

The Direct Line

Jamie Buckingham

More and more I am convinced that God will move supernaturally when you make your requests known unto him. I don't understand the mystery of prayer. All I know is it works. I can understand the principle of compassion when I ask someone else to help me. They see my need and give me money or take me to where I need to go. I can see this with my eyes. But talking to an invisible God who doesn't even have a credit rating with Dun and Bradstreet, and expecting him to meet my need, still mystifies me.

Maybe if I tell you a couple of little stories of how God has heard these requests which were made to him only, you'll understand what I'm talking about.

Last spring my dear friend, Al West, the former editor of Logos Journal, was dying of leukemia. For some reason God had given me peace about it, relieved me of the burden to pray for his healing. Yet I was still greatly concerned, especially since he was in New Jersey and I in Florida.

One particular day I had been in an elders' meeting all morning and was running late for an afternoon appointment. Yet for some reason I detoured to stop by my house. No real reason. My wife was out of town and the children were in

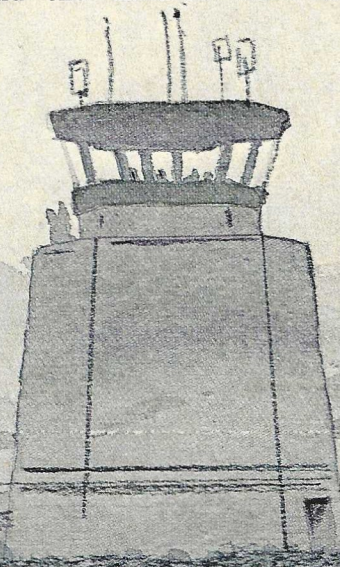
school. When I opened the front door the phone was ringing. It was Donna West, Al's wife. Her voice was tense.

"Al is dying. Can you come?" I dropped everything. I would barely have time to catch the three o'clock plane out of Melbourne to Atlanta, then make the six-thirty connection to Newark. I called my friend at the travel agency.

"No way," she said sadly. "The flight to Atlanta is oversold. However, the Atlanta/Newark flight is open. I'll make a reservation."

But it was already three-thirty, the flight left in three hours, and Atlanta was 450 miles away.

I hung up the phone and made my request known to God. I didn't drop



to my knees. It was just a matter of heart commitment.

Then, before I had a chance to say "now what?" the phone jangled at my elbow. It was Gene Ryce, a friend from Maryland who has business interests in Florida.

"This is the strangest thing," he said. "I'm down here at the restaurant in a phone booth. I've just finished a business appointment and have some time to spare. I felt I should drop a dime in the phone and call you. How about a cup of coffee?"

"Gene, I'm sorry. I don't have time to talk. I'm trying to get to Atlanta and can't find a way."

"How soon do you have to leave?" he asked.

"I need to catch a flight from the Atlanta airport that leaves for

Newark at six-thirty," I answered impatiently.

God Takes Over

Gene began to laugh. "My Beechcraft Baron is all gassed up. All I have to do is file a flight plan and turn the key. We can be there two hours after take-off."

I met him at the nearby private field. It took a few minutes to file the instrument flight plan and wait for clearance. By then both engines on the powerful Baron were purring, and at four-fifteen we were in the air. It was going to be close. Very close.

"Flight control says I can't land at the Atlanta airport without a recording altimeter," Gene said as we cleared the runway and pulled up the landing gear. "I have one on order but it's not installed. But God

has brought us this far, we'll let him take us in."

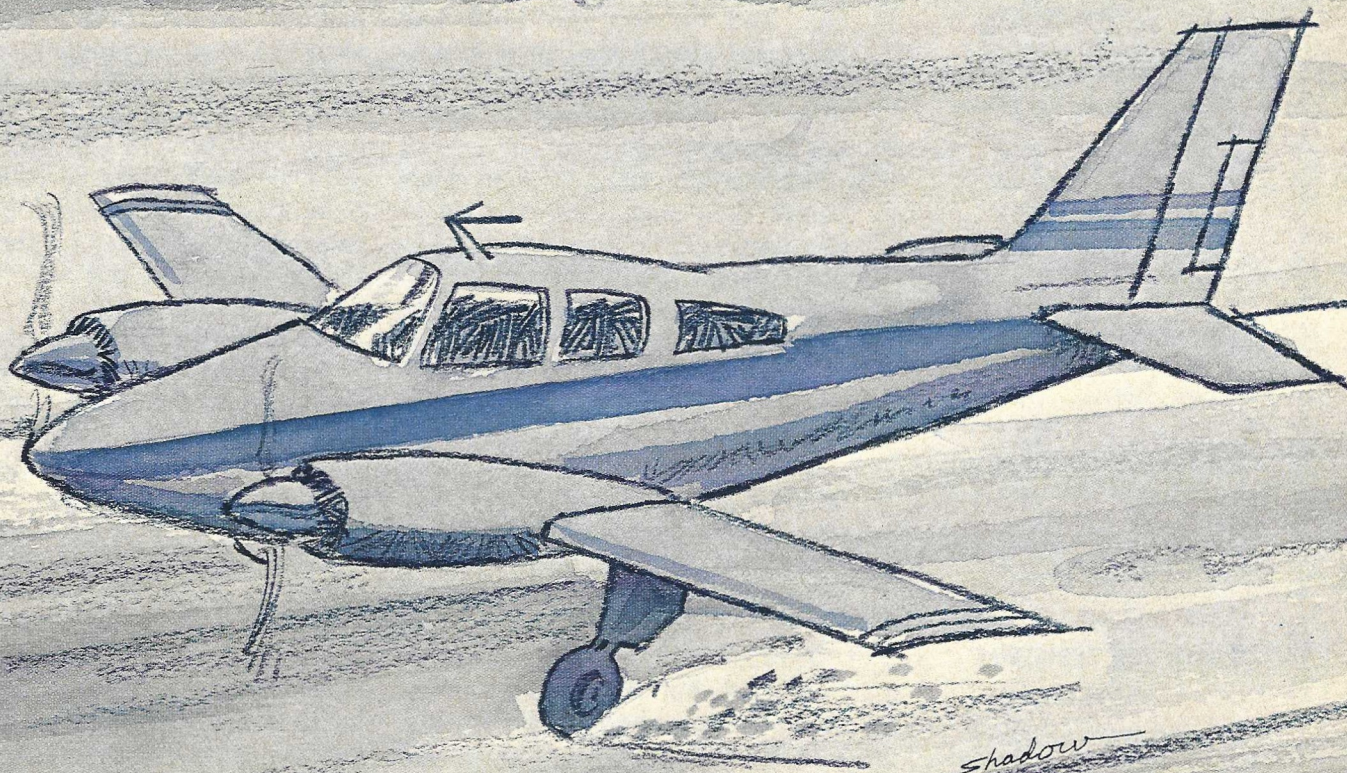
Fifty miles south of Atlanta we ran into heavy clouds filled with rain. We were switched to Approach Control. The first question that crackled through the radio was, "Do you have a recording altimeter?"

Gene looked over at me in the right seat. "Let's pray before I answer." He took his thumb off the mike and we both joined in a cockpit prayer. "Lord, we believe you have sent us. We trust you to open the doors."

Gene punched the mike button but we had delayed so long that Approach Control was too busy to talk to us. We kept boring right in towards Atlanta.

We were fifteen miles south of the field when Approach Control came back to us. "You're too close to the field for me," he said. "I'm turning you over to the tower."

please turn page



The first question Atlanta tower asked when we identified ourselves was, "Do you have a recording altimeter in that plane?"

"Let's pray," Gene said again. Once more he took his thumb off the mike and we prayed. "We commit this into your hands, Lord. Hallelujah! Praise your name!"

Gene put the mike to his mouth. "No sir, we do not have a recording altimeter on the aircraft."

The tower answered immediately. "Federal regulations say you cannot come into this field without a recording altimeter."

By that time we had broken out of the clouds and were flying in heavy rain. But the field was in sight. We prayed again and kept boring in towards the busy airport. Gene punched the mike button again.

"Sir, your Approach Control has allowed us to get this far."

There was a long pause. The airport was dead ahead. "You're too close to turn back," the tower oper-

ator said with a note of exasperation. We've got two 727s right behind you and another taking off in front of you. You're cleared to land. Make a straight-in approach and turn off at the first exit before you get run over from behind."

Our tires squealed on the runway at six twenty-five. "Oh God, hold that Delta flight."

After taxiing around the big jets we pulled up at the private plane gate at six thirty-five. It was pouring rain. I opened the door, grabbed my bag, and heard Gene say, "I'll pray while you make a dash for it."

God Acts Again

Well, "make a dash" meant a quarter of a mile across the apron to the Delta concourse. Then I had to find my gate. Already it was past time.

Suddenly a huge Gulf Oil truck pulled up beside me. "Want a ride?" the driver shouted through the window. I piled in beside him.

"Ordinarily I don't pick up folks," he explained. "But it began raining, and I hated to see you get wet."

He took me straight to the gate. My plane was still there—delayed by the bad weather. I picked up my ticket, walked on, and we were off.

The Lord *did* want me there for that special time in Al and Donna's life. And because the Lord had called me, then it was up to him to provide the way. All I had to do was make my request known to him—and be available.

It's one thing to make your needs known unto man. There seems to be, however, a word coming to God's people today that there is a higher way than leaning on man to meet our needs. Rather, the call is to rely on God and let others respond to God's leading, not to our pleading.

Several nights ago our phone rang. It was a young couple who were having some serious problems. They were both weeping. I asked, "Have you made your request known to God?"

Through tears they answered. "We tried, but God didn't answer. That's the reason we're calling you."

In the stillness of their weeping I heard God whisper to me, "They

want you to do something for them that I would not do. Are you going to do it? Are you going to put yourself in a position of doing something for them that I have denied?"

I gently told the couple they were going to have to depend entirely on God. He had additional things he wanted to teach them. In his time, if they were obedient, all would work out.

You see, the horizontal channel is never pure. Our requests, when made to man, are tinged with selfishness. And often, when we answer our friends' requests, we do so out of compassion rather than divine compelling. Need, I am learning, does not necessarily constitute a call. The *only* clear channel is through the Holy Spirit to God, then back through the Holy Spirit to whomever God wants to be the answer to our prayer.

Last April I spoke at a Camp Farthest Out (CFO) meeting at Ardmore, Oklahoma. My wife and youngest daughter accompanied me. During the week I had a strong impression to return home by way of Tulsa. No reason, unless it was to stop and visit with my good friend, Bill Sanders at Tulsa Christian Fellowship. The afternoon we were to leave from Ardmore a man we had met only the day before stopped me after the morning meeting.

God told me to give you this," he said. He handed me five twenty-dollar bills. Well, if God told him to do it I wasn't going to refuse the Lord. Besides, we were broke and I wanted at least to pay for the gas in the private plane Bill was sending down to pick us up.

More Blessed to Give

That afternoon, after we had checked in a local motel, I met with a group of young men who meet with Bill Sanders every week—men who are planning to go into the ministry. Some of them are students at Oral Roberts University, others are local men. During the meeting I was drawn to a young man with a sad face sitting across the room. In that deep place where God speaks I heard a voice whispering, "I want you to give that man forty dollars."

I hesitated, but the urging grew

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stronger and stronger. The meeting finally broke up, and the young man was the first one out of the room. I quickly excused myself and caught him at the door leading out to the parking lot.

"I don't understand this," I said half apologetically. "But here's something from God." I handed him two of my remaining twenty-dollar bills.

He just looked at me. Neither of us had ever seen the other before that afternoon. I didn't even know his name. He nodded, stuffed the bills in his pocket, and walked out into the parking lot.

I was a little disappointed. Maybe *hurt* is a better word. Here I had tried to be so obedient and generous, and he hadn't even said thank you.

I followed him with my eyes. When he got about half way across the parking lot he suddenly began to leap in the air, kicking his feet and waving his hands in unbridled joy. I was just a little irritated. After all, it was I who had given him the money. He could have thanked me warmly. Or wept. No, instead he just stuck it in his pocket and went out there and started dancing around the parking lot.

Then I realized what had happened. He had made his request known only to God. Now he was out there giving God the praise. I was just the instrument the Lord had used to pass along the money given me by the man in Ardmore. In the process God had given us a free trip to Tulsa, a chance to fellowship with dear friends, and I had enough left over to pay for a comfortable night's lodging and a good meal. God simply wanted me to go to Tulsa as a messenger to carry two twenty-dollar bills to a young man who had made his request known to God alone.

As I said, I don't understand all that. All I know is it works. ✠



Jamie Buckingham is executive editor of Logos Journal and pastor of Tabernacle Church in Melbourne, Florida. He has authored several books and innumerable articles.
