

Perspective

E. Bledsoe

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM



I still remember Charlotte Adkins. For years she lay on her back, paralyzed with arthritis. Once a beauty queen, her body had shriveled away until there was only a tiny, bent frame covered with thin skin. The last time I saw her, lying on her bed in the home of her parents, the Redstones, down on U.S. Highway 1, she was smiling. Her muscles were twitching involuntarily, her eyes looking straight up, but she recognized me and smiled. What did Charlotte have to smile about?

Joe Snyder lived in Greenwood, South Carolina. He was a mechanic, and a good one. I never saw him without grease under his fingernails. But at 42 years of age he was struck down with lung cancer. The day before he died I sat beside his bed. He was gasping for breath, but he said, "If He just wants me to lie here and groan, then I'll groan to the glory of God." What did Joe have to praise God about?

Roy Mathis was a cattle-buyer for a stockyard. One afternoon, while he was mowing his grass, his little 3-year-old girl knocked over a jar of gasoline in the utility room. There was an explosion and most of her skin was burned off. Roy beat out the flames with his hands and then sat with her for a week in the hospital as her life slipped away. Just an hour before she died I rode the elevator with him in the hospital. His burned hands were bandaged and I had to push the button for him. But as he stepped off the elevator outside her room, he was whistling. What did Roy have to whistle about?

B. C. Bledsoe had bone cancer. The doctors sent him home from the hospital to die. He was in horrible pain. The minute you walked into the house you could smell the odor of death. "Go on back into the bedroom," his wife told me. "He'd like to see you." As I walked down the hall I could

hear, coming from B. C.'s room, a cracked, off-key sound. I softly opened the door. Lying on his bed, tears of pain running down his cheeks, this old man was singing. What did B. C. have to sing about?

A. D. Croft is a blind preacher in the hills of South Carolina. He pastors four rural churches. His wife drives him everywhere he goes. The last time I was with him he gave out with a big belly laugh, hugged my neck and roared, "I'll be seeing you." What does a blind man have to laugh about?

A Protestant chaplain told of walking through a rice paddy with a South Vietnamese Catholic soldier. Suddenly the soldier stepped on a land mine. It blew off both legs at the hips. The chaplain said he cradled the young man's head in his lap while the lifeblood pumped out of his body into the muddy water. It was just a matter of seconds before he would be gone. There was no way to communicate since neither spoke the other's language. Then the chaplain remembered a phrase from an ancient Latin liturgy. Looking down into the ashen face of the dying soldier he said, "Sursum corda." There was a surprised look of recognition. "Lift up your heart." Then with a final smile the soldier gave the congregation's response. "Regem habamas." "We have a King."

That's the one thing that Charlotte Adkins, Joe Snyder, Roy Mathis, B. C. Bledsoe and A. D. Croft had in common. They had a King. And when the blackness of pain and grief wraps itself around our lives. When it seems all hope has gone and nothing remains but despair. Lift up your hearts. Before us is an open tomb. We have a King. He lives. His name is Jesus.