

# LIVING THROUGH THE FIRE

by MRS. JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

**I tried to hide everything. You just don't come out and tell people your husband is having an affair . . .**

After 27 years of marriage — and 5 years of dating and engagement before that — I'm still in love with Jamie. In fact, more today than ever. I still enjoy just holding his hand.

But, our past has certainly been a stormy one. It's not so difficult to talk about it now ... especially if it can help someone else. But, the only reason I can talk about it at all is because we have experienced healing and wholeness in Jesus Christ.

Fifteen years ago, it was different. I tried to hide everything. You just don't come out and tell people your husband is having an affair, especially if he's the pastor of the church. Many times I felt like I was carrying this load all alone. I felt humiliated, wounded, rejected ... and I didn't know who I could turn to.

I remember even as word began to leak out — other people started seeing things on their own — and they would come and try to tell me. But, I refused to acknowledge Jamie's sin to anyone. I knew in my heart it was so, but I wasn't about to allow others to throw stones at him.

For the most part, he was good to me, a good father and a good provider. It was just that he was being unfaithful to me, his wife, and to our commitment with each other and God.

I have always said that it is easy to forgive someone when you love them. That is the only reason I could keep on forgiving and forgiving.

As Jamie says it, "Forgiveness is not something you do. It is something you are." It is a state of being. It is not words that come out of my mouth saying, "I forgive you." It is a way a person lives. It is not putting off retaliation to a better time. It is wiping the slate clean. It's like the difference between a self-cleaning and a continuous-cleaning oven. Forgiveness is continual cleaning. To me the central theme of Jesus Christ is forgiveness. It is the purpose of the cross ... Christ hanging upon it to forgive us of all our sins.

I guess I was always questioning Jamie's salvation. I didn't understand how he could be involved with someone other than his wife and still have a relationship with God. Then, in 1968, Jamie and I both had an experience with the Holy Spirit. That did not settle our problems. It didn't make us both sinless. But we were different. Now there was a new power working inside us — a desire to be holy as God is holy. Gradually that moved us toward truth. Truth with each other. Truth with God.

Jamie began sharing his fears. His desires — both those moral and immoral. I was free to tell him where and how I hurt — not just lash back at him in anger. We were both different. Jesus had become Lord of our lives.

The problems did not disappear overnight, but remained as "echos". Occasionally the former relationships reappear in our lives, but now we face them together.

Healing doesn't happen over night. But it always starts with truthfulness — as painful as that may be. It takes a long time, but it gets better all the time. There are many happy experiences that build on top of the unhappy experiences of the past. I make it a policy to focus on the good things over the past 15 years instead of the bad memories 20 years ago.

But, in all of this, we never considered separation or divorce. It was just never an option. Now in looking back, I'm thankful that no one came along and counseled me to get a divorce. If I were being abused physically, separation or divorce might have been necessary for my protection. But, except for that, I see the whole message of the cross calling us to stay in the marriage relationship — and dying to self there. How else is there going to be new life spring up in your mate, unless you are willing to "die". I came to the place in my walk with the Lord that I could honestly say to Jamie: "I love you and I'm going to stay with you and be your wife as I promised I would from the beginning." I know I could have left. I had every legal and moral right to do so. But, I chose to stay. I believed with all my heart that as long as I stayed obedient to God, that He would take care of Jamie. (The lilly perfumes the hand that crushes it.)

I'm convinced that is one of the reasons God has blessed us. We made it through the fire, with God's help. We have beautiful children, a happy family, a beautiful home and an income that exceeds our needs. It is God's blessing on our lives.

Jamie has a driving desire — a desire I believe God has given him — to see things restored. To see even those wrong relationships brought to holiness and purity. And I am standing with him.

Together, I am convinced, we'll not stumble anymore.