

January 19, 1973

Letter to Editor Prompts  
"Bible Phone" for Aging

By Robert LaFavre

ATLANTA (BP)--A letter to the editor of Southern Baptists' foreign missions monthly magazine provided the seed for a unique idea to minister to the needs of elderly Christians who are losing their eyesight and can no longer read Christian literature.

Bridging the generation gap, the new program called "Bible Phone" was launched by the campus minister at Georgia State University here.

Dick Houston, a Baptist minister at Georgia State, read in the August, 1972, issue of The Commission magazine a letter to the editor written by 90-year-old Minnie T. Speck of Garland, Tex.

Mrs. Speck had been a subscriber to the foreign mission magazine for 20 years, but was entering her last subscription. Her advanced years and loss of eyesight prompted her action.

Houston realized there are many elderly people with the same problem, and decided to seek a way to help those unable to read because of failing eyesight or other handicaps.

He contacted an Atlanta communications firm seeking a machine that would play lengthy tapes to a telephone caller. He wanted to establish a "call-in" ministry similar to the popular "Dial-A-Prayer," but the tapes would have to be much longer.

He was told no such equipment was available--only equipment with short playback capability. An electronics bug, Houston decided to try to build his own equipment.

With long hours of work late at night, he designed and built a system that will play 20 minutes in response to a telephone call.

With the help of six Georgia Baptist Student Union members, the "Bible Phone" as they called it was launched in January.

Now, 24 hours a day, callers to (404) 659-3360 in Atlanta may receive up to 20 minutes of recorded material from a variety of sources.

During the daytime, readings come from Southern Baptist Sunday School lessons, and three SBC magazines--The Commission, Home Missions magazine published by the SBC Home Mission Board, and Home Life, a devotional and family magazine published by the SBC Sunday School Board.

At night, readings from the scripture are available. The American Bible Society gave permission for Houston to transfer from their records to his tapes the readings of scriptures for late-night callers on the "Bible Phone."

Each day, the readings are different. The nature of the equipment is such that tapes need be changed only once a week. Yet no program is repeated from one day to the next.

At present, three telephone lines to the equipment at the Baptist Student Center here provide opportunity to serve more than 1,500 persons a week with what Houston believes is the first ministry of its type in the nation.

Recording the selections on tape is the work of the students assisting Houston. They select appropriate passages from the magazines and scriptures.

Houston originally envisioned the program essentially to help the blind, but now his concept has widened.

He wants to use it to reach the people of the city--the lonely, the tired, friendless and sometimes helpless people.

To inform people of the program, brochures describing the "Bible Phone" are going to rest homes, retirement complexes and hospitals in the area. Pastors of Baptist churches have been asked to share the information with their members.

Houston is encouraged by the response. And he finds hope in the fact that the idea started when a 90-year-old lady wrote a letter to the editor.

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Baptist Schools Escape Riots  
Because of Respect, McCall Says

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FORT WORTH (BP)--Baptist schools escaped the riots that have hit many other colleges and universities because students and faculty are used to treating each other with respect and compassion, Baylor University President Abner McCall said here.

"When we have problems, we talk it over," said McCall at the mid-winter meeting of Texas Baptist missions leaders here.

The Baylor president said there is a growing support in the 1970's by Baptists to send their children to Baptist schools, a feeling that wasn't so prevalent in the 1950's. He said Baylor couldn't take all the qualified students who applied in September.

McCall disputed the claims of those who have said education is the answer to all of America's problems.

"Making a man smart doesn't necessarily make him good," he said. "Sometimes it just makes him meaner and more dangerous. If everybody in the United States had a Ph.D., we wouldn't be a better people."

The reason, said McCall, is that "our problems have a moral basis. Drugs, alcohol, crime, juvenile delinquency and even unemployment problems have a moral basis."

The answer, said McCall, lies in Christian education. He noted, however, that Christian education isn't determined by how many religion courses are taught, or by academic differences. "There's no such thing as Baptist math.

"The test is how we treat each other. If we don't have the tie that binds in Christian love, we're not a Christian school," he observed.

The president of the world's largest Baptist university said research has shown there is no statistical difference between what students learn at Harvard and Yale or at any other college.

"I want to refute any idea that we're better or worse academically," he said. "We've found that learning doesn't depend so much upon the facility or the teacher. No matter what college you go to, it depends about 95 per cent on the student."

McCall said he has advocated "limited state and federal aid for Baptist schools, but not where it involves controls."

When it comes to government aid, he said, "some people say that if you let the camel get his head in the tent, you're in trouble. Well, I tell you that the camel not only has his head in the tent, but his hump and his feet also."

McCall sees the weakest area between and their schools in the area of inadequate support. "With us it's sufficient, but some are barely existing," he said.

"Baylor was Baptist before there was a Texas Baptist convention, and we'd stay Baptist is you didn't give us a dime," he told Baptist leaders.

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