

## Baptist Pastor Shares Testimony

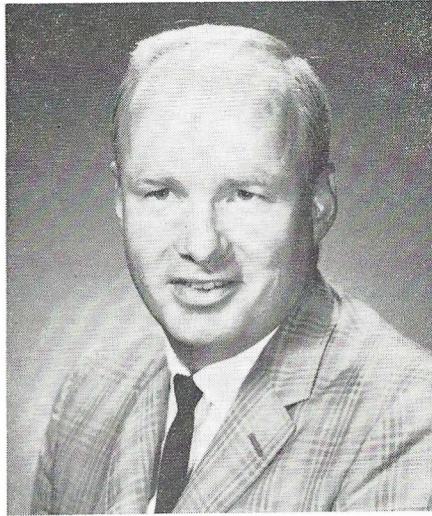
By Jamie Buckingham

I'm not sure at all how you will receive what I am about to share with you. I have given much prayer to the matter and thank God that this is probably the only church in the Convention that would hear me out and not think that I am completely crazy. (I think that most of you have accepted that as a fact already, anyway.) What I am going to say could be construed as the words of a man gone completely insane—or the words of one who has witnessed and experienced the Power of God at work in an awesome way. I shall leave the evaluation up to you.

This past week I have been in Washington, D.C. doing research for my book **Run Baby Run**, which is the sequel to **The Cross and the Switchblade**. I was there on the invitation of my publisher and the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship, a lay organization of Spirit-filled men who are helping sponsor Nicky Cruz, the subject of the book. The FGBMF had a regional convention beginning Wednesday night at the Shoreham Hotel. I had arrived a few days earlier to interview my subject and do some additional research.

Monday night I attended a prayer meeting at a church in Arlington, Virginia, made up of businessmen from all churches who had felt they were going spiritually dry and had been meeting once a week for fellowship and inspiration. That night there were more than 600 present. I was dumbfounded at their enthusiasm and their freedom of worship. They sang with great intensity. They raised their hands when they sang and prayed. There was an electricity quality about the congregation as they said, "Praise God", "Amen", and "Thank you, Jesus" in response to the speaker's remarks.

Tuesday afternoon I went with Nicky and some of the men to the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis where Nicky was to address the brigade of midshipmen. I spoke briefly on the program and then sat back in amazement as these midshipmen and their officers alike gave their Christian testimony. None of this timidity that I notice among our young people. No inhibitions about whom they might offend. They were standing up straight and tall, witnessing to the saving power of Jesus Christ. I was im-



JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

pressed especially with the testimony of a young naval aviator, Commander Bob Wright, who was overflowing about the power of God in his life. I kept noticing that all these men used terms such as "Spirit-filled" and "Baptized in the Spirit" as the secret of their power.

Wednesday night I had my first experience with the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship. Al Malachuk, Nicky's host during the week and the brother of my publisher, was directing the Convention. He is a printer and machinery salesman from Virginia. There were about 1,200 people present that first night. The meeting was very informal but very orderly. I was amazed that they had no "formal" order of service. They said they were "following the leadership of the Spirit."

I was afraid that the meeting would be filled with a bunch of fanatical Pentecostals, but found that they were all respectable business people from all over the nation. And that they came from all kinds of churches—Methodist, Presbyterians, Baptists, Episcopalians. Al introduced me and I spoke about five minutes promoting the book and the testimony that the book would have. I then took a seat on the front row while the other guests were introduced. I was particularly impressed with an Anglican Priest, David Stiles, from Canada that now had a unique boat ministry in Sarasota, Fla. He had on a clerical collar and I could tell that he was not the regular run of the mill priest. He, too, testified that he had received this "Baptism in the Spirit"

and it had transformed his life.

During the service Al Malachuk came down off the platform and whispered in my ear that he felt "led by the Spirit" to ask me to sing. I was flabbergasted. I had no music. I couldn't even think of the words of a single song. I made my way to the organ and asked the organist if she had any music. She was playing by ear. It was time for me to sing. I frantically told her to play "How Great Thou Art", that's all I could think of. I sang the verse and chorus and then asked the congregation to join me on the chorus the second time around since I couldn't think of the 2nd stanza. They did. They stood and sang. I watched them, many of them singing with arms raised towards the ceiling and with tears running down their face—"How Great Thou Art". I was deeply moved and impressed.

The next afternoon I attended the afternoon service. The people were arriving at the Shoreham Hotel in great numbers. The lobby was filled with respectable people with wide smiles on their faces, hugging one another and shaking hands and saying in loud voices, "Praise God." I even noticed a couple of Catholic Priests, in full garb, saying "Praise God". I shook my head in disbelief.

In the service there were more than 3,000 present. I had to leave early to complete an interview so I stood along side the wall. Many were standing, and all the seats were long taken. I carefully observed the people present. No "peculiars". No "fanatics". I noticed a beautiful young woman sitting on the end of a row. She looked like a fashion model. We were singing "Amazing Grace" and as we sang she raised her hand—just one delicately gloved hand—and there was a radiance on her face the likes I had never seen. Directly in front of her was a little stooped man. He must have been 90 years old. He was standing beside a darkskinned woman I later found out was from Pakistan. The little old man was bent and feeble. But as they sang, "When I've been there ten thousand years", he raised his head and that same radiance was on his face. He held up both arms as far as they would go, not much past his chest, and shaking with age, and tears streaming down his face, he sang of the glory of heaven.

I was deeply moved. There was, indeed, something special going on here that



I had never before experienced. Where did this freedom come from? Where did they receive the power to lose their earthly inhibitions? I had to find out.

That night I ate supper with David Stiles, the Anglican Priest, and his wife. I told him frankly that I was amazed over this mysterious power, that I had witnessed. I didn't want to talk to a Pentecostal because I didn't trust them and because I didn't want to become a tongue-speaking, floor-rolling fanatic. But I had to have some answers.

He laughed at me and we discussed for an hour and a half the experiences in the Scripture of the "baptism in the Spirit". I had a growing feeling that I was familiar with what he was discussing but had always referred to it in different terms like "total commitment" or "surrender". Only now I understood that it was not something that you did . . . but something that you received.

He asked me what I thought of Mark 16 and I told him that I simply ignored the last few verses as something that I couldn't understand. He asked me if I didn't believe the whole Bible. I said "yes". Then he said, "Why not these and other passages?" I had no answer. He asked me if I believed that Peter and John and Philip and the others actually performed miracles. I said "yes". He said, "Do you think God can still perform miracles through his people? I said "yes". He said, "has he ever performed one through you?". I said "no". He asked me why. I had no answer.

After supper we hurried to the main assembly hall. There were more than 3,000 people present. The meeting had already started and the only seat left for me was on the third row directly in front of the preacher.

They had a series of testimonies. A Federal Judge from Atlanta, Ga. A former governor's candidate from North Carolina, a physician, a Roman Catholic Priest from Notre Dame. All testified about the grace of Christ and the marvelous, amazing power of the Holy Spirit that enables them to witness and praise God without restriction.

All around me people were smiling and clapping and saying, "Praise God" . . . out loud . . . right out there in public . . . they were saying in loud voices, "Praise God".

Then, the leader said, "Listen for a word from God". The assembly got unbelievably quiet. It had been noisy before, not bedlam, but a warm, friendly noisiness. Now it was death still.

Suddenly a voice from the far back

right began to speak. Clear as a bell. The most beautiful, melodious speaking voice I've ever heard. It was speaking in a foreign language. I knew it was an "unknown" tongue. Yet it wasn't babbling. It was estatic. It sounded like an Oriental or an American Indian dialect. The voice spoke in sentences with voice inflections indicating punctuation. The speaker spoke for about a minute and then stopped. I knew, from having read on the subject and from a surface reading of I Cor. 14, that there should be an "interpreter". There was. Immediately a man 4 seats down from me on the same row began to speak in the 1st person with the most authoritative voice I've ever heard. It was as if God were speaking. I do not remember all he said, but it was something like: "I have sent you and anointed you to preach. I shall never leave nor forsake you. I shall be with you always. You will be great in the Kingdom of God because it is my Spirit that leads you. The task is great and many are lost, but in my Spirit you shall overcome".

I was overcome. As he spoke I stood trembling. Tears coursed down my face. I had the awesome feeling that this was God's message to me—alone. That out of all these 3,000 people that He was speaking to me, the skeptic.

We sat down and I felt that anything else that followed would be anti-climatic. I was embarrassed over my emotional condition but no one else seemed to notice. The experience of having had a "word from God" was so strong that I could hardly contain it. I wanted to stand

up and shout, "He spoke to me". But I didn't dare do that. My ancestors would turn over in their graves. Although I had a suspicion that if I did everyone in that room would have shouted "Praise God" or something like that.

They introduced the preacher. He was a Southern Baptist from Houston, Texas, a graduate of Baylor and Southwestern Seminary. It was, without doubt, the greatest sermon I have ever heard—yet all he did was give his testimony. But I identified with everything he said. He told of how he had longed for additional power in his ministry. How he felt that God had intended him for greater things than a denominational box. How he recognized the superficiality and powerlessness of all their church activities. He told of seeking this power, of knowing that the Pentecostals had something yet of being afraid to receive it. He told of how he shied away from them because of some of their obviously false doctrines and because of the few fakers in their midst that blighted out the truth. Then he told of receiving this "Baptism" in the Holy Spirit. Suddenly he was preaching and ministering and witnessing with a new power. He told of going to India and preaching and how in one service he cried out for all the deaf people to hear, and they did. How in another service he put his hand on blind people and demanded in the name of Christ that they see—and they did. It was fantastic. I have heard these claims from those that I have always classified as fanatics, but never from a bonafide minister.

He gave the invitation and about 15 adults came forward. I was impressed because my seminary professors who had preached against this movement told me that the Holy Spirit's one purpose was to glorify Christ—and that these "baptized in the Spirit" people were trying to discount Christ and glorify the Holy Spirit. Small point, perhaps, but this was all definitely Christ centered. And I remembered that Paul said, "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost". (I Cor 12:3).

Then he called all those who wanted the "baptism in the Spirit" to come forward. Hundreds did. I found out later that there was a Southern Baptist pastor in the group. I was trapped down front. I wanted out but couldn't get out. I stood and tried to be objective. I kept reminding myself that I was there as a writer and maybe I could make notes or something. That seemed ridiculous. So for a lack of anything better to do I sat down. I realized I ought to at least be

#### TREASURES

One by one He took them from me,  
All the things I valued most;  
Until I was empty handed,  
Every glittering toy was lost.

And I walked earth's highways  
grieving,  
In my rags and poverty  
Till I heard His voice inviting  
"Lift up your empty hands to Me."

So I held my hands toward heaven  
And He filled them with a store  
Of His own transcendent riches  
Until they could hold no more.

And at last I comprehended  
With my stupid mind and dull  
That God could not pour His riches  
Into hands already full.

—Selected



praying. The mob of people were pressed all around me, many of them with their hands in the air. Many crying and calling out to God for power. I put my head on the chair in front of me and tried to pray. Nothing. I was blank. Cold. Suddenly I felt someone sit down beside me and bump me. I glanced up and it was David Stiles, this Anglican Priest. He put his hand on my shoulder. I began to weep. I could sense that he was praying for me. His lips were moving but no sound. I was racked with sobs. I was holding on to the chair in front of me saying, "no, no, no, no". I wanted to turn loose but was afraid to. I was still bound to this earth and all my conservative inhibitions. Suddenly I felt an arm go around my shoulders from the other side and heard a man praying. I didn't recognize his voice but he was calling me by name, praying that God would fill me with His Spirit. I have never gone through such an intense emotional turmoil. I was crying so hard I was shaking . . . and out in public . . . but I had no choice . . . I was a man possessed with a strange new power.

David moved around in front of me and picked up my head and said, "Now tell me, Jamie. You have your degree in psychology. Do you still tell me that all this is a bunch of cheap, hypocritical emotionalism on a superficial basis. Is all this fraud and fakery?" All I could say was that something was happening in my heart—on the left side of my chest . . . and I felt I was being washed completely clean and being picked up by an unseen hand.

He put his hand on my head and prayed again. Suddenly I realized he was praying in an unknown tongue — very softly and quietly. I remember what the Scripture says in Roman 8:26 about praying in the Spirit with groanings that cannot be uttered. It only lasted a minute and it was over. I looked up to see who the man was, beside me. It was Commander Bob Wright, in his full dress naval uniform, with a chest full of ribbons. How he had spotted me in all that mob of people I will never know. But these were the only two men in Washington that I respected enough to have reached me—and both of them were beside me at this minute.

I staggered to my feet and out the door. I went to my room like I was walking on air. Many times before, in private, I have shed tears over repentance from sin, but never had I had an experience like this.

I ran into Nicky and he threw his arms around me and told me that he had been praying for me. I found out later that the preacher for that night had just appeared in town that afternoon. He had cancelled out an engagement in California because he felt "compelled by the Spirit" to come to Washington. And when Al Malachuk learned that I was leaving town the next morning, he put Johnny Osteen on to preach that night. It was almost more than I could stand.

The next morning, I left the hotel early to catch my plane at National Airport. Going through the almost vacant lobby I heard the bellboys, over to one side, making fun of the people who were there that week. They were laughing and kidding and shouting, "Praise the Lord, Brother Bell Boy, let me carry your Big Bible for you". Before I would have cringed at this. This morning I simply smiled to myself and said, "If they only knew what I know". The fears and inhibitions were gone.

Coming home on the plane I witnessed to a girl sitting beside me. Before I would have talked about the Lord when somebody brought it up. But this morning I brought it up. I felt as if I were riding on a cloud. I've never been as anxious to get back home and go to work. I caught myself praying for various people that I seldom prayed for. I had a feeling that this HAD to happen to me so I could complete the book—which deals with a similar experience in this boy's life.

Yesterday (Saturday) I began to get apprehensive about how much of this to share with you—my church. I felt you would understand and felt that many of you had actually been praying for me to receive an experience like this. But still, I was a bit uneasy. I did, twice, and guess I would have talked all night had I had the chance. But I needed a sign—some sign—that God was at work in my life and not some evil spirit that

would seek to disrupt the Christian koinonia (Fellowship).

Last night I had the strongest impulse to call my parents in Vero Beach and ask my dad to set up an appointment with Billy Graham who was supposed to be in Vero for another month recovering from his illness. I had felt while in Washington that I would ask him to write the Foreword for the book. I knew it would take at least one interview, maybe more, before he would consent. I had intended to wait until the first of the week but felt compelled to call last night.

My Dad and Mother both wanted to know all the details. I felt it was unnecessary to share it with them but they demanded to know all the details and so I told them exactly what I would have told Graham. They said they would phone him (they are close personal friends) and see if he would talk to me this afternoon when I drove down.

Later last night they called back. My dad said that Graham had had a change of plans and was leaving early this morning (Sunday) to return to North Carolina. They had caught him just before he went to bed and it was the only possible time that any outsider could have talked to him before he left. He listened as they explained what I wanted and then enthusiastically said that he felt this was of God and that he would be delighted to write the Foreword and would have it ready before he left for Australia the first of May.

This was all the sign I needed that God was at work.

Now you may call this whole experience a neurotic episode or an acute emotional trauma. I don't know. I will simply have to wait and see. I have not "spoken in tongues" and have no desire to do so. However, I suddenly see the validity if others are so led by the Spirit of God. I do know that for the last two days there has been a radiance in my life that I have never had before—a joy—an inner confidence that I want to share this with others and have no hesitation to talk about Christ. Maybe I have been "baptized in the Spirit". I don't know. I only know that something wonderful has happened to me, and I have a deep feeling that from now on things are going to be marvelously different.

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#### AS A MAN SOWETH

We must not hope to be mowers,  
 And to gather the ripe gold ears,  
 Unless we have first been sowers  
 And watered the furrows with  
 tears.

It is not just as we take it,  
 This mystical world of ours,  
 Life's field will yield as we make it  
 A harvest of thorns or of flowers.

Johann W. von Goethe,  
 1749-1832