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Daughter's blossoming faith
beckoned mom, dad, brother By Dianne Shaw Casolaro

Baptist Press
4/25/94

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--The anxiety in the Piscitello home was almost unbearable.

Every time something bad would happen, Vince Piscitello, the husband and father, would "go nuts," explains his son, 13-year-old Brian. His daughter, Gina, 15, would talk to her mother, Donna, about everyday happenings at school and beg her not to tell Vince for fear he would lose his temper. Gradually, Gina begin to drift away from her father.

Ironically, it was Gina who helped bring that relationship full circle when she became a Christian last year. Through the change in her life, the entire family committed their lives to Christ and were baptized last year. Gina was baptized in April, her parents in August and her brother in November.

Now, the Piscitello home is a much calmer, peaceful place, one they had always dreamed of but weren't quite sure how to obtain.

Like many fathers, Vince was protective of his children, particularly because the couple once was told they would never be able to conceive. Vince felt he had to be in total control of his household. As Gina began to approach dating age, he knew she was about to enter a world he couldn't fully control. "I was loosing control," Vince said, and as a result, he admitted "OK, I need help."

He didn't recognize that silent plea as a prayer, nor was he looking for the answer in church. However, he says he now sees God answered that prayer a year and a half ago when the family was invited to a Christmas Eve service by Gina's school teacher.

Gina said she especially enjoyed the service at the Church at Brook Hills, a Southern Baptist congregation in the Birmingham, Ala., suburb a few miles from their home. She and her father continued to attend worship and Bible studies, with Gina much more interested spiritually than Vince.

"Part of my going was because I knew this was a good place for Gina," Vince said. "I was almost like a spectator, when it dawned on me 'You answered my prayer.' There was no way this was an accident. I began seeing God in everything. This wasn't fate. I knew for sure he was for real."

The parents went from wanting to see the children involved with "good" people to "a direct line to the Lord," Vince said. They learned of a "relationship" versus "fearing God," but they credit Gina with the biggest impact in their decision. "She led us," Vince said of his daughter.

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Donna agrees. "She ministered to us. It's amazing to see a child minister to parents. It should have been the other way."

Gina was excited about the Scripture she was learning, shared it and encouraged her family to become more involved in the church.

The turning point in Donna's relationship with the Lord was after Gina attended camp at Judson College last summer. Donna saw "God was all over her. I just said, 'Praise the Lord.'"

Both Donna and Vince grew up as Roman Catholics, but drifted away as adults. They attended churches of various denominations, all of which played into their skepticism about "organized religion."

"I was taught to fear God," Donna said. "I wanted to try something. But I didn't know where to look." She kept thinking, however, "there has to be something out there."

The children attended Sunday school and knew Jesus died on the cross, but not really why, Gina said. For Brian, church was boring and unattractive.

Despite not attending a church regularly, the parents did read Bible stories to the children and maintained moral values. Still, they couldn't understand why everything wasn't going as they wanted.

"I never realized why we needed to go to church until I started seeing other Christians," Vince said. "We need to be with others. If we don't, it seems to fall apart on our own."

They found in their church a contemporary worship style, biblical, practical messages, and small-group Bible studies, including the Baptist Sunday School Board study, "Experiencing God," which they credit with supporting their spiritual growth. They also have found a family.

Previously, they understood family as only relatives who lived several hundred miles away, but when Donna was diagnosed with a tumor late last year, she realized how special her new "family" was. Church members poured out their love and prayers on the Piscitilloes, and pastor Rick Ousley stopped in the middle of a worship service to pray for Donna. "That they would stop and pray really strengthened me," Donna said. (The tumor was removed and she has recovered completely.)

The Piscitilloes look for that family elsewhere too. While visiting relatives in Cincinnati at Christmas, they made special effort to seek out a Southern Baptist church. The only one they found listed in the telephone book was First Baptist Church of Anderson Hills in the Cherry Grove area of the city.

Though the church is a small mission, Vince said it was "nice to see how they are trying to love the Lord in the same way."

Loving the Lord is something the Piscitilloes have done with ease though not without sacrifices. Donna's father asked her from his deathbed not to leave her childhood church, but she said she has never regretted that decision.

For Vince, the sacrifice was giving up control of his life and family. But, that has been a sacrifice with the side effect of peace. "I felt finally God loves (my children) more than I do."

Perhaps the greatest sacrifice was for Gina. She had heard church leaders say that it's easier for friends to pull you down than for you to pull them up. She didn't believe them and continued to maintain close relationships with non-Christians. One friend in particular, with whom she had been friends since second grade, "had more effect on me than I had on her," Gina said. "I prayed about it and felt God wanted me to pull away." She has let go of that friend.

Regardless of such sacrifices, the family is eternally thankful for their relationship with Christ and for the difference he has made in their home.

No longer does Donna go to bed wondering what someone would say at her funeral if she died in her sleep. No longer does Vince feel he has to have complete control that he only has a few years left with his children.

"I wish I'd had this 10 to 20 years ago," he said. "All these years I've suffered thinking I had to control. It is such a peace in knowing the Lord, in knowing we will see the kids again ... in being bonded for eternity."

Graham, Colson praise Nixon
for foreign policy, family life By Tom Strode

WASHINGTON (BP)--Evangelical Christian leaders who knew President Richard M. Nixon well praised him upon his death April 22.

Nixon, 81, died in a New York City hospital after suffering a stroke. His funeral will be April 27 in Yorba Linda, Calif. Billy Graham, the well-known evangelist and longtime Nixon friend, will officiate.

Nixon probably is most identified with the Watergate scandal, which led to his resignation from office in 1974 under the threat of impeachment. In statements released through their ministries, Graham and Prison Fellowship Chairman Charles Colson, who served as Nixon's White House special counsel for three and a half years, did not comment directly on Watergate but recalled his foreign policy accomplishments and his relationship with his family.

"I believe history will be generous toward him," said Graham, who described Nixon as a close friend for 44 years. "He will always be remembered for his boldness in ushering in a whole new era of history by opening the door of China. In recent years, he had become America's elder statesman, for he had no peer in the area of foreign affairs. Even in my own work I turned to him frequently for advice, especially about my trips to Eastern Europe, China and, more recently, North Korea."

Colson, who said he saw Nixon "at his finest and his worst," commented, "In the longer perspective of history, Watergate notwithstanding, Richard Nixon will be remembered as one of the truly great leaders of this century."

"His foreign policy built a bridge across the Pacific, opening relations with one quarter of the world's population, but even more important, it decisively split the communist world, a policy which ultimately brought the Soviet Union and communism to its knees."

In announcing Nixon's death to the country, President Bill Clinton also praised his foreign policy work.

"We face today a world of increasing uncertainty and difficult challenges, but it is a world of great opportunity, in no small part because of the vision of Richard Nixon during a particularly difficult period of the Cold War," Clinton said. "He understood the threat of communism, but he also had the wisdom to know when it was time to reach out to the Soviet Union and to China."

He sought Nixon's advice on foreign policy and they spoke frequently by telephone, said Clinton, who, as a student, opposed the president's Vietnam War policies.

Both Graham and Colson were affected by Watergate, the 1972 break-in at Democratic National Committee headquarters which the Nixon White House unsuccessfully sought to cover up. Graham, who defended Nixon during the Watergate controversy, expressed shock when audio tapes revealed the president's profane language. Colson became a Christian, served time in prison as a result of Watergate and founded an international prison ministry.

"He was a very private person, but beneath the surface I found him to be a warm and compassionate individual, quite different from the popular caricatures of him," Graham said. "... I have never known anyone who was more devoted to his wife or his children and their families."

"He was a man of genuine faith, rooted simply in the teachings and prayers of his devout Quaker mother. Often he had me pray with him and read the Bible to him when we would visit."

Colson said, "Though he consciously worked to show no emotion, never wearing his feelings on his sleeve, as he put it, he was devoted to his wife and daughters. It was a close and devoted family which, from my perspective at least, is the most significant reflection on any individual's character."

Nixon's wife, Pat, died in June 1993. He is survived by two daughters, Tricia Cox and Julie Eisenhower, and four grandchildren.

**Swindoll unswervingly upbeat
in the midst of transitions**

By Linda Lawson

NASHVILLE (BP)--At 59, Chuck Swindoll is in transition.

He completed 23 years of service as senior pastor of First Evangelical Free Church in Fullerton, Calif., in mid-April and will become president of Dallas Theological Seminary July 1.

He is moving his office from the church to the headquarters of his international radio ministry, Insight for Living, in Fullerton. He is building a home in Dallas.

But he also is planning to move his radio ministry and permanent residence to the greater Nashville area in about two years, continuing to serve as seminary president while starting an independent, nondenominational church in Williamson County, south of Nashville.

Swindoll, a high school classmate and revival team member with James T. Draper Jr., now president of the Baptist Sunday School Board, spoke at the annual Spiritual Emphasis Days services at the board, April 20-22. The same week, his 33rd book, "Active Spirituality: A Non-Devotional Guide," was released.

Describing his plans, Swindoll said he believes the seminary "will do better with a leader who is not a full-time resident of Dallas. I think objectivity comes by keeping some distance."

Also, he said, he likes the smaller size of Nashville.

"We want to live in an area that is a little slower paced, a little easier lifestyle and, admittedly, less expensive. We love the high value placed on family," he said.

The location of Nashville -- 50 percent of the U.S. population lives within a 600-mile radius -- also was a drawing card, he said.

When he starts a church, Swindoll envisions using Dallas seminary students as interns, giving them practical experience in ministry.

He believes his pastoral career was one reason the seminary, his alma mater, turned to him to be its president.

"I think the school will benefit from a pastor's heart at the top position. It's easy for a school to become an academic, cloistered setting.

"Also, at the heart of my life now is the desire to train men and women for ministry and to model ministry. I don't think there's a better place to do that than the place where we train the preachers of tomorrow," Swindoll said.

As he relates to ministers and those planning for ministry, Swindoll listed four common spiritual needs, including home and family pressures and coming to grips with the "relevance of Scripture to the practical things of life."

Also, he cited problems in relationships. "I find there is a breakdown in relating to each other -- solving conflicts, forgiving one another." Like laypeople, Swindoll said ministers are seeking a sense of direction in their lives.

Despite the problems in today's society, Swindoll said he remains optimistic about opportunities for reaching out to people with the gospel.

"I don't think we could be at a better moment," he said. "Take technology. A person can speak and not only be heard but seen around the world."

Also, he said he finds people hungry for truth and open to the gospel. "I'm not a doomsdayer. I don't think we've come anywhere near the end of opportunity. In fact, it's all around us," Swindoll said.

Positive attitude -- whether about opportunities for spreading the gospel or living each day to the fullest -- is at the heart of Swindoll's sermons and writings. He links Bible truth to practical issues of life.

His topics to board employees were grace, coping with worry and laughter.

"I love to take the Bible and help people see how up-to-date, how relevant its truths are," Swindoll said. "The Bible really represents absolute truth that's reliable and without error."

After preaching a sermon in the mid-1970s, "For Those Who Hurt," Swindoll was encouraged by a church member to put the message into a book.

While Swindoll's only writing experience was a journal he had kept as a Marine, along with the letters he had written, he pursued the idea and his first book was published in 1977. With the release of his 33rd book, the previous 32 are still in print.

"I have never taken a course in writing," he said, laughing. Becoming a writer "is the most homemade story you could ever believe. I live my life surprised."

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

Swindoll to educators: 'know who you are ... be who you are' By Charles Willis

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NASHVILLE (BP)--With more than 30 years of pastoral ministry behind him, Chuck Swindoll told approximately 50 Christian educators from among the largest Southern Baptist churches in the nation he hopes the next phase of his life can be devoted to training others for ministry.

Speaking April 22 to participants in a Megachurch Educators Conference at the Baptist Sunday School Board, Swindoll, who will become president of Dallas Theological Seminary July 1, outlined some of his personal principles for ministry.

Basic to personal happiness in ministry, he said, are "Know who you are; like who you are; and be who you are. These are original to me," he said, adding he found satisfaction in the 23 years he was pastor of First Evangelical Free Church of Fullerton, Calif., in "feeling the freedom to be, to try, to risk, to invest and to change."

Swindoll said while he never placed an emphasis on numerical goals, he led the church to a membership of 6,000 persons requiring five services on Sundays for four years prior to a move to a larger facility.

"Our policy has been open arms rather than folded arms," he reflected.

Among other principles he cited, are:

- Study the Bible.
- Treat people with dignity and respect.
- Stand with broken people.
- Stand against wrong.
- Be honest.
- Have a small group that knows the innards of your life.
- Have a good relationship at home with your spouse and children.
- Keep your promises.
- Be punctual.
- Answer your mail and telephone calls.
- Do not hold grudges.
- Read widely, keeping up in the literature of your work.
- Pay attention to relationships. "The ministry has no place for people who love their books, or the principles of their work, more than they love people."
- Read a book or two each year on leadership and on servanthood. "See yourself not as one who deserves penthouse treatment but as a servant."
- Maintain the right priorities that are essential for ministry and personal survival. "I often say no to good things, wonderful things, to keep my priorities."
- Take criticism. "Everyone who gets a big job done will get shot at. Learn from it. How you take it is dependent on relationships. I've always said, where there's light, there's bugs.' The real critics of your life are few, but they are the ones who know you best."

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-- Desire to reach people more than having personal success.

Swindoll said the issue of time to accomplish goals is "constant. I can't get all things done in a day that I want done," he admitted. "My 'in' box will never be empty. I will never accomplish all I want to do in my life.

"But I make sure there is time for relationships. I have required my staff to take their day off," he said. "That means I have to model that. I have to take my day off. You have to do the things that you think are, for you, essential.

The Megachurch Educators Conference was sponsored by the Baptist Sunday School Board's church leadership department.

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Modern-day Nehemiah restoring
seminary's historic rock wall

By Dwayne Hastings

Baptist Press
4/25/94

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--Most of the work he does by hand. His tools -- a small trowel, a hammer, chisel and brush -- are no more sophisticated than one would find being used by artisans a hundred years ago.

"I came here to get an M.Div.," said Doug Buttram, who has spent more than three years rebuilding the rock wall surrounding Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary's Wake Forest, N.C., campus. Although he

admitted he has not been "a real good estimator of completion," Buttram said he expects soon to complete the wall, which ranges in height from two to four feet.

When he came to Southeastern as a student, Buttram had no idea he would ever do this type of work: "I'd never done rock work, yet I became convinced that this was my calling. The school is part of it, but this is something God wanted me to do because of what it means to other people and myself."

Buttram's quest to complete the wall began in December 1990 when some minor repairs revealed serious trouble with the rampart. "Ivy and junipers had totally taken over," he recalled. "When we began to pull those out, a large portion of the wall just collapsed. Then it was determined the entire wall would be rebuilt."

Buttram said, "There was this excitement when I began, lots of community interest, but when I got into the middle of it, it's day after day, week after week, month after month, real hard work.

"Halfway through I felt absolutely abandoned by God. I was so exhausted and felt like this thing would never end, and that I was insane for ever getting myself into it," Buttram confessed.

Yet he described the job as "drawing me back, pushing me on." This man that some people affectionately refer to as Nehemiah gave up the effort more than once but "I just couldn't keep away from it. I was more miserable after I left than when I was there."

Buttram, who has since had to put his education on hold for financial reasons, explained the wall was started in 1885 by "Doctor Tom" Jeffries, a freed slave from Virginia: "He was brought down to be the janitor and groundskeeper for the (Wake Forest) College. Then the grounds were more pasture land, not manicured as it is now. As he was clearing the land, he picked up the stones he found lying there and stacked them around the wood posts of a fence that used to surround the campus."

The wall became "a community effort of people bringing in rocks and dropping them off." The president of the college asked farmers in the churches where he preached to bring the stones they found while plowing. The wall now stands only for its aesthetic value, but it once was reportedly "horse-high, hog-tight and bull-strong" as professors and administrators pastured their horses and cattle on the school's grounds "as part of their salaries."

This is the first time it has been totally uncovered since the planting of ivy along the wall in 1951.

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"I've had people pull up their cars right on the sidewalk just to tell me how much they thought about the project and how special it was," said Buttram, now an employee of a local landscaping firm.

Many longtime town residents have fond memories of the wall, some having told Buttram "of walking it when they were children." Rumor has it that some members of the old Wake Forest College football team may have used the wall in lieu of a blocking sled and that other students used to see how far they could kick rocks from the top of the wall.

Buttram said he hopes the rebuilding of the wall will also mean something to those within the seminary family.

"God has given me, one of his children, the talent, opportunity and time to do this for my own self-worth and his own glory," Buttram said. "I can't really explain the struggle that was within me to give up classes and do this. I thought I could do both, but it was one or the other. What I really felt that God had for me was this."

What will he do when he finishes the wall? "I don't have a clue," Buttram said. Noting some people have talked to him about building smaller walls for them, Buttram said, "There's a lot of rock out there."

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(BP) photo available upon request from Southeastern Seminary.

**BSSB national consultant named
for special education ministry**

**Baptist Press
4/25/94**

NASHVILLE (BP)--In response to concerns that the visibility of special education ministry would be diminished by recently announced changes at the Baptist Sunday School Board, the position of national special education consultant has been created in the Bible teaching-reaching division's general leadership department, according to Harry Piland, division director.

Gene Nabi, who recently retired as special education consultant, will fill the position on a contract basis, serving as central contact person and coordinator for special education ministry activities. Also, he will represent special education concerns with other BSSB components, Southern Baptist agencies and other national groups.

As recently announced, special education responsibilities also have been assigned to editors and consultants in the preschool-children's, youth-adult and general leadership departments. They will work as a team with Nabi to suggest plans for resources and emphases. Bible teaching resources for all age groups will include help for reaching and teaching persons with special needs and ministering to their families.

"The intent of this change is to clearly state to churches and leaders our intent to give visibility and strong support to special education ministries," Piland said. "We believe this combination of a national consultant and age-group personnel with assigned responsibilities in special education ministry will strengthen both our field service and availability of resources in this area."

Piland said a newly-designed adult special education curriculum will be released in 1995. A quarterly magazine also will be introduced in 1995 to address a broad span of special education issues from a Christian perspective. The magazine will be targeted to parents and other family members, special education leaders and church staff members in Southern Baptist churches and other denominational and Christian groups.

Nabi may be contacted at the BSSB, 127 Ninth Ave. N., Nashville, TN 37234; phone, (615) 251-2477.

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