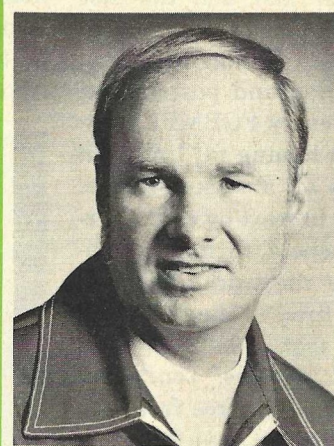


THE LAST WORD...

Jamie Buckingham



A COUPLE OF months ago I stood in a funeral home looking down into the casket that contained the body of my wife's Daddy. Still young at the age of sixty-six, he had died suddenly following a severe pancreas infection.

A thought raced through my mind. "Why do I stand here in defeat? All I have to do is lay my hand on him and say, In the name of Jesus, ARISE!" But I could not.

On the way home I questioned God. "Why? Why didn't you let me do it?"

His answer came simply. "You're not ready for that kind of ministry. Do you know what would happen to you when the word spread across this nation that I had used you to raise a man from the dead? You couldn't handle it. No, first you must learn to walk in the Spirit."

I had been glibly saying I wanted all God had for me. Suddenly I was aware I wasn't ready. There were still some foundation stones to be laid.

Three weeks later I lay on my bunk in a dark room on a mission compound in New Guinea. It had been a busy day which included a helicopter ride over Indian villages in the highlands, interviews with the jungle pilots for my book, and a time of ministry with some of the missionaries. My traveling companion, Al West, editor of *Logos Journal*, was already asleep. I, too, was tired, but slowly in my mind, the steps of how to walk in the Spirit began to crystalize.

I sat up in bed, pulled back the curtain, and by the light of the full moon jotted them down. Twelve steps on how to walk in the Spirit.

Get thoroughly dissatisfied with yourself. Complacency is the deadly enemy of spiritual progress. The contented person stagnates. When speaking of earthly goods Paul said, "I have learned to be content," but when referring to his spiritual life he testified, "I have not arrived. I press toward the mark."

Set your face like a rock toward a sweeping transformation of self. Timid experimenters are tagged for failure before they start. We must be willing to obey, even if it means ridicule, failure, even death. I have a sign above my desk: "Attempt something so big, that unless God intervenes, it is bound to fail."

Put yourself in the position to receive God's blessings. There are plainly marked paths which lead straight to the blessings of God. Walk in them. To desire a renewal of your soul and spiritual life, and think you can get it without practicing the basic elements of the walk in the Spirit, is folly. Here are the necessities. Prayer. Daily and systematic Bible study. Confession of sin. Asking and receiving forgiveness. The Bible also indicates that tithing one's income opens the windows of Heaven for God's blessings.

Do a thorough job of repenting. Don't hurry to get it over with. Hasty re-

pentance means shallow spiritual experiences and lack of certainty. We have a wretched way of tolerating half-dead sin that keeps us from experiencing the truly crucified life.

Make restitution wherever possible. If you owe a debt, pay it, or at least have an honest understanding with your creditor about your intentions to pay. If you hold a grudge against someone, go to them and apologize. Jesus said in Mark 11:25 that God will not answer our prayers as long as we hold aught against any. And remember, the way you say, "I forgive you" is to put an arm around a shoulder and say simply, "I love you!"

Bring your life into accord with the life and teachings of Jesus. Take your Bible in one hand, a pad and pencil in the other, and run a self-inventory. You'll find out what's wrong. Apply all of God's teachings to your own life rather than spending your time applying them to the lives of others. Get your eyes off the imperfections of others and put them on Jesus. Look at what he's done, rather than what you fear he won't do."

Narrow your interests. The jack-of-all-trades is a master of none. Too many projects use up time and energy without bringing us nearer God, or nearer his purpose for our lives. If you narrow your interests God will enlarge your heart.

Start where you are. Make yourself available to God. If the spiritual leaders don't ask you to do something, then step out boldly and volunteer. Remember, though, too many want to move to

the head of the table when Jesus says the first shall be last and the last first. A friend recently felt called to the ministry of evangelism. He printed up ten thousand posters and then traveled to every FGBMFI meeting in the region hoping to "line up a meeting". It was all a waste of time. God wanted him to start by evangelizing his own household, then his neighbors and finally the world. Instead, he moved to the head of the table and wound up at the foot.

Seek personal holiness. Too many have found themselves free from the bondage of legalism but have forgotten that the walk in the Spirit should make us more holy, not less. A leaky fountain pen still writes, but it leaves blotches behind. God much prefers to pour his wine into a clean vessel.

Determine to be in divine order. This begins in the home. A husband who does not treat his wife with constant love (whether she is submissive or not) is out of order. A wife who does not submit to her husband as the governmental head of the home (whether he shows love or not) is out

of order. The same applies in relationship to the body of Christ. There is no place for the lone-wolf-minister in the walk in the Spirit. Even the Apostle Paul submitted himself to the



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local body and did not attempt any mission work until they sent him out. Every Christian, especially leaders, need to be submitted to a local body for correction, edification, encouragement and fellowship. Amputated limbs

die the minute they are separated from the rest of the Body.

Use all the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The purpose of the gifts, however, is to produce fruit. Just as we do not brag about our new hoe, but use it unobtrusively to produce cabbages and tomatoes, so we should not brag about faith, miracles or tongues. These are simply tools to produce love, joy, peace, gentleness, etc.

Take all the authority God gives. Someone asked that remarkable Dutch woman, Corrie ten Boom, her impression of a particular missionary. She answered, "He has given all but he has not taken all." She was referring to the authority God gives to cast out demons, the authority to rebuke sickness and walk in health, the authority to take possession of the world and live above it.

Walking in the Spirit is not a prerequisite for receiving the gifts of the Spirit (Even a donkey spoke in tongues when God wanted it to.). But if signs and wonders are to consistently follow our ministry, then there must be a consistent walk with Jesus. ♦♦