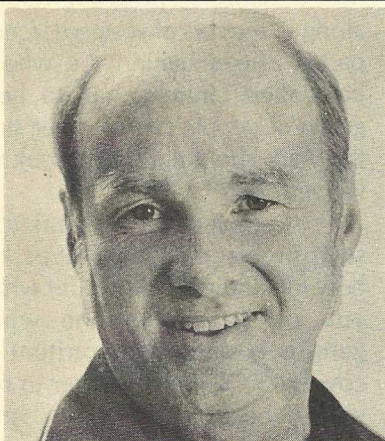


# HEART OF THE MATTER



Jamie Buckingham Melbourne, Florida: The writings, frequent national television appearances and speaking at conferences across the world have made the name of Jamie Buckingham a household word in many Christian circles.

Respected as a significant leader in the charismatic renewal, this former Southern Baptist pastor continues as the spiritual overseer of the Tabernacle Church in Melbourne, Fla.—a church making radical commitment to New Testament norms of church life an order.

Before entering the writing field at the age of 35, he pastored Baptist churches in South Carolina and Florida. Since then he has been a roving editor for *Guideposts* magazine and later editor of *Logos Journal*. A prize-winning newspaper and magazine columnist, his "Last Word" column in *Logos Journal* is often the first word read by those who

pick up the magazine. He is the author of 27 major books and has helped a number of other well-known authors as an editor. Titles such as *Run Baby Run*, *Tramp for the Lord* and *Shout It From the Housetops* have sold millions of copies. He also authored nine books for the late Kathryn Kuhlman.

His writing and research trips have taken him all over the world. He has spent time in the jungles of the Amazon, the mountains of Nepal and the islands of the Philippines. He has trekked through the wilds of New Guinea and spent a number of weeks on several different occasions camping out in the Sinai desert.

A native of Vero Beach, Florida, he is a graduate of Mercer University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He and his wife, Jackie, are parents of five children.

Over the past several years books such as *Daughter of Destiny*, the controversial biography of Kathryn Kuhlman, his own semi-autobiography, *Risky Living*, have inspired and sometimes shocked people to new levels of honesty. His two latest books, *The Last Word* and *Coping with Criticism*, continued in this vein.

Last fall I took a group of twelve men and we spent two weeks camping in the Sinai. We were following the footsteps of Moses from the Gulf of Suez where the legendary "Red Sea" crossing took place, to Mt. Nebo in Jordan where the great leader remained behind as the Israelites crossed the Jordan River into Canaan.

The trip was made in an open, four-wheel-drive truck which bounced across the rocky desert and through the sometimes narrow, sometimes wide wadis (dried river beds) between the towering mountains. We would often dismount to climb mountains, or, taking our canteens, trek through the narrow gorges and meet the truck on the other side many hours later. We cooked our own food and slept under the stars at night. There was no need for tents since the average rainfall in the Sinai is less than one inch a year. Sometimes it goes for as long as five years without any rain, then all five inches may fall in one night. That, I understand, is a terrifying event as the water roars off the mountains, fills the huge wadis and goes roaring out to the sea in a mighty tidal wave of fury and force.

I had made the trip the previous year and wanted to return to finish

research on a book. When I discovered several friends were interested in joining me we hired a truck in Jerusalem, along with an Israeli driver, and made it a group experience.

The third day out we cut inland from the Suez and made our way through a wide wadi, bouncing along in the ruts of other vehicles which had sometime in the future gone before. One of the men beside me in the back of the truck pointed at the steep side of a mountain on the other side of the riverbed—half a mile away. He had spotted some ancient, abandoned turquoise mines high on the side of the mountain.

I rapped on the cab of the truck and asked the Israeli driver to stop. I explained our fellows wanted to climb the mountain and explore the mines. I asked if he would pull the truck out of the deep, sandy ruts and drive us closer to the base of the mountain.

He scowled, wrinkled his brow, and shook his head. "No way!" he grunted. "Too dangerous!"

During an earlier Sinai Campaign, he told us, the Israelis had mined that particular wadi, knowing it was the only way the Egyptians could escape through the rugged territory. As usual, they had kept a chart of the

mine placements, intending to return and retrieve them after the war. However, at the height of the campaign one of the rare cloudbursts flooded the Sinai. Torrents of rain fell on the desert mountains, pouring off the sides of the treeless cliffs and roaring through the ancient riverbed in destructive mayhem on its way to the Gulf of Suez. The land mines had been swept out of the ground and scattered across the wadi. Some had exploded in the force of the water, but others were buried beneath the trackless waste. Experienced drivers knew the only safe place was in the ruts made by a previous truck or military tank. In fact, just a few months before an Israeli colonel had been killed when his jeep ran over one of those old land mines and it exploded.

Our driver said the only way we could explore the turquoise mines would be to dismount from the truck



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and walk across the sand. But he and his truck, he said, would remain behind.

"Just walk lightly," he said, slouching down in the seat and pulling his cap over his eyes for a nap. "I'll be here waiting—if you return."

I glanced at the other men. "We're not afraid," a Baptist deacon—a medical doctor from North Carolina—joked. "Just as long as you lead the way."

It was too much of a challenge to pass up. But we walked gingerly. And did a lot of praying. Back at the truck our driver said most pilgrims choose to stay in the safety of the ruts. He then reminded me it was "Tradition!" which had kept the Jews alive all these centuries.

But he, like them, missed the joy and excitement of discovery.

Jesus said the Holy Spirit (whom I firmly believe is being poured out on the world in a new and mighty way) would be like new wine. His characteristic would be movement, expansion and change. To try and contain him in the old wineskins of traditional church structure would surely cause division and schisms. And many a pastor can testify of the mess that follows once the yeast of the Holy Spirit is digested by the sheep of his pasture. You've got to keep moving, or mire down.

Unfortunately, most of us, when it comes to change and expansion—especially if it calls for personal risk and there are land mines involved—opt for ruts. It's dangerous to leave the beaten track. Why should we divert from the "tried and true" way of our forefathers?

Why? Because there is a new call from God. Because times have changed. Because we're approaching the end of history. Because a lot of us have drifted from the original direction of our forefathers, anyway.

The ruts of tradition are safe and comfortable. But churches—and church leaders—must grow. Or die. And nothing is worse than death from sameness.

Growth demands change. Change demands movement, sometimes across the trackless sands of the untried. All that has gone before is not

bad. Most of it is good. Some of it is sacred. Some of it is worthless and carnal. But there is a new generation rising whose eyes are fixed on higher goals than mere personal safety. They need to know the beauty of tradition, yet not be bound by it. They also need to know the dangers of discovery. And, believe me, when a man stumbles out of the desert with one leg missing, he's usually worth listening to.

One of the problems which has characterized all spiritual movements—from charismatic to church renewal—has been the unwillingness of leaders to return and point the way to others. I know from personal experience that it's hard to return. Especially is this true once you've been through the mine field and are now in position to establish your own new set of ruts. But someone has to speak balance—and what better voice than one who has been in both camps. For to be unfettered can lead to a deception which kills quicker than the ruts which destroy by boredom.

Thus when Dick Critz asked me to head this department for *VineLife* I recognized it as an opportunity to share—not only my discoveries but my scars. And to introduce you to others who have ventured into exciting new spiritual locations and are also willing to take time to share their revelations.

So much of that which holds us in bondage is useless life style. Cultural. It has no spiritual reason. Yet, afraid of any discovery which may demand change—or cause us to be classified as radicals—we not only limit ourselves, but limit those sheep in our flock who might venture into deeper areas of spiritual revelation.

Much of our reservation stems from a genuine desire to protect the sheep from land mines hidden beneath the sand—from deception, from cultism, from wolves in sheep's clothing, from renegade shepherds who use the media to shear the sheep, sell the wool and live in stolen luxury.

At the same time, there is also an element of simple fear—the fear of our own reputation and financial

safety—which holds us back. And there is nothing more distracting to a denominational program rumbling along in the ruts of yesteryear, or to a pastor asleep behind the wheel of his stalled church, than to hear a group of people on the other side of the wadi shouting, "Hey, look what we've found!"

In these pages I will speak to just such problems. Most pastors know how to handle a fanatic. But what do you do with someone who is genuinely bent on spiritual discovery? So if you are eager to move your sheep into fresh, green pastures, but are uncertain of the way because of reports which keep filtering back that folks are getting blown-up, then this is for you.

Several years ago we had a bad drought down here in Florida. The water level in the Everglades dropped lower than it had in years. When it did the thick, black soil of the 'Glades caught fire through spontaneous combustion.

But it was a different kind of fire. Occasionally it would break through to the surface, but for the most part it smoldered underground. No sooner would the fire control people get one fire out than the earth would erupt in flames miles away.

The Seminole Indians, their fishing lakes dry and their wild game hiding in the deeper regions of the Everglades, left their villages and came to the towns to find food. Many of them walked out of the 'Glades barefooted. All had the same testimony.

"The ground is hot with fire."

So it is today as the Holy Spirit once again sets the Kingdom afire with his presence. Rather than putting out brush fires, the call of God is for us to stand ready to be ignited.

I often remember the words of Dr. H. C. Brown, my homiletics professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. "If you catch on fire in the pulpit," he told us young students, "the entire world will turn out to see you burn."

The secret is learning how to burn—without being blown up.

And that's what this department is all about.

