

# My Finest Christmas

By Jamie Buckingham

**I** had known for several months that my body could not maintain the pace. The time was December 1979—10 years ago. The pressures in our church had brought us to another crisis stage.

Writing deadlines, to which I had agreed the year before when things were less hectic, were now screaming frantically at me from the finish line.

Then there was the traveling ministry. I enjoyed it because I could go into a different city each week and be treated like a king—and not have to live with or solve the problems I constantly created at home.

Running on wound-up energy, I was growing less and less effective in all I was doing.

I first realized I was in big trouble in early December when I stepped off a plane in Bogota, Colombia. After stumbling through customs and finding myself standing on a dark curbside outside the airport terminal, I suddenly realized I didn't know where I was staying or who was meeting me.

It was an empty feeling. I was surrounded by my suitcase and boxes of supplies I was to deliver to missionaries. I wanted to sit down on the curb and cry. What in the world was I doing here anyway. I wanted to be home.

Suddenly I heard a horn blowing and blowing. I looked up. There was an old friend—a native Colombian. He was motioning for me to get into his car. In a daze I did.

"What are you doing here?" I asked.

"I was praying and the Lord said to go to the airport and meet Jamie.

"I don't understand."

"You had written earlier, saying you were coming and would stay with me. But you never said when. Each night I have prayed. Tonight the Lord said you had arrived and needed help."

I remember little about the trip to South America except the conversation



**Jamie Buckingham**  
is an award-winning  
columnist and popular  
conference speaker.

I had with a friend on the plane back home. I was to arrive home in mid-December, then leave the day after Christmas for South Africa—returning home in mid-January via Israel. I said to my friend, "I don't see anyway to slow down except to be struck down."

"Don't curse yourself with that," he said.

"It would be a blessing, not a curse," I mumbled.

Christmas fell on Tuesday that year. On the Thursday before, Jackie and I attended our home group meeting—a group of five couples out of our church who meet weekly.

During the week I had been home I had started getting criticized by some leaders inside our church over a written proposal I had made on future plans. They had been stung by my wording, drafted on the plane between Panama and Miami. None had come to me personally, but they were mouthing their anger to others. I heard about it, naturally, and was not handling it well. At the home group meeting I opened up and expressed my confusion and my inability to come up with the necessary wisdom to draw conclusions.

In short, I was weary.

That group prayed a dangerous prayer: "Lord, do whatever You have to do to get Jamie back in right rela-

tionship with You." I knew it was dangerous to pray that way, but I added an "amen!" I was desperate.

That night when I got home my right lower leg was red and swollen. By bedtime I was feverish. Friday Jackie insisted I see a doctor. He glanced at it, gave me a shot of penicillin and said to come back next week. I was in bed all day Friday and Saturday with fever. Sunday morning I felt better, but was woozy. Somehow I stumbled through the service, but was limping badly.

Alice King was a medical doctor in our congregation. She grabbed me after the service and asked, "What's wrong?" When I told her, she sat me down in a chair on the front row of the auditorium, took off my shoe and sock, and pulled up my pants leg.

"You have a blood clot in your leg," she said with alarm. "It's called phlebitis. Get in the back seat of my car and prop your leg up—now. I'm going to take you to your home and you're going to bed—with your leg elevated higher than your body."

So with several of the men supporting me I hobbled out of the church, went home and got in bed—where I stayed for three weeks.

I discovered some things. When my wife called South Africa and said I was sick and couldn't come, the brothers accepted it. But I knew if she had called and said, "He's tired" or "He doesn't feel God wants him to come," they would have been upset.

The same was true with my publishers—who willingly pushed back the deadlines. Friends wanted to come and rebuke the devil. But it wasn't the devil who needed rebuking. It was me.

As a wonderful bonus I was able to spend Christmas at home, surrounded by the happy sounds of all my children. Even though I was upstairs in bed, I was alive. It was my finest Christmas, so far. ■