

From the desk of

MARK BUCKLEY



PO Box 44800 Phoenix, AZ 85064

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A TRIBUTE TO A FRIEND

Dear Friends,

Jamie Buckingham died on Feb 17th. I know He is in heaven seeing the glory of God. His suffering is over and his joy is full. But I'm going to miss my friend.

Two years ago Jamie was diagnosed as having inoperable cancer in his kidney and lymph system. He fought against that cancer with prayer and everything medical science had to offer. He had an initial recovery after a five hour surgery, during which his kidney was removed. He went from one battle to another over the following months. Jamie underwent radiation treatment when the cancer reappeared on his liver this winter, but his liver never recovered.

My first contact with Jamie was through his Last Word column in *Charisma Magazine*. In Jamie's stories people came alive on the page. I looked forward to that back page every month.

In 1981 I flew from California to Ridgecrest, North Carolina to attend a Spiritual Leadership Conference. I went primarily to hear Jamie preach. He and his wife, Jackie, shared in a seminar about the pain in their marriage and ministry after his moral failure in the 1960's.

I had never heard a pastor confess his sins during a conference before. I was gripped by his honesty and openness. Jackie's testimony, as well as the beautiful smile on her face, was evidence that the restoration of their marriage was complete.

Jamie was the last speaker scheduled at the conference. He followed a preacher who went on so long that there were only a few of us left in attendance when he finally got up to speak.

Jamie didn't preach that day. He told stories. Later I discovered that this was his primary style. He told us about his relationship with his father. They had a deep love for each other, but it was rarely expressed. In the last months before his father died, Jamie and his dad were able to

hug and express their love in a close and personal way.

I had been through pain in numerous relationships. Through Jamie's testimony, the protective shell I had built began to crumble. A new freedom to love and be vulnerable was released in my soul.

Jamie and I became friends at a writers conference in 1987. During the opening session I sat up front. I wanted to be close to the man I considered one of the greatest Christian writers of our time. Jamie sat on a stool and shared from his heart as we all listened intently.

After a few minutes he pulled out a piece of paper and began to read a story aloud. I was stunned. He was reading from one of my newsletters. He stopped reading and began to critique my writing. He was using my story as an example of what "not to do" when writing. He used his red pencil to prune the pieces I had submitted to the conference. What I learned from him cut my pride, but opened up a door for ministry.

One warm spring afternoon two years ago, Jamie, Hylan Slobodkin and I hiked up to the top of Squaw Peak. This little mountain, covered with rocks and cactus, overlooks the city of Phoenix. Climbing the twisting trail, Hylan and I questioned Jamie about everything from his position on the Middle East to televangelists.

We sat on a rocky ledge overlooking the Valley of the Sun. We opened our hearts to God, and shared with each other as brothers. You have to look closely to appreciate the beauty of a desert. It is a good place to get to know the Lord, or a friend.

Jamie was a gifted man with a lot of energy. Earlier that morning I interviewed him on our local TBN station. At a noon luncheon he spoke to 150 pastors and wives gathered from around Arizona. In between

these events he had been typing articles on his portable computer. What impressed me the most, however, was his humble transparency. He didn't pretend to have all the answers. He was open about his faults. He was the same genuine brother, whether he was in front of a TV camera, a large congregation or overlooking the desert with two obscure pastors.

Several years ago Jamie wrote a column about playing racketball with his friends. When he came to Phoenix I challenged him to a match. If you want to get to know a busy preacher, joining him for some recreation is easier than scheduling a counseling appointment.

I have been competing in sports all my life. My coaches in high school used to say, "We are out here to have a good time. It's a good time when you win. So you better win!" I played racketball to win, and so did Jamie. But he had a different approach about competition. He would dive for the ball and laugh if he missed it. He hustled and sweated, but when he was frustrated, he did not get angry. He was gracious till the end. He knew how to win, how to lose, and how to have a good time.

Mark Leuning, a pastor and friend of mine recently showed a copy of one of my columns in *Ministries Today* magazine to Rick, a staff member in his church. When Rick saw the column he said, "Oh, how nice that they let a nobody write a column in this magazine." Mark thought Rick's comment was so funny he just had to tell me about it.

It always takes a somebody to open a door, so that a nobody can have an opportunity. Jamie has been one of those special somebodies for this nobody. He has left a legacy of nobodies, who now feel like somebody, because of his love.

Jamie loved good writing, basketball and preaching. He was at home in the deserts of Israel and Arizona, and in the swamps of the Everglades and the Amazon. Jamie was a real Christian, who cared more about God and people than about money or fame.

I know our prayers for him were not in vain. He grew closer to the Lord until the

day he died. He gave his strength to the Lord, his family and the body of Christ.

After the deaths of several people I have been close to, I finally learned a lesson. The power of a person's life is magnified when they die. I think about these special people and feel their influence more now than when they were alive.

Death causes a separation and brings grief. The pain of our grief is a testimony that our love was real. The greatest honor we can give to someone who has loved us is to share that love with others.

Jamie made me laugh, and he made me cry. I will miss his writing. I will miss his stories. But, most of all, I will miss my friend.

Thank you Jackie and thank you Jesus, for sharing Jamie with us.

Kristina often comes up with creative ideas for making a little extra money for our family. On Saturday mornings she has been selling lemons from our tree at a local farmers market. She puts on her gardening clothes and a wide brim peasant hat. As people stroll past her white lace table, she greets them with a friendly smile and strikes up a conversation about the virtues of her lemons.

One recent Saturday, our son Matt took Kristina's place at the lemon booth for several hours. He was confident that he was going to make some good money after hearing about his mother's success.

When Kristina went to relieve him he said, "Mom, I didn't do very good."

"Well Matt, what did you say to the people when they walked by?"

"We talked about social culture and racism and time management and the stock market. I had great conversations with a lot of people, but perhaps I was too aggressive in changing the topic to lemons."

That just goes to show that some people don't want to hear your message, no matter how hard you try.

Love in Christ,

Mark and Kristina