



News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

**---FEATURES**

produced by Baptist Press

460 James Robertson Parkway  
Nashville, Tennessee 37219  
Telephone (615) 244-2355  
W. C. Fields, Director  
Jim Newton, Assistant Director

Marcy 13, 1973

POWs Created "Living Bible"  
From Memory, Baptist Pilot Says

By Larry Jerden

CONROE, Tex. (BP)--When Capt. James E. Ray and other American prisoners of war held captive in Vietnam were permitted to live in groups rather than solitary confinement, one of their major activities was the creation of "a living Bible."

Theirs was not the paraphrase version which was becoming a best-seller back in the United States. Few of them even knew of its publication.

They were busy creating their own "living Bible," reconstructed from verses memorized years before, mostly in Sunday School, plus occasional use of a Bible their captors would allow them to see.

"Under a lot of pressure, the Vietnamese decided to let us have a Bible one hour a week," Ray recalled in an interview with the Baptist Standard shortly after his return to his home in Conroe, Tex.

As a special project, the POWs had decided to try to copy and memorize the entire Sermon on the Mount, Ray said.

"The project did fine for about three weeks, and then the 'V' (North Vietnamese) would start throwing a 'monkey wrench' into it.

"For example," he said, "you would go out to copy (the Bible) for one hour, and the interrogator would put his elbow on the Bible for the first 15 minutes. Then after he let you start copying, he would ask you mundane questions and try to distract you.

"I'd just ignore him and write as fast as I could," Ray noted. To make matters more difficult, the Vietnamese made the prisoners return the sheet they had copied the previous week when they went back to copy more verses from the Bible. "So the only way we could keep it would be to put it in our 'memory banks' or copy it on something clandestine," he said.

"After five weeks, the program fell through completely, and we didn't see the Bible again," he added. But during that time the prisoners had copied and memorized the entire Sermon on the Mount, and several other passages.

The prisoners each tried to memorize different passages, so that they could refer to one another to prisoners who knew certain scriptures.

"We had our own 'living Bible' walking wround the room," Ray said.

Like several other returning POWs, Ray said he felt that his faith, and the prayers of his family and church, were major factors bringing him through his ordeal.

"Growing up in a Southern Baptist church, having parents who not only taught the Christian disciplines but set the example, the tremendous fellowship in First Baptist Church, Longview (Tex.) where I grew up and in First Baptist Church, Conroe, established a training and a discipline which were great sustaining forces," Ray confided.

Ray mentioned specifically the training he received as a child in the Sunday School, Training Union, Royal Ambassadors and Vacation Bible School, with their emphasis on Bible study and memorization.

Saying he never realized at the time the depth of meaning of memorizing those verses, Ray stated: "In reality, the fullest depth of their meaning was not discovered until I was in prison and understood that you haveto have something that is meaningful taken away to value it and appreciate it."

-more-

"The enemy tries to deny you anything to occupy your mind and time," he pointed out. "Your only resources are your mental resources. What you have in your mind is what sustains you."

A prisoner for nearly seven years, Ray, like other POWs, spent the first couple of years of his imprisonment in solitary confinement.

Despite the "physical and mental duress" applied by his captors, the loneliness and depression of that solitary confinement often would disappear, he recalled.

"For some reason, I suddenly felt I wasn't alone," he remembered. "I don't know whether it was the power of prayer or an intervention by God. There is nothing physical you can document, but when you experience something like that, it is real to you."

If it was the power of prayer Ray felt, it came as no surprise to the members of First Baptist Church here. They had been praying for the 31-year-old Ray ever since they received word that on Mother's Day of 1966, Ray's F-105 had been shot down over North Vietnam and exploded 30 seconds after he ejected.

Ray was captured immediately. For three years, he was listed as missing in action until his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Ray Sr., of Conroe, were notified he was alive.

Their faith never wavered. "We believed James was coming home from the beginning," said. During weekly Monday morning prayer sessions, Sunday worship services, and daily periods of prayer by countless members of the church, Ray's name was mentioned.

In addition to the strength coming from the prayers of people at home, Ray said the prisoners, even while in solitary confinement, would whisper scripture verses and other morale-sustaining words of encouragement when the guards were not around.

Recalling one such instance, Ray said that the prisoner in the adjacent cell, a Catholic, asked if he knew any Bible scriptures. Both knew the Lord's Prayer, and reviewed it together.

"They I said, 'Hey, do you have the 23rd Psalm?'" Ray recounted. "He said he knew part of it, but wanted to go over it. I did, and he said, 'Man, that made my whole day.'"

Ray didn't see that officer for two or three years, but when they did meet, his neighbor told him: "James, I'll never forget the day you taught me the 23rd Psalm. I've been using it and teaching it to all my roommates."

During his time in Hanoi, Ray was able to remember most of I Cor. 13, but was missing a couple of lines and had some of it out of sequence.

"When we got the Bible for the first time in December of 1970, we stood up and read portions of it aloud. As time was running out I slipped through to I. Cor. 13 and read through it. I got it memorized because we weren't sure if we'd ever see the Bible again."

Ray also mentioned the 100th and 121st Psalms and Romans 12 as passages that helped sustain him during his captivity. They also helped him sustain close quarters during a time of "two men to a room."

His first roommate was a Mormon, and while they did have irritations between them and Ray could not accept Mormon beliefs, he noted that their times of Bible study together and their common belief in Christ kept their differences at a far lower level than was common among others in the camp.

After the men were allowed to meet together in large groups, the prisoners organized worship services, Sunday School groups to study scripture, and general discussions of religion and differences between denominations.

"It was during those discussions I found that we have so many common denominators with other Christian groups that the areas where we do differ are minor," Ray observed. "And even though some of the differences are fairly important, I think the common denominator we have in Christ should be emphasized," he added.

Ray, who had helped organize Sunday night fellowships at First Baptist Conroe and had even preached at youth revivals and at Student night at Christmas, used his past experience to help organize the worship services at the POW camp in North Vietnam.

At the Thanksgiving season of 1970, the North Vietnamese decided for security reasons to put the prisoners together into large rooms. Ray was in a room with 57 POWs.

"Those Thanksgiving and Christmas services were the most meaningful I had ever been a part of," Ray recounted. The beginning of the group religious activities was a major factor in maintaining morale among the prisoners, he added.

One Easter, the men were able to piece together enough scripture about the Last Supper to have a communion service, using orange and rice wine. Ray helped write the order of service for that first Easter worship experience, and Capt. Tom Curtis of Houston presided.

Once something of a "routine" was established, regular church call was held every Sunday. The service was divided into patriotic and religious parts. The patriotic segment included use of a clandestine U.S. flag and a cross placed on one wall, the pledge of allegiance to the flag, and the singing of a patriotic song.

The men would sing the Doxology, pray, sing one or two hymns, and listen to a devotional talk. Ray gave several of the "sermons," including one on why Southern Baptists feel a public profession of faith should be an integral part of one's Christian experience.

Speakers were recruited by the room chaplain, a voluntary post which rotated every two to four months. Ray served in that capacity as well as doing a four-month stint as choir director.

The singing, both by the "congregation" and the eight-voice choir, was at a volume reached by compromise with the Vietnamese guards.

"We picked a time when the guards weren't around," Ray explained, "but if they heard our singing they would knock on the door. So we kept the volume down and didn't flaunt it."

The Sunday School part of the religious program consisted at first of a general review of the Bible, book by book. "We told which stories were in each book, expanding bit by bit whatever we could.

"Then we went into denominational studies," he added. "We'd get volunteers from each denomination...to discuss the church structure and then get into theological aspects."

Ray said that some of the more "irreverent" pilots--the "eat, drink and be merry types"--took part in the services. "When the chips were down and somebody was in trouble, some of them were the first to jump in and help. Some of them contributed as much to our worship services as the guys who had always professed to be Christians.

"Most people relied on what faith they had," Ray remembered, "and I was surprised to find that most of the men had some Christian training, even though it had oftentimes 'gone dormant.'"

Ray was reluctant to talk about any possible "bad treatment" during his seven years in prison, but he was quick to list factors he felt enabled him to come through the experience.

Included were such things as the leadership training he received in his youth--in high school athletics where he lettered in baseball, basketball and football; in church where he led and preached and prayed and memorized; and at Texas A&M University where he rose to the rank of Lt. Col. in the corps and was president of the Baptist Student Union. These he considers "input."

These factors resulted in personal integrity, social discipline and social responsibility--things he said he and the other POWs hope to emphasize in months to come.

All of these, he said, helped sustain the men. But most of all it was their faith--and that included knowledge that they were not forgotten, that America would not let them down, the people back home were praying for them, and that God would not forsake them.

For Ray, the power of that prayer, coming from members of First Baptist Church here, was real and powerful, even though it sometimes came from people who had never met Ray.

One four-year-old, the granddaughter of one of Ray's former youth leaders at the church, said the day before she met him for the first time: "I know James Ray--I pray for him every night: 'God bless mommy, God bless daddy, and God bless James Ray.'"

-30-

EDITORS NOTES: When Air Force Capt. James E. Ray returned home the first weekend in March, he was greeted by his church and by a celebration attended by more than 5,000 in the high school stadium. He granted his first exclusive interview after his return to Baptist Standard Assistant Editor Larry Jerden.

#####

Photo mailed to state paper editors.

Missionaries Study  
Long-Range Planning

3/13/73

CUERNAVACA, Mexico (BP)--"There are nine times as many people in the world today who have not heard the gospel as the total world population when Jesus gave the Great Commission," 30 Baptist missionaries were told as they began a two-week long-range planning workshop here.

"The year 1973 will end with 50 million more lost people than when it began," said Charles W. Bryan, Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board secretary for Middle America and the Caribbean.

The missionaries of Middle America and the Caribbean are committed to accelerating the process of bringing persons to know God through Jesus Christ in order to increase quantitative and qualitative growth in this area, Bryan told the workshop.

The meeting was designed to help equip one or more (in most cases two) missionaries from 13 countries of the area to lead their missions in long-range planning.

Directed by W.L. Howse, East Asia program consultant for the Foreign Mission Board and former Education Division Director for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, the workshop was also designed to determine objectives, goals, action plans and actions for Baptist work in Middle America and the Caribbean for 1973 through 1976.

In his introductory speech, Bryan urged the missionary planners to turn to advantage the events and developments of the rapidly changing world situation.

"Planning to grow is timely in Middle America and the Caribbean," he explained. "The annual rate of population growth is higher in this area than in any other region in the world. The percentage rate for all of Latin America is 2.8, and for Middle America, it is 3.2 per cent. For the Caribbean, it is 2.2 per cent.

"Missions need to determine direction, achievement and progress. They need to know where they are going and be able to measure their progress toward their goals."

Bryan dealt with the problems of planning to grow: the deluge of change, the diversity of responsibility and opportunity, and the changing pattern of missionary service.

"The lingering old image of the missionary makes planning with nationals difficult," he said. "And the changing role of the missionary requires more skills and greater maturity. A missionary must possess special gifts or qualities to meet the demands placed upon him.

Bryan added that the missionary must be motivated by a positive call to missions, must be adaptable to working with people with strange customs and unfamiliar conditions, and must be sympathetic and sensitive to the feelings and interests of others.

"The missionary of today needs all the expertise available to him by way of training and experience. That training and experience will most profitably be used in the role of an enabler," he said.

-more-

Bryan called the workshop "the most important meeting we have had in Middle America and the Caribbean."

Missionaries participating in the workshop included the chairman of each mission and the chairman of the the strategy committee for each mission. The two missionary field representatives for the area, A. Clark Scanlon, Middle America, and William W. Graves, the Caribbean, also participated.

Countries represented were Bermuda, Bahamas, Antigua, Guadeloupe, Trinidad, Guyana, Surinam, Dominican Republic, Barbados, Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and Costa Rica. Also present were two representatives from the Spanish Baptist Publishing House, located in El Paso, Tex.

-30-

Photo mailed to Baptist state paper editors.

National Groups Hit  
Tax Credit Parochial

3/13/73

WASHINGTON (BP)--Representatives of more than 50 religious, educational, labor and civil liberties organizations caucused here to plan ways to defeat state and national drives for public aid to private and parochial schools, especially through the means of tax credits to parents with children in such schools.

The two chief reasons given by these organizations for their positions were: (1) to preserve religious liberty and separation of church and state, and (2) to preserve "the integrity and viability of public education."

The group took initial steps toward the formation of a national committee for Public Education and Religious Liberty (PEARL). There are a number of state organizations under the PEARL banner, but prior to this there has been no national organization.

James E. Wood Jr., executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, presided over the session that approved a statement of purpose for the proposed PEARL organization.

The next step will be for the various groups to approve the statement of purpose and decide formally on the creation of the new national PEARL body.

Approximately 75 persons representing the 50 organizations met in the national headquarters building of the National Educational Association to discuss the current drive for tax credit aid to private and church-related elementary and secondary schools.

The lead-off speaker for the all-day meeting was Rep. James Corman (D., Calif.), a member of the House Committee on Ways and Means that is now considering tax credit bills to aid private schools. The congressman pointed out that support for private school education is strong in Congress and that it will take massive effort on the part of the people of the country to stop it.

Corman explained that two major forces in the nation are converging in the drive for public aid to private schools: (1) those who believe that their children should be taught in private schools so they can receive religious instruction, and (2) those who want to abandon the public schools because of racial integration. The second group is the strongest of the two, he observed.

The drive for public aid to private schools is greatly strengthened by the efforts of President Nixon, Corman declared. He claimed that "the President has never been a strong supporter of public education." The California congressman pointed out that Nixon as a congressman was much opposed to federal aid to education and voted against it in committee.

Later, as vice-president, Corman recalled, Nixon broke a tie vote in the Senate by voting against federal aid to education. Since becoming President, Corman said, Nixon has not rolled

-more-

back educational aid completely but that he has come forward with his proposals for public aid to private schools.

After reports on four workshops during the day, the representatives of nearly 40 of the other groups present agreed with the statement but were not authorized by their parent bodies to issue statements before formal approval. The text of the statement is as follows:

"We regard tax credit legislation, such as that now being considered by the House Ways and Means Committee, as threatening the very evils that the constitutional principle of separation of church and state was designed to prevent. It would entangle government in interreligious strife. It would impair religious freedom by making religious institutions dependent on the state. In addition, it would gravely undermine our public school system, which is now struggling against great odds to continue its vital contributions to maintenance of our democratic way of life.

"We regard the constitutional principles of religious freedom both as guaranteeing the right of sectarian schools to exist and as barring government aid to them. We therefore call on all members of the United States Congress and the various state legislatures to reject all tax credit proposals as no more than a device to supply government aid to sectarian schools and consequently as inconsistent with constitutional principle and sound educational practice."

The five-person steering committee that brought the groups together for the formation of this new national consortium were: Florence Flast, New York State PEARL; Stanley McFarland, National Education Association; Alan Reitman, American Civil Liberties Union; Joseph Robison, American Jewish Congress, and Wood, Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs.

-30-

Texas Church Records  
400 Converts in One Night

3/13/73

NEDERLAND, Tex. (BP)--Nearly 400 professions of faith in one evening at First Baptist Church here have prompted the Nederland church's leaders to wonder if it's a new record for a single night of a church revival.

More than 900 decisions were recorded during the one-week revival including a total of 609 professions of faith. Tuesday night alone saw 398 professions.

The evangelist, David Stockwell, of Baton Rouge, La., is a student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, and a former linebacker for Rice University, Houston.

-30-

Native Tennessean Named  
Promotion Supervisor at Board

3/13/73

NASHVILLE (BP)--Jerry C. Wolverton, youth director at Woodcock Memorial Baptist Church here, has been named supervisor of the promotional materials section at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

A staff member of the central support group in the Church Services and Materials Division, Wolverton will be responsible for coordinating development of the division's advertising and sales promotion.

Prior to joining the board's staff, Wolverton was a field underwriter for New York Life Insurance Company in Nashville. Earlier, he was executive vice president of Wyatt Chemical Company in Franklin, Tenn., and for six years was regional sales manager at Dart Industries, Los Angeles, Calif. A native of Old Hickory, Tenn., he was graduated in 1960 from Belmont College, Nashville.

-30-

Photo mailed to Baptist state papers.