

The Present Crisis

By Jamie Buckingham

Last October a dear friend had open-heart surgery at a major hospital in Boston. The doctors had forewarned him he could need as much as nine pints of blood for transfusion. He was also told there was no guarantee at least one of those might not be infected with the deadly AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) virus. Fortunately, Christian friends at the Community of Jesus on Cape Cod donated whole blood to be used during surgery.

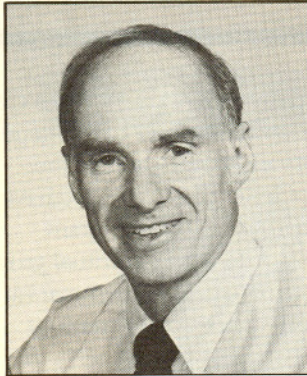
My friend recovered, but what of others who may not have friends like that?

Last year a young Baptist minister in Kansas discovered his wife and twin infants all had AIDS. They traced it back to a blood transfusion she received before giving birth in San Francisco, where they were doing mission work.

The U.S. Public Health Service has now declared AIDS a raging epidemic. Surgeon General Everett Koop says there is no known way to stop it from killing—perhaps millions. He's calling not only for massive measures to combat it, but sex education in the public schools, warning kids to always use condoms or run the risk of dying.

Here are some devastating facts:

- AIDS is 40 times as deadly as the deadliest diseases heretofore known—including the plague.
- For a decade the number of people infected with AIDS virus has been doubling every 10 months. Some 15,000 have died already. Today more than two million Americans are infected.
- There is no cure and no vaccine. Most carriers do not show indication of having the virus, but once the disease becomes active it is always fatal.
- A spokesman for one of America's leading pharmaceutical companies, Dana-Farber, says, "AIDS is not going to go away. It's going to get worse."
- Dr. John Seale of the British Royal Society of Medicine says AIDS is the "molecular-biological equivalent of the nuclear bomb" and "has the capability to wipe out the entire human race."
- There are dying AIDS patients in almost every hospital in America. Hospital authorities are warned to say nothing. They are afraid of public panic, and rightly so.
- Many nurses and doctors refuse to treat AIDS patients for fear of contracting the disease themselves—or scaring off other patients—even though there is no proof (yet) the disease can be transmitted by touch alone. A Christian doctor I know ministers to AIDS patients, but is forced to see them secretly at night to keep from scaring off his other patients.
- Although AIDS is spread primarily through homosexual activity and "dirty needles" used by drug addicts, there is growing research it may also be spread by blood sucking insects. It is a proven factor that AIDS can be passed along through infected blood in transfusions.
- Prisons are huge breeding grounds for the virus. Michael



Jamie Buckingham is an award-winning columnist and editor-at-large of Charisma.

Moore, security director of the Texas Department of Corrections, says up to one third of the inmates in the Texas prison system (14,000 out of 38,000) could be identified as carriers of the AIDS virus. (The courts have ruled that AIDS tests for entering convicts is illegal.) In the past two years 10 Texas inmates have died of AIDS.

- AIDS is not limited to homosexuals. Medical research shows it can be transmitted by heterosexual activity. In many cases the carriers (who remain healthy) do not even know they are passing the disease to others.

- Drug companies predict AIDS victims will soon spend \$1.5 billion a year to stay alive. "There's money to be made," says Mervyn

Silverman, president of the American Foundation for AIDS Research. AIDS, then, is "big business."

What can Christians do?

Start by seeing AIDS for what it really is: the natural result of sin gone wild in our nation. That means good people suffer with the bad. Vaccines may be developed, but there is only one cure: a return to national righteousness.

Christians must band together in covenant relationships for protection and healing. Blood banks are a good place to start.

We must return to monogamous sexual relations. Casual sexual relationships mean higher risk. Remember, there are 1.5 million "healthy carriers" out there—men and women.

Christian sex education for children is imperative. Dr. Koop is calling for explicit teaching in our schools. Sadly, he's right. All the more reason for parents to teach their children correctly at home. I've written a new book, *Let's Talk About Life* (Creation House).

Parents should read it with their preteen children, or the children may read it alone. It is a frank and candid approach to sex written for children about to enter puberty. Order several copies from your Christian bookstore and give them to parents with children.

How should the church react when AIDS victims come for help? Do we lay on hands? Dare we drink communion from a common cup? First Corinthians 11:28-30 says each Christian should "examine *himself* before he...drinks of the cup," rather than examining his neighbor.

Casual communion, like casual sin, is equally dangerous. Only those who mean business with God would dare drink from His cup under such circumstances; otherwise we "drink judgment on ourselves" causing "many to be sick or even die."

Bottom line: We must run the risk of infection by ministering to those who come for help. Remember Jesus promises protection (Mark 16:18) if we are forced to handle snakes or drink poison. As Jesus touched the lepers, so we must touch AIDS victims in His name. Man has no cure, but God can heal. Such healing will come through us, but only if we are willing to lay down our lives for others. ■