



FEATURES

produced by Baptist Press

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March 5, 1976
Carpenter's Concern
Rebuilds Young Lives

76-42

By Polly A. McNabb

FRESNO, Calif. (BP)--Ron Climer works with his hands 7 a.m.-4 p.m., constructing, repairing and renewing buildings. He is a carpenter.

From 4 p.m. until all hours of the night, he works with his heart, rebuilding and renewing teenage youths. A volunteer worker at the juvenile hall here, Climer is part of the outreach ministry of Sierra Heights Baptist Church and of the Mid-Valley Southern Baptist Association in this area.

In his first year of ministry, more than 100 youths have made decisions for Jesus Christ, resulting in changed lives. Experiences he has shared with youths coming through juvenile hall and Climer's own life story help to explain the amazement of other juvenile workers with the carpenter's success in communicating with some of the more difficult young people.

Take John, for example (not his real name). The first time John went into worship services on Sunday afternoon, he cursed Climer, God and the world. The second time, he wasn't quite so mean, but was still belligerent. The third time, he accepted Christ.

Thereafter, John attended every class and showed a real hunger for Bible study. Because of the seriousness of his crime, he was transferred to jail and later to the state penitentiary.

Knowing how difficult it would be for John in the Fresno jail, Climer gave him a 10-night crash course in discipleship.

The odds were not in John's favor. He was black, only 17, and had turned state's evidence. To use Climer's language, "They hung a jacket on him for being a snitch."

Climer described John's letters from prison as sounding almost like those of the Apostle Paul. When John was asked to join a black gang he told its members: "I'm not a black man and I'm not a white man. I'm God's man, and I don't want to join a radical gang. I just want to do my time and be what God wants me to be."

Twice his life was threatened, and he was put into protective custody. Twice he has been transferred.

"But he's still hanging in there... He says he's going to stand for God wherever he is, even if it means his life."

One authority at juvenile hall said that of 10 churches involved there, "Climer's ministry is the the most meaningful."

To understand why, you have to know Climer's background.

Reared in an "unstable home," Climer ran away from home three times by age 15. Twice, he landed in juvenile hall.

Then he started using narcotics. But when he was 17, he met Carol. She was so special that he cut down on his drinking and stopped using dope for a while. In six months they were married.

Within two months, however, he went back to drugs. He was "pretty heavy into drugs" when their daughter, Lori, was born.

He was on acid when Carol told him she was expecting another baby. It scared Climer. He had heard what sometimes happens to babies whose parents are on acid. He wanted Carol to lose the baby, but the boy was born normal.

By this time Climer was leaning on "reds," (a barbituate), wrecking cars and hurting people. It wasn't long before he had a \$500-a-week heroin habit. He stole, robbed, lied and cheated to support it. On Christmas Day 1973, he shot another man in the face.

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Twice he tried to kick the drug habit, but it didn't work. One day he and another friend discovered that "old drinking buddy" Leroy, had become "some kind of a Jesus freak."

Leroy tried to tell them how Jesus had delivered him from drugs. Climer couldn't help noting the look of love and concern on Leroy's face.

Climer went home and told his wife they were going to start going to church. But after two weeks of attending worship services, nothing happened. He had to "fix" before he left for church and immediately when he got home. By this time, he needed six fixes a day.

Carol suggested he talk to the minister, so they made an appointment. Climer didn't really know what to say to the minister and often cursed because that "was the only way I knew to talk." But the minister, Bill Thornton, just overlooked it.

Once again, Climer was confronted with God. "That same God I saw on the face of Leroy, I saw on the face of Mr. Thornton."

They talked and prayed for several hours, then Thornton asked: "What time do you have to fix in the morning?"

"About 5:30 or 6," Climer replied.

"Okay. When you're up fixing, I'll be up praying for you," the pastor said.

Three days later, Jan. 25, 1973, Climer resolved "I'm not going to fix any more after today."

He fixed six "quarters" that day, and woke up the next day really hurting. He began smoking all the pot he had, and he drank until he was drunk. But the pain was still there.

Then he started reading the Bible. He thought of Leroy and Thornton, and prayed: "God, why can you give Leroy that kind of love and peace and joy and give it to Bill (Thornton), and for me You got this? Why? Lord, if this is all you got for me, I don't want it..."

Then he prayed, "Okay God, I'll do whatever you want me to do, wherever and however you want to use me. I'm ready. Just don't let me fix anymore."

Climer did not awaken until 9 the next morning, the latest he had slept in months. He wasn't sick, and he didn't need a fix. The hours and weeks went by, and he never had a withdrawal pain, he said.

"For the first time in my life, I really felt loved," he said. "I knew my wife loved me," and "I really knew that God loved me."

The only effect of withdrawal he felt, Climer said, was sleeplessness. For the next 30 days he slept only two hours a night. The remaining 22 hours he spent "saturating myself in the Word." He soaked up the Bible like a man dying of thirst who finally found a waterhole. Within a month, his Bible was dog-eared.

When Climer tells the story to the youth in juvenile hall, he points out that no matter what they might have done, God is willing to forgive them and help them start a new life.

They listen, because they know Climer knows what he is talking about from personal experience.

Missionaries Go
From Riches to Rags

DACCA, Bangladesh (BP)--When the James E. Youngs, a missionary family, returned here after a furlough they felt the contrast between the world's richest nation, the United States, and Bangladesh, the poorest.

As they walked toward the microbus awaiting them at the Dacca airport, "just 25 feet away," Mrs. Young said, "we were bombarded by beggars. One was blind. Another was a starved-looking child led by a mother in tattered clothes. None of them wore shoes, each had a matted wad of hair--they weren't play-acting."

The tragic conditions in Bangladesh that contribute to her poverty--her small size, many people, natural disasters, war--contribute to discouragement.

"After the terrible flooding in 1974, we missionaries nearly wanted to quit. But we couldn't. Matthew 25:35 (New Testament) wouldn't let us," Mrs. Young quoted: 'For I was hungered and ye gave me meat. I was thirsty and ye gave me drink.'

Young "realized that God had a special purpose" for his Mississippi farm background. He used his share of the relief money for a two-acre demonstration garden. Then he used one member from each of 35 families, working the field by hand and oxen.

At harvest time each of the 35 families received 20 heads of cabbage, 25 heads of Chinese cabbage, 16 pounds of broccoli, 80 pounds of tomatoes, 90 pounds of Irish potatoes and 100 ears of sweet corn.

"Providing physical food is not our primary reason for coming to Bangladesh," Mrs. Young said. "We are here because of the oughtness, rightness of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) given by our Lord. During the gardening, spiritual food was given.

"We found it hard to come to Bangladesh again. We knew too much about the place. But, we feel 'the Call' (of God) made us come back.

"The night before we were to leave the states," Mrs. Young reflected, "our six-year-old Tim surprised me with, 'This is a happy day. This is an exciting day. You know why? We go back to Bangladesh tomorrow.'"

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(BP) Photos will be mailed to Baptist state papers.

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Bible Societies Send Aid;
Scriptures to Guatemala

Baptist Press
3/5/76

NEW YORK (BP)--The American Bible Society (ABS) has announced that 500,000 scripture leaflets which were printed on an emergency basis are being distributed among victims of the Guatemalan earthquake.

The staff of the United Bible Societies' regional center in Mexico City has also collected two tons of food and clothing which were shipped to Guatemala.

The leaflets, containing messages of comfort and assurance from Psalms 23 and 46 and Romans 8:31-39, are being distributed by Christian relief agencies along with food, clothing, and medicine, the American Bible Society said.

Guatemalan churches also have asked the Bible Society of Guatemala to help them replace the Bibles and New Testaments people lost in the disaster. About 65,000 gospels, New Testaments, and Bibles in Spanish are being shipped from New York and Mexico City to meet this need.

The Bible Society offices in Guatemala City were damaged, but not destroyed in the earthquake. No members of the Bible Society staff were killed or injured. But the homes of two staff persons were destroyed and their families are now housed in tents.

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CORRECTION

In Baptist Press story mailed March 3, 1976 entitled "SBC Religious Educators Set Annual Session," in the middle of graph six, make that read: . . . Roy Lee Williams, director, church services, Union Baptist Association, Houston, Tex. . . . instead of Fort Worth.

Thanks