

Jamie Buckingham: Learning to Slow Down and Hear From God

Even my wife (especially my wife) knew I was going too fast. Like a speeding train, I whistled through grade crossings, roared over trestles only moments before they collapsed (thanking God I had made it just in time—never thinking it might have been my excess speed that caused the thing to fall down) and sped by passenger stations, too busy even to wave at the friendly folk gathered by the track, much less have time to stop and pick them up.

It's a syndrome that attacks many. Too many of God's servants who are busy, busy, busy in the Lord's vineyard. But after all, we've got to get all those grapes picked before Jesus comes.

Then suddenly I was down. Flat on my back, my right leg elevated to prevent the blood clots in my shin from surging through my veins and doing unthinkable things to my heart and lungs.

My trip to South Africa with other American "spiritual giants" for the important conference was off. The doctors said I couldn't even go downstairs to eat with my family, much less circle the globe.

I was down for almost three weeks. It was a strange and mysterious thing: Everything in my body was working fine except that blood clot. There was lots of time to consider the ways of the Lord and sort through His priorities in my life.

You just can't do that, I now know, when you're always on the move.

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My older brother, Clay, called and reminded me my father had a heart scare when he was about my age. He was dashing up a flight of stairs (it seems to run in the family) when his heart began to flutter and skip. He went to bed for a week, and when he got up, he was a changed man. As a result, Clay pointed out, he lived another 40 years.

It was a good reminder. I knew God was in control of the situation. And even though it didn't fit my theology, I asked my friends to go easy in asking God to heal me quickly. If He was purging me, I wanted to receive His chastisement, not rebuke it.

I had never faced the possibility of death from internal causes. There have been a number of times I thought I was going to be killed (once by a Baptist deacon). But to lie in bed in a lonely house, as I did one night, feel intense chest pains and assume the clot had broken loose and was doing what the doctors had warned it might do ... that causes a man to see things with different eyes.

A good burp took care of that pain, but I saw it as a beneficent warning to get serious with my priorities—and to stop doing the things reserved for the Holy Spirit.

One of the freedoms that has come as I have regained my physical strength has been that I no longer have to fulfill my self-appointed position as president of Operation World Rescue.

I suspected it all along, but now it is apparent. It is not my task to rescue the world, feed all the hungry, clothe all the poor, redeem the government, save the lost or even give direction to the Good Ship Zion, which is always on the verge of sailing into some harrowing maelstrom and carrying all the saints to destruction.

All this is the job of the Holy Spirit. My job is to abide in Him.

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I've told people to love one another—and have been too busy to love. I've told people to slow down and hear God—but have been so busy going so many places that I have not put it into practice in my own life.

I've said we need to have deep relations with a few—but have spread myself so thin that even my own children hardly have a relationship with me.

Thus, it is time for me to establish credibility. So much of what I have received from God I accepted in order to pass on to others rather than apply it personally.

Unfortunately, I'm not the only minister in this situation. There are too many whose lives (and wives) don't back up what they say. They buzz into the pulpit, splatter people with revelational truth and hasten on to another topic—never experiencing what they are saying nor taking any interest in whether the good seed they sow in their congregations will produce good fruit.

As a result, the number of spiritual casualties among Christian leaders is most alarming.

But what others do is really not my responsibility. As I said, I'm having my own struggles as the Holy Spirit moves me backward—from Pentecost to Gethsemane.

Yet where else does a man hear God?

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Jamie Buckingham wrote 153 columns for Charisma over 13 years, first known as "Dry Bones" but later as its most recognized "Last Word." His singular voice was animated by a heart for

Jesus baptized in the power of the Holy Spirit in 1967 at a Full Gospel Businessmen's convention. Buckingham provided a steadying force during the scandals of the 1980s, penning the seminal article on the PTL scandal, "God Is Shaking His Church" in May 1986.