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90-24

Beware of backsliding,
Hill warns seminarians

By Breena Kent Paine

N-CO
(NOBTS)

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--"Backsliding is something that can happen to any Christian," evangelist Junior Hill told students and faculty at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary during campus revival services.

"Most of the time, when a child of God backslides, he never drops out of church; he never stops giving his tithe; he never really stops reading the Bible; he never falls into overt sin; he never turns his back on his call into ministry," said Hill, first vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention from Hartselle, Ala.

"Backsliding, in the word of God, is nothing more than when Jesus becomes less than first place in a believer's life," he explained. "And that is really what has happened to a large segment of our church membership today."

Even pastors and seminary professors and students can backslide, Hill commented, if "you get so engrossed in the word of God that you forget the God of the word."

Christians can know whether or not they have backslidden if they find any of three "unmistakable symptoms," Hill said.

The first symptom is being unembarrassed about sin. The devil brings a Christian to this point by distorting the appearance of the sin, debating its acceptability and diverting the Christian's accountability, he noted.

"The devil takes a monstrous sin that is clearly defined in the word of God, and he rubs off the rough edges of it until he distorts it, and he holds it up to us, and it's not as bad as we thought it was," he said.

For example, he described: "If the average person in the world knew what homosexuality was, they would be immediately repelled by it and they would draw back and start resistance to it. But the average person is not going to get that vision of homosexuality. What he's going to get is homosexuality cloaked in respectability, culture, refinement and acceptability, and a person looks at it and says it's really not so bad."

"We are debating moral issues today that have been settled thousands of years ago in the word of God. What is there to debate about adultery? The Bible says, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery.' What is there to debate about abortion? The Bible says, 'Thou shalt not kill.'"

However, a woman who is "inconvenienced" by pregnancy and chooses abortion because it is legal is "going to have to answer to God regardless of what the laws of the land say."

"Don't let the devil ever lead you to believe that your accountability is any less than what God says it is," Hill challenged. "Whoever you are, if you have unconfessed and unforsaken sin in your life, you have a backslidden spirit and you cannot walk in obedience to God."

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"You can't play with sin. I don't care how insignificant, trivial and minor it may appear to you, if it is large enough for the Holy Spirit to make you aware of it, it's large enough to rob you of God's power if you don't get it right."

Second, the backslidden Christian has an unhappy spirit. "While you may not always feel like you're on top of the mountain, there should always be an abiding, sweet peace in your heart in fellowship with the Lord Jesus. If you don't have it, you've backslidden on God," Hill said. "Fellowship with God is nothing more than falling in love with Jesus over again."

"You can get so engrossed in (the Bible) and the study of theological experts that you can lose the thrill of a daily touch with the Lord Jesus. If all you've got is what you get with your theological studies, you're going to come up cold and empty and miserable without the touch of God's breath on what you've learned."

Third, the backslidden Christian is "uncaring about the lost." To illustrate this, Hill related a story from his own experience as a pastor. After a church service one day, a woman named Diane shook Hill's hand and told him how much she liked his sermon. Her visitor's card indicated she was interested in becoming a Christian, so he told her he would visit her within the next few days.

Weeks went by and he still had not visited her, but one evening he felt compelled to fulfill his promise. He and the deacon he took with him got side-tracked, however, when they stopped off at another Christian's home, trying to persuade him to move his membership. The time was late, so Hill thought he would visit Diane "tomorrow."

When he returned home, he received a phone call begging him to go to Diane's house -- her husband had just killed her. Since that time, every time Hill passes the street corner where he had seen her body riddled with knife wounds, he remembers "the pastor that didn't care."

Hill challenged Christians to look within their hearts, confess the sin that God shows them, spend time with God so they can be filled with joy in their ministry and care enough about people who have not accepted Christ to go out of their way to lead them to salvation.

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BP photo available upon request from New Orleans Seminary.

NBC to broadcast
ethics documentary

N- CO
(RTUC)

Baptist Press
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FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--A Southern Baptist-produced documentary exploring the decline in ethical values and the trend toward introducing ethical codes into business, politics, sports and education is to kick off an NBC television series titled "Horizons of the Spirit" presented by the Interfaith Broadcasting Commission.

WNBC-TV, in New York City and NBC affiliate stations across the nation will broadcast "Choices," a one-hour documentary produced by the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission, Sunday, Feb. 25.

Other NBC stations have scheduled the showing for later dates throughout the year.

Dick Van Patten, who played the father in "Eight is Enough," narrates "Choices," which was written by Robert Thornton of the Radio and Television Commission staff.

Featuring interviews with personalities from various walks of life who stress the importance of placing ethics and moral values over personal gain, "Choices" was filmed in New York, Washington, Dallas, Fort Worth, Atlanta, and Baltimore.

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"Choices" is one of four programs in the "Horizons of the Spirit" series. The other programs and their respective producers are "Spirit of the Rising Son," National Council of Churches; "The Earth Is the Lord's," The Jewish Theological Seminary of America; and "Circle in the Spirit," United States Catholic Conference.

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Mission Service Corps opens
way for campus ministry

By Mark Wingfield

F - HMB

Baptist Press
2/20/90

IRVINE, Calif. (BP)--Brad Sprague's work as a campus minister is motivated by the IRS factor.

Not the IRS with the April 15 calling card. Sprague and his wife, Marty, are Southern Baptist volunteers who receive no salary for their work.

The IRS on Sprague's mind is an acrostic for the three reasons he believes college students must be reached with the gospel. Students are the most easily "influenced," "reached" and "sent" group in society, he said.

The Spragues felt that conviction so strongly that they left behind a salaried ministry position, moved 2,000 miles and started a Baptist campus ministry from scratch at the University of California at Irvine.

While serving as pastor of Hope Baptist Church in Nashville, Sprague felt God's call to a different ministry outside the Bible Belt. When he visited California and saw the 16,000 students at UC-Irvine with no Baptist witness, he knew this was the place.

The Spragues drove into Los Angeles in November 1987 with all their worldly possessions loaded in two rented trucks. Soon afterward, they walked onto the university campus to start a ministry, not knowing a single student.

California schools enroll 1.8 million students annually -- one of every seven students in the nation. Yet the California Southern Baptist Convention and Southern Baptist Home Mission Board can only fund seven full-time campus ministry positions in California, home of 303 campuses.

"The state convention said, 'Yes, this is a strategic area, but there are no funds available,'" recalled Sprague, who was not discouraged by this news. "We've always been taught that you determine God's will and then find a way to do it."

They found the way in Mission Service Corps, a Home Mission Board program for enlisting adult volunteers. Mission Service Corps volunteers raise their own financial support, drawing upon resources not already being given to the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program unified budget.

"Mission Service Corps is the kind of program I think is going to be the key to advancing the gospel in new-work areas," Sprague said. "If student work is going to grow, this is the only way it will happen."

Even so, moving was a tough decision for the Spragues and their three young children. "Thinking of raising support for a family of five in Orange County, Calif., was going to take a miracle," Mrs. Sprague said. "But God did a miracle to raise our support in three months."

What has happened in the two years since then is another miracle, they believe. The Baptist Student Union has grown from zero to 50 students, with a dozen students making first-time commitments to Jesus Christ.

Last summer the UC-Irvine BSU sent out its first summer missionary; this summer three more will go.

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These events have made an impact across the campus. One new convert hosted a Thanksgiving dinner for 45 friends, in which he gave a public testimony about his christian faith for the first time.

Cheryl McHaney convinced her boyfriend to attend a BSU event because of its activities. Once there, he made a decision to read the Bible for the first time in his life. Soon afterward, he decided what he had read was true and made a profession of faith in Christ.

Another student, who is captain of the crew team, opened the door for the BSU to host a "Crew Feed" the night before a rowing competition. To facilitate the carbohydrate loading the 60-man team routinely does before a meet, the BSU prepared 20 pounds of pasta, 4 gallons of sauce and 18 loaves of bread.

The student, Lance Brown, gave a testimony about his source of motivation. As a result, 13 team members began attending a BSU Bible study.

The Tuesday night Bible study is the core of Sprague's BSU ministry. Four students have formed a worship band that plays upbeat music, followed by a practical message from Sprague. One series was titled "Stress Busters," with topics such as "The Power to Cope with Anything" and "What to Do When the Roof Caves In."

Beyond the Bible study, the Spragues spend time on campus meeting students, planning special activities and attempting to develop relationships that lead to ministry.

The BSU has no building or office, but Sprague believes that is beneficial. "That's one of the best things that ever happened, because you have to be out there with the students, he explained."

Students accepted at UC-Irvine generally represent the top 10 percent of their high school classes and are highly motivated to enter successful careers, Sprague said.

"If you can reach these students and direct their tremendous desire to succeed toward the things of God -- that's one of the best opportunities we could find," he noted.

Most are open to the gospel as one of many acceptable ways to wholeness, he said: "When you start talking about Jesus being lord, being the son of God, that's when the hairs begin to bristle. The lordship of Christ is a barrier."

Despite that barrier, BSU regulars have started a "10 Most Loved" list of people they want to introduce to Jesus. Last quarter, three on that list professed faith in Christ; this quarter, two more have.

"This kind of growth doesn't come just by people's works," said Brown, the crew team captain. "The Holy Spirit is moving. That's the bottom line."

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BP photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press

Baptists direct ex-cons
to inner-city churches

By Ken Camp

F - Texas

Baptist Press
2/20/90

DALLAS (BP)--Southern Baptists are seeking to link prison MasterLife graduates with churches in transitional communities to help evangelize the inner-cities.

More than 200 inmates in 15 Texas prisons have been or are currently involved in MasterLife, a 26-week Christian discipleship program. Participants at a Feb. 13-14 conference near Tyler, Texas, discussed ways to incorporate prison MasterLife graduates into inner-city churches upon release.

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Don Dennis, an ex-convict who coordinates MasterLife Prison Ministry with the Baptist General Convention of Texas, said he envisions an army of prison MasterLife graduates returning to the inner-city streets as trained Christian witnesses. However, he stressed providing Christian nurture and a "no pressure" time of adjustment for ex-offenders immediately following release.

Dennis, who became a Christian while in prison, said: "When I got out of the joint, I had so much guilt on my shoulders for what I'd done, I wanted to pay the Lord Jesus Christ back for saving me. I wanted to minister, when what I really needed was to be ministered to."

Earia Charles, pastor of Rhoads Terrace Baptist Church in Dallas, said ex-convicts often are readily accepted by inner-city churches where members have family and friends who have been in similar circumstances.

"Our church is located in a crisis community," Charles said. "We are a small, struggling church dealing with people who are in trouble. But under God, we are working to help them to get in control of their own lives."

Anyone seeking to minister in the inner-city should identify with the people there and work through existing churches in those communities, he emphasized.

Chris Simmons, pastor of Cornerstone Baptist Church in south Dallas, discussed the possibility of suburban churches working in partnership with inner-city churches to help re-establish ex-convicts and assist in their continuing spiritual development.

"We've given people a free ticket from hell to heaven, but too often we haven't taught them how to live heavenly in a hellish environment," he said.

Both Charles and Simmons are members of a transitional communities committee in Dallas Baptist Association that has proposed a pilot program linking ex-offenders with inner-city churches.

In the pilot program, churches and individual inmates would sign a "covenant" agreement. Upon release, an inmate would agree to be accountable to a particular church. Following a period of readjustment, he would accept a bivocational leadership position in that church. The church, in turn, would help the ex-convict become established in the community and provide him spiritual support.

Emmett Solomon, director of chaplains for the Texas Department of Corrections, emphasized the importance of an ongoing relationship with inmates during imprisonment and immediate contact following release. He also stressed involving Christian family members in helping ex-convicts become re-established.

"This morning, there probably were about 120 prisoners released in Huntsville. Of that number, seven or eight were met by family at the gate. Guess which group has the better chance of staying out," said Solomon, a Southern Baptist chaplain. "A man becomes what the individual is who meets him at the gate."

Lester Meriwether, Texas Baptists' literacy missions coordinator, suggested cross-training prison ministry volunteers both in MasterLife and in some type of literacy education. He noted that 85 percent of all Texas inmates are high school drop-outs, and as many as 50 percent of the inmates read at less than a sixth-grade level.

Avery Willis, author of the MasterLife curriculum, encouraged the conference participants not to be overwhelmed by the massive problems of prison reform, recidivism, family break-ups and the crime, drugs and poverty of the inner-city.

"It's as if we're standing under a waterfall with a cup," Willis said. "The problem is greater than we are. We can't do everything, but we can start where we are with the training we have and do what we can."

CORRECTION: Please change the 18th paragraph of the 2/15/90 Baptist Press story titled "FMB trustees elect Law, hear of overseas growth" to read:

On the question of divorce, trustees decided unanimously to continue the board's policy of not appointing people who have been divorced. The action, following a yearlong study, came in response to a motion at the 1988 SBC annual meeting calling for an evaluation of the board's divorce policy.

Thanks,
Baptist Press
