

DRY BONES

As 1979 Ends — The Junkman Cometh

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM



Every year about this time I look around my study and, feeling a great surge of panic, begin to throw things away. Somehow I have a way of accumulating a lot of things in

the little world which extends out six feet from my desk — things which at one time had great meaning but now are merely junk.

The floor of my studio is littered with piles of this once-precious, now worthless, junk.

For instance, it's amazing how many of those little plastic boxes that hold cassette tapes you can collect in a year. Especially those still filled with unheard tapes.

Over there near the bookcase is a series of 14 tapes from a conference in Montana — sent by a friend who thought I might want to listen to them in my spare time. I don't even have time to listen to my wife — much less 14 hours of preaching.

There are tapes from people who have seen angels. And demons. And tapes from our own church services sent by folks who want me to listen to my own preaching in hopes I'll unsay some of the things I said.

I have 13 tapes that disturbed folks have sent me about the Illuminati — accusing everyone from Jimmy Carter to Demos Shakarian of belonging.

There are tapes of poetry, tapes of sermons my elders have preached in my absence that folks think contain heresy, and that tape of frogs from 72 of the world's great swamps sent after someone heard my famous sermon on "Kiss Me; I May Be a Prince."

Since I don't know how to speed-listen, none of them except the frog tape (which I play as background music when I read Lamentations) have gotten a hearing.

Then there's the unanswered mail. I ran a time estimate last summer and

discovered I was spending more than half my day answering letters — most of them written to tell people I didn't have time to do what they were asking me to do because I was busy answering mail and practicing toad puckers.

Jackie says I am intimidated because someone told me that C.S. Lewis answered every letter he received. Maybe so, but as the year's end looms ahead like a sheer granite cliff, there is no way for me to leap over it carrying all these unanswered letters.



They're everywhere. Huge stacks of yellowing and crumbling letters all over my desk, on the floor and spilling out into Jackie's sewing room.

Last night my friend Russ Burns, who is a supervisor for the telephone company, came over to watch Monday night football on TV. When he peeked into my studio and saw all those letters he gleefully remarked he had not written a letter in more than 25 years. I had to leave the room with horrible gas pains.

A much wiser man than I once said that in order to do the things God is telling you to do, you have to stop doing a lot of things He hasn't told you to do — like answering every letter and listening to every tape.

There's a lot of other stuff I'm throwing away. A set of Esterbrook desk pens — 28 years old and stolen from the Quartermaster Corps. Now they are clogged with dried ink. I considered returning them to the U.S. Army, but dropped them in the trash basket instead.

Also into the circular file went a Spring 1975 catalog from L.L. Bean advertising a pup tent like I had at Boy Scout summer camp in 1945, a brown photo of my great-grandfather, a letter opener from Israel designed to pry open the Red Sea and a huge marble paperweight I found under a stack of unanswered mail.

The last thing to go was a blue tassel which has hung for years from the front edge of the bookshelf over my desk. It was the tassel that came off my high school graduation cap — Vero Beach, Florida, class of '50.

I lingered over that for a few moments. I thought my son might like to have it, but last week I noticed he had thrown away his tassel — from the class of '79. Why look back? That 16-year-old blond was exciting, but even more exciting is the 46-year-old blond who is the mother of my five children.

I fingered the tassel fondly and dropped it in the trash can with the rest of the nonessentials which have cluttered my life.

With this done it ought to be easier to get rid of the bigger things which keep me from moving forward with God. The motorcycle which has been in my garage for two years without running. A couple of good-sized resentments. A memory which I keep stirring to life, knowing it will never be possible to reactivate the past. And then all those *National Geographic*s.

The idea of coming down to the end of the year, discarding the unimportant, and entering the home stretch without the encumbrances of clutter, trash and guilt is exciting.

"Travel light!" I keep hearing the Holy Spirit say.

"Yea, verily," I respond.

It's good to be spiritual.

And I can hardly wait until 1980 gets here. There're so many things I want to start collecting. ↪