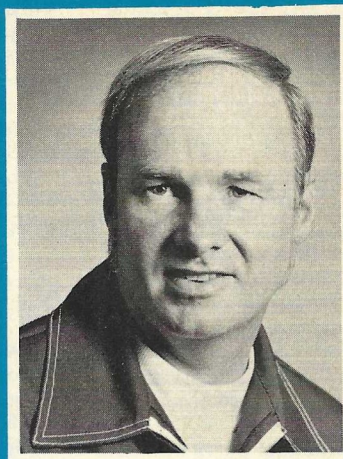


# THE LAST WORD...

Jamie Buckingham



THE OTHER MORNING, just at dawn, I was driving north along the deserted ocean highway between Vero Beach and my home in Melbourne, Florida. The highway follows a strip of sand and trees that separates the Indian River, which is actually a salt-water lagoon extending along the east coast, from the Atlantic Ocean.

Suddenly my little Volkswagen was atop the high bridge over the Sebastian Inlet. On one side the blue of the Indian River extended toward the mainland, barely visible on the western horizon. On the other side was the magnificent sunrise, exploding out of the sea in a kaleidoscope of color that was so awesome it literally took my breath away.

Early that morning I had read from the Living Bible. Now the words of David burst spontaneously from my lips: "Hallelujah, yes, praise the Lord! Sing Him a new song!"

The words of a hymn flooded my mind and I sang:

*Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty,*

*Early in the morning my song shall rise to Thee.*

But even this was not sufficient to express the explosion of adoration that came rushing from my soul as I longed to worship, to praise Him in the "womb of the morning." My human vocabulary was too limited, too restrained.

I pulled off the highway, up a little sand road to the top of a dune overlooking the ocean, and cut off my engine. For long moments I sat in silence, feasting my soul on the mir-

acle of God's new day. Then, from the very depths of my inner being, I heard the Holy Spirit Himself begin to speak, praising the Father through my lips. I was speaking in the language of the angels.

It was an unforgettable moment. Sheer ecstasy. And long after the sun had risen like a great fireball, dragging behind it the heat and light of a new day, I sat in the front seat of my little car, looking out beyond the crashing surf, praising God in the Spirit.

Praying in tongues was not a new experience for me. Although it was not the "initial" evidence of my baptism in the Holy Spirit, I do believe I "received" the gift at that time (even though it was more than two years before I appropriated it) and believe it is surely for all Believers. However, using tongues to praise God was new. Wonderfully new.

I remembered, shortly after experiencing the baptism in the Holy Spirit, that I shared my testimony before an interdenominational group. A visiting pastor, angered by what I said, approached me after the meeting. "Even if tongues are for today," he snapped, "what good are they?"

I was disturbed by his defensiveness, for although I did not speak in tongues

at the time, I believed it was a valid gift of the Spirit. But I was equally disturbed that I could not answer him intelligently.

"All I know is that Paul says he spoke in tongues more than all the others," I answered, "so it must have some value to the Christian."

He snorted and walked off, leaving me frustrated. I believed some things were to be accepted on faith alone. But I also agreed with my friend that there was a difference between toys and gifts. Toys are to be played with. But I didn't believe God would give us "gifts" unless He had a solid, logical purpose for each one.

It was in the two years following my Baptism that I began to discover His purposes. It started with my first experience with tongues. I was deathly sick in a lonely Washington, D.C., hotel room. Chills, raging fever, nausea, and a splitting headache—so weak I couldn't even walk. It was one of the few times in my life I thought I might be dying.

In the middle of the night, I heard myself praying, first in English as I begged God to "do something," and then in what sounded like an Oriental or Indian language. I was too weak to question what was happening, and on into the early dawn hours I spoke the words, sometimes dozing off and then waking to continue.

Just before daylight, I dropped off to sleep. When I awoke it was mid-morning. I was healed. Well.

Had the language been the babbling



sounds of a delirious mind? No, I believe it was the Holy Spirit praying through me, taking over to utter words my delirious mind could not handle. It was the kind of praying referred to in Romans 8:26: *Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*

Almost a year later I discovered another purpose, just as solid and logical as intercession. Our family was sharing a vacation duplex cottage on the outer banks of North Carolina with Judge Allen Harrell, his writer-wife, Irene, and their six children. One morning after the women and children had taken off for the beach, the Judge and I sat on the porch and talked. It was one of those special times when two men expose their souls to each other.

"How do I purge my inner self of the garbage that I have collected across the years?" I asked.

In his eastern North Carolina drawl, the Judge told me: "I hold court in several cities. Each morning when I leave the house and drive out of town I use the time in the car to pray or sing in the Spirit. And you know," he chuckled, "God is using this to cleanse me, to purify my soul."

His testimony led me to discover something of the tremendous purgative, cathartic purpose of praying in the Spirit. There is a deep healing that goes on in the subconscious as one prays "in tongues." Down there in the deep areas of the mind, as the Holy Spirit communes with the Father, old hurts are dredged up and healed, inherent character flaws are replaced with supernatural strength, and the carnal nature dies to take on the nature of Jesus. It's what Paul refers to in Romans 12:2 when he talks about the transformation that takes place by the "renewing of your mind." Once again I saw the beautiful practicality of this gift which edifies (builds up, strengthens) the Believer.

In searching the scripture, I've found that tongues are always some form of prayer—man to God. "Messages," it seems, come in prophecy

rather than through tongues and interpretations. It also seems that tongues need interpretation when they are spoken out loud in a group, so that all may be edified. The purpose of tongues seems to be praise, intercession, and edification.

However, I'm learning not to subject God to my absolutes. Every time, it seems, I say God *never* does a certain thing, He does it. Or when I say He *always* does it in a particular way, He does it differently. This was emphatically hammered home in a beautiful, but strange, lesson last October in the Amazon jungle of South America where I was researching a new *Logos* book on the jungle pilots who fly for the Wycliffe Bible Translators.

My old friend, Tom Smoak, had flown me deep into the jungle to a small Indian village. We landed our single-engine plane on a tiny airstrip only to learn the chief of the tribe had been taken by canoe and river launch to a hospital in an upriver town.

The chief's old wife, fearing her husband was dying, was preparing to leave that day by canoe to see him. It would take her three days of paddling to reach the town. We could fly her there in twenty minutes, and offered to do it.

Tom helped her into the back seat of the plane and strapped her down. All the time she kept speaking in her language and gesturing outside the plane. She wanted her grandson, a half naked nine-year-old child, to come with her. He was standing outside the window of the plane, tears making little streaks in the dirt on his face.

Tom patiently explained that we were at maximum weight and any additional weight would mean the plane could not clear the towering trees on take-off. The chief's wife understood, but the little boy, standing under the wing, continued to cry and beg to go along.

Something in me let me understand how he felt. His grandfather, the chief, had been taken away, maybe dying. Now his grandmother was strapped in the back of a strange silver bird that roared off into the sky. Panic, terror, fear, and loneliness—I could

read it all in his eyes as he huddled against the fuselage, wetting the plexiglass window with his tears.

I stepped out of the cockpit and bent over, putting my arm around his bare shoulders. Suddenly I heard myself praying (or speaking) softly in tongues. It lasted only seconds, but when I finished, the child turned and looked in my face, his eyes filled with wonder. Pulling away, he ran to the edge of the grass strip to join the other Indians who had come out of the village to watch the take-off. We taxied to the end of the strip, gunned the engine, and released the brakes. As we roared into the air, I saw the little boy clutching the skirt of an Indian woman and waving at the plane—his face wreathed in smiles.

I have no idea what I said, or what the Holy Spirit said through me. I don't know whether my words to him were in his own language; whether I was praying to God and the child understood, or whether God answered my prayer, which the child could not understand, by giving him peace in his heart.

I guess the explanation is immaterial. Whatever it was, though, it was practical, logical, and with purpose. For God is *always* like that . . . er, I think. ♦♦