

Pray for Ozzy

British tabloid veteran Dan Wooding knows a good headline when he hears one.

Here is a good one for grocery checkout racks: "Churches pray for the Osbournes." Or even better: "Bleeping Baptists asked to pray for the Bleeping Osbournes."

That second headline is true, minus the "bleeping" parts.

The media juggernaut led by Ozzy "The Prince of Darkness" Osbourne and his wife Sharon is back in the news, with mom and dad renewing their marriage vows before a flock of family, friends and the 1970s disco group "Village People." The 20th anniversary rites were delayed several months by Sharon Osbourne's life-and-death struggle with colon cancer.

Real Struggles

All of this is, of course, fodder for the hit reality TV series about life in the family's Beverly Hills mansion.

"I was watching their show and I thought to myself, *we should have Ozzy Osbourne day in churches across America*," said Wooding, now a California-based writer for Christian radio and news. "I mean, these are some people who truly need our prayers."

So Wooding wrote a commentary for the Baptist Press wire service and others asking why Christians don't try praying for distressed entertainers, instead of just cursing them.

Wooding wasn't joking, in large part because his own life once veered into the media wonderland occupied by MTV's *First Dysfunctional Family*. He was born into a missionary family in

Nigeria, but raised in Birmingham, England. As a young man, Wooding worked on the warped side of journalism, serving as London correspondent for the *National Enquirer*, the *Sunday Mirror*, and the Fleet Street tabloids. He chased the Beatles, Monty Python, gangsters, movie stars, and everybody else.

It was in 1980 that Wooding—drunk in London's Stab in the Back pub—hit bottom and vowed to return to the faith. He changed gigs, but also retained his intense interest in entertainment.

"Christians are so quick to judge and

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write people off as lost causes," he said. "The end result is that the only image of Christianity that someone like Ozzy may ever have is angry protestors marching around outside his shows. . . . Christians need some option other than pointing a finger at people and yelling."

Real Needs

There is evidence, said Wooding, that Ozzy Osbourne is aware of his own "spiritual desperation," which is symbolized by the myriad crosses in his wardrobe and home décor. Ozzy has had private talks about faith with superstar keyboardist Rick Wakeman of Yes, who is also one of Wooding's close friends.

And, as Sharon Osbourne told journalists when their MTV series first hit cable, "The best neighbor we've ever had is Pat Boone. We miss him terribly." Of course, that meant the born-again

Boone was on one side and cleaned-up rocker Meat Loaf was on the other, daughter Kelly reminded her mother.

"It was," quipped Ozzy, "sort of like a Satan sandwich."

That's funny and so is the family's show. But there is also an undercurrent of unhappiness and pain—with the children trashing each other, Ozzy living in a daze, and Sharon waging war against the "next door neighbors from Hell," said Wooding.

What is clear to even the most casual viewer is that whatever peace and stability the clan enjoys is rooted in Ozzy and Sharon's marriage and, especially, in her commitment to support him during his legendary struggles with alcohol, aging, depression, and the other forms of madness that accompany heavy-metal superstardom.

"If she goes, I can't even imagine what happens to that man and those children," said Wooding. "So right there, that is something people can pray about. This mother is holding this family together and she has cancer. Pray for her."

In a way, the Osbourne family can serve as a wake-up call for church people who tend to focus only on life in their own sacred circles, he said.

"The Osbournes are not, believe it or not, the most dysfunctional family in America," he concluded. "Millions of families are just as messed up as they are. The Osbournes at least have the courage to admit how messed up they are. The point is that we need to be praying for messed-up families in general, and maybe praying for the Osbournes would help some people realize that." ■

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