

# Would Jesus Drive a Mercedes?

*Jamie Buckingham*

**C**larance Jordan was the first and probably only man I've ever heard speak who, had he pointed his finger at me and said, "Lay down your nets and follow me," I would have followed.

Maybe that's because he was one of the few men I've ever met who knew exactly where he was going.

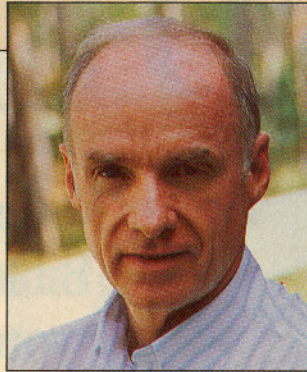
The year was 1953. I was a junior English major at Mercer University, a Baptist school in Macon, Georgia. Ray Brewster, who was the university chaplain, had invited Jordan (pronounced JUR-dan in south Georgia) to drive over from Koinonia Farms, the community near Americus Jordan birthed in the '50s, to speak to the Baptist ministerial students. Brewster made a special trip up to my room in the ATO fraternity suite to invite me.

Why me? I wasn't a ministerial student. I was cynical, active in campus politics and athletics, with no good word for the campus preacher-boys. Perhaps, as I think back to that time 34 years ago, Brewster sensed I was struggling with God's call on my life. I agreed to go hear this man who had given up his secure position as professor of Greek at Southern Baptist Seminary to start the South's first interracial farm.

Koinonia Farms was my first exposure to community. Clarence Jordan was my first exposure to someone who was willing to give his life to follow Jesus. Every other Christian I knew—including myself—used the teachings of Jesus to justify their worldly lifestyle. Jordan was determined to live the lifestyle of Jesus.

Only about five or six of the more than 150 ministerial students on campus turned out to hear him. After listening, I could understand why.

He was poor, I mean he was poor on purpose. His hair needed cutting. His suit (I discovered it was borrowed) was frayed and unpressed. He and the handful of others who lived in the simple buildings on the farm, held all things in common. That was radical enough to cause the area residents to accuse him of being a communist. Not only that, blacks as well as whites were welcome at



**Jamie Buckingham** won third place in the 1987 Florida Magazine Association columnists competition. He is a pastor and an author.

Koinonia Farms. That was radical enough—in the '50s—to cause the area residents to dynamite his buildings, fire shotguns at his old car as he drove down the road at night, and burn crosses on the community's property.

He spoke that afternoon about how "the foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.... Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead." Few leap to their feet and say "Send me!" after that kind of message. But my heart burned within for I knew this man represented Jesus.

It was Clarence Jordan who asked that afternoon: "If Jesus were here today, would He drive a Mercedes?"

I am not one of those who believes that Jesus wants us all poor. Neither am I one who believes Jesus wants us all rich. Jesus wants us to have enough to do what He's called us to do.

A friend who works with Habitat for Humanity, an organization made up of people (former President Jimmy Carter is one of them) who donate their time to build houses for the poor, wrote recently. Tony Campolo had just spoken to their group and asked, "Is it a sin to own a BMW?" (That's a yuppie Mercedes.) Then he added, "If Jesus had \$40,000 would he buy a BMW or use that to feed or house the needy in the Third World?"

People get dynamited for asking questions like that. Or crucified.

Tony, however, said one woman was

so struck by one of his talks that she wrote his ministry a check for the same amount that she paid for her custom drapes. It built three houses in Haiti.

The question, of course, is not about custom drapes or expensive automobiles. It is about attitude.

Recently I wrote my younger brother, John, who is in family medical practice in Birmingham, Alabama. I asked if he wanted to go with me to Israel. His reply devastated me:

"I hope God will someday allow me to see the Jordan, walk to Calvary's mountain, sit on the hillside by the sea of Galilee, and walk on the Jericho road where the Good Samaritan showed the world what it meant to live the life of love. I just can't forget, however, my visits to the diseased Mayans in the poverty-stricken nation of Belize. If they had only one clinic, they would not be crippled, blind, or mentally incompetent. In a poor country, prevention is the only hope. I cannot go to Israel and build that clinic also."

Like Clarence Jordan, John had set his priorities.

Would Jesus drive a Mercedes? Oral Roberts, in a refreshingly candid revelation about his finances, says he drives a Mercedes.

But that's not the question. The question is: What does God want *me* to drive? Not Oral.

I never saw Clarence Jordan after that dreary winter afternoon in early 1953. He returned to Americus and lived out his life helping the poor. He worked side by side with his wife Florence, who died in June. People continued to try to kill him but never were quite successful. We never corresponded. I never visited Koinonia Farms, but I read everything I could find about it. For, you see, his question still haunts me.

What would Jesus drive? ■

*Jamie Buckingham's latest book, Let's Talk About Life, is a candid discussion of growth and sex for preteens and their parents. It is available for \$6.95, plus \$1.50 for postage and handling, from Creation House Books, 190 N. Westmonte Drive, Altamonte Springs, FL 32714.*