

My True Love

My True Love

An Autobiography

Essie B. Bryant



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Published by Redemption Press, PO Box 427, Enumclaw, WA 98022.

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Some names in this book have been changed to protect the privacy of certain individuals.

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ISBN 13: 978-1-63232-237-1

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2007901479

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Foreword



“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

—Romans 8:28

God works in “all things”—not just isolated incidents—for our good. This does not mean that all that happens to us is good. Evil is prevalent in our fallen world, but God is able to turn every circumstance around for our long-range good. Note that God is not working to make us happy, but to fulfill his purpose.

Note also that this promise is not for everybody. It can be claimed only by those who love God and are called according to his purpose. Those who are “called” are those the Holy Spirit convinces and enables to receive Christ. Such people have a new perspective, a new mind-set on life. They trust in God, not life’s treasures; they look for their security in heaven, not on earth; they learn to accept, not resent, pain and persecution because God is with them.

As you read of the experiences of Elder Essie Bryant, rich with the history of God’s awesomeness, I know it will increase your faith as it challenges you to trust in him always and in every situation and circumstance. They also bring to life Jeremiah 29:11, where God says,

“I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

God knows the future, and his plans for us are good and full of hope. As long as God, who knows the future, provides our agenda and goes with us as we fulfill his mission, we can have boundless hope. This does not mean that we will be spared pain, suffering, or hardship, but that God will see us through to a glorious conclusion.

Elder Essie Bryant’s life is evidence of Jeremiah 29:11, and she has done an outstanding job in this book of sharing testimony after testimony of how God through pain, suffering, and hardship has remained faithful to her even in those times when she was faithless.

—Apostle William T. Ford, Sr.

Preface



Writing this book was the most challenging task I have ever encountered. This book has taken me three years to write. I soon realized that it would be impossible to write about everything that happened. The hardest part was deciding what to put in and what to leave out as the Holy Spirit renewed my memory. How humbling and yet gratifying it was as he, the Holy Spirit, enabled me to reflect back on my past. The only time I could write was by the leading of the Holy Spirit.

In summarizing the events and conversations, I have tried to be as accurate as possible. In some of the chapters, as I wrote them, I relived them. There were times I had to stop writing and weep; then I would thank God for his faithfulness to me. I went through a period of heavy enemy attack trying to discourage me from writing the truth. That period was short-lived because I was under strict orders not to compromise the truth. This book was not written to trash or judge anyone but that through these pages the truth would be told.

Throughout these pages, the reader will see my life's struggles in looking for that special person to make me happy. In the book you will hear me say often, "God or the Holy Spirit said." No, I have never heard God's voice audibly. He has always spoken to me

inwardly. As I directed my heart and my mind together to seek the Lord, his Spirit spoke into my heart, directly impressing his thoughts and ideas upon it.¹ I was able to remember some details and dates because I kept a daily diary. In my prayer time, I created a prayer room dairy. In it, I recorded the unprompted flow of thoughts that came from God to me. In the beginning, God's voice was strange to me, but the more I listened to him, the more I became familiar with his voice. Then I would record what he said. After prayer, I would go to my Bible to reference and confirm what he (the Holy Spirit) had said to me. In the back of the book, there is a section called "How to Listen to God."

For those of you who want your lives to be changed, read the entire book. The blessings of God will overtake you in the process. My prayer is that God will be glorified. Amen.

Acknowledgements



First of all, I want to thank the Lord for helping me do something I thought was impossible for me—writing this book. I do not think this book would have ever been written without the guiding and leading of the Holy Spirit. I realize most of all that if anything has been accomplished through my life, it has been solely God's doing, not mine, but his alone. I cannot take any of the credit. To be honest, I never thought I would be writing a book. First of all, I knew that I did not have the ability to write a whole book. Secondly, I knew that in order to write a book, I would need someone with experience in writing to assist me.

I met Denise at a prayer breakfast in Rose Hill, North Carolina. She was there to introduce her poetry books. After the service, I introduced myself to her. I shared with her details of me writing a book about my life. I also told her that the book was about me but that it was being written for God's glory. I asked her to pray about assisting me with my book. As I started to walk away, she said, "I'll see what I can do to help." I cannot adequately express my gratitude to Denise for her long, hard hours of editing the beginning of this book. Thank you, Denise.

I'd also like to thank minister Ellerbe for her assistance on editing the last part of this book. I want to thank Pastor Angela Little for the time she spent reediting my book. Mr. Dennison, my teacher, was my greatest encouragement. When I thought I didn't have the ability to accomplish this awesome task, he encouraged me to write. I thank Joycelyn for her faithfulness of six years in calling me on the first of every month to pray for me. Pastor Michael and Monica, thank you both for being there for me. You both are true friends.

I'd like to thank God for all of the pastors that have been a part of my life and for giving me different little nuggets of the Word that have enhanced my growth in the Lord—the late Pastor Benjamin Smith, Rev. J. A. Jones, Rev. Gus Roman, Pastor William Thomas Ford and First Lady Glendora Ford, Pastor K. P. Johnson, Rev. Wesley Pinnock, and Pastors William and Paula Carver.

Chapter One

Family Memories



Even now, I sometimes reminiscence on what my life was like when I lived with my parents. I remember the white house with a red tin roof. It was about four feet off the ground. It was perfect for playing hide-and-seek and a cool place to rest during those long hot summer days.

Oh, how I loved the spring and the fall seasons. As I would walk those three miles to school, I thought about the hot bowl of oatmeal waiting for me. It was such a joy to see the beauty of the new budding of the trees, the flowers and the new grass peeking up its head. Even now, it is just fascinating to observe the fall season as everything changes its colors.

Little did my mother know that the names of her four youngest children (listed in chronological order from oldest to youngest, all ending in “ie”) would be used to tease her years later. Willie, Charlie, Essie, and Bessie One day I said, “Mom, you had us so quickly that you did not have time to give us proper names!” She would smile, wave her hand at me, and say, “Hush, child.” My oldest brother was the only one who had a name that was different and made any sense to me. He was named after our father. My named is Essie, child number four out of five children born to Benjamin and Alma Bryant. I had

three older brothers and one younger sister. The year of my birth was 1935. The place was Duplin County, North Carolina.

My mother's sister, Aunt Adell, lived about seven yards from our back door. Her daughter, Helen, lived with us because her mother's husband did not want her to live with them. In fact, she was not even allowed to visit their house. When my mother would send us (my sister and me) to visit our aunt, we would not stay long because we disliked my aunt's husband for being so mean to our cousin. And, he was also abusive to my aunt. Finally, my aunt decided to leave him and move to Philadelphia. My mother did not allow her to take Helen with her. Therefore, Helen became a part of our family.

My childhood brings back many memories, also, of all my immediate family members, except for my father. Telling you something about him would be very difficult. Even when I was five years old, memories of him were rare, almost nonexistent. Memories of happy times between my father and mother were also rare. That is because my father was an alcoholic. I am not sure how true this story is, but I was told that he often used our grocery money to buy alcohol. To fool everyone, he would put rocks and bricks in the bottom of the bags to give them weight and feel as though groceries were in them. It would not be until mother was ready to fix a meal for us that she would realize there was no food to cook!

My mother, on the other hand, was a totally different story. I will always remember her to be a woman of great strength. One of her strengths was her desire to work toward a better life. Thus begins the setting of my first story about her. It concerns the cotton fields.

CLOSE CALLS WITH DEATH

My mother was out working in the field one day. I was home with my brother, Willie, and can still hear him just as clear as if it were only yesterday, giving me strict orders, "Do not leave this house!" This order may have stuck with some people. But me, I had only one boss! And she was out working in the cotton field at this time. Thus, I began my adventure of finding my mother, without my

brother being aware of it, of course. In my determination to reach my mother, I forgot how dangerous a certain wide ditch could be that I had to cross in order to reach her.

My siblings and I had been warned many times not to cross this ditch, for not only was the water deep, but snakes had been known to lodge there. The path over this ditch was an old wooden board about three-to-four feet wide. It was not until I began crossing this ditch that fear gripped me and tears began to roll down my cheeks. I cried out loud for my mother, who recognized my voice and yelled back to me from the fields. Her response encouraged me enough so that I soon made it over that crossing and ran to her protective arms. When I reached her, she gave me a big hug, which took away the overwhelming trauma I had just experienced. Knowing my sometimes reckless personality so well, my mother did not question why I came looking for her so abruptly that day. I stayed with her the rest of the evening and vowed to myself to never again tackle that old trail alone.

Another experience I remember well with my mother was also a close encounter with my demise. My mother, at the time, was scrubbing the kitchen floor. Back then, all of our floors were made of wood and were kept clean with water mixed with lye (pure lye from a can). While my mother was busy scrubbing, I ran into the kitchen to inform her that I was thirsty. My mother told me, "Just drink some water," and pointed to a cup sitting on the table. Unbeknown to my mother or myself, Helen had poured some lye into this cup. Upon taking one sip of this "water," my throat and stomach began to burn. In my panic, I cried out to my mother, "Water hot, Mom! Water hot, Mom!" In response to my distress, my mother's eyes quickly rested on a can of lye that had been opened. Immediately, she knew what had happened. This event of so many years ago is as vivid as if it were yesterday. I remember my mother swiftly grabbing me in her arms, running outside, and proceeding to encircle the house over and over again while screaming to the top of her lungs. Our neighbors responded to the distressed calls, and I soon received the help that I

needed. To this day, I realize that mixed in my mother's frantic cries for help were some earnest prayers, because today I am completely healed, with no setbacks from this event.

MY DEVASTATING LOSS

I can't remember the exact month or date, but one Saturday night in 1943, my mother made the difficult decision to leave my dad. I remember her packing everything she owned into her suitcase as she was preparing to slip out of the side window of our house. When we, her children, got wind of what she was doing, all six of us approached her and asked her what her intentions were. She quickly informed us that she was going up North to visit her aunt and that we would go to live with our maternal grandparents.

My world came to an abrupt halt. Here I was about to lose my mother and there was nothing I could do about it. I was in shock. At first, time seemed to stand still. But soon afterward, the seconds began to quickly roll by. Around 11:00 P.M., a dreaded train whistle roared in my ear, signaling an end to a precious era in my family's life. Since the train was the only mode of transportation at that time, its whistle confirmed the fears of my siblings and myself. Our mother had left us for good. I lay in bed that night and cried until I felt there were no more tears in my eyes. I don't even recall falling asleep. I do remember, though, my Uncle Ernest coming by the next morning and waking the six of us up to carry us to our grandparents' house.

MY GRANDPARENTS' HOUSE

The thought of going to visit my grandparents' home had always been exciting, but going to live with them was a different story. My grandfather was a very strict man who never showed any love. To sum it up, he was not a pleasant person to be around. My grandmother, on the other hand, was the one who made life more tolerable. She was very quiet, sweet, and loving. She always had a listening ear and encouraging words. She was really a God-fearing woman.

I will always remember Sunday afternoons with her. Every Sunday about dusk, which was around 6:30 P.M., she would go to the living room and play the piano. She didn't know how to play that well, yet she struck the keys so quickly that they made beautiful music to my undisciplined ears. Even today, I remember how her voice sounded singing, "Amazing grace. How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me..." "Standing on the promises..." "Standing in the need of prayer..." "Near the cross..." and "Take my hand, Precious Lord..." There were others, but these were my favorite ones. I didn't know it, but while I was sitting there listening, these songs of Zion were being instilled in me and preparing me for my destiny set forth by God.

I had an inquiring personality, and this often got me in trouble with some folks. However, this did not stop me from bombarding others with the familiar "Who?", "What?", "When?", "Where?", and "Why?" My grandmother understood my personality, though, and would often smile when I sat at her feet and asked questions like, "What do you mean when you say, 'You reap what you sow'?" She would reply, "Whatever you do to someone else will come back to you." I would then state something like, "Well, I am not going to sow much. That way I won't have to reap much!" Replies like these would often bring an even wider grin to her face and sparkle to her eyes. She would often pat me on the head with a knowing look. Looking back, I believe she talked to God on my behalf in order that I would reach my destiny. Although I never saw my grandmother personally read a Bible, she introduced me to God. She instilled scriptures in me that remain to this day, and I thank God for her guidance.

MY LIFE ON THE FARM

The first year my siblings and I moved in with our grandparents, my grandfather, whom we called "Pop'pa," decided that we needed a bigger house and a larger farm. My grandparents were now responsible for nine children ranging in age from six to nineteen years old. The new house, which had six rooms, was huge to us. Five girls

shared a large bedroom. Four boys occupied a smaller room. Pop'pa and Mama stayed in the biggest room of all, which housed the pot-bellied stove that heated the house. As one would imagine, this is where the family spent most of its time, since it was the only heated place in the house. We lived two miles from the main road and were surrounded by acres and acres of farmland. It did not take me long to realize that Pop'pa's intentions were to make us farmers!

Every spring, our farm was prepared to plant the following: potatoes, strawberries, cucumbers, sweet potatoes, tobacco, peanuts, watermelons, cantaloupe, corn, cotton, and other things too numerous to mention. We were sharecroppers, which meant that the land we lived on did not belong to us. Therefore, half of everything we harvested went to our landowner. I realized early that sharecropping from sunup until sundown was not how I wanted to spend the rest of my life. I could not, for the life of me, understand how half of the profit from our harvests went to someone else. So one day, Pop'pa explained to me that since the landowner furnished the house and land that we lived on, as well as the seedling and equipment for us to farm, one-half of our profit was fair compensation. I understood his explanation, but it did not satisfy my inner longing to escape this way of living. I decided during those early days that sharecropping was not something I planned on doing the rest of my life!

September and October brought in the first two months of the school year. This conflicted with harvest time. Because farming was a priority, my siblings and I did not know what it was like to be in school those two months. We were stuck with farming from sunrise until sunset. Oh, how I hated this!

Because we could not work in the fields until the dew dried up, early morning was spent feeding the animals (cows, chickens, and mules). As I stated before, there were nine children in the household. They consisted of my siblings and me, two of my cousins, and my aunt and uncle. However, only eight of us worked in the fields. Since my sister was very small for her age, she stayed at home to help Grandma around the house and bring water to the field for us

to drink. She also would let us know when to come home for lunch and dinner. The memories remain as if it were only yesterday. My sister would constantly tease us for having to work in the hot sun. She, herself, would not come directly into the field, but she would wait under the shade tree while we drank our water. To get back at her, we would often do little things like taking a worm or bug and chasing her back to the house with it. We never really put those little creatures on her because that would automatically mean a beating for anyone who did it. And those beatings were no joke!