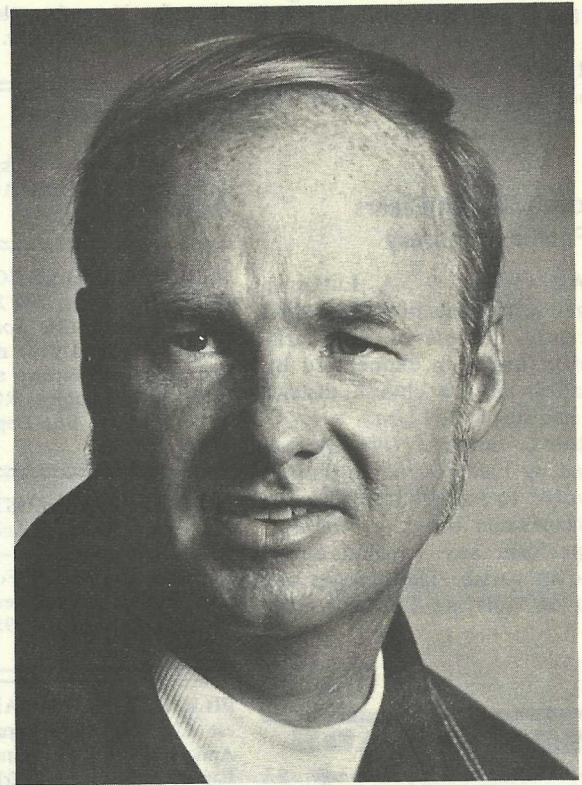


THE LAST WORD...

Jamie Buckingham



One evening, recently, I had to spank my twelve-year-old son, Timmy. Then, since I was in a hurry to complete a magazine article before leaving town early the next morning, I returned to my manuscript on the dining-room table. Minutes later I heard sobbing coming from the darkened living room. Impatiently pushing back the papers, I went in and found Timmy huddled on the floor at the end of the sofa.

"Daddy," he sobbed, "why are you always too busy to play with me?"

The next morning as I strapped myself in the 7 a.m. plane for Atlanta, Timmy's words were striking at my heart like a whole quiver full of arrows. I was to speak at an FGBMFI convention in Norfolk. Sharing the program was a Juvenile and Domestic Relations judge from Virginia. In his testimony he related how his own seventeen-year-old daughter had rebelled and left home the year before. I thought of my own five children, three of whom are teenagers. If such a thing can happen in the home of a Spirit-filled judge, I thought, what about me? Once again Timmy's question seared a hole in

my heart.

Returning home from Norfolk, I sat down and took a long look at my calendar. How in God's name could a man get so busy? Somehow I had convinced myself that all my speaking, researching, and writing took priority. Yet, to paraphrase the Scripture, "What does it profit a man if he win the whole world, and lose his own children?"

I remembered the story of a former president at my seminary. Although he was a world-renowned Bible scholar, his son became an alcoholic. The day finally arrived when the son lay inside the president's home in a drunken stupor, while the old servant of God paced back and forth in the driveway, repeating over and over the words of Solomon: "They made me a keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept."

It didn't take much of this kind of prodding by the Holy Spirit to make me realize that if I did not minister to my own wife and children, nothing I had to say elsewhere would ring true.

I began by thinning out my obligations. To some out-of-town invitations I

said I would not come unless I could bring one or more of my children with me, which would not only expose them to ministry but give me some precious, personal time with them.

But this was just the beginning of what I now understand to be God's role for me as the *priest in my home*. Although there is a need for the believers to assemble together, my understanding of "church" has broadened; I no longer see it as a building, or even as an organization—but as God's people. And this begins with what Paul called "the church in thy house." Thus, my family is my parish, and if I fail to minister to them, then any other ministry I may attempt is powerless. To this extent I now see the home as the *prime* place of teaching, worshiping, evangelizing, and personal ministry. And in this setting I am the priest.

As priest in my home, I lead the family in prayer. For years we tried having "family devotions." It was a dismal failure. The entire concept seemed to be a throwback to the days when the family retired after a hard day's work on the farm and sat around the fireplace with

the Bible. Now I see family prayer as a time of personal prayer with the priest and one or more children—at any time available. In our case, I try to make the rounds at night for a private time with each child. Here as Priest/Daddy, I encourage, answer questions, talk about big and little things—and yes, lay on hands and pray. It is of vital importance that my children hear me tell them every night how proud I am of them, that I love them and have great confidence in them.

As priest in my home, I preside over family worship. Often, after dinner, we push back the dishes and serve the Lord's supper around the table in memory of Him. It means passing a goblet of grape juice, with each child taking a sip and then passing it on, saying, "This is the blood of Jesus. He loves you and I love you."

The priest administers discipline. To spare the rod is to spoil the child, but to wield the rod without accompanying love, prayer, and explanation is to drive the child out of the family church. No spanking (or other discipline) should ever be administered without full explanation followed by prayer together.

Priestly duties also include such things as playing catch, baiting hooks, putting on Band-Aids and helping my son change the oil in his old car. It may sound corny, but when my children found out I loved them enough not only to spank them, but to give them my time, things began to happen in our house.

Something else happened. As I have assumed my Christ-given authority as priest, I have become aware of a new relationship developing between me and my wife. For the first time in our marriage I am able to lay hands on her and pray, sensing beneath my hands a new spirit of submission. I know, now, this only comes when a husband submits himself to the ultimate purpose of Christ in his life.

Since my baptism in the Holy Spirit, I have been blessed in countless ways. But nothing blesses me as much as kneeling beside the bed of one of my teenagers while we pray together softly in the Spirit, and then hearing a sleepy voice as I leave the room: "Thanks, Dad. I love you."

That's high pay, even for a priest. □ □