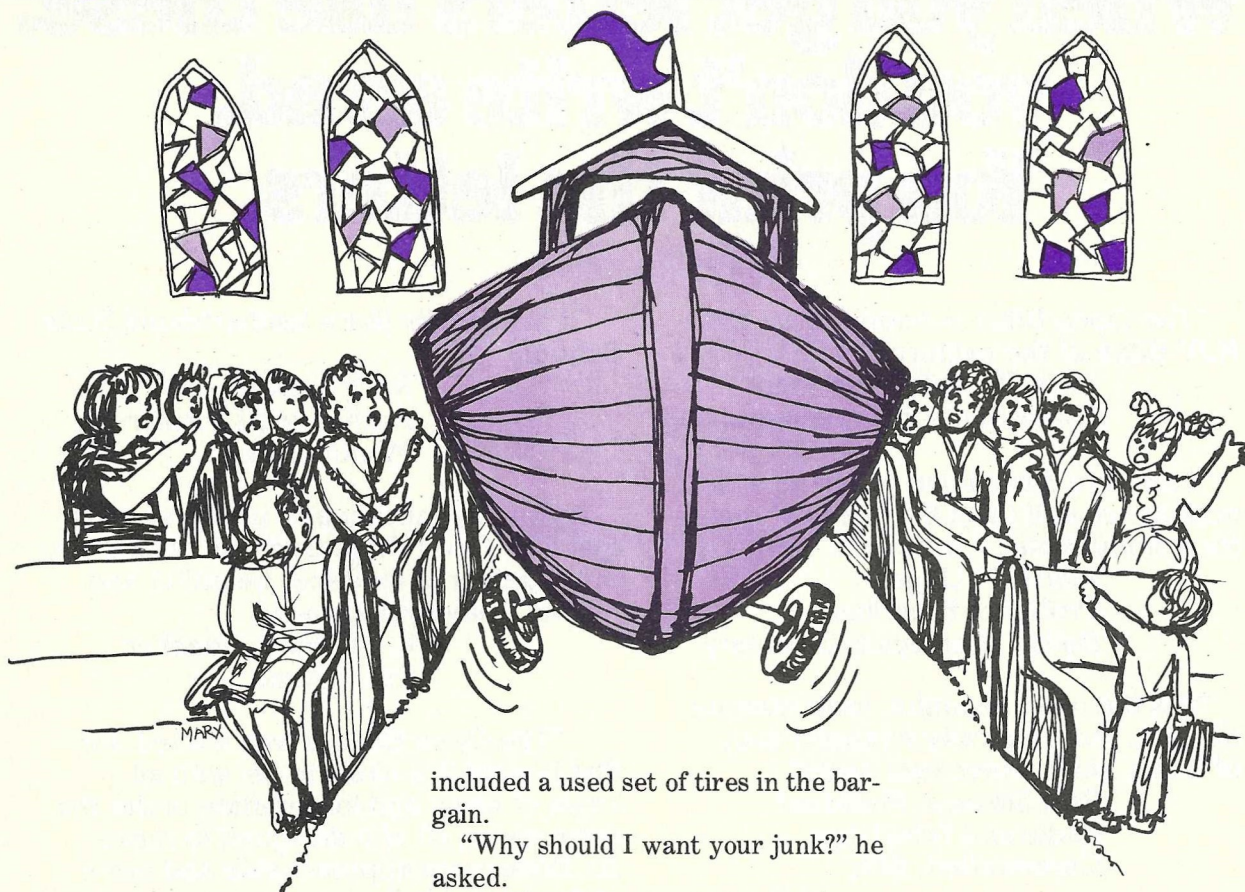


# The Last Word



## Jamie Buckingham

Charles Simpson once said the two happiest days of his life were the day he bought his boat—and the day he sold it.

Unfortunately, I didn't believe him. I bought one of my own.

First it was a new prop when my son hit some rocks in the river. Then it was a new crankshaft. Last summer the boat and trailer came loose from a friend's truck and wound up in the show window of a furniture store. That meant a new hull plus the plateglass window and a bunch of lawn chairs. Last month the cylinders needed re-boring and the battery died.

Definition: "Boat: a hole in the water into which a fool pours his money."

The boat was obviously a jinx. I began to think about giving it to the church. That way I could count it as a contribution and escape having to give my tithe in cash.

Somehow, though, that smacked of the time I tried to trade in my old car for a newer model. I asked the dealer if he would give me a better price if I

included a used set of tires in the bargain.

"Why should I want your junk?" he asked.

It's disturbing that I often wait until a thing is almost beyond repair—or out of control—before I give it to God.

Recently a young missionary family moved into our church. The people provided most of the furnishings for their house. Everything but the refrigerator. That night at the dinner table I had a generous idea.

"Our old refrigerator is on its last legs. Why don't we give it to Paul and Ginny and buy ourselves a new one—with an automatic icemaker?"

"You mean," my discerning wife smiled, "why not give God our leftovers?"

"Yeah, dad," our teen-aged Bonnie chimed in, "I thought God was supposed to get the first fruits—not the rotten apples at the bottom of the barrel."

Unfortunately, I'm like the little kid who took two dimes to church—one for the offering and the other for an ice-cream cone. When he dropped one coin down the gutter in front of the church, he said, "Sorry, God, there goes your dime."

We still have our old refrigerator.

God's servants have a new one—with an automatic icemaker.

You see, the old me is always trying to work out some kind of a "deal" with God. Last year I spoke at a prayer retreat in North Carolina. The day I arrived I promised the Lord I would give all the honorarium (I expected it to be small) to my friend Aley Gonzalesz, a native pastor in the Philippines. I felt really good about it until they handed me the check. It was for \$3,000.

Hmmm, I thought. Had I known it was going to be this big I would have promised God half—and kept the rest. But something (or Someone) told me God's words to Moses were still in effect: "That which has gone out of thy mouth I will require it of you." It seemed better to keep my promise than to have God extract it from me.

Bonnie was right. God wants our best—not our jinxes, leftovers, and compromised promises.

Anyway, I would have looked silly trying to get that boat down the aisle of the church.