

My Tribute to Jamie

The day Jamie Buckingham died, my wife, Joy, and I sat in the middle of our bed, held each other and cried. Even though Jamie had been battling cancer for a year and a half, we did not expect him to die. He was so full of life. His faith seemed so strong.

Jamie said he intended to live to be 100. Now he was dead, just a few weeks short of his 60th birthday. How would we get along without him?

The day Jamie died, the March/April issue of *Ministries Today* was already at the printer. We delayed its printing so we could publish a six-page tribute to *Ministries Today's* editor-in-chief, along with putting his picture on the cover. We are publishing the same tribute in this issue, beginning on page 26.

Never before have we published the same story in both magazines, let alone the same cover. But never before have we lost a person so important to both magazines, a writer and editor and columnist so loved by readers of both publications—and by the staff.

Jamie was well-known for his Last Word column: Each month for years, thousands have begun their reading of *Charisma* with the last page. But his role in shaping this magazine—and me—is not widely known.

I met Jamie when I was 26, shortly after I started *Charisma*. Back then, the magazine was a small bimonthly church publication. I was desperate for guidance, and Jamie took me under his wing.

His contribution to the success of Strang Communications Company is immeasurable. He helped guide us through many major transitions, such as absorbing the readers of *Logos Journal* and *Christian Life* magazines. He provided wisdom and support in 1983 when we started our second magazine, *Ministries Today*—a magazine that never really took off until he became editor-in-chief in 1989. And he was there when we decided to publish books and Sunday school curriculum, and when we started or acquired our other magazines.

On a personal level, Jamie helped me move beyond my limited Pentecostal background to see a larger dimension of what God is doing in our day. He introduced me to the leaders of the charismatic renewal, often by letting me tag along with him to meetings. And he sparked my sense of adventure by urging me to take on new challenges—like accompanying him to retrace Moses' footsteps and climb Mount Sinai.



To me, Jamie was a mentor, a confidant and a best friend.

Jamie lived only 75 miles away, so we got together frequently—for editorial and planning meetings, for family weddings and birthday celebrations, and for a good game of racquetball. We worked as colleagues for 15 years without a major disagreement, and enjoyed a marvelously transparent personal relationship. When *The Orlando Sentinel* asked me for a quote for his obituary, I described Jamie as “a mentor, a confidant and a best friend.”

But now my best friend is gone. And Joy and I have had to cope with grief deeper than any we've ever experienced.

We take comfort, however, in knowing that Jamie's work will continue through the 47 books he authored, the magazine articles he wrote and the videos he made. His work will also continue through the countless lives—such as mine—that he touched personally.

Moreover, Jamie will continue to touch lives through Hebron Ministries, a small non-profit organization he founded several years ago. Hebron Ministries is dedicated to a mission very close to Jamie's heart: ministering in personal ways to church leaders needing restoration and caring for the poor and homeless. It also provides Jamie's written and video materials free of charge to prison ministries and to needy ministers. If you would like to help his family continue Jamie's dream, you may send tax-deductible contributions to Hebron Ministries, 3905 Hield Road N.W., Palm Bay, FL 32907.

Four days before he died, I visited Jamie for the last time. I didn't go to say goodbye because I fully expected he would recover. I told him that I loved him and that I needed him to get well. He told me that it seemed easier just to slip over into glory.

In his Last Word in the February issue of *Charisma*, he described his longing for heaven. “Those of us who have tasted from the sweet spring of intimacy with God, will never again be satisfied with lapping from earth's polluted puddles,” he wrote. “So it is with those of us who have been to heaven's gate, have heard the sound of His voice, have felt the touch of His saving, healing hand. Nothing else—no love, no desire, no pleasure—will ever match His sweet, holy presence.”

Today Jamie has the intimacy he longed for. Today he's home with Jesus. ■

Stephen Strang is founding editor and publisher of Charisma and Christian Life.