From Lespair De to Victory

60 Exciting Years in the Ministry

From Lespair Victory

Dr. Ben Bates



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ISBN 13: 978-1-63232-505-1 Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2008907119 I PROUDLY, AND with honor, dedicate my memoirs to my wife, Bettie; my son, Carey Franklin; my daughter, Donelia (Dodie) Bates (Davis); my son-in-law, Walter H. Davis; my daughter-in-law, Lynne Bates; my precious six grandchildren, Beth Ann (Davis) Bard, Heather Irene Bates, Hollie Gabriélle Bates, Walter H. Davis Jr., Bettie Dianne (Davis) Mayhew, and Hudson M. Bates; and to many precious friends who have blessed my life throughout these past 60 years. May God bless you.



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Foreword by Dr. John , Jullivan

ARIVER FORMS as many tributaries flow into it. These smaller bodies of water converge together to produce a rushing river. Dr. Ben Bates has demonstrated this very principle in his memoir, *From Despair to Victory*.

Dr. Bates demonstrates great gifts of gratitude and recall in his exciting life story.

Beginning with humble beginnings and difficult times seems to always ready us for the long-run. Someone well said, "Life is not to be gulped—it is to be sipped." This enables us to enjoy the journey. No one comprehends this like a man called of God. Bates does not bemoan his humble beginnings; he allows this "tributary" to become one part of the river of his life. His meager beginnings were not a trial but a testimony.

So many people make so many contributions to our lives. However, no one makes a greater contribution than the preacher's wife. She becomes the counselor, disciplinarian, homemaker, "buffer zone," and loving critic—sometimes wrapped in an apron, and other times Sunday's best, but

always on display. The attitude of the minister's wife constitutes the most significant and longest running "tributaries" into the man called of God. My observation about Dr. Ben, without Bettie, is that perhaps neither his life nor his ministry would have lasted 60 years!

Another "tributary" making the river of our life is the friends we make and the impact they have in shaping our lives. After family, friends shape us most. Charles and Judy Hill, Greg and Barbara Walcott, "Doc" Dishner, and various pastors all helped to form the valleys and peaks of Ben Bates' life and ministry. Gratitude for these friends breathes on every page.

There is no question that when you read this compelling story, you will look over your shoulder and remember many of those who helped form your life and ministry. When you do, let the words of Psalms 46:4 bless you, "There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God..." (KJV). Ben Bates is one of the "rivers" that blesses God.

Dr. John Sullivan, Executive Director-Treasurer Florida Baptist Convention



Presenting a man
you'll never forget!

FTER READING THE events of the life of Dr. Ben Bates,  $m{\Lambda}$ as recorded in his book, I have been inspired by the way that God has used him in evangelism, in the pastorate, in denominational service, and in his influence for our Lord upon the lives of so many people. As a personal friend, I have known him for many years. I made my first acquaintance with him while pastoring the Park Avenue Baptist Church in Nashville, Tennessee, for thirty-five years. His daughter, Dodie, was married to one of our staff members, Walter Davis, and she was greatly loved by our membership and looked upon as one of our finest and sweetest members. I also had the privilege of being the pastor of Dr. Bates while he was employed in Nashville. This book will challenge you to be a greater personal witness for Christ, to remember that, as Christians, we all have times when we get knocked down, but we don't get knocked out, because our loving Lord places His arms around us, causing us to stand on our feet once more and to keep on being fruitful and faithful to Him. Dr. Bates also reminds us that at the end of this short. From Despair to Victory

journey called "life," the only important thing will be to hear Christ say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." May you be blessed by this book as I have been blessed.

Your fellow servant in Christ,
Pastor Bob Mowrey,
First Baptist Church, Scottsboro, TN
Pastor emeritus: Park Avenue Baptist Church,
Nashville, TN



BEGIN MY memoirs, the story of my 60 years in the Lord's service, by giving some background of my life that began 84 years ago on June 5, 1924, in a poor, rural farming community in Lonoke County, Arkansas. I was born the first of five sons to Ben and Ellie Bates, a poor share-crop-farmer family, in a time of extreme poverty, when it was exceedingly difficult for two to make a living, let alone start a family.

Life expectancy in those days was less than 50 years. There were but a few automobiles in all of America. There was not more than a thousand miles of gravel and hard surfaced roads in all the state of Arkansas. The maximum speed of motorized vehicles was 40 miles per hour. The average hourly wage was 40 cents per hour. The average public worker made less than a thousand dollars annually. A farm day-worker made 50 to 75 cents a day, working from dawn to dark. And 90 percent of all births took place in the home bedroom with the assistance of a mid-wife.

Times were hard and difficult, and for my parents to eke out a livelihood; raise five boys; clothe, feed, and send them all to school; and literally climb out of the worst living conditions one can possibly imagine was a miracle in itself. The conditions of that day and time would be difficult to impossible for this generation to imagine. However, we never knew we were poor and poverty ridden, as we think of those conditions today, because everybody in our rural part of the country was in the same condition. Nevertheless, by very hard work and sheer determination, my mother and daddy always believed that there would come a brighter day if they worked hard and kept the faith and never gave up. Thank God, through great sacrifice, extreme difficulty, and back-breaking hard work, those better times eventually came.



Entire family in front of first new home in 1940

In 1938, through a government program to help poor farmers, my parents were able to move into a new home on a 40-acre tract of rich farmland near Scott, Arkansas. They were also given two mules with which to farm the land and 40 years to pay the debt. I was 14 years old, and for the first time since my parents were married, my daddy

and mother and five brothers all had a decent home to live in. From that day forward, life began to change, but not without a lot of hard work.

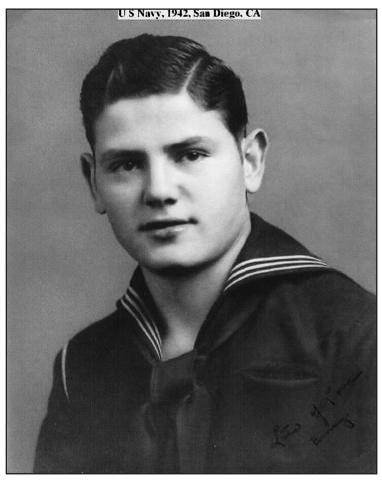
When my daddy went home to be with the Lord, he left my mother with a comfortable farm home, 40 acres of farmland that was debt free, money enough in the bank, and all the necessities she needed to continue on for 17 more years, while living alone, before going home to be with the Lord at age 84.

When I remember my heritage and reflect on the long and difficult journey through which my parents traveled—the abject poverty and privation of those desperate times through the Depression years that I can remember so well—I have to humbly say that I owe every success and every accomplishment of my life to godly parents who made every effort to instill into their sons the very things that sustained them through the worst of times and the best of times.

When I was 16 years of age, I embraced my parents' faith and became a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. I was converted in a small Baptist mission revival being held in a vacant store building on Broadway Street in North Little Rock, Arkansas, on the seventh day of July. I was baptized on July 14, 1940, in the Immanuel Baptist Church in Little Rock, Arkansas—the church that founded and sponsored the small mission.

Because I lived 18 miles away from the city, I moved my membership to the Toltec Baptist Church near the farm where my parents lived. For the next two years, I put forth every effort into walking and living the life of a believer, and I believed that I had made good progress. However, the United States was entering a time of war, and I wanted to choose a branch of service in which I could serve. I chose to enter the Navy in 1942 and was sent to San Diego, California, where I received my boot camp training. I had lived a sheltered

country boy's life, and because of the Christian atmosphere of our home, I had not been exposed to the world. Before I knew what was happening, I began to indulge in things I never knew existed. Through the encouragement of my fellow servicemen, I began to experiment with alcohol. One thing led to another, and yet I could sense in my heart that this way of life was not right.



Ben in the Navy

Following eight weeks in boot-camp training, I was given a 10-day leave to return home. I had left behind someone who had become the love of my life. I had met Bettie Morgan while attending a New Year's Eve party in the home of the Morgan family in North Little Rock in 1940. We had dated each other for about 19 months, and though we were young—she was 18 and I was 19—we wanted to be married. While I was on my leave, we hurriedly got married and had five short days together before I had to return to my base in San Diego.

After several months, I managed to send for Bettie, and she came by train to Los Angeles, where we lived with her Aunt Annie and Uncle Ben Waddle until we could afford our own apartment. My 66-dollar monthly pay as an apprentice seaman badly needed supplementing in order for two to exist, so Bettie went to work for the Douglas Aircraft factory in Long Beach. Her salary made it possible for us to get our first apartment, but we could not afford a car, so all of our travel was by street bus or with friends or relatives.

By this stage in my life, I had drifted far away from where I had been when I entered the Navy. I was like the prodigal son of the Bible who had left home, gone away to a foreign country, and become involved in riotous living. I was living on "Fool's Mountain" and had been drawn away from the principles, standards, and parental training of the first 18 years of my life. Satan had taken control of my life, as he can so cleverly do, and was tearing down all that was good, decent, and wholesome.

The memory of that wilderness experience still shames and sorrows me to this day. Although every sin and stain has long since been removed, the memories of that time still linger and often are as bitter as wormwood. I have spent a lifetime reminding the young men and women whom I have seen drifting onto the wrong track of life to "be not deceived,"



Ben and his new wife, Bettie

for God is not mocked, for whatsoever you sow, that you shall also reap" (Galatians 6:7 KJV).+ Sin bites like a serpent and stings like an adder.

I received a medical discharge from the Navy in 1945, after spending six months in the Naval Hospital at Corona, California. I had contracted tuberculosis, and therefore I could not return to active duty. This was one of my life's great disappointments. Being stationed on an air base, I had spent much of my spare time out on the flight line watching planes

warm up and take off. I had a deep desire to fly an airplane, and I finally mustered up enough courage to ask some of the pilots if I could hitch a ride with them. That wasn't difficult at all. After many such rides—even getting to follow through on the flight controls during dive bombing runs and some of the dog fight maneuvers—some of the pilots began to encourage me to go for flight training. Some of them even put in a good word to flight command for me.

Their encouragement and belief in my abilities led me to put in a request to become a naval pilot. The thrill of my life came the day I was notified that my request had been granted and that I was to report to begin my physical. After passing all of the tests, I was taken off all duty and notified that I would be relocating to Pensacola, Florida, where I would receive my flight training. But all of this shattered a few days later, when I was diagnosed with tuberculosis. It was as if a bomb had exploded and taken my dreams and hopes of becoming a Navy pilot along with it. My career in the Navy was too short lived. After one year, 10 months, and 20 days, I was discharged back to civilian life.