

People

TODAY

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He's No Ordinary Man of God



SPEARS FROM New Guinea and other artifacts from his travels throughout the world decorate the Buckingham home. Here, Jamie is shown with his wife Jackie

By AMY CLARK

TODAY Women's Editor

In a book entitled "SOME GALL...and other reflections on life..." Jamie Buckingham admits to having prejudice, being quick to anger, being proud, cowardly, selfish and self-centered.

He is a man of this world who sins. He is human.

But he is, most of all, a man of God who prays to his God to help him win the battle over pride and prejudice.

And the way he fights that battle is what makes Jamie Buckingham no ordinary man.

He's a man who describes himself as a "fool for Jesus Christ."

HE'S A man of some controversy in his community of Melbourne, an ordained minister who prefers not to be called "Reverend." "Just call me Jamie," he says.

He's a man who receives threatening phone calls in the dark of night who laughs them off by saying, "I don't have any enemies. I can't think of a single person I've ever come in contact with in my life that I wouldn't want to see again."

He gave up ministering in a traditional, Baptist Church to help form a New Testament Church — interdenominational, structureless and charismatic.

He believes in miracles, in raising the dead and in the very real and dangerous presence of the devil.

He believes that the "end of time" is not far away.

All these things are Jamie Buckingham.

But how does a Vero Beach native, born and reared in the Southern Baptist Church, change so profoundly?

FORMING a New Testament Church was the beginning of the changes in Buckingham's life. It marked the end of a period of turmoil when he was disillusioned with churches in general.

"I had been pastor of a Baptist Church in Greenwood, S.C., from 1958 until 1965, when I was transferred back here to become pastor of the Harbor City Baptist Church," he said in a recent interview in his Melbourne home. "We were there for a year when the church split. I didn't know it at the time but all churches in the area were splitting and dividing.

"I went through a pretty heavy time of disgust. My relationship with churches was pretty strained. Christianity was not real. It was a set of rules. This was really one of those black holes that you fall into. For me it was a time of instability. I really thought I was going to leave the ministry at that time."

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Instead, the Buckingham family — Jamie, his wife Jackie and their five children — and about 50 other families from the Harbor City Baptist Church decided not to give up. "Let's go back to the New Testament and see if we can form a church that way," was what we said to each other," Buckingham.

That's the origin. That's where

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THE OFFICE where Buckingham writes in his Melbourne home has papers spread all over the room. His latest Christian publication is "O Happy Day" about the gospel singing group, the Happy Goodman Family

began and we figured that somewhere between the first church and now, we'd gotten off the beaten track."

"We wanted to start a church where the emphasis is on relationships and not on buildings and membership. It seems like God wants his people out in the marketplace carrying the message of love and trust, the message that Jesus carried."

BUT more changes were in store for the soul and mind of Jamie Buckingham. Early in 1968 he entered a religious writing contest sponsored by Guideposts, a magazine published by Dr. Norman Vincent Peale. And he won.

The week's trip that he won to a writer's conference in New York brought him in contact with some of the greatest and most famous Christian writers of this century — Dr. Peale, Kathryn Marshall and John Sherrill. Before that week was over, he had been recommended by Sherrill and Mrs. Marshall to write the life story of Nicky Cruz, a Puerto Rican street gang leader in New York who was converted to Christianity, he attended a meeting in Washington, D.C., of 4,000 men who called themselves Full Gospel Businessmen.

"It was a supernatural turning of events like the river that turns this way and suddenly it turns that," He said. "All of a sudden I was a professional writer. I was overcome by the challenge.

"And in the process of all this, I began to realize that God was at work in my life and in the lives of His people and that they weren't all as rotten as I'd thought."

And yet, the most important event in his life was still to come. While researching the powerful story of Nicky Cruz, the Puerto Rican street gang leader in New York who was converted to Christianity, he attended a meeting in Washington, D.C., of 4,000 men who called themselves Full Gospel Businessmen.

"I didn't know what it was all about," explained Buckingham. "I thought they were either religious fanatics or gospel kooks. They spoke in tongues. They were unashamed of their beliefs in God. They were open in their love. It bowled me over. It really blew my mind. I saw a reality in Christ that I had never seen before.

"**EACH** one of these people that I talked to testified that they were like they were because they'd had an experience with the Holy Spirit that they called the Baptism in the Holy Spirit."

"And this is the thing that turns an ordinary follower of God into a minister of God. . . into a vibrant, living facsimile of Jesus Christ. On the closing night of that meeting I had an experience with the Holy Spirit which revolutionized my life. It is so real today that I still have

trouble talking about it. I get so emotional that I still want to cry after five-and-a-half years.

"It was God's intervention in my life. Suddenly Jesus was real and living."

And so, three basic events in Buckingham's life changed a Southern Baptist pastor into the author of 11 books with three in the works, a sought-after lecturer, a world traveler, a roving editor for Guideposts, an editorial consultant for Logos Journal and His Paper (published in England) and a columnist for the Vero Beach Press Journal. Recently his weekly column for the Vero Beach newspaper was cited by the Florida Press Association as the best column in the state of Florida for class 15, weekly and bi-weekly newspapers.

The changes that took place in the New Testament Church in Melbourne, were as profound as those that took place within his personal life. After being baptised in the Holy Spirit, Jamie brought his amazing story back to the members of the Tabernacle Baptist Church, as it was known then.

TODAY, it's known simply as The Tabernacle.

Gone are the membership roles. Gone are the ties with the Baptist Association. Gone are the printed programs of Sunday church activities.

During a recent Sunday at the Tabernacle, Jamie talked about

the change with about 200 people who made up that day's congregation. "Remember how it was when we were just beginning to feel free? Remember when occasionally someone would say, 'Praise the Lord' right out loud in the middle of the service and not feel embarrassed about it?

"Now, look at us. Most of us are free. Maybe there are still some who don't know what's happening here, but it's so wonderful to be free to praise the Lord."

The Tabernacle is a temple of God in the New Testament sense and it's filled with joyful, happy people. Peace fills many faces. Prayers are on most lips. And some speak in tongues, viewed as the gift of God's baptism in the Holy Spirit. Other speak

prophecies while in trance-like states.

"There's a church like The Tabernacle in almost every city I go to," said Buckingham. "What I really see is a supernatural move of God to restore to the church the power of the Holy Spirit. I see it for a purpose — from a historical and pragmatic standpoint, I believe that we are approaching the end of time in history. Biblical prophecies are rapidly coming true.

"**WHAT'S** happening in America is happening in South America, New Guinea, the Philippines, the Orient and behind the Iron Curtain.

"In the Lord's Prayer we say 'Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done.' That prayer is now being answered."



Jamie Buckingham's life has changed drastically in the six years since he was pastor of the Harbor City Baptist Church. Now after publishing 11 books, he's an internationally known Christian writer and lecturer

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Staff Photos by

Bill Ballenberg