

Finding

MY PLACE IN HIM

written by

Ashley Raevonne

The events and conversations in this book have been set down to the best of the author's ability, although some names and details have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.

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Contents

*For God so loved the world that He have His only begotten Son,
that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting
life.*

John 3:16 NKJV

Dedication

To my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Thank you for loving me unconditionally and never leaving me. I love You.

To my four daughters Monica, Tamia, Gabrielle, and Laila. I love you so much and I am grateful the Lord chose me to be your mommy.

To my grandmother Bertha, the matriarch of my family, I am grateful for your love, and support. I love you.

To my parents Scefenia and Vincent, thank you for your many sacrifices, love, and believing in me. I love you.

To my Aunt Charese thank you for always being available. I love you.

And,

To my father Arthur Ray Fuller, although I did not get a chance to know you, I still honor you and I love you.

Foreword

In late 2009 I was blessed to meet a young mother in Dallas, TX who at the time was about to begin a journey towards God and purpose. The seed had been planted years before but was now germinated by the process of living life. She was pregnant in both the natural and although unawares at the time, in the spirit. Looking back, she clearly realizes this now.

I have always believed that God truly places treasure in earthen vessels. God uses these vessels to speak to us in ways that are both unique and special. These vessels are in and of themselves often quite unique and very special.

From the moment I met a young Ashley Raevonne, I knew that she was one of those God designed and God purposed vessels in the treasure chest of our lives.

Through her journey towards purpose, she has garnered the experience of life, motherhood, academics, and ministry empowering her to provide others with a helpful guide towards a deeply enriching spiritual life. She invokes within those who interact with her a desire to dig deeply into the realms of relationship with God.

In writing this book, Ashley shares with us all the joy and power of seeking and finding purpose in God. She allows us to see her

destiny in Christ as it unfolds and develops from a planted seed to a beautiful flower in God's garden. She shares the joys and sorrows of the journey and provides those who read this book with a personal insight and guide towards evolving into God-ordained purpose.

Her story will inspire both men and women, single and married, the saved as well as those seeking to find God and know who they are, why they are and how they will eventually find themselves on the journey to fulfilled purpose.

Gratefully,

A very proud father and friend,

Vincent D. Dent, Th. D.

Marvelous Christian Fellowship House of Prayer

Part One



Chapter 1

I woke to the loud humming sound of a lawnmower filling my bedroom. Squinting under the brightness, streams of sunlight danced like golden beams through the curtains. I pulled the blanket over my head with hopes of falling back a sleep. But beads of sweat started trickling down my forehead; my Minnie Mouse nightgown plastered to my back. I pulled the blanket off my head; the cool air hit me like a winter breeze. The smell of fresh-cut grass mixed with fuel, filled the room and made me nauseous. I got up to close the window, but was distracted when the entry door opened and then closed.

I hope that wasn't Momma; she wouldn't dare leave me. I thought as I walked out my room.

Every Saturday, Momma and I would run errands. Sometimes I would be bored out of my mind and tired of riding in the car, but it didn't bother me that much. Our last errand was always the grocery store, and Momma let me get whatever I wanted—which was mostly candy. After our transaction, she would always tell me, “Don't tell your brothers, I don't want to hear all of that complaining.” Shoot, our secret was safe with me. I wasn't going to mess up my candy *supply*.

Momma was sweet as pie, but she knew how to toughen up when needed. Her name was Scefenia, but no one seemed to know how to pronounce it correctly, so everyone called her by her middle name, Renee. Momma had a cocoa-colored complexion. She stood

five-feet-four inches but would swear up and down that she was five-feet-five. She was reserved, always wore her hair in a low ponytail or down with a side part. She made it a point to dress conservatively, and the only time she would wear makeup was to church and on special occasions. Momma never talked loudly, but when she did, you knew you better run because something must be wrong.

While I walked down the narrow hall towards my parent's room, the overpowering smell of bleach and pine-sol filled my nostrils. My oldest brother Maurice was cleaning the bathroom.

He's about to kill himself. I thought as I passed by.

We lived in Lawrence, Kansas—home to the Kansas University Jayhawks. Our small single-story, three bedrooms, and one-bathroom house resided in a peaceful neighborhood surrounded by big oak trees and narrow brick streets.

Since we had one bathroom, Momma demanded we keep the bathroom clean. Whoever had bathroom duty had to make sure they cleaned it the right way. If it weren't clean the way Momma wanted it clean, then it would have to be cleaned again until it was cleaned the right way.

As I neared my parents' room, I could hear Momma talking on the phone. Once I heard her voice, I didn't need to get any closer—I knew she hadn't left me and I wasn't trying to get into trouble again for butting into her conversation, so I began to walk away.

"Oh, no!" Momma cried.

I froze. So many concerns were going through my mind. I needed to make sure Momma was okay. It hurt my heart to hear her cry. I turned around, got down on my hands and knees, and crawled into the room without Momma seeing me. I crawled to the opposite side of her bed and lay on the floor.

Moments later, the hard floor caused my back to hurt. I got up, lifted my head, and peeped over the bed to see where Momma was. Her back faced me as she sat on the edge of her bed. Just then, a boldness came over me, and I gently climbed on to the bed without making a sound.

Momma turned around and stared at me. My heart started pounding so hard, I thought it would come through my nightgown. She reached over and rubbed my back.

What... that's it? I thought. I just knew I would get into trouble once she saw me. There was no placing the phone on mute to yell at me to get out or snapping her fingers while signaling me to get out. No nothing.

“I have to tell Ashley,” she said.

Tell me what? I thought. I assumed I was in trouble. I jumped off the bed and walked towards the door. *If I'm not around, maybe Momma would forget what she needed to tell me.*

Right before I got to the door, she called my name. I acted like I didn't hear her and kept walking.

“Ashley!” Momma said with a shaky voice.

I turned around and looked her in the eyes—they were red from crying, tear stains were on her cheeks.

“Yes, ma'am.”

“I have something to tell you, sit down.”

I sat down on the bed and stared at her, trying to figure out what she was about to say.

“Um, I know you don't remember your dad.”

I looked at her and shook my head—I just knew that whatever she was about to say wasn't going to be good.

I GREW UP with momma occasionally telling me different stories about my dad. From what I knew, his name was Arthur Ray Fuller. He was tall with a husky build, had a chubby baby face with sharp piercing eyes, and dark curly hair. Momma told me the first thing she noticed about Daddy was his infectious smile—which I had inherited.

Momma was fifteen-years-old when she met Daddy who was already eighteen-years-old. She and one of her sisters had gone to Dallas to visit an aunt for the summer. Being teenage girls, they had grown bored with sitting in an apartment all day long, so they'd decided to walk around the apartment complex. As they walked past a payphone, it started to ring. Momma said they looked at each other like that was the most exciting thing they had ever seen.

“Let’s go over there and answer it,” Momma said. Her sister agreed, and so they did.

“Hello. Who is this?” Momma had asked.

“Arthur.”

“What are you doing calling this phone?”

“I saw you were walking, and I wanted to talk to you. I can see you right now, look up.”

Daddy lived in an apartment on the second floor. He was sitting on his balcony, looking down at them. Eventually, he came downstairs and walked them back to their aunt’s apartment—then gave Momma his number. However, she never called. But Daddy was persistent, he wrote Momma letters until she responded.

MOMMA AND DADDY had grown up very differently. Momma had lived a sheltered life, and Daddy did what he thought he had to in order to survive. Both of Daddy’s parents were deceased before he was even an adult. His father died when he was still a young child, and his mother died when he was fourteen. He had been forced to live with family members willing to take him in.

His mother’s death took a toll on him, and he didn’t handle it very well. He didn’t listen to anybody. Daddy did what he wanted to do, when he wanted to do it. He had the mentality that someone owed him something, and that they had to put up with his erratic behavior. He transferred from one family member’s house to the next, and soon no one wanted to deal with him. As a result, he would find himself homeless, sleeping on park benches or trying to bum a floor at a friend’s house. In the end, he learned how to be a hustler.

Over the years, Daddy would write Momma letters, saying how he wanted to marry her, and take care of her, but Momma didn’t like daddy enough to be with him. She ended up getting married to someone else and had two children. But shortly after Momma divorced, Daddy started sending Momma letters again—talking about how he purchased new furniture for his new apartment, and wanted to send for her and my brothers and take care of them. This time Momma held Daddy to his word, and he paid for them to take a greyhound to Dallas, Texas.

When they arrived, Momma went into the apartment and discovered that the only furniture there was an old bed and a dresser. Daddy must've known what she was thinking, because he told her the furniture would get delivered in the next couple of days. Every day, Momma questioned him about it, but Daddy always had a story about why the furniture company hadn't delivered it. Momma knew the furniture was never coming, so she quit asking.

Soon after moving in, Momma got pregnant with me. And Daddy was getting evicted from his apartment, which forced them to move into a rundown hotel. Daddy left Momma and my brothers at the hotel for two days without telling her where he was going.

Eventually, they ran out of money and could no longer pay for the hotel, so they often stayed with some of Daddy's relatives—the mere reason they allowed them to stay was because of Momma and my brothers. Daddy still didn't act right, Momma always had to tell him to stop being disrespectful so they wouldn't get kicked out. Well, Daddy didn't listen and got them kicked out. Momma ended up staying with one of her aunts. However, Daddy was not allowed to stay.

Soon Daddy was sending Momma letters again, telling her he would come and get her and the boys when he got settled in Austin, Texas. He kept his word and got them. Daddy did not want Momma to bring me into this world out of wedlock, so they got married.

After they got married, Daddy consistently did things to stress Momma out. She started to have early contractions and was admitted to the hospital. They were able to stop the contractions, but the doctor had to put Momma on bed rest. While the doctor talked to Momma, Daddy was playing with momma's hospital bed, making it go up and down and was laughing about it until the doctor called security and had daddy escorted out of the hospital.

Two days later, Momma returned home, and Daddy was still stressing her out, saying crazy things, and picking on my brothers. In the midst of Momma yelling at Daddy, her water broke, and she had me at thirty-one weeks. I weighed only four pounds. Momma told me I was so small. I could've worn doll clothes.

Even after I was born, Daddy continued to stress Momma out, so she left and did not tell him where we were going.

Sometime later, Daddy found out where Momma went, and he came to visit. He tried to get Momma back, but she wanted nothing to do with him. Daddy got upset, so when he left, he took me too. Momma called the police, but they said it was nothing that they could do since his name was on the birth certificate, and they did not have custody established.

Two weeks later, Daddy brought me back. Momma said when she got me, I looked like I was homeless. She said my hair was nappy looking, the dress that I had on wasn't clean, and I had a strange smell.

After that last incident, Momma was done with Daddy and left him for good.

“YOUR FATHER PASSED away,” Momma said. I stared at Momma for a long time. I didn't know what to do or say. She was already crying and I felt like I had to be strong for her.

“Momma, it's okay... I didn't know him, anyway; Chris is my dad.”

The truth was, I wasn't okay. Despite the stories Momma told me about my father, I wanted to know him and have a relationship with him. But, at that moment, that opportunity was taken away from me. Momma started to cry again as she reached over and hugged me.

As I was in her arms, tears formed in my eyes, but I would not cry. I thought if I cried in front of her, it would make her feel worse than she already felt. The last thing I ever wanted to do was cause Momma to cry.

After our hugging session, I walked out of her room and headed down the hallway. Maurice walked out of the bathroom and bumped into me as he passed by. I turned around and pushed him.

“Why did you hit me?!” I screamed.

He just looked at me like I was crazy and continued on his way.

By the time I made it to my room, tears were streaming down my cheeks. I closed the door, lay on my bed, and cried—this was way too much for my little seven-year-old self to handle.

Chapter 2

Chris was Momma's husband and the father of my little brother Allen. Chris's name was also Allen, but people called him Chris, short for Christopher, which was his middle name. He was about six-feet-tall, slender and had a cocoa complexion —same as Momma, and he always had a bald fade haircut. He reminded me of a darker Will Smith from the television show, *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*. Sometimes he even acted like him. He could walk into a room full of people and have everyone laughing in no time at all.

I remember the first time I met Chris. When I was five years old, my oldest brother Maurice woke up and walked into the living room to watch television. Just as he was about to sit down, he noticed a man lying on the couch. He was so excited about what he had discovered, he woke up me and our brother Ben to show us.

Maurice led the way, as Ben and I willingly followed. He was the eldest of the three of us, and he could persuade Ben and me to do just about anything. Once we got to the living room, we wanted a closer look, so we stood directly in front of the couch, staring at Chris for an unusually long time, as we tried to figure out who this man was and why was he lying on our couch.

Suddenly, Chris rolled over and nearly jumped out of his skin. I imagined we probably looked like creepy little kids plotting some-

thing sinister with the way we were staring down at him. But Chris was a good sport, and instead smiled and waved up at us as he said, “Hi.”

My brothers and I looked at each other and then laughed hysterically as we ran away to our mother’s room.

I COULD NEVER get close to Chris, despite him being more amicable than Momma. He’d even tried to comb my hair once. My siblings and I considered Chris to be the cool, fun parent. If Momma said no to something, he’d step in on our behalf and say yes, we learned very quickly to ask him first if we wanted anything.

But my reservations against Chris came because of Momma’s ex-boyfriend Jim— who also was my little sister, Whitney’s dad. Jim was an average build man with dark shoulder-length hair, who always had a serious look about him. And when he laughed, I could never tell if he was happy or angry.

At Christmas, when I was only four-years-old, Jim bought me a wind-up toy mouse that looked real. It had fur, a tail, and everything. When it was wound up and placed on the floor, it would move fast in different directions. Jim noticed that I was scared of it, so he wound it up, put it on the floor, and watch me run a bit. He thought it was funny and kept on tormenting me until Momma saw what was happening and told him to stop. But as soon as Momma went into another room, he wound-up that rat again, only that time while trying to run away from the dang thing, I stepped on it and broke it.

“Now look what you did; you broke it—it’s a piece of junk now.” Jim had snarled.

I don’t think he was mad that I broke it, but that he couldn’t torment me with it anymore.

The toy rat incident was only the beginning. Jim always yelled at my brothers and me and whipped us for every little thing. My oldest brother, Maurice, who was only six-years-old at the time, did something that he wasn’t supposed to do, and I remember Jim whipped him with an extension cord—leaving welts all over his body. Momma saw the wounds and was angry to the point of tears. She tried to talk to Jim about it, but he pushed her away from him. “You need to keep a better eye on your kids,” Jim had yelled.

After that, Momma got tired of Jim's abusive behavior and decided to leave him. Jim told Momma that she could go. However, he would not allow her to take their three-month-old daughter, Whitney. So, Momma called the police, but it turns out they couldn't do much since Jim was the father, and they would have to get custody established.

A short time later, Momma couldn't handle being away from Whitney. She was desperate to get her baby back. So, one night, she woke my brothers and me up and told us to get into the car.

The next thing I knew, we were pulling up to Jim's apartment complex. Momma parked the car in a parking spot close to Jim's front door. "Wait in the car while I try to get Whitney." "We all nodded our heads. Momma ran to Jim's door and pounded on it three times with a sideways fist. "Open up the door." She screamed. Jim opened the door, said something to her, and yanked her inside his apartment, then slammed the door.

"When is Momma coming back?" Ben cried.

Maurice patted Ben on the back, trying to soothe him.

"She will be back in a minute."

Suddenly, the apartment door opened, we heard Momma scream, and the door slammed shut.

We all began to cry.

"I want my Mommy—I want my Mommy," I sobbed.

Maurice picked up his toy Robocop gun and then pointed it out of the window towards the apartment.

"I'm going to hurt him for hurting Momma," Maurice said.

The blaring sound from a police siren pierced the stillness of the night. I rose onto my knees and looked through the back window of the car where I saw flashing blue and red lights on top of several vehicles quickly speeding into the complex. I plopped down onto the seat, my heart racing.

Several police cars pulled up next to us, blocking us in.

Whoop! Whoop! Two police officers got out of the car and shined his flashlight in on us.

"Stan, that little boy has a gun."

"Can I see that?" Stan asked Maurice. Stan glanced at the gun and gave it to him. He then pointed to Jim's apartment. "Is your

mom in there?” Stan asked.

Without saying a word, we nodded our heads.

Stan turned his back away from the car and began saying something on his radio. I heard him say something about, kids left in the car, and their mother is inside the apartment.

I looked out the window towards Jim’s apartment. Several people were standing outside. A woman with a robe on, placed her hand over her mouth, and shook her head.

Police were going in and out of Jim’s apartment.

Minutes later, Stan covered Momma as they walked out of the apartment. He told people to go home as he walked her to the car.

“Are you going to be okay?” Stan asked as he closed her door.

“Yes,” she cried.

Momma sat in the car for a while before she drove off.

While we sat there, I couldn’t help but notice her blooded, ripped light pink sweater.

“Momma, what happened?” I asked.

She ignored me.

“Are you okay, Momma...?” Ben asked. “Are you okay?”

“I’m okay,” Momma said.

I knew Momma was hurt, but she didn’t want to tell us.

A few minutes later, we pulled up to our house and got out of the car. On the way to the front door, I noticed Momma had a bleeding swollen lip. I wanted to ask her if she was okay again, but I was scared to say anything. Instead, I stared at her while we walked inside the house. “Put on your pajamas, then go to bed,” Momma said.

After putting on my pajamas, I called Momma’s name, but she didn’t answer. I got out of bed and peeped my head past her room door. She wasn’t in there. I started to cry as I walked away, but then I heard her muffled voice. I walked back towards her room, but this time I went inside.

Looking around, I noticed the phone cord coming from the wall into the closet. Quietly, I walked up to the closet door and peeped inside. I saw Momma had her back towards the door, and she was on the phone. “Lisa, he kept hitting me, so I got a knife, and he lost it,” Momma said.

I continued to stand by the door and listen to Momma’s conver-

sation.

“The police were going to take me to jail because I came over there and left the kids in the car,” Momma said. “Instead, they let me go home. I don’t know what Jim said to them, but they wouldn’t let me take Whitney home.”

Momma started to cry again. I noticed the clothes she had been wearing earlier were now in her hands. She neatly folded them up, then placed them in a box on the top shelf. She started to walk towards the door, and I took off, running back down the hall.

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