

THE NO-GOOD PREACHER

Serving God



Despite All Odds

Charles White With Lois Moore



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Chapter 1

WELCOME TO THE WORLD

Emily pulled her faded yellow apron to her face and wiped the sweat from her brow. “Cooking on a wood stove just makes too much heat for September,” she sighed. She straightened her back and tried to rub away the ache. A sudden twinge of pain made her catch her breath.

Seven-year-old Harold looked up as he heard Emily’s gasp. His neatly patched jeans and old T-shirt hung on his thin frame like a dressed scarecrow. He shoved aside his reading book. He had noticed his mother moving slower and slower the last few weeks. *What was wrong with her?* he wondered.

Emily saw his worried look and smiled in spite of her pain. “It’s OK, son. I’ll be fine,” she assured him. “Now get back to your reading.” She pushed back a few wisps of gray hair that showed among the brunette ones. Because her hair was curly, it refused to stay in a tightly twisted bun, and ringlets framed her lined brow. She dearly loved each of her children, those still at home and her two grown daughters. Life had been good to the Whites, who had come to Colorado shortly after their marriage.

Bertha, two years younger than Harold, came screaming into the house, her two braids flying behind her. “Mama! Make Lloyd stop hitting me! He’s so mean!” Bertha looked just like her mother—same brunette hair, blue eyes, angelic face, and dainty hands. Even in her brown corduroy coveralls, she was the picture of femininity. Emily frowned at Lloyd who burst through the door behind his sister.

“She won’t play cowboys and Indians with me, and Ray and Lawrence are too little,” he complained. Although small for his age, Lloyd had just turned 4 and felt much older than his little brothers. Ray, at 3, was not much bigger than 1 1/2-year-old Lawrence. Just yesterday, Lloyd had tried to tie up Bertha, telling her that he was an Indian brave and she was his captive. Her screams had brought Emily waddling as fast as she could to rescue her poor daughter.

Emily grimaced as another pain gripped her. She leaned forward and suppressed a groan. Harold, Lloyd, and Bertha all noticed her tense up and

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catch her breath. Instinctively, Emily placed her hands over her swollen belly and felt the baby kick against her ribs.

The stew gently bubbled on the back of the stove and the aroma of hot biscuits perfumed the kitchen. But supper would have to wait, because this baby wasn't going to! Having delivered 15 children, Emily knew that it wouldn't be long. *Why*, she wondered, *is Charles insisting that this baby be born in the hospital?* All her other children had been delivered at home.

"Harold. Go get Daddy quickly. Tell him that Mommy is having bad pain."

Thankful to leave his reading lesson, Harold scuttled out of the house in search of his dad.

Where is Charles? Emily wondered. *He'd better hurry, or this baby will be born right here at home anyway!*

Just then Charles came racing into the house, panting, hoe still in hand. "Charles, put the hoe down!" Emily laughed in spite of her condition.

Charles instructed Harold to walk himself and the four younger children to Aunt Lottie's house, just two blocks away. Dear aunt Lottie! A professional secretary, she prided herself on her skills. Always on time to work, she never failed to meet or exceed a deadline. Like Charles, she had jet-black hair, which she combed into a bun. She always looked the picture of perfection in her dark suit, stiffly starched blouse, and sturdy shoes. One of Charles' two younger sisters, she was always ready to help out in a pinch. His other sister, Lois, taught school and didn't have as much spare time as Lottie did.

Tossing Emily's prepacked satchel into the back seat of their old Model T with one hand, Charles helped her climb into the front seat with the other. In 1920, Model T Fords were still common and Charles and Emily felt fortunate to own one—along with the work truck. Both vehicles were black. The upholstery in the Model T had tape covering several rips, and the floorboards would have allowed water to splash in had Emily not laid down an oilcloth and covered it with a tattered piece of carpet. The truck showed even more signs of wear—the water did splash up through the floorboards, and one headlight had been wired into place over a bent-up front fender. Charles kept them both in good running condition, so he knew the trip to the hospital would be mechanically uneventful.

As Charles tried to back out of the driveway as smoothly as possible, Emily looked over at their house. *Home*, she thought. The exterior paint almost matched the faded apron she had forgotten to take off. The three oldest boys shared one tiny bedroom only because that room had a trun-

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dle that slid underneath the bunk beds. Bertha and baby Lawrence shared another bedroom with hardly enough room to move between the two cots. She and Charles' postage stamp-sized room held their double bed, which, when shoved against the wall, allowed just enough room for a cradle for each newborn.

Home. Enough food, hand-me-down clothes, and lots of love and good times. Home. A happy place, even though Charles had to work long hours to make enough money to survive. Though he worked hard, Charles made time to play with his sons and teach them as they worked at his side.

As the Model T bumped along the dirt road toward the hospital, Emily reflected over her past 20 years of marriage to her dear Charles. Their move to Colorado Springs had brought many changes, as Charles began farming their newly bought small acreage. He'd learned a good bit about farming during those years, and the crops improved each year. He had to take odd carpentry jobs in addition to the farm work to make ends meet.

They had been difficult years, as well. Emily still grieved for the eight children who had died either as infants or in early childhood. She thought fondly of their two older daughters who had survived, one of whom was now married, making her a grandma to three. Their own "younguns," as Charles fondly called them, were about the same age as their grandchildren.

Harold proved to be her right-hand helper. "True blue," she called him. Dependable and honest, he showed consistent kindness to his younger siblings. Bertha, age 5, suffered being the only girl, tormented at the hands of both Lloyd and Raymond! Baby Lawrence enjoyed Bertha's motherly care and any attention he got from his older brothers. *Quite a family*, Emily mused.

Fortunately, the hospital was only a couple of miles away, and there was virtually no traffic to impede their progress. Charles pulled up to the emergency entrance and called for someone to help. No one seemed to hear, so he helped Emily out of the car, leaving it parked at the entrance. Arm in arm, they hurried inside as fast as Emily could waddle.

The smell of rubbing alcohol and other hospital smells assaulted their nostrils as they entered the emergency room. Taking one look at Emily, one of the nurses, in her stiffly starched white uniform and nurse's cap, grabbed a wheelchair and began wheeling her to the labor and delivery room. "Go park your car and then you can come back," the nurse called to Charles over her shoulder.

Graying at the temples and portly in size, Dr. Herdt carried himself

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erectly. His kindly eyes belied his take-charge demeanor, and as soon as he walked in, Emily felt that she was in good hands. As soon as the labor and delivery nurse briefed him on Emily's condition, he strode to the sink to scrub his hands before donning a sterile gown and gloves.

Charles paced back and forth in the waiting room, feeling useless, yet wanting to be near just in case he was needed. He whispered, "Oh God Almighty, you have blessed us with 15 children. Let this one be healthy, especially since half of my children have died so young. Bless the only two who have seen adulthood and bless my five little ones at Lottie's place until we can all be together again."

Half an hour passed. Expectant fathers seem to share a penchant for worry, and Charles was no different. *What if . . . ? How come it's taking so long?*

"You're going to wear a hole in that floor." Dr. Herdt's approach interrupted Charles' anxious thoughts. Still wearing his green gown, now stained with blood and certainly no longer sterile, he walked up to the weak-kneed, wide-eyed husband. Charles hurriedly caught the edge of a chair as Dr. Herdt announced, "Congratulations, Charles! You have another baby boy. What are you going to name him?"

"We'd, we'd hoped for a girl," Charles stammered, "and were going to name her Charlene. We haven't picked out a boy's name. I guess we've run out of boys' names!"

"Charlene. Hmmm. Well, how about 'Charles'?" Dr. Herdt suggested. "You don't have a 'Charles, Junior' yet."

"Charles . . . Charles. Yes, I like that," Charles said, nodding his head. "I guess that'll make me Charles, Senior, won't it?"

After Emily was cleaned up she was wheeled into a room with two other mothers. All the moms in the maternity wards of those days were supposed to sleep at the same time, awaken at the same time, and feed their babies at the same time. The maternity ward smelled just as sterile as the rest of the hospital, and Emily wondered silently why it was supposed to be so much better than delivering at home. She missed Charles' two spinster sisters, Lottie and Lois, hovering around. She missed the sight of the other children gingerly touching the baby, fearing that he might break! She missed Charles being right there with her, and she missed her own bed! Still, she was thankful that Charles cared enough to provide the very best that their budget would allow.

During visiting hours that evening, Charles asked, "What do you think, Emily? Dr. Herdt suggested that we name the baby Charles, and I kinda like it."

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“Charles . . .” Emily murmured thoughtfully. “Yes! I like it, too.” Thus, Charles White, Junior was named. “Let’s call him ‘Little Charlie,’” Emily suggested, “so we won’t get confused about which Charles we mean.”

Just then, the nurse brought Little Charlie in to his parents. He was wrapped tightly in two white receiving blankets, with just his head visible. Emily eagerly unwrapped Little Charlie and began inspecting him. She counted his fingers and toes and felt the soft spot on his head. He had only a little hair, but it was black, just like his dad’s. Just when she decided that he was normal, he coughed. It was a weak, whiney cough, which made her notice that his breathing and cry weren’t very strong, either. Visiting hours over, Charles left for home, and Little Charlie was whisked back into the nursery.

Emily fell into a troubled sleep. She just didn’t like the sound of Little Charlie’s breathing, his cough, or his cry. She decided she would ask Dr. Herdt about him in the morning.

Dr. Herdt agreed that Little Charlie’s lungs were not as strong as those of other newborns, but he hoped that after a few days of good breast milk and rest from the delivery process, he would improve.

Normally, women were kept in the hospital for up to a week, but Charles convinced Dr. Herdt that he would be able to care for Emily at home. Dr. Herdt reluctantly discharged both Emily and Little Charlie on the fourth day, admonishing Charles to keep the baby warm and away from drafts of air, and to keep Emily in bed.

Little Charlie didn’t improve much. During his checkup three days later, Dr. Herdt softly informed his parents, “I’m afraid he’s going to be a sickly baby.”

“Well, Lord,” Charles prayed aloud after the door closed behind Dr. Herdt, “we prayed for a healthy baby. We don’t understand why Little Charlie has to be sickly, but we pray for wisdom to know how to raise him. Thank You that Emily is regaining her strength. And thank You for the bumper crop of potatoes that will soon be ready to harvest.”

With six children to support, Charles was thankful for his carpentry skills that were needed now more than ever to augment the income from their small Colorado farm. Emily helped when and where she could, but she had her hands pretty well full with her family of now five boys and one girl.

As she sat in their rocking chair nursing little Charlie and humming softly to him, Emily heard Charles come up the back stairs. She thought