

# PRAYING FOR THE FORGOTTEN

**T**he late-night phone call was from David McKemy, a young evangelist with the United Pentecostal Church. David grew up in our church and still checks in with me on a regular basis.

"I've been praying for Jim Bakker," he told me. "I've also started writing him. Although I never did agree with him, he's still a man of God." There was a catch in David's voice as he added, "And he's been forgotten by his brothers."

David's statement convicted me. I, too, often forget my brothers who are in trouble. I pray for them during the crisis, then drop back into my own self-centeredness as soon as they are out of sight.

I prayed for Jim while he was under attack by the press. I prayed for him during his trial. I lamented his sentence. Judge Robert Potter was harsh beyond reason. To sentence a non-violent offender—of any kind—to 45 years in prison is not justice. In Jim's case it was cruelty, motivated, it seems, by vengeance against all enthusiastic Christians.

The man who raped a 14-year-old girl, then hacked off her arms with an ax and left her staggering, naked and armless, along a dark road, received only seven years in prison. He now has resumed his normal life in a free world.

The former attorney general of the United States—America's chief law officer—who arrogantly lied under oath and almost brought down the entire U.S. government during the Watergate scandal—served only a few months in prison.

It was not right to give Jim Bakker a sentence seven times as severe as that given Al Capone. Bakker has been punished enough. He should be released.

Has he "learned his lesson"?

Have any of us the right even to ask that question in the light of what Jesus said to those "righteous" men ready to stone the woman caught in adultery?

What can we do about Jim's situation? Some of Jim's friends are trying to organize marches on Washington and drum up a letter-barrage to Congress, asking that Heritage USA be returned to the people from whom it was taken.

Unfortunately, Heritage USA was not taken from the Bakkers. It was not their private playground. It was taken from the "partners"—those people who invested money and lost it. But, all

that is now inconsequential. The bankruptcy court has sold Heritage USA to Morris Cerullo, who takes over this month with a fresh approach. Only time will show whether the "Ichabod" sign has been removed from the entrance.

At this writing, Bakker's case is under judicial appeal. Petitions and public opinion have little influence on jurists. The only thing that can change the minds of the judges is the Spirit of God. Rather than petitioning, Christians should pray. Pray for the release of Jim Bakker from prison, just as the early Christians prayed for Peter's release.

Pray, also, for Jim himself. Write him letters of encouragement. Don't write letters that need to be answered. Rather, write to bless.

I have talked to scores of pastors and missionaries who were loved, supported financially and prayed for while they were in "active ministry." But when they retired, or were disabled from an accident, or burned themselves out for the people, or were defrocked because of some moral failure (after many years of noble service), they were almost immediately forgotten. Many of them have died in obscurity with broken hearts. How easy it is to forget our brethren who are cast aside by church and society.

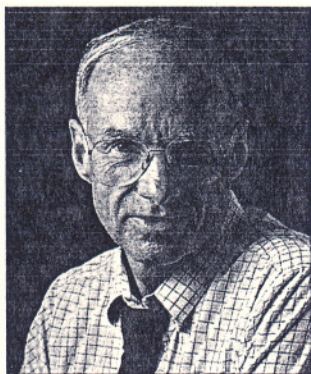
Of course, God does not forget. The blind man at the Pool of Siloam was thrown out of the synagogue because he refused to call his Healer a heretic, and he had no place to go. He was now an outcast, forgotten by the religious society. But he was not alone. Jesus met him back at the place of his healing. The fellowship they had—between the healed and the Healer—was precious. Jesus revealed to that forgotten man something he told only a chosen few. He told him he was the Messiah.

God reveals more in lonely places than He does in crowds. Jim Bakker will learn more of God during this dark night of the soul than he ever would on stage at Heritage USA.

But that does not justify our forgetfulness. Pray for him. Pray for his wife and children. Pray for all the other "forgotten brethren."

Then do more. Start by writing: Jim Bakker 07407-058, P.O. Box 4600, Rochester, MN 55903. It will make his second Christmas in prison a little brighter. ■

**Editor's Note:** *Jim Bakker's appeal process began at the end of October. At the time of publication, the final judicial decision was unknown.*



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