

the last word

Of Goats, Boats and Happiness

by Jamie Buckingham

According to my friend Ollie Swenson, who, like me, lives in the country, the second happiest day in the life of a gentleman farmer is the day someone gives him a goat.

The happiest day is when he gets rid of it.

Ollie went on to explain how his goat—the very first day he had it—climbed the fence and ate every one of his wife's expensive shrubs, including nine hanging baskets on the patio (rope and all). He finished it off by devouring all the imported tulips from Holland.

The next day the goat butted Ollie's mother-in-law head first into the compost pile and then totally destroyed his neighbor's garden. When the neighbor called, two days later, to apologize that the goat had accidentally gotten mixed up with two cows he took to market and wound up at the slaughterhouse, it was a time for rejoicing throughout the Kingdom.

Well, I didn't know much about goats. But I knew the principle of second happiest day and first happiest day surely applied to boats—especially those with large engines which always quit running two miles offshore.

I know, because last week we had our happiest day. I finally got rid of the boat. I gave it to the church.

There was a lot of thunder and lightning that afternoon. Jackie says it was because God knew what that boat was like. Three times before I had tried to give it to him, but he had always refused. I finally left it in the parking lot behind the church office with a note saying it was from an anonymous donor.

Jackie says that won't work since God saw me put it there. She says all that thunder and lightning came when he finally went outside, inspected his gift, and saw the trailer was rusted out, the canvas leaked, the battery was dead and the motor was frozen up.

When he realized it was going to cost more to fix it up than it was worth, he came looking for me. Fortunately I had gone to Atlanta to preach and he couldn't find me. In fact, it's hard for God to locate most of the preachers in Atlanta.

But I felt good. After all, at one time the

boat had been my most prized possession. It feels good to sacrifice once in a while, especially if you have depreciated a thing out or you're going to have to go into bankruptcy anyway.

So now the boat belongs to God. We really shouldn't have bought it in the first place. No one should own a boat unless

it what it's really worth. So you keep it, or give it away.

I gave the boat to God.

Jackie said God was going to get me back. "The last thing he needs is a leaky boat that stays in dry dock all the time."

"Not so," I argued back, quoting 2 Corinthians 9:7. "The Lord loves a



he has time to use it every week. And all this boat did was sit in the backyard and collect pine needles.

Well, actually it saw a bit more action than that. There was the time it had come loose from the back of a friend's car while he was pulling it through town, and it wound up—trailer and all—in the plate glass window of a furniture store. Then there was the time an old fisherman told my son the only way to get through those shallows in the river was to run the boat wide open so it would plane over the rocks. That cost me a new prop and extensive work on the keel.

Jackie kept telling me to sell it.

"What good is a red-and-white boat sitting in the backyard if you never have time to use it?" Jackie asked. But it's like my 1972 station wagon, which still runs, but not too good. You never can get out of

cheerful giver. No one has ever been more cheerful about a gift than I have."

"Just the same," Jackie said, "the first time he has to paddle that 19-foot boat home after the engine won't start, I bet he'll come after you."

I laughed it off and gratefully accepted my tax receipt from the church.

Then last night our son Tim came home from work and called me out in the backyard. He had a goat in his truck.

"Not on your life," I stormed, remembering Ollie's horror stories.

"But Dad," Tim pleaded "he's been following me around all day. It's just like God sent him to us."

Looking at her hanging baskets Jackie didn't know whether to cry—or laugh out loud.

Now, if only I can figure some way to get that goat in the offering plate. <