



Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

Adger McKay

Forty-nine years of age is too young to die. That is, unless you willingly lay down your life for someone else.

Jesus gave His life at the age of 33. John the Baptist was about the same age. So was Stephen when he was stoned to death a few months later.

In this age of materialism, with our emphasis on long life, to lose one's life while youth is still blooming in the cheeks is considered tragic. Perhaps, however, it is far more tragic to live long while living selfishly, than to live as a servant and die at 49.

That's how old Adger McKay was when he died last week.

Adger came from a prominent Hendersonville, N.C., family. But instead of becoming a banker like his brother, or a prosperous farmer like his other brother, Adger went to Mexico as an agricultural missionary.

He didn't last long. After two terms the Presbyterian Church officials told him to go home. All that talk about the power of God, praying for the sick and believing God still speaks to men today through prophecy — it was too

much. So Adger was asked to leave.

But he wasn't a wave-maker. Not really. All he wanted to do was serve. When I first met him he had just returned from Mexico — rejected by organized religion. He was working for his brother, milking cows. Poor guy, I thought. All those graduate degrees and all he can do for a living is milk cows.

I didn't realize at the time that "whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant."

Adger never complained of the way he was treated. He moved his family to nearby Montreat, N.C., and lived in rented houses — some of which had more holes in the roof than shingles. He had a Bible study in his home. He ministered to the kids at Montreat-Anderson College. He traveled across the state, to Greensboro, Gaffney, Hickory, Charlotte, High Point, Asheville, Winston-Salem — ministering to small groups of people. When he was home on Sunday he and his family worshiped at the Montreat Presbyterian Church. He held no bitterness.

During the last several years he made repeated trips overseas —

Africa, Europe, Mexico. Although he lived by faith — subsisting on whatever people gave him — he always had enough. On his last trip to Africa he gave away all his money to the Africans. Then he gave away his life. He contacted malignant malaria. By the time he got back home it was too late. He died Easter morning — at the age of 49.

A failure? Not much. Billy Graham came to the hospital personally to pray for him. His Presbyterian pastor called him a saint. When I flew up to conduct his memorial service I boarded the plane with a young missionary to Mexico who was bringing his entire family up from Oaxaca — a 30-hour trip. "Adger was my spiritual father," he said. A lot of other people must have felt the same way. With no official notice of his death, almost 2,000 people showed up for the memorial service in Anderson Auditorium on the Montreat Assembly Grounds.

Long life is to be desired. But when the final score is tallied, it's better to burn out than to rust out. That's what Adger McKay did — on Easter morning.