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All-Star Status Doesn't Help;
He Has To Rely On God's Power

By Art Toalston

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Carlos Rios had baseball tales aplenty to tell when he went to Chile last year.

This year he knows better. "They don't even know what a baseball or a bat is," he says. In Chile, soccer is the all-important sport.

But Rios, International League all-star shortstop, didn't go to Chile just to tell anecdotes. He and his wife, Martha, were among 60 Southern Baptist volunteers for a partnership evangelism campaign. They plan to go to Chile again in October with another Foreign Mission Board-sponsored team of lay people and pastors.

Before last year's trip, Rios knew "that the Lord can really use me in many, many ways through baseball, but I never knew that he could use me out of baseball." In Chile, he experienced anew "the power of Jesus Christ...Christ was there with me."

"Ever since I came back from that trip, there has been a tremendous change in my life--a blessing, a joy, a satisfaction, a burden for missionaries, for people outside the United States." His fortified faith also sustained him through perilous medical problems last December.

Rios, 25, plays for the Richmond Braves, top farm club of the Atlanta Braves. The San Juan, Puerto Rico, native entered professional baseball at the age of 17. He has been a Christian since 1982 and has shared his faith in numerous churches, but the trip to Chile required his first substantive preaching efforts.

He preached in 10 evening services at the 40-member Second Baptist Church in the small town of Los Angeles, Chile, and his wife sang. A third volunteer also worked at the church, Jim Aloway, a U.S. Marine from Summerville, S.C. Beyond leading the evangelistic services, the trio joined church members in visitation each morning and afternoon.

Rios also was chosen to preach when all the volunteers came together for a closing rally.

In preparing for the trip, Rios realized that "he (God) was going to have to show me his power through writing sermons (and) being able to be a good witness for him. There was no way I could have done these things by my own strength. I just turned everything over to the Lord, just totally said, 'Lord, this is what I got. Make the very best out of it for your glory and your honor.'"

Rios didn't think his first sermon in Spanish went over well, but a pastor-volunteer reminded him, "Our job is to just spread the good news, spread the seed, and the Lord is going to do the growing. Just trust in the Lord and you'll see."

Forty people later made decisions for Christ through the small church's evangelism and, for Rios, "It was a tremendous feeling to know that they were being written into the book of life and that I had something to do with that."

In one day of visitation, for example, wayward sons in two families returned to faith. The parents' rejoicing each time was: "You don't know how long we've praying for this."

Rios now wants others to grasp Christ's power more fully. "If people would realize that (power) a little more, we wouldn't have as many sleepy Christians as we have in the churches today. Some of us have Jesus Christ still tied up on a cross, and we doubt. When we bring doubt to him, we bring doubt to ourselves, and we limit ourselves from things we can do."

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Christ's power also helped Rios face death soon after returning from Chile. In the midst of winter baseball in Puerto Rico, massive swelling hit his left arm. A doctor found a four inch blood clot and was astounded Rios was still alive. Surgery was immediate. Two days later, Rios faced another lengthy surgery for bleeding in one of his lungs. Then he came down with pneumonia and was placed in intensive care.

"I knew that if I died at that particular point I was going to go to heaven. There was no doubt in my mind because Christ was really alive in my heart. That trip helped so much."

Still, he voiced a simple prayer: "Your will has got to be done.... I want to see my son (his wife was expecting their first child).... There's a lot of things I want to do for you. I want to serve you more." The next morning, doctors "could not believe how well I recovered."

Rios plans to continue in baseball "as long as the Lord directs me to play. I have fun playing the game, sure, but I have more fun representing Christ through baseball."

He realizes "baseball doesn't last forever." In looking to the future, he says, "we're open and we're letting Christ put the pieces together." Rios and his wife may enter church work or venture into foreign missions, but he is convinced "you can be a baseball player, a carpenter, a painter—it doesn't matter. There is something you can do for Christ no matter what you are. The Bible says in Colossians 3:23, '... whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto man.' That's my way of living."

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

Pastors Should Abandon
"Superhuman" Role, Says Hendricks

By Leisa A. Hammett

Baptist Press
9/13/85

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)—Middle-age adults, particularly those in ministerial roles, need to ditch their superman or woman role and ask if it is necessary to "always go out and save the world singlehandedly," according to a Baptist theologian.

William L. Hendricks, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary professor of Christian theology, said ministers are often "guilt tripped" by their congregations who push them into the mind set of having to meet every need, even at the sacrifice of their own families and well-being.

Speaking to Southern Baptist chaplains during home missions week at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center, Hendricks presented four lectures on the life stages from adolescence to late adulthood.

Singleness, divorce, homosexuality and childlessness are lifestyle options being chosen by young adults, ages 23 to 34, he said.

Hendricks said churches can address singlehood by beginning "solo" and "solo again" Sunday school classes. He also warned against using "pejorative" labels such as "spinster."

Jesus Christ, Hendricks reminded, was a successful single. The church needs to recognize that the large number of young adults who are choosing to remain single are whole individuals, he said, and are not necessarily lonely because they are not married.

Hendricks added some singles express frustration about church emphases such as Christian home week when it is often assumed that every church member is married.

The church, he said, may be sensitive and assume a comforting role to those who grieve over death but fail to show the same concern for single Christians experiencing divorce.

"If God were no more forgiving than his church, we'd be in big trouble," the Louisville, Ky., professor said.

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More than 33 percent of marriages end in divorce, he said. Ignoring divorce is one option available to churches. But, said Hendricks, that's "not much of a Christian ministry." Hendricks suggested notes, gestures of friendships and being available as appropriate ways of responding to the divorced.

Homosexuality, which Hendrix termed "same sex preference" is another marital bypass also prevalent in churches today, whether or not it is realized, he said.

Hendricks said churches which respond to same sex preference with outrage deny their ministry and churches which "totally approve" of the marital alternative "compromise" their integrity, he continued.

"A church that can accept people where they are will be able to minister in ways that matter," he said.

Hendricks listed providing the good news of Jesus Christ, a community of grace and suggesting helpful support systems as effective ways the church could minister to homosexuals.

Childlessness, said Hendricks, is another lifestyle option young adults are exercising. It is now a conscious choice, he said. The feminist movement has challenged beliefs such as every woman has an internal mothering instinct and wants to be a mother, he added.

Hendricks observed several reasons why seminary couples are choosing not to have children. Reasons he cited included the perceived vocational and ministry inhibitions children would cause in addition to social and economic restrictions.

"A real dilemma that needs to be dealt with is what will happen down the road if all these thoughtful people don't contribute children," he said.

The focus of middle age, said Hendricks, turns from marriage and child bearing to recommitment and renewal. Ages 35 to 60, Hendricks said, may need to "bury" certain projects while admitting that they will not be able to accomplish everything they want to.

Hendricks explained that middle-age adults are more frustrated by what they do not get done than what they do get done. "Unfinished tasks are nerve strings on our psyches," he said.

"Some projects are not worth beginning," he added, and middle-age is the time to start asking which projects are worth the effort.

Once routine is established in their lives, said Hendricks, middle-age adults often avoid changes that may be necessary for emotional well-being. But, according to Hendricks, change, including new careers, are often needed for emotional survival.

Decisions made in midlife, "whether to generate or stagnate," said Hendricks, determine lifestyle and attitude in late adulthood.

People are living longer but liking it less, said Hendricks, adding that aging does not necessarily occur when a person grows older. Categorically, late adulthood begins at age 61, which is older than the last stage of life used to be classified, he said.

Aging, Hendricks continued, slows a person's reflexes and abilities to perceive and respond, while increasing anxiety levels. The physical changes that occur in late adulthood require major adjustment for both middle-aged children and their aging parents, he added.

Hendricks suggested finding the elderly jobs, bonified new interests and involving children in their lives.

"The elderly are a resource of common sense and wisdom to all ages," added Hendricks. "They know life and its despair. They don't have to know psychology or theology to know that God will help," he said.

NOTE TO EDITORS: FOR POSSIBLE USE WITH WORLD HUNGER DAY EMPHASIS

Ethiopia's Elderly:
They Were The Children

By Robert O'Brien

RABEL, Ethiopia (BP)--Craggy and rutted as the parched Ethiopian highlands which once supported him, ancient Byllene surveyed the remnants of his once-proud existence.

He sat on a rock near the Southern Baptist feeding and health care center at remote Rabel and spoke with quiet grace and dignity--gifts age gives as it takes away youth.

"I have nothing," he said. "Without you I would have died." Those words were difficult for a proud, old man in a land of proud, independent-minded people to utter to a white-faced "feringe" (foreigner).

Drought and famine have decimated people, animals and earth in vast stretches of Ethiopia but not Ethiopians' proud heritage, desire for life or tenacity. Earlier this year, even before rain came to give some hope for crops by December, gaunt farmers tried to plow worthless soil with gaunt oxen.

A farmer, who paused during a long trek to talk, typified that spirit. He had walked miles to find thistles to grind to feed his starving oxen. They usually won't eat them but little else green was left. "What will you do when you can't find thistles?" missionary Lynn Groce asked. "The oxen will die," the man replied, sadly lifting the thistles, bundled in a skin, back onto his head.

Death is a daily reality in Ethiopia. People resist it but expect it. The people and the land face a long period of recovery, despite the recent rain.

"It's been five years since much of Ethiopia has had a good crop," Groce said. "These people always, even under the best conditions, live one crop failure away from hunger."

Ethiopians cling to a fragile life line, depending on the "short rains" and the "big rains" each year to sustain crops. The life line has strained to the breaking point before, but probably not like this in nearly 100 years.

Groce, agriculturist and self-taught student of Ethiopia's 3,000 years of recorded history, believes history shows major droughts in Ethiopia--and likely much of Africa--come roughly in 100-year cycles. That doesn't count smaller ones. The last great drought of the proportions of the current one, Groce said, raged between 1893 and 1896.

He believes such droughts will come despite efforts to prevent them. Modern Africa faces a variety of problems, such as denuding of land, population pressures and economic and political problems. Those and other things, Groce said, make drought worse but aren't the ultimate cause of it.

Byllene, born sometime after 1890, sat on his rock at Rabel and contemplated drought. He recalled the great one of the 1890s, dating it, as Africans often do, by an event--when King Menelik defeated the Italians in the Battle of Adowa in 1896.

Mind still sharp and eyes flashing with visions of bygone days, Byllene described the desolation then and traced his life through his times as a soldier, farmer, husband and father--surviving through good and bad conditions. Now, wife and children dead, he sat alone in Rabel reflecting on the sweep of history.

He remembered other droughts but not one, even the great one, as bad as now. "I don't have words to explain this one," he said.

Words fail anyone who tries to describe Ethiopia's hunger area, where famine hits children and old people hardest. The sight of starving, sick, ragged remnants of families overwhelms even veteran missionaries.

Frail old people and desperate mothers--tear-streaked dust on their faces and vacant-eyed, starving children in their arms--fall down and try to kiss missionaries' feet in gratitude for a system which puts food in their mouths and blankets around their cold shoulders, and provides medicine for their ills.

Motivated by scenes of starving children, world relief agencies and religious groups have rushed in with aid, trying to save lives despite overwhelming logistical problems.

Many youth-oriented people in the Western world have downplayed the needs of old people, believing younger people, especially children, are the hope for the future.

That influence affects some on-the-scene relief efforts, but not of Southern Baptists and most others. Old and young have found help at Rabel and will continue to as missionaries and volunteers open new centers.

What else can you do when frail Waldargia, who struggled through 10,000-foot highlands to find sanctuary at Rabel, tells of a blind, 65-year-old wife alone back home? "Help her," he begs. "She's dying. All she has to eat are dirt and ashes she scoops up and licks."

Ethiopians have increased respect for Southern Baptists because they take good care of old people. Like most Africans, Ethiopians revere gray hair, which signals wisdom, leadership and a storehouse of indispensable knowledge on a continent where stark conditions work against long life even in the best of times. Especially in the bush, the elderly serve as the children's main link to their heritage.

Children cling to the beginning of life and old people to the close of it. The two ages have natural affinity for each other and need what the other can provide.

If compassion prevails, people of the world won't blind themselves to the needs of the weak of any age. They'll join those who sing, "We are the world, We are the children..." and keep trying to save the children.

But they won't forget the children's grandparents in the process.

Once, they were the children--the hope for Africa's future. Now, along with the children, they're still part of that hope.

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Adapted from the September issue of The Commission, magazine of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

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

Kentucky Law Officer Takes
Gospel To Kenyan Peers

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LIMURU, Kenya (BP)--A Kentucky highway patrolman learned in Kenya that he has a message important to law enforcement officers anywhere.

Steve Duff, highway patrolman stationed in Harlan, Ky., gave his testimony to policemen during a 10-day volunteer stint in Kenya and saw four make professions of faith.

Duff gave his testimony at a tea given by the staff of the Brackenhurst Baptist International Conference Centre in Limuru to thank officers for helping retrieve some stolen conference center property. About 15 men attended.

Duff, a member of Evarts (Ky.) Baptist Church, gave his testimony as a Christian law enforcement officer. After a devotional by Southern Baptist missionary Ralph Bethea, four policemen responded to an invitation to profess faith in Jesus Christ.

The next day one of the four found himself under fire from robbers he was helping apprehend. He said he was really glad he had "settled things with the Lord" before that experience.

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