

Jim Bakker Shares New Details of Time in Prison: 'Great Hands Picked Me Up in My Cell'

Last week, I wrote about part 1 of my in-depth interview with Jim Bakker, where he shared fascinating stories about his early work in revival preaching and Christian television. Today I want to share with you part 2, in which Bakker shares new details about his downfall and time in prison as well as his eventual restoration. (Click [here](#) or scroll to the end of this article to listen to part 2 of our interview in its entirety.)

Bakker told me he never does these kinds of interviews because the leftist media repeatedly misrepresents him. But since we've been friends for so long, Bakker knew he could trust me with his personal stories. He tells me that his days in prison were some of the hardest moments of his life, and he remembers one wintry night in particular when his depression overwhelmed him.

"I thought I couldn't go on," Bakker says. "And all of the sudden, it was like hands—great hands—had picked me up, and I was floating in my bunk bed in that prison cell. And I said, 'God, what's happening?' ... He said, 'This is the prayers of the people.' And I know I would have never made it through prison without the prayers of the people."

Many of you may remember the scandal surrounding Bakker's arrest in 1988 for wire fraud. Later, news came out about an affair Bakker had with a church secretary. As a result, he lost Praise the Lord (PTL) Ministries and his resort, Heritage USA.

I remember when PTL and Heritage USA closed. I was heartbroken because not only had I benefited from those ministries, but I knew many others who had been as well.

“I never dealt with that—the pain of losing [those ministries] and what happened to me and what happened to it,” Bakker told me during our interview. “I still don’t know why [all that happened.] I do know it all worked together for good because I studied in the prison. I studied Revelation one word at a time, and it’s changed my life, changed my theology a lot, and it all worked together for good. I believe that. I have to.”

When Bakker was originally indicted, he was sentenced to 45 years in prison. But by God’s grace, Bakker’s case was thrown out, and he was released after eight years after his lawyer proved the judge was biased against the Christian television host. During those eight years, Bakker got a doctorate in biblical studies. He asked God for a miracle—all A’s in his courses. Although Bakker says he was never an all-A student, God gave him straight A’s while getting his doctorate in prison.

Although Bakker’s sins were grave, I can’t help but wonder if the media wouldn’t have been so ruthless with him if they hadn’t already formed a feeding frenzy. A few months before Bakker’s scandal broke, Oral Roberts had been trying to raise money for a medical school, and he said on his television show that if he didn’t raise the money, he felt God was going to take him home. The secular media jumped on that, of course, and falsely reported that Roberts said God would kill him if he didn’t raise enough money. That clearly wasn’t what Roberts meant, but it put the media in a position to latch onto any Christian scandal, and as a result, they blasted Bakker’s sins as national news.

“You have to understand, Oral Roberts is a man of God,” Bakker says. “And he was going to finish what God called him to do—or die. He really felt that. But they make fun of it. That’s why

I don't do interviews anymore. They just make fun of what is holy and special."

Bakker's relationship with Roberts reaches way back to the early years of his ministry. In last week's interview, Bakker told me Roberts had mentored him and poured into him in ways few others have. As a result, he has a deep affection for Roberts and a strong respect for his faith and healing ministry.

In fact, Bakker considers Roberts and Billy Graham two of his mentors. At one of the lowest moments of Bakker's imprisonment, Graham visited him and offered the comfort of Christ. Bakker had at one point interviewed Graham at the National Religious Broadcasters convention, but now he was cleaning toilets throughout the prison. The last time the two men interacted, Bakker was his clean-cut, charismatic self, but now his hair was a mess, he was sick with the flu and his toes poked out of his worn-out shoes.

"You have to have clearance to [visit] the prison, but Billy Graham just went up to the prison and said, 'I want to see Jim Bakker,'" he says. "The [prison officials] asked me, 'Do you want to see him?' And I said, 'I look like a man who's been sleeping under a bridge.' But I said yes. I didn't want to say no to someone who had been so kind to come."

When Bakker walked into the visitors' room to see Graham, many people in the prison were crowding to see the prominent crusade evangelist. But all Bakker could see was Graham's kind expression.

"My eyes were glued to Billy Graham's eyes," he says. "He has amazing eyes. And he put his arms around me, and he held me. He wasn't ashamed to hug me. And on the radio, just hours before, he had been voted one of the top three most-respected men in the world. And here he is showing up at my prison unexpectedly, but he held me and he said, 'Jim, I love you.'"

The world stopped. Somebody loved me. I was at the bottom of the barrel. My ex-wife left me in prison.”

But Graham’s kindness didn’t end there. As soon as Bakker got out of prison, the Grahams invited him into their home and ministered to him.

“People always tell me, ‘There are no real Christians,’” Bakker tells me. “I’ll tell you what, there are a lot of real Christians, and I’ve seen them. When I stepped out of prison with no place to go—I didn’t have a house, I didn’t have a car, I didn’t have anything—Ruth Graham invited me the first Sunday I was out to go to church with them and then to come to their house and have dinner with them. They’re the most real Christians, and they’re real people.”

God used genuine Christians like the Grahams to prepare Bakker to go back into ministry. And as Bakker says, the Lord truly did use all of his mistakes and all the evil that happened to him for good. He married Lori Beth Graham in 1998, and the couple adopted five children. He records his new television show, *The Jim Bakker Show*, and at his new ministry, Morningside, in Blue Eye, Missouri. I’ve visited Morningside several times, and I can attest that Bakker hasn’t lost his creativity for television and entertainment.

Bakker shared many more fascinating and encouraging details about his downfall and restoration. To listen to them, just click on the podcast below. And if Bakker’s story of grace encourages you, share this article on your social media and remind your followers of God’s unlimited kindness to those who fear Him.