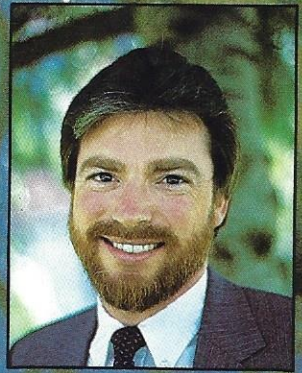


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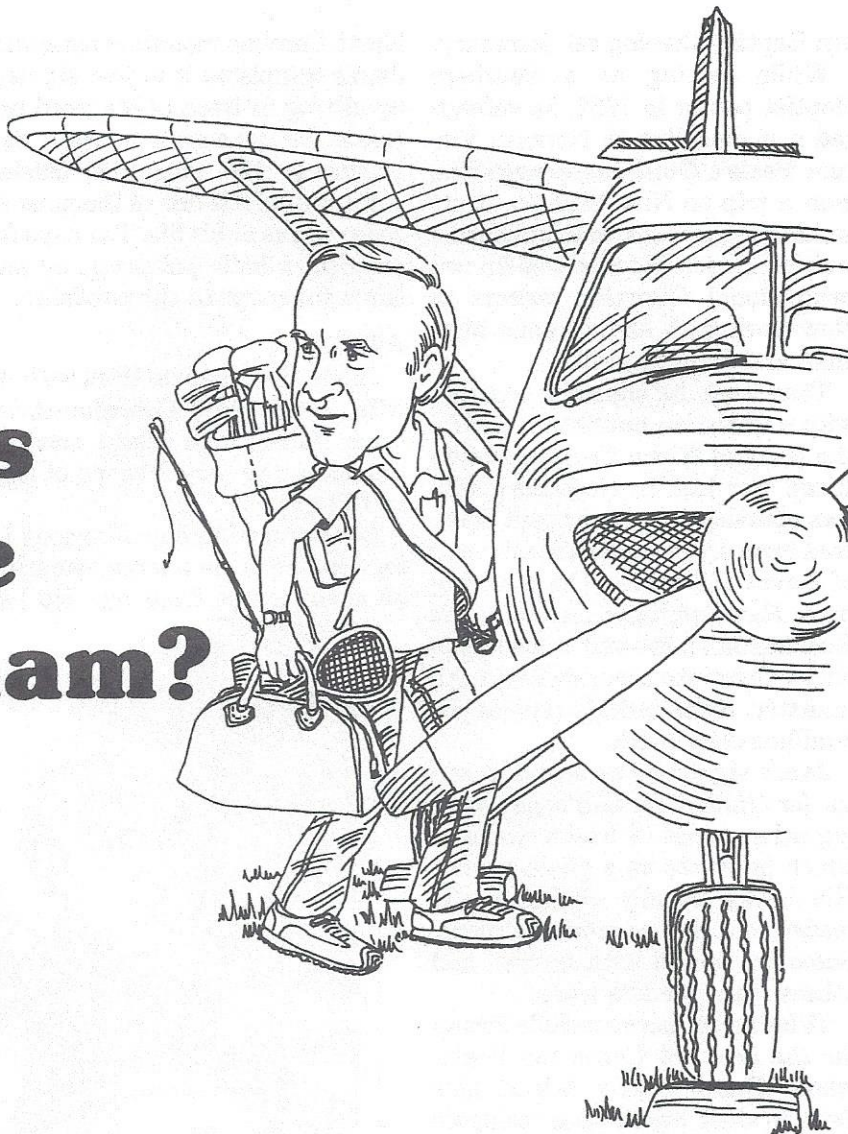
**A Tough Teacher
Pitfalls on the Pathway
Don't Let Kids Have All the Fun
Writing for the Religious Market**

Jamie Buckingham

**NEW
Question
and
Answer
Column**

Who is Jamie Buckingham?

by
Quin Sherrer



MR. Jamie Buckingham is an illustrious author and *Reverend* Jamie Buckingham is a globe-trotting "pulpit"eer." It's generally acknowledged that in both careers his impact has been felt around the world. Who is the real Jamie Buckingham? They both are.

In fourteen years he has written thirty-six books, some of which sold over a million copies. He has earned a solid reputation as one of the most widely read Christian writers of this generation. Yet he still has time to oversee a congregation of 2,500 at the interdenominational Tabernacle Church in Melbourne, Florida, where he has been the senior minister since its inception in 1967.

A few book fans have dared mention that he give up preaching to write full time. He shrugs off that suggestion. He sees himself primarily as a storyteller and the pulpit is an excellent opportunity to practice

this craft. Invitations to preach, especially overseas, allow him to gather poignant, life-changing stories everywhere he goes. Whether it's behind the Iron Curtain encouraging believers in an underground church, or ministering to missionaries in Indonesia, Jamie knows he will eventually share some of their personal experiences in articles and books.

At various times in his preaching/writing career, he's been labeled *humorist, prophet, teacher, renewal leader, peacemaker, and sage*. But labels don't bother this fifty-one-year-old father and grandfather.

To critics who call him controversial, Jamie claims he's just

Quin Sherrer is a free-lance writer and interviewer living in Destin, Florida.

Special thanks to artist Cindy Deaton.

transparent and honest in his writing and preaching. Those who don't believe that, probably haven't yet read his autobiographical work *Risky Living*. In it he painfully exposes many of the shortcomings he had before Jesus set him free to be himself.

Currently, he is editor-at-large for both *Charisma* and *Ministries* magazines, on the editorial advisory board for *Leadership* magazine, a consultant for Wycliffe Bible Translators, and on the board of directors for the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem. So he's often hurrying to meet a deadline.

Jamie—everyone calls him that—insists that the "reverend" title be left off his name. He's a graduate of Mercer University and Southwest-

ern Baptist Theological Seminary.

While serving as a Southern Baptist pastor in 1967, he submitted a manuscript to Norman Vincent Peale's *Guideposts* magazine, won a trip to New York to study writing techniques, and launched a writing career. He met well-known professional Christian writers in New York such as Catherine Marshall and John Sherrill.

That week he signed a contract with a Christian publisher to write the story of Nicky Cruz—a Puerto Rican war lord in New York who was converted to Christ and delivered from drugs under the ministry of David Wilkerson. The resulting book, *Run Baby Run*, altered Jamie Buckingham's life and helped push Nicky Cruz into a worldwide youth ministry. Sales quickly passed the 3-million-copy mark.

Jamie signed on as a roving editor for *Guideposts* and began writing other types of books, some of which he wrote as a ghost writer. His books usually challenge the reader to a higher spiritual plane. Some are spiced with humor, and others make readers weep.

Titles for his books include *Tramp for the Lord* for Corrie ten Boom, whose Dutch family helped hide Jews in their watch shop residence during World War II; *Shout It from the Housetops* for Christian Broadcasting Network television founder Pat Robertson; *Ben Israel* for Art Katz, an intellectual atheist Jew who found his Messiah; *The End of Youngblood Johnson* for a black whose ministry reached thousands; *God Can Do It Again* and seven other books for the late Kathryn Kuhlman, about her healing ministry; *Into the Glory* for the flying branch of Wycliffe missionaries; *Jesus World*, an allegorical novel; two autobiographical works, *Risky Living* and *Where Eagles Soar*; several books on the Christian's approach to sex for adolescent readers; and others like *Coping with Criticism*, *Some Gall*, and *The Last Word*.

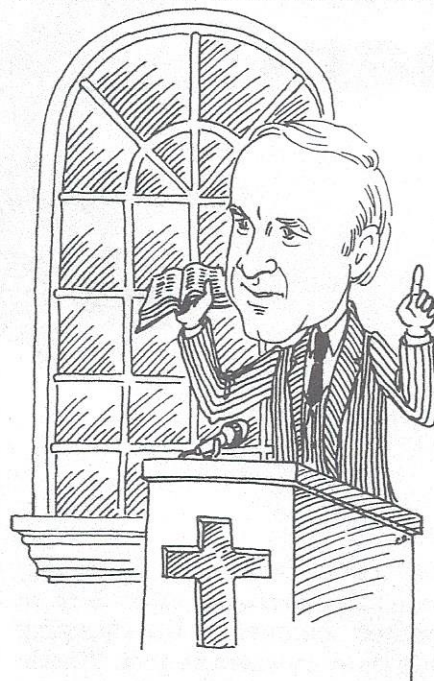
His latest book, *Power for Living*, written for the De Moss Foundation as a television giveaway to win viewers to Christ, was written in a

North Carolina mountain hideaway. Jamie completed it in just six days by sitting in front of his word processor for seventeen hours a day, producing 160 pages of finished copy. He calls it one of the most intense weeks of his life. Ten days later, after a little polishing, he sent the manuscript to the publisher.

AT HOME

Jamie Buckingham lives with his wife, Jackie, in a Georgian-styled brick house with white columns hidden in the piney woods of Central Florida.

During our Sunday afternoon interview, he sat in a large overstuffed chair across from me. He had



spent the entire morning in church preaching at two services and lingering to pray for those who had special needs. In a few hours he was leaving for Atlanta and then to California for interviews and television appearances.

"I stayed up until one o'clock this morning to get this article done so I'll be ready to catch the plane this evening after a church meeting," he explained.

He handed Jackie, his petite, blond wife of twenty-eight years, a four-page magazine article and said, "Please read this and tell me what you think."

She took the pages from his hand, nodded, and concentrated on his

typed manuscript.

"I submit my finished manuscripts to professional editors. But I sometimes submit the content to Jackie first because she reads with a discerning eye. She's puritanical. She sees everything in blacks and whites, and I see things in tones of gray, darker or lighter. When I come to a column like this, I'll run it by Jackie, then to my editors."

He remembers rewriting one of his early books seventeen times. Today with his new tool, the word processor/printer, it is hard to say how many times he rewrites a page or paragraph. He's all for the modern Space Age technology that helps speed up the work of a writer. Not wanting to lose a minute of precious writing time, Jamie has recently purchased a small portable battery-operated typewriter. He uses it aboard airplanes or anywhere else he is stranded with time on his hands.

Jamie admits he didn't just one day become a writer. He had some years of training. He laughs when he recalls how his dad, a former English literature teacher, corrected every letter Jamie wrote home from college. "He was a jot and tittle man. But that's how I learned to write. I knew Daddy would also be correcting me, and I appreciated it."

Then too, writing out his sermons for eleven years was great training. He'd spend ten hours in study, then ten hours in writing a sermon. Now he saves time by outlining rather than writing out his sermons.

In the past decade, Jamie has become enthused with the Christian's ancient Hebrew heritage and is now recognized as one of the nation's leading authorities on the Sinai. His recent book *A Way through the Wilderness* (Chosen/Zondervan, 1983) was written after five trips to the Sinai in an attempt to trace the footsteps of Moses. Jamie sensitively threaded together Biblical history, the customs of ancient peoples and modern Bedouins, and exciting personal experiences and help for today's Christian walking in his own wilderness. A chapter in it on

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THE CHRISTIAN WRITER

I live." He paused a moment.

"Every so often I'll sit down and write in one sentence what I feel my purpose here in life is. If a man doesn't know his purpose, then he's going to take a lot of people with him on his lost trek and wanderings. If I know where I'm going, I can say, 'come follow me.' Basically, God's been saying the same thing over the past several years to me. That's what I want to do with my life and writing . . ."

Jamie Buckingham says he's not a philosopher, just a participant and a storyteller. He sees writing primarily as a feeling communication. He said, "Writers must be participants. I couldn't write if I weren't a participant in life.

"I grab hold of things through smell, sight, taste. My five senses are finely honed. . . I couldn't have written *Run Baby Run* for Nicky Cruz if I hadn't visited his old hangouts and tried to 'feel' what his life was like."

He sees writing as a ministry: "The Christian writer's words are his tools and those tools should constantly be proclaiming the message of the living Christ."

His versatility in writing has produced hundreds of nonfiction articles. When asked if he was interested in trying new fields, he said, "Yes, I'm at a place now where I hear God saying, 'Lift up your eyes, there's more than the writing of books. Think communication.' So I'm testing the waters, spending far more time working with *Charisma* magazine than writing books." He stopped momentarily to collect his thoughts.

"Books stay around. Magazines don't. Television blows through the room and it's gone. Audio tapes get lost under somebody's night stand or the seat of a car. I think the Lord is saying there are many areas that should be combined in communication. Maybe television, magazine, and book editors should hold conferences. Maybe through satellite TV. We've just scratched the surface of that. I'm seeking the Lord's direction if I'm to broaden my life beyond being a book writer and

a magazine columnist."

Jamie thinks the current trend is moving toward in-depth Bible study with emphasis on Bible interpretation books. Testimony books are no longer in such high demand. He believes that Christian books aren't selling as well because the price of books has skyrocketed. Then there's also the fact that people who need Christian books don't read them.

"In the early days, everything I wrote would sell a million copies," he said. Yet his recent book *A Way through the Wilderness*, which he feels is the best he's written, has been a big disappointment. It has sold less than 5,000 copies and publishers are planning to print only 10,000 more.

Here is an author whose books are displayed on racks in drugstores, airports, and secular bookstores—a writer published even in the prestigious *Reader's Digest*—saying his best book won't pass the 15,000-copy mark, primarily because of lack of marketing.

This is why Jamie believes that writing for the Christian market must be viewed as a ministry.

"I don't know of but four or five Christian writers who are making a living as writers. There are a lot of people who are writing, but they are also doing a lot of other things for income." In his case, he chooses to continue preaching.

I asked him if he was flexible in his writing schedule or if he followed a daily discipline.

He stretched his legs, contemplating the question. His eyes lit up while a warm smile enveloped his face. It is his smile that endears him to so many—because he gives you the impression you have his full attention.

He admitted he writes best under pressure. But he added, "You can't write thirty-six books without being disciplined. Writing is extremely disciplined. I force myself into discipline modes. But I'm flexible in that I usually put off deadlines, then stay up until one in the morning like I did last night."

When he craves privacy for this

Pilgrims begins—

There are three kinds of people in the wilderness. The hermits move in from the outside, settle in caves and stay in one place until they die. The Bedouin are nomads, on the move but always in a circle. However, God never intends for His children to settle in the wilderness as hermits or nomads. We are thus to be the third breed of wilderness person—the pilgrim. Each wilderness experience becomes a pilgrimage—an experience in which we meet, know and follow God to His land of promise. The process is simple, although often painful.

When asked what he saw as his purpose in life, Jamie leaned back in his chair and said, "I believe every person is born with an inner desire to achieve, create, and leave behind something meaningful. I feel God has a mandate on my life." That mandate is ". . . to impart the Holy Spirit to the generation in which

writing, he retreats to his special hideaway—a tree house 300 yards behind, but not visible from, his house. This writing studio is a twelve-by-twelve-foot room on five-foot stilts, equipped with electricity and airconditioning. When Jackie needs him, she rings an old railroad bell.

HANDLING THE INDUSTRY

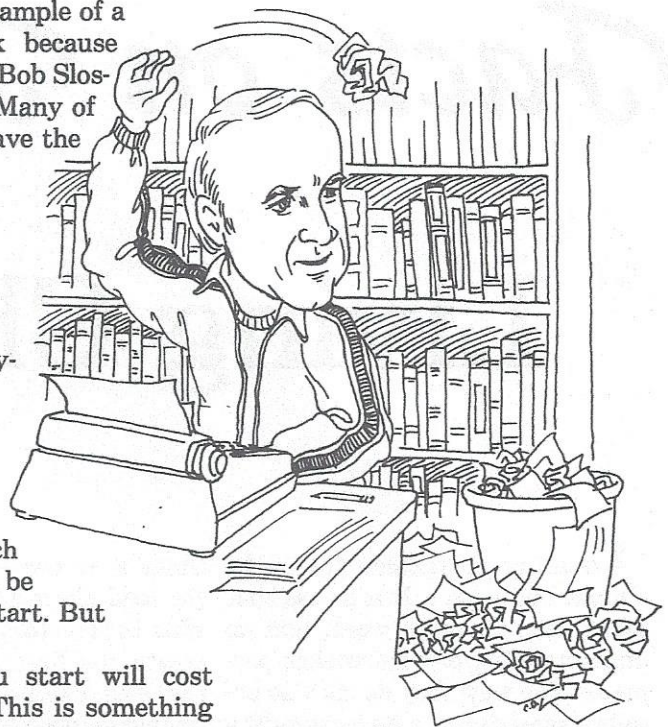
Jamie lamented a flaw he sees with some major publishers: the lack of editorial service for writers. Good editors are needed to help the writer, he says. Everyone seems too busy trying to sell books. He's uncomfortable selling his own books.

"There is still a place for a good book. There are specialist books today by some of the top evangelists in the nation. They have something to say, but most of them need a good writer working for them to help them make it a quality book. Pat Robertson's best seller *Secret*

Kingdom is an example of a well-written book because he had an expert, Bob Slosser, to help him. Many of the evangelists have the television media to help promote their books."

As advice for the beginning writer, he said, "Start small, maybe with a local newspaper. They are hungry for good writing, especially the weeklies. A church newsletter would be a good place to start. But start somewhere.

"Anything you start will cost you something. This is something writers and pastors don't seem to understand. Lay down your life for whatever it is—your readers or



whatever. You have to pay to start."

He mentioned that his current editor at *Charisma* magazine, Steve Strang, started that magazine for Calvary Assembly while he was employed with the Orlando Sentinel newspaper. It cost him time, money, and sacrifice. But today it's a major Christian publication.

"Simply sit down at the typewriter and put words on paper. Until that is done, nothing will be accomplished. It's a good idea to work from some kind of outline. Ask yourself what is the single point you are going to make."

He said that a way to determine whether or not what you write should be published is whether or not somebody wants to publish it. But he added that perhaps God simply wants you to write the story in order to have a personal catharsis.

Jamie doesn't consider himself controversial. He said, "I think I am real and transparent. In the Christian field that is not an allowable quality among people—especially among leaders."

An example is the time he wrote an article on how to dispose of worn-out Bibles.

"Yes, it was a very real question

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Jamie Buckingham's Advice to Writers

Sign over his typewriter: *Pray Before Using.*

The anointing of the Holy Spirit in writing makes the story lasting.

Your life is your message.

Feel the touch of God when you write. Write through your tears.

Growth comes through criticism. Nothing has been written that cannot be improved by re-writing.

In writing a piece ask, what will the reader *remember* that he can apply in some helpful way to his life?

We cannot communicate to others until we let God communicate with us.

The Christian writer's words are his tools and those tools should be constantly proclaiming the message of the Living Christ.

Don't present the whole dose of the Christian message in one story.

Make a single spiritual point.

Use action words—the smell of diesel smoke, the soft crunch of sand beneath his sandals . . .

If you confess a weakness, the audience is with you.

Stop trying to improve your vocabulary. Use words you already know and words your readers won't stumble over. Use "got" not "procure," and "find" not "locate."

Recognize who you are and don't try to be who you are not. Don't imitate style. God has a special writing style for you.

Grab the reader's attention with the first paragraph. Write like you talk. Talk on paper. Pretend the person you are writing for is sitting across the desk from you. Tell him your story. Use short sentences, personal pronouns, direct quotes.

Invite the reader to participate in the scene you write. Imagine you are using a television camera and let him see the scene.

It's not how colorfully you write nor how long, but do you move the hearts of the people who read?

You must interest or you will never convince.

to me because I've got a bunch of them back there in my office. Do you drop them in the trash can, trash compactor, or burn them like you do the American flag? Do you give them to your children to collect dust?

"The Bible is a book with words written in it. Everybody got all uptight, saying I didn't honor the Word of God. Jesus is the Word of God. The Bible is not the Word of God. The Bible is merely paper and ink and Morocco leather. What has happened to us is that we have venerated that book. We've made it an idol as much as the Pharisees made the Law an idol. The Bible is here to serve us, not for us to serve the Bible. Well, that's a message Jesus brought and they crucified him."

When he published his first book *Run Baby Run*, he thought he'd be happy just to "get the word out," never thinking about fame or financial rewards. But when Nicky Cruz's name was emblazoned in big letters across the top, and his name in tiny type read "as told to Jamie Buckingham," he was chagrined because of his unholy attitude. He knew then that he had to be willing to die to self.

Then, when Miss Kuhlman asked him to write a book for her, he thought it would take just two months and, therefore, agreed to her initial offer of \$2,000. He turned down her suggestion that he might like to get royalties instead. The book sold almost four-hundred-thousand copies in the first year in the hardback edition. At \$5 a copy, his coauthor's royalties would have amounted to many times more than the \$2,000 he accepted. Besides that, it took him six months to write it. He learned a lot about keeping his motives pure.

The real Jamie Buckingham is the character you choose for yourself in whichever book of his you liked best. For me it was the transparent, honest man who is "coping with criticism" and boldly shared his plight in a book by the title (*Logos International*, 1978).

If I lose my composure, get a twitch in my face, raise my

voice in anger, or feel my eyes dilating, then I know I am out of spiritual control. . . . At such times there is no other way out except to bow my head, let the other person take the lead and respond with love. Such a procedure not only disarms my critic, but it kills the argument. Again, how can you argue with someone who admits he is wrong.

Jamie Buckingham is an uncommon man with an uncommon call, busily imparting the Holy Spirit to the generation in which he lives.

