

From Jail to the Rose Garden

One of Tracey Bailey's highest moments in life happened in 1993, he wrote in *Guideposts* magazine. He stood in the White House Rose Garden in the presence of the president of the United States to receive the National Teacher of the Year Award.



Bailey had come a long way. About 15 years earlier, he had stood as a teenager in the presence of a county judge in an Indiana courtroom to be sentenced to jail. Bailey had gone on a drunken rampage with friends, vandalizing a high school, had been caught and found guilty. Nevertheless, Bailey stood before the judge with his head held high, the words of his high school wrestling coach ringing in his ears: "Don't you ever hang your head. Don't admit defeat. The minute you do, it's over."

The judge looked at the proud teenager and stunned the courtroom with Bailey's sentence: five years in the Indiana youth center, a prison one step below the state penitentiary.

Bailey went to jail with his head still held high, but it took only a few months for reality to set in. One day, as he sat in solitary confinement in a cell with nothing more than a metal cot, a sink, and a toilet, he realized what a mistake he had made. He began to weep. More importantly, he began to pray to God. "God, I need help," he said. "I am defeated without you."

That was the turning point for Bailey. He joined a prison Bible study and began taking college correspondence courses. After 14 months in jail, he was released on probation, and after further college studies, he became a science teacher in Florida. He served in the Florida Department of Education for four years as the state coordinator for education reform and as the director of Charter Schools and Public School Choice under the leadership of Lt. Gov. Frank T. Brogan. In 1998, Bailey was inducted into the Florida Educators' Hall of Fame.

How did all that happen? With these words, Bailey summarizes the lesson he had learned in life: "I bowed my head and tasted victory."

When we humble ourselves and pray, seeking God's forgiveness of our sins, He is able to fulfill His plans for our lives.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

– Beecher Hunter