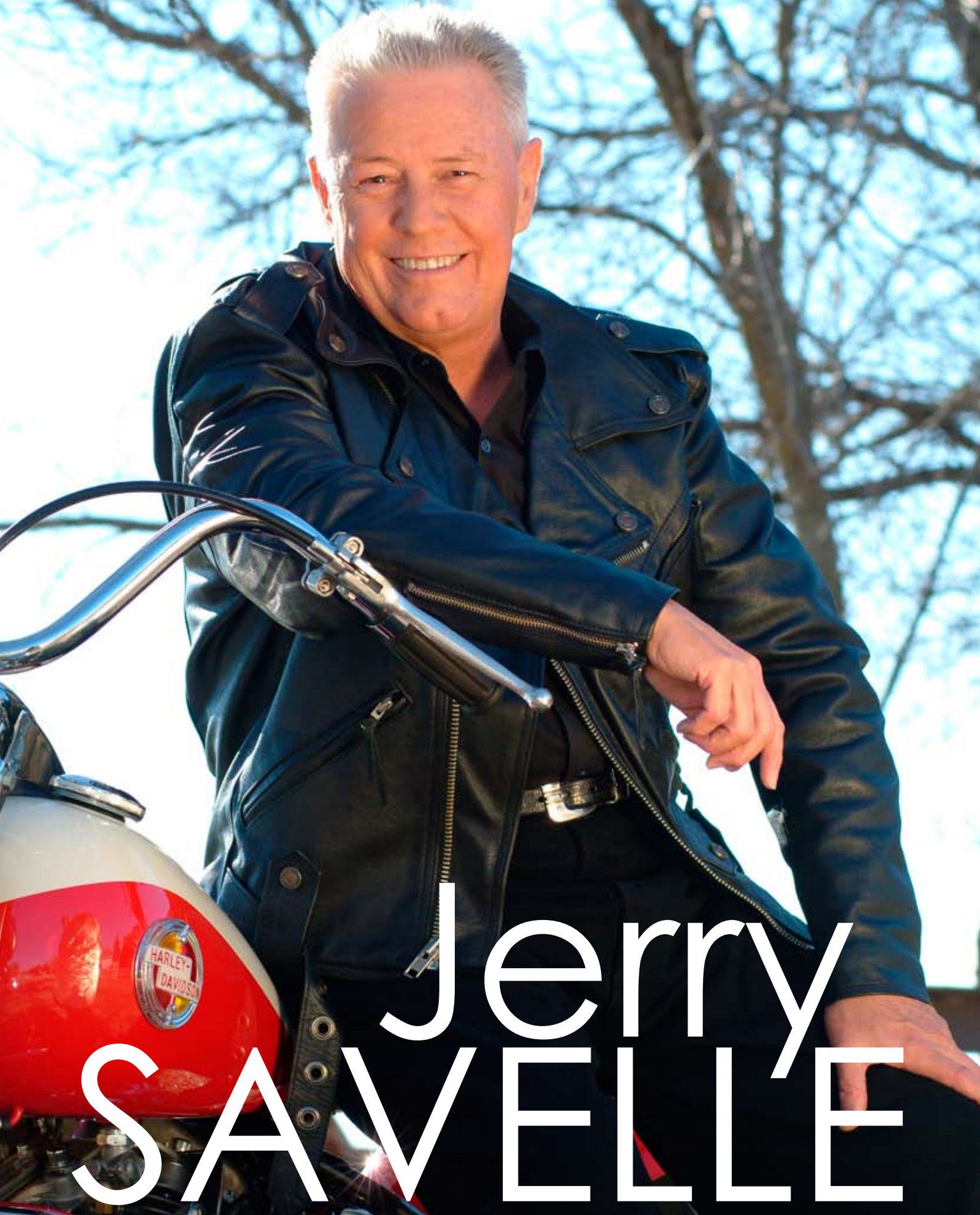


**“Everything I had lived for had no meaning or value. God told me to shut my business down and study the Word.”**



# Jerry SAVELLE

# A childhood passion with a Kingdom purpose

He has travelled the world, preached to millions, written over 40 books, but a childhood passion for motorcycles would turn out to be his biggest soul-winning tool. *Nicole Partridge* meets the man who is making the bad boys cry.

It's a chilly autumn afternoon in our nation's capital and I am about to meet well-known word of faith teacher and television minister, Jerry Savelle. For lunch first, then an interview. I know a little about Jerry Savelle from my Bible college days. I have read one of his best selling books, *If Satan Can't Steal Your Joy, He Can't Keep Your Goods*; I've watched a few of his sermons on video. On the plane from Sydney to Canberra, I finished reading his biography, *In the Footsteps of a Prophet*, in which he shares intimate details about his life and ministry, alongside prominent word of faith teacher Kenneth Copeland. A few months ago, I caught his television program on the Christian Channel. Here was Jerry Savelle, in what looked like an automotive shop, wearing leathers and preaching the gospel. So I'm really not sure what to expect when I meet him.

It has to be said there are certain perceptions, rightly or wrongly, about television evangelists. Perhaps we have seen one too many designer suits or gold Rolex watches, or heard stories about lavish lifestyles being funded by the ministry. This is not the Jerry Savelle I am to meet with today. In fact, he looks more like a college footballer, than a flashy evangelist.

I am introduced to Jerry Savelle as Brother Jerry, as he prefers to be called. When we sit down to a buffet lunch, I notice he's eating a small salad and a glass of water, (there goes my second slice of pavlova and glass of pinot). He is casually dressed; a bomber jacket with his signature logo - Chariots of Light - and classic black trousers. He tells me later his favourite outfit is his biker leathers, not designer suits.

Jerry Savelle has a weathered but sincere warm smile and a sparkle in his eyes. His hair is white and spiky; a little like a US military crew cut. His slightly olive complexion and easy manner give him an air of youthfulness, which belies his 61 years. When he speaks, his accent has a slight Texan twang—not the Forest Gump drawl, but more of an educated 'Bill Clinton' tone. Over lunch we talk about his favourite food, which is Cajun. We laugh about the time he and Kenneth Copeland took their glamorous wives on a motorcycle road trip—with no room for hairdryers or make up cases. And chat about his trip to Australia, which has been spent teaching at various churches, meeting up with Pastors and going on a ride with the Australian chapter of his motorcycle outreach, Chariots of Light.

## Receiving God's call

Jerry Savelle is an evangelist, author, pastor and teacher and he is extraordinarily successful. His ministry, which has been operating for 38 years, has offices in the USA, UK, Australia, Africa and Canada. According to his biography, he is husband to Carolyn, father to Terri and Jerri and grandfather to seven. He has ministered in over 3,000 churches in 26 nations around the world and hosts a regular television broadcast with his daughter



Terri, which airs in 200 countries. The author of more than 40 books, Jerry also runs global Bible correspondence schools and has a ministry in Africa that has planted over 50 churches. But perhaps one of the most remarkable aspects of his ministry is Chariots of Light—his evangelistic outreach. To understand how extraordinary this ministry is I must take you back.

Picture a little boy in the 50s with cropped hair, blue jeans and a white t-shirt on the back of his dad's motorcycle. Arms wrapped tightly around his dad's waist and wind blowing through his hair. Jerry has recounted this as one of his favourite childhood memories. "I grew up on racetracks round the southern part of the US," Jerry says. "I knew at the age of nine I was going to follow in the footsteps of my father. My dad represented everything I wanted to be. His dream was to own his own automotive business and race automobiles and that's what I intended to do." According to Jerry, nothing was going to stop him.

But a Thanksgiving lunch at his grandmother's house at age 11 would shake his world. As was customary, during lunch, the family gathered around the black and white television in the living room. Glued to the set, they flicked channels and found a man by the name of Oral Roberts preaching. "I was captivated, I had never seen preachers like this before," he explains. "I had never seen people heal the sick. While I was watching, I heard these words, 'Someday you'll preach like that and pray for people.'

"I thought it was one of my cousins, but when I turned around they had all left the room. I never told a living soul. I thought if I did, then I would have to give up on my dream of racing automobiles."

Perhaps it was his grandmother's confessions of greatness over Jerry Savelle as a baby, or the spirit of God speaking to him as a little boy, or even the declaration of a nine-year-old girl who said to her mother, "Some day I am going to marry that boy. He is going to preach the gospel and go to Africa." Whatever it was, God's hand was on Jerry Savelle from the beginning.

Jerry Savelle was born on 24 December, 1946 in Vicksburg, Mississippi to Jerry Wallace and Attie Snow Savelle. He likens his family to the Cunningham's of *Happy Days* fame. Life was good. Music was great and all the neighbours knew each other. At high school, he was an accomplished athlete. But his dream



Chariots of Light prayer meeting

was not to star on the track, but to own an automotive business. “I remember my dad constantly telling me this was a hard way to earn a living and that I should get an education,” he remembers. “I didn’t want to disappoint him, so I did.” In 1964, he went to college—acquiring a young college man’s problems with alcohol and gambling—which he says often conflicted with his Christian upbringing.

During his second year at university, he met and dated Carolyn Creech, a young Christian girl who had grown up in the same neighbourhood. Attracted to her unwavering faith in God, he eventually asked her to marry him.

The night before their wedding, Carolyn told Jerry she had made a vow to God that the man she would marry would be born again, filled with the Holy Spirit, would preach the gospel and go to Africa. “I just said to her, ‘Carolyn, you know it’s not too late to call this marriage off, because I am not going to do those things,’” recalls Jerry.

“I reminded her of my dream to race automobiles and that I understood what she was called to, but that wasn’t me.

“And then I said to her,

“You will spend the rest of your days on the racetrack.”

“Unmoved, she just said to me,

“Jerry, you don’t know the power of intercession.”

A driving force in their relationship, Carolyn was relentless in her determination to see her husband saved and in this ministry. But after three years of marriage, a young Jerry still hadn’t changed his ways. In 1968, he had opened Jerry’s Paint and Body Shop. The racetrack had become his church and his automotive manual his Bible. Yet, in spite of tensions in the marriage, Jerry says divorce wasn’t an option, “During our first three years of marriage, Carolyn continued to pray. She had a quiet confidence that it was a matter of time. At

the same time, I got to a point in my life where I was no longer satisfied with the business and my life. There was something missing.”

### Laying down the dream

The turning point for Jerry Savelle came in February 1969, after hearing a preacher by the name of Brian Rudd; a former prison inmate, drug addict and drug dealer who shared his testimony and prophesied over Savelle. “He told me I was called to preach and that I had known it since I was 11 years old. The following day I was standing in my yard when a young man who had been delivered from drugs started sharing his testimony. I couldn’t deny this miracle that was standing in front of me,” he says. “That night I couldn’t sleep. I got up and went into our living room. I am walking the floor; pacing up and down, saying to myself, ‘If I yield to this, it’s all over. My days of racing are over.’”

At 3am, Jerry Savelle got down on his hands and knees and asked God to use him. At that moment, he says he got the call to preach, “Everything that had been important to me before, everything I was passionate about, everything I had lived for had no meaning or value.

“I finally said, ‘God I heard you call me to the ministry when I was 11 years old. I’ve run from you and I have fought you for most of my life. I don’t know if you still want me or even need me. But if you do, here I am.’”

It was this confession that changed his life. He was now on a pathway towards his God given calling. But there was one more experience that would catapult him into his destiny—meeting Kenneth Copeland.

“Shortly after I surrendered my life to Christ, a man by the name of Kenneth Copeland came to my hometown to hold a seminar,” he says. “I remember Carolyn coming home excited after hearing his message. She told me she had never heard anything like this before. The next night I went to hear Kenneth. It made such a huge impact on me. The following day I went to my automotive shop and locked myself in with the Bible. I spent the day trying to find all the Scriptures Kenneth Copeland had preached the night before. As I found them I would weep. All of a sudden, everything that had been important

## After nearly three decades, it's the ministry of **Chariots of Light** that has allowed **Jerry Savelle** to combine his childhood passion for automobiles and motorcycles with **kingdom purpose**

to me; everything I had lived for had no meaning or value. God told me to shut my business down and study the Word.”

For the next three months, he says he dedicated himself to at least eight to 12 hours of study a day. “I started reading the Word like it was a race car manual. It started making sense to me. Whatever I read, I would go and do it. If it said to lay hands on the sick and they shall recover, that’s what I did.” After three months of intense study, Jerry says he was a changed man, ready to preach the gospel.

Passionate, yet unknown, Jerry Savelle took his message into the streets of his city, preaching to alcoholics, drug addicts and prostitutes. “Amazingly I was having such success winning people to Christ that other doors opened for me. Eventually the churches started taking notice.”

A few year’s later, he joined Kenneth Copeland Evangelistic Association, where he worked as an associate Minister. During his three years with Kenneth Copeland, he says he learnt valuable lessons that would help provide the foundation for his own ministry, which he birthed in January 1974.

### **Jerry's greatest soul-winning tool**

After twenty years in ministry, God spoke to Jerry about his childhood passion—one that had been laid to rest.

“I remember God clearly saying to me one day,

“I want you to take your love of motorcycles and turn it into a tool for evangelism.”

“So I began to put motorcycles back into my life. Going on pleasure rides with friends opened doors and conversations. Over time, I began to realise that this could be used as a tool to win souls,” he says.

In 1994, Jerry established Chariots of Light—a motorcycle outreach that has developed its own patch, colours and a steady stream of merchandise. Each year, in addition to regular rides, Jerry Savelle Ministries International conducts ‘Thunder over Texas’ which attracts more than 18,000 bike enthusiasts. During the course of the year, they will run five major Chariots of Light tours across America, holding rallies in every town and winning people to Christ. “We also use the secular outlaw rallies like Daytona Bike Week which attracts 250,000 bikers from all over the nation. We set up our Chariots of Light tent. It’s not uncommon for us to win several hundred people to Christ,” he says.

Jerry tells me about the President of an outlaw biker club who attended one of his rallies, “He was a big guy, about six foot five inches and weighed about 300 pounds, covered in tattoos. He looked mean. He came to one of our meetings and gave his life to the Lord.

“Now when this guy stands up at one of our rallies and says,

“I’ve been shot three times, stabbed twice, I was the president of an outlaw biker club,” it makes an impression.

“He then starts crying like a baby when he talks about Jesus.”

Today, Chariots of Light has more than 1,000 members

and continues to grow. Here in Australia, the outreach has six chapters based in capital cities across the nation.

Throughout our time together, it is clear that Jerry Savelle is passionate about Chariots of Light – a ministry which has allowed him to combine his childhood passion for automobiles and motorbikes with Kingdom purpose. He regards it as his greatest soul-winning tool. He is equally passionate about plans to revamp his television programme, his new books which will soon be released to a secular market, his motivational seminars and his ongoing work with local churches around the world. Jerry Savelle is unstoppable and I can’t help but think that this Father in the Faith could perhaps be teaching people to win from the front of a platform or on the back of a Harley for many years to come. (A)

**Nicole Partridge**  
Freelance Writer

For more information about Chariots of Light  
go to [www.chariotsoflight.org.au](http://www.chariotsoflight.org.au)

To find out more about the ministry of Jerry Savelle,  
go to [www.jsmiaustralia.org](http://www.jsmiaustralia.org)



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