

A NEW PERSPECTIVE...

jamië buckingham



Very few events in southern society take prestige over the running of the Kentucky Derby. It is opening night at the Met, the Academy Awards, the Rose Bowl and a Moon Shot at the Cape all rolled into one. Each year the city of Louisville braces itself for an invasion of wealthy socialites from all over the world who come to watch two minutes of horse racing at Churchill Downs on a Saturday afternoon.

Last Saturday afternoon, however, while the eyes of the world were focused in on Churchill Downs, the eye of God was upon a much smaller group of Kentuckians who had gathered around a lake at the Cedarmore Baptist Assembly Grounds at a CFO (Camps Farthest Out) retreat. And just about the time a giant horse named Secretariat was setting the record at the Derby, men and women, more serious with God than they had ever been in their life, were wading into that chilly lake to be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

I had thought that only four or five of the group at the retreat were serious about water baptism. But when we

reached the lake it seemed they all wanted to come in. Presbyterian elders, a Baptist deacon and his wife, even a Mormon who had just that afternoon given her life to Jesus--were immersed and raised to walk in the newness of life.

That evening, while back in Louisville, Kentucky whiskey was flowing and the people were filled on spirits, a group of about 40 intense Christians, nearly all social and industrial leaders, crowded into a tiny prayer room on the Baptist-owned grounds and waited for the coming of the Holy Spirit. I met with them, and the minute I walked in the door I received a word of knowledge that everyone in the room would receive the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. It was too crowded to lay on hands. All we did was speak the word of faith, inhale the Holy Spirit, and exhale our prayer language. It was marvelous. All received. Pentecost!

Monday morning, flying out of Louisville, most of the passengers were still full of the spirits of Kentucky bourbon. But I was filled with a different Spirit. And no hangover!



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Jamie Buckingham

A great choir master was once asked what song he considered the greatest and most profound of all spiritual songs. He sat for long moments, his head in his hands, while he pondered the thought. Then a light twinkled on behind his eyes.

"I have sung and directed music all my life, but the most profound song I know is a Negro spiritual:
 "Nobody knows de trouble I've seen.
 Glory, Hallelujah!"

James, the half-brother of our Lord put it this way. "Dear Brothers, is your life full of difficulties and temptations? Then be happy, for when the way is rough, your patience has a chance to grow. So let it grow, and don't try to squirm out of your problems. For when your patience is finally in full bloom, then you will be ready for anything, strong in character, full and complete."

Last week we returned from vacation to find our house burglarized. Before leaving we had committed the house and all its contents to the Lord. "All I have belongs to God," I had piously said. However, when we returned after two weeks to find the back door broken and some cash and antique silver dollars of some value gone, I realized that my commitment had been mostly lip service. Those dirty thieves hadn't stolen God's money, they had stolen mine--and I wanted it back.

It's one thing to say "Glory, Hallelujah!" when you're sitting on top of the world. But when the world falls in on top of you, then "Glory, Hallelujah!" comes mighty hard.

Anybody can say, "Blessed be the name of the Lord" when the Lord gives. But to say it when the Lord takes away requires a man who has sat where Job sat. It's easy to worship Him when we see signs and miracles, but to praise Him in our sickness and poverty is quite another matter. Only the Holy Spirit can do that.

Don't wait!

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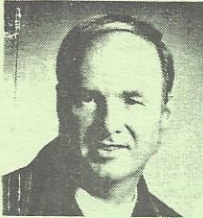
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The average man lives behind a mask. His smiles his laughter, his piousness, his shows of confid-

ence are all part of the roll he is playing. Seldom, if ever, does he let anyone know who he really is. Only in times of pain, fear, or perhaps when he has drunk a bit too much, does his mask come down and we see him as he really is.

For 35 years I was involved in mask-wearing. Dissatisfied with myself, I was continually imitating someone who seemed successful (never dreaming that he, too, was probably wearing a mask.) As a minister, if I heard of some program or activity that was "working" in some other church, I could hardly wait to get it started in mine. I tried to sound like Billy Graham when I preached, like Bev Shay when I sang, and like Cliff Barrows when I made "announcements". I wanted to be all things to all men that I might be thought winsome.

Always, though, my mask was up. I dreaded the thought that one day someone might peek behind it, see the real me, and reject me as a person.

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One of the greatest releases that accompanied my baptism in the Holy Spirit was the release from having to be someone else. With the Holy Spirit alive in me, I could now afford to be me.

Once afraid of growing bald I had considered a hair-piece (wig, that is). Now came a new freedom to grow bald to the glory of God. Once afraid that I would not be thought of as a "profound" minister, I had memorized the sermons of several successful men of the cloth. Now came a new freedom to say what God wanted me to say, regardless of how simple it sounded.

God wants his people to be honest and open-faced. A middle-aged minister confessed to me that after 20 years in the ministry he still had doubts about God, was still bothered with lust and greed. "But if I ever let my people know what I am really like," he said, "they would demand a new minister in the pulpit."

I disagree. I believe people love you more when you are honest with them. After all, who can accuse a man who says he is wrong. Men like this don't wear masks. They're free.

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Several years ago, as we were pecking our way out of our denominational shell, I came to the realization that we should be serving wine for communion, not Welches. As a Southern Baptist I knew all the arguments against wine. Yet as I read the Scriptures, substituting grape juice seemed tantamount to substituting sprinkling for immersion. Thus, even though wine had never passed my tender lips, I took my stand.

I knew we had a few fundamentalists left in the congregation. Among them was my wife who threatened, "Lips that touch wine shall never touch mine." I finally forced her (in love, of course) to submit to my new theology.

"I'll submit," she said, "but this will be the last straw for our Baptist friends. They've stuck with you through speaking in tongues, healing, even casting out demons--but they'll draw the line at wine."

Fearing she might be right, I decided, the first time out, to sneak up on them. I'd mix the wine with grape juice.

The result was chaotic. The

wine drinkers (who were in the majority) were offended because we had diluted the Holy Communion. The tea-totalers were furious because they could smell alcohol in their sacred grape juice.

(We later went on to use pure wine. Now, though, because we believe the principle of abstaining from meat to keep from offending a brother is more apropos than insisting on the letter of the Bible, we are using grape juice.)

But here is what I learned from that near disaster. No sheep is going to follow a shepherd who whistles an uncertain tune, or gives them an option of which trail to take to the green pastures. Jesus (and Paul) spoke with authority. They knew the Way and commanded their followers to walk in it. Many didn't, but those who did walked into power and glory.

If we are going to walk the Spirit-walk, we must go all the way. If we're going to drink the new wine, we'd better be willing to put on a new wineskin. Lukewarmness, which is the mixing of hot and cold, is always nauseating.