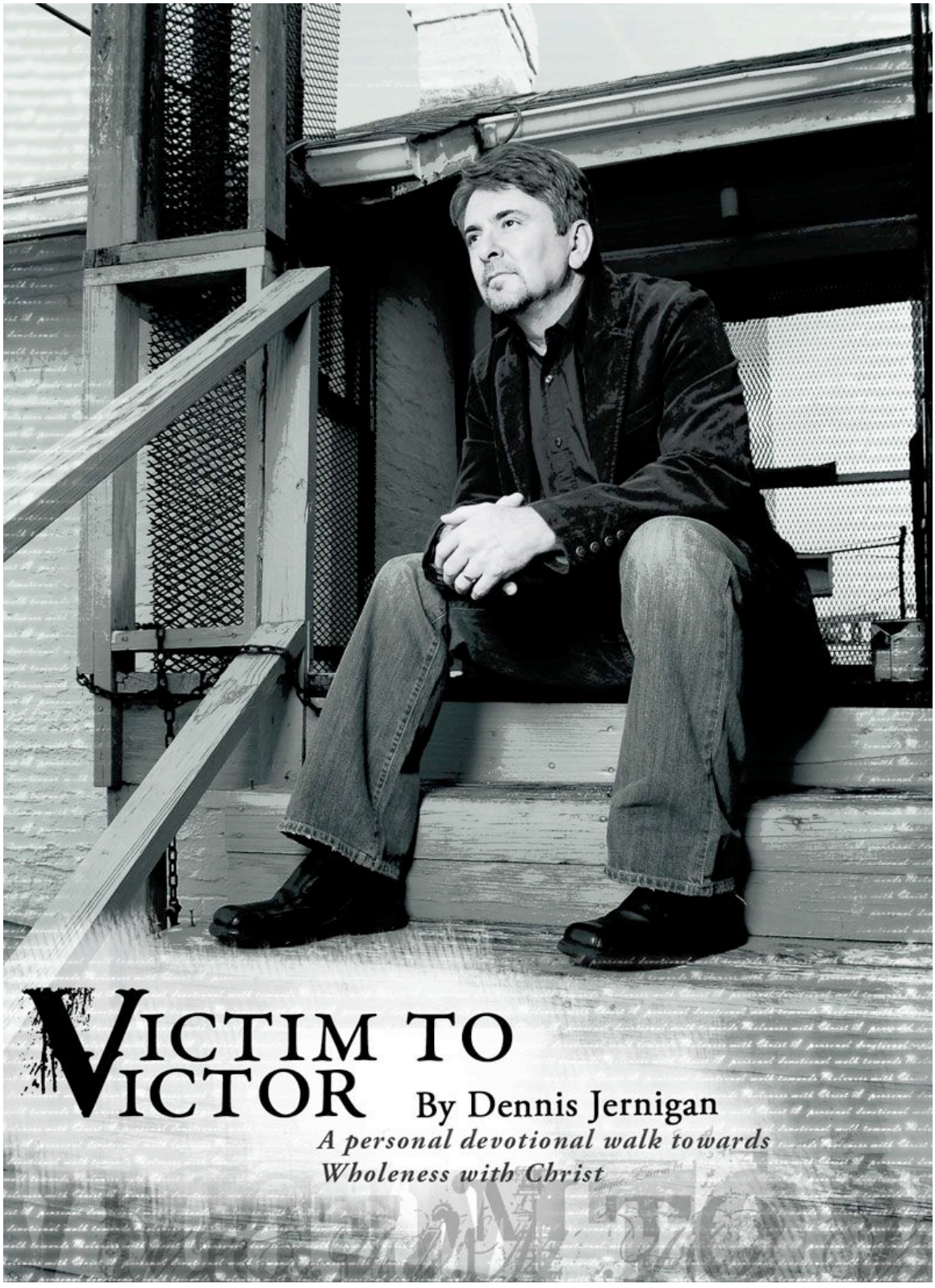


VICTIM TO VICTOR

By Dennis Jernigan

A personal devotional walk towards Wholeness with Christ

Victim to Victor

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About the use of this devotional book:

This book has been born out of the life and trials of Dennis Jernigan. Called to lay down his life in order for others to know there is, indeed, hope and redemption for even the most far-fallen soul, Dennis gladly bears his soul in the following pages.

This book is designed to be an outline you, the reader, may use to adapt to the unique twists and turns of your own life. Use it in personal study as a self-help tool. Use it in home group/ Bible study settings.

All we ask is that you pay for each copy you download. Do not share copies with anyone else. In so doing, you will help ensure that the work of ministry through Dennis Jernigan is able to continue. These tools of ministry are one of the ways Dennis provides for his wife and nine children. Please honor the Lord and the hard work of Dennis Jernigan by purchasing your copy of this book in a proper and legal manner.

That being said, if you cannot afford a copy, please simply let us know and we will make arrangements for you to get a copy of this book. Again, we simply ask that you not give copies away to anyone else.

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Prolog

Yes, it's true. I walked out of homosexuality on November 7, 1981. During that period of my life I had never heard of Exodus International or of any other group that espoused the possibility of freedom from same-sex attractions. I felt so alone yet so hopeful at the same time. Still afraid to share with anyone else the things I struggled with yet so hopeful because I had finally found the only One Who I believed understood me and had as His only agenda my healing and restoration. I was used to being used…so to be confronted in a real way by God's love – and not feeling used and worthless all the time – led me a deep longing and desire to get to know Someone who would love me like that.

Telling the story of how God led me to freedom is honestly one of my favorite things to do. In the telling of that story I am asked many questions by those who hear it.

The most often asked question?
"Was your healing instant or was it a process?"

The answer? "Yes!"

On the evening I began my journey towards wholeness I believe the power of my sin was broken…but I came to realize very quickly that this journey required many frequent stops for healing along the way. The purpose of this collection of writings I call devotions is to encourage you – regardless of your present circumstances or past failures – would come to find your place in that journey towards wholeness and that you would find many places to stop along the way where you find deep healing for the wounds and rejections you have already experiences in this life. As you read and practice what you find here, know this: I will be praying that you would come to the place I have come to…that knowing Christ intimately (and being known *by* Him) is worth every struggle you have had to face. I am certain that God will meet you in your own journey and will walk every step of the way *with* you…and that ultimately you will come to the place where so much healing has happened that you will then turn around and lead others through that same journey.

Are you ready? I encourage you to begin each session by asking the Lord to give you insight into your own life. After praying this simple prayer, begin listening to the song that serves as the theme of that session. Then read the devotion and Scripture. Then simply answer the questions and meditate on God's Word. End your session by once again listening to the song. Take it personally as you listen. It's all for you.

In His Love & Grace,

Dennis Jernigan

How Did I Get Here?

Listen to the song 'Lord, Though the World Rejected Me' before you begin reading

How in the world did I ever get here? I was raised in a Christian home…played piano for my church from the time I was a young man…all-star athlete in high school…valedictorian of my graduating class…representative who traveled the nation promoting the Christian University I attended…and homosexual. In reality, I had been living this lifestyle since I was a young boy. Having learned to hide it well, I had convinced myself that I really could lead two lives. My assumption was that everyone seemed to be living two lives.

My sexual journey began at the age of five. Along with the normal experimentation that children experience, I had several other influences that came to bear helping shape my sexuality. When I was five, I had gone into a public restroom. Being a shy kid, I did my business without looking at the man who was at the other urinal. As I was preparing to leave, he turned to me with his pants down and asked me if I would like to touch 'it'. I shook my head 'no' and quickly ran away from the encounter…but I could not bring myself to tell anyone what had just happened. Why?

Although I could not put words to my feelings at that time, I have since come to believe two things concerning my identity and destiny which came to play in my life at this time. To help you understand what I am about to share and to help you understand how my healing has come, you need to understand what I believe about God. I believe He made me and that He wants nothing but the best for me - and He speaks truth. And I believe God has an enemy. He is known as Satan – and he wants to destroy me, wants nothing but evil for my life (often disguised as *good*) – and he speaks lies.

As I ran from the bathroom encounter my mind began to be filled with thoughts like…

"What's wrong with me?"

"Why would that man think he could do that to me?"

"Something must be wrong with *me*."

And, yes. A five-year-old boy can think those thoughts. I know. I did. This is how my identity and self-concept began to take shape. Along with sexual encounters such as this, I can look back now and see very clearly some of the factors that came into play as my identity took shape.

At an early age, I was gifted with musical aptitude. At an early age, I was blessed with emotional sensitivity and an eye for the artistic and creative. As I entered school, other boys noticed these traits and deemed them *feminine*…and labeled me a sissy. What I did not realize at the time was that it was God who had given me these very special gifts…and it was the enemy of God who had come alongside and, through his subtle lies, began to pervert the very gifts of God. The very word *pervert* is not intended to hurt anyone in this instance. In its very purest meaning, pervert means *to distort from the intended use or purpose*. I believe God gifted me in ways our culture may consider feminine in a man. In my mind, God gave these gifts to me and the enemy came along and led me to use these very holy gifts in a manner that was less than God's intended best for those gifts – or for me!

I believe God wanted me to be emotionally sensitive to the needs and feelings of others…and the enemy wanted me to sexualize that sensitivity by focusing my thoughts on *me*. I believe God blessed me with musical ability and artistic flair in order to use my life to create in ways that would bring glory to Him and healing to others…and the enemy's desire was to lead me to use those abilities to seek my own glory and pleasure (always sure to couch this way of thinking with how compassionate and tolerant my way of thinking was!). Absurd logically…but where I was in reality.

As if this weren't enough to set my path toward homosexuality, there was my relationship with my dad. My perception? My dad only spoke to me when he needed me to do something for him…or if he was disciplining me. Never heard him say 'I love you, son'. Never remember him hugging me…remember the spankings. Never felt I was pleasing to him…but remember feeling like I constantly let him down. I needed my dad's approval and acceptance and affirmation…and never felt I received it as a child (I have now. More on that later! God is *so* good!). As I matured physically, my emotional needs

became mingled with my sexuality. Sexually maturing and in need of male affirmation, my mind was constantly bombarded with nothing but what I now consider *wrong information*. Put simply, I had believed many lies about myself and had convinced myself that this was simply *the way I was born*.

I had become so self-focused concerning what others thought of me that I took great pains to keep others at an emotional distance. If I let a friend too close, he might discover my attraction to him. If I allowed my dad access to the realities of my attraction to men he would certainly reject me. Being very athletic helped me hide most of the time…and actually helped reinforce my wrong self-perceptions. Whenever I performed well on the athletic field I found great affirmation from the men in my life.

"Good catch, son!"

"Awesome basket!"

"Way to go, boy!"

I actually became very adept at being the best at whatever I did. I found the same affirmation in every arena. Scholastics. Church activities. FFA (believe it or not, I was Napoleon Dynamite before there was a ND!). Even though I loved all these activities, I loved the affirmation and attention more than the activity itself. But what happens when one's performance doesn't measure up? Worthless. Failure. Loser. Gifted young man who excelled at all he did. How did I get here? I had believed a lie.

It would be many years before my eyes would open to the reality of God's love and true identity for my life. Take some time right now to think about the following thoughts and see if maybe, just maybe, you have believed some lies, too.

Questions for Meditation

•Are there any experiences from my childhood that have helped shape my concept of *self*?

•What are some of my self-perceptions that have resulted from these experiences?

•What gift(s) has God placed in my life that the enemy has tried to pervert?

•For what purpose has the Lord given me my gifts and abilities?

•Am I using those gifts for His purpose…or for my own selfish gain/pleasure?

•Is it possible that I believed have about myself? If so, what might those lies be?

•Is it possible that my very own thought processes have led me to believe I was born a certain way when in reality God had other intentions when He created me?

"…Even in Their Sleep…"

As you prepare for sleep tonight, allow the Lord the freedom to search your heart and mind and reveal any forgotten events which may have led to lies you may have believed or any wrong perceptions that you may have come to concerning you identity as a male/female.

Listen to the song 'Lord, Though the World Rejected Me'…and take it very personally. Make it your prayer.

DJ's Thought For the Day

Knowing Jesus Christ intimately is worth every struggle we face in this life.

When I Gave Up the First Time

Before you read, listen to the song 'I Will Not Forget You'

By the time I was nine years old, I had become sexually active…still in the realm of experimenting with other boys…but sexually active. Raised near a small town of about 400 people, same-sex attractions were simply not talked about or tolerated. Of course, there was the young man who flaunted his homosexuality. As if his mannerisms weren't enough, the halter-tops in summer were pretty much a dead give-away. Seen as a curiosity more than something to be concerned about, this young man was ignored for the most part. "He's not normal. My kids are fine," was the general attitude. This young man's actions were so blatantly *out there* it made guys like me seem a little more *normal*.

At the age of nine I had an experience that would – for quite a long time – alter not only my perception of myself, but also my perception of what others thought of it and most importantly, altered my perception of what God was like.

I grew up going to church. My dad was the song leader at our little Baptist church – the same church my grandfather had pastored when my mom (his daughter) was in high school. Because I could play the piano by ear and had grown up knowing the hymns, I began playing for the children's worship times in Sunday School and eventually began playing for the hymn services in the regular worship times by the time I was about 10 years of age. I loved to play…but, again, my performance brought me respect from those in the generation of my parents…and this made me feel better about myself – and helped take my mind off of what the kids at school said about me.

One Sunday morning after playing the piano for Sunday School, my brothers, cousins, and I ran out of the classroom and up to the front steps of the church building. One of our favorite Sunday activities was jumping off of the wall and running back up the steps and jumping off again and again, pretending we could fly. After all, we all had *PF Flyers* so we could run faster and jump higher! While we played the men would congregate next to that wall and talk before the Sunday morning worship time. By this age, I was very interested in what others thought of me so when the conversation of these men focused on homosexuals they had my attention for sure.

These men were men I had grown up admiring. They were good men whom I respected a great deal. Some of these men had taught me Sunday School through my formative years…and I thought they knew everything! As they described what they thought of homosexuals – queers, as they called them – my heart froze in shock. I could feel the heat run through my body as fear began to flood my mind. As they gave their thoughts on what should be done with *people like this*, I realized they were talking about *me*! They didn't know they were talking about me…but I did. As a nine year old who had just heard something like this, where would you have gone for help? What would you have thought of yourself? What would you have thought about God?

On that day, I began to believe several lies that would become detrimental to the formation of my identity as a homosexual. My emotional sensitivity and artistic gifts were somehow good yet somehow abnormal…if these men who knew God so well thought these things about people like me, then God must hate me, too…homosexuality was so disgusting and vile that even God would have nothing to do with me. I would never be able to tell anyone of my struggles. If I did, they would surely not understand. Then it hit me. This was what *hopelessness* felt like…

After this most eye-opening encounter, I withdrew even more from any semblance of real relationship. Even more than before, I had to perform well in order to be accepted. I had to perform well in order to maintain the facade of normalcy. I had to perform to be loved.

Questions for Meditation

•In what areas of your life are you simply performing for the approval and acceptance and affirmation of others?

•If you were unable to perform to the standards you deem acceptable what would you have left to base your identity on?

•List the moments of your life you have felt utterly helpless. How did you deal with each one?

•How have these incidents shaped your perception of others? of yourself? Of God?

"…Even in Their Sleep…"

As you fall to sleep tonight, allow the Lord access to your thoughts. Give Him permission to dredge up old hurts that led to feelings of hopelessness and despair. When you rise in the morning, write down what you saw then set them aside for later consideration.

Listen to the song 'I Will Not Forget You' and hear Father's heart for you…

DJ's Thought For The Day

The only thing we should give up is the hope of changing our past.

Somebody's Watching

Before you read, listen to the song 'Watching Over You'

By the time I was thirteen, I was pretty set in my sexual ways. Finding no solace in relationships because I could never get too close to anyone, I discovered several places of refuge like self-gratification in a sexual manner as well as the refuge of listening to the music of Elton John (read the lyrics to *Someone Saved My Life Tonight* and you'll get a good picture of where I was emotionally as a teenager) and others who seemed to have an understanding of my predicament. Perhaps the greatest refuge of all in those days was the home of my grandmother Jernigan.

Grandma lived on the farm with us – next door to our farmhouse – in a trailer house (tornado magnet!). She often told me things of the Lord and reminded me constantly that my musical abilities were a gift from God. I found refuge at her piano, playing literally for hours because of the sheer joy of playing and for the relative peace my soul found during those times. There was an even greater refuge I found at grandma's house. Grandma herself. She seemed to understand me and went out of her way to nurture my gifts. In the winter-time, she would see me doing my chores in the barnyard, stick her head out her back door, and call to me, "Dennis, when you're through with your chores come in here and warm up your hands at the piano." And I would. Those were precious times of refuge and peace…and they were all stripped away when my grandmother died. Being 13 and feeling rejected by God and now abandoned by Him as well, I withdrew even further into my own mind.

I hated going to school. School itself was fine. Scholastically I excelled. It was the times before school, during recesses, or after school when I had to be careful who I hung around with. There was a certain group of boys who really disliked me. These were the ones who called me *faggot* and *queer* and any other derogatory word they could think of (and cannot print here). Because I played basketball and was the only white guy on my team for a while, I tended to hang out with my black friends…which earned me the moniker *nigger-lover*. How I hate the 'n' word to this day.

Needless to say, I found myself looking around corners after class or during times when students would gather before activities began, hoping for at least one day without

conflict of some kind. I never knew when some of these guys was going to corner me and make my life not only an emotional hell but a physical one as well. I became so paranoid about it that I couldn't wait to get home, do my chores, finish my homework, and go to bed. At least when I was asleep no one could hurt me.

One of the special things the Lord did for me in those days was the ability to make myself dream specific dreams. My favorite dream was very *out there*. In this dream, I lived on the *USS Enterprise* with my dad, Captain James T. Kirk. Each night I found myself captured by aliens. Just as it appeared the end had come, my dad would swoop into the room, take out the aliens, then set me free…then my mom, Doris Day, would end that dream by singing *Que Sera, Sera*. Honestly, this dream was what helped keep me sane. As I look back now, I believe God allowed that dream to recur in my mind because He was trying to get me to see that He loved me like Captain Kirk loved me…enough to give everything He had for me because He wanted me for His own.

He had been there watching all along. Because of my inexperience with the things of the Lord and because I had bought into the lies of this world that tell us that man is the highest and that I should have the freedom to do and think anything I desired, I simply did not have eyes to see His hand in my life…or ears to hear His voice…or a heart that would even let Him in! I would soon discover that life is best lived when seen from God's perspective and not my own. He is God and I am not. It took a long time to learn that.

As you walk further through the writings to come, you will come to understand more and more (at least that is my prayer and hope for you) just how wonderful god's perspective on life is…regardless of how miserable my past might have been. I encourage you with this: would you consider (at least while you are reading this book) looking at life from more than just your perspective or the perspective of the world. Look at life – even the junk – from His point of view. You'll be glad you did.

Listen to the song 'Watching Over You'

Questions For Meditation

•What was life like for you at school when you were younger?

•How have those experiences influenced who you are now?

•How have those experiences influenced how you respond to hurt? To failure? To disappointment?

•What do you think you might see if you somehow saw each of those experiences from God's point of view?

"…Even in their sleep…"

As you prepare for sleep tonight, allow the Lord to bring comfort to the hurts of your soul. Give Him access to some of the memories the previous questions may have stirred up.

DJ's Thought For the Day

Life is best lived when seen from God's perspective and not my own.

Over the Edge

Listen to the song "If I Could Just Sit With You Awhile"

After my grandmother died, I remember falling apart emotionally after the funeral. I didn't get to ride in the family car because there wasn't enough room. My little brothers needed to be with my parents. I had sworn no one would see me cry…but after the funeral, finality began to set in…and loneliness began to flood over me…and in that car I could no longer hold it all in. I sobbed for several minutes as my aunt Patsy tried to console me. She was wonderful but I couldn't tell her why I felt so alone. Once I had gotten it out of my system, I went into self-preservation mode. In my mind I had reasoned that no one would be able to understand me even if I had been able to be honest – because they had not been where I had already been in my short life.

As I look back, it is that very reasoning that kept me from receiving help. Pride comes in many forms. For me to not allow others in because they had not *been there* was rather self-focused and utterly self-centered. As I will share later in more detail, one does not have to have been where I have been to help me. One does not even have to understand me to be able to help me. All that is required is that the one who wants to help is willing to walk toward Jesus with me…regardless of how long or hard the journey. This type of relationship requires *true* intimacy. True intimacy is born of complete honesty. Complete honesty is born of trust…but I could not bring myself to trust anyone.

During my senior year in high school there were several instances of sexual failure that led me to places of darkness I did not realize a teenager could get to. In my town there had been another young man who I had an ongoing sexual relationship with for several years. He would use me (and I him) and then he would turn around and call me *fag* and *queer* with the other guys. I was too afraid to point the finger at him…and always felt even more disgusted when I would fall into yet another sexual encounter with him. In my mind at least for those brief encounters he made me feel good. Isn't that sad? To make matters worse, there was an adult male (15 years my senior) who came into my life around this same time. He was a very masculine guy that I looked up to…and after 2 encounters actually became fearful that maybe I had gotten myself into something too deep…a mire that I would regret getting myself into. Fortunately, this man moved away

and was never a factor in my life again – except for the memories and damage that had already been done.

I made it through high school and enrolled in a Christian University – Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee, Oklahoma. Man, was I in for a rude awakening! Being raised in the country and having attended a high school where I was one of 12 in my graduating class, I was suddenly thrust into a town of about 25,000 and a school enrollment of about 1800! I (at least in my mind) stuck out like a sore thumb (there's that subtle hint of self-focus again). I knew no one. Scared. Alone. First in my family to ever attend college…so I had no one to tell me what to expect. (As a side note: isn't it amazing how the scheme of the enemy is to get the wounded sheep away from the herd so he can have his way with that sheep?).

After the week of orientation where I felt constantly humiliated by the upper classmen (whose innocent teasing I took completely as rejection), I attended my first music class. Because I had never studied music but could hear and play what I heard fluently, I was placed in the next-to-the-top theory class. By the end of the first semester I had progressed enough that my theory instructor kicked me out and into the *top* theory class! I felt like an imbecile among geniuses! I was truly amazed at the knowledge of my classmates and was helped along by their encouragement.

Although my musical education was progressing at a wonderful pace, my personal struggles began to take me deeper into a whirlpool of sexual failure I could not seem to swim out of. Here I was, a wounded sheep too hurt to let anyone close, among a group of creative types…many of whom were just as wounded as I. And we gravitated toward one another. One failure led to the next. Because of guilt, I would avoid those I had been sexually intimate with…but because of the longing to be accepted would eventually fall right back into the same trap. It became a vicious cycle I had not power to break.

As my senior year began, I was confronted with the realization that very soon I would have to face the real world…and that thought scared me to death. I wanted so much to be *normal*. I longed to one day be married and have a family. To complicate matters, I had been drawn to the woman who would one day miraculously become my wife. We had dated off-and-on for over 2 years…and my ultimate fear was that I would

never be able to perform sexually with a woman…so I knew the day would come when I would need to tell her I never wanted to see her again. I reasoned that it was for her own good (see how easy it is to play God!).

During that same period near the beginning of my senior year an older gentleman who was a respected leader in the community befriended me. Husband. Father. Church leader. My thoughts were 'I am a worthless worm of a person. Why would he even give me the time of day?' Yet he poured his life into me with encouragement and affirmation, often taking me out for a Coke and asking me to share how my studies were going…often praying with me. Basically mentoring me. After just a few weeks, it became more and more easy to share my heart and hopes with him…and eventually there came the night I asked him if I could share my darkest secrets.

He assured me that he would love me *no matter what*. I remember finally getting up the nerve to share my struggles…and how it felt so much like the weight of the world finally being lifted from my shoulders! How good to finally be honest. I felt so free. My relief became euphoric as it became apparent that he was in no way shocked....that I had *not* been rejected as I had feared. As he began to verbally express his affirmation, the conversation soon turned to him asking me a series of questions. He asked me how I had come to have same-sex attractions. He asked me whom I had actually been attracted to at school. He asked me how I thought those feelings might affect our relationship…and then he began to share how natural he felt my sexual attractions to other males were…how he himself had experienced sexual encounters with other men…and then he took me by the hand and…

In those moments I gave up. Expecting acceptance and help for my problems, I had fallen into a very well conceived plan to be exploited. My euphoria melted away into confusion and utter despair. My mind felt numb and my heart had been broken…this time, it seemed, beyond repair.

He dropped me off at my apartment. Since I lived alone and had no intention of ever trusting another man, the enemy began to bombard my mind with all types of wrong thinking. I believe this was the first time I ever felt utterly hopeless – beyond help. And because of my extreme self-focus and inability to hear or know the voice of God, I decided I would finally take matters into my own hands once and for all. I would end my

life. My reasoning, once again, (since I was playing God for my own life) was that it would be better for everyone. What a sad perspective!

I turned on the gas heater but did not ignite the gas…and I simply lay down to die. As I laid there for several minutes thinking about how my family and friends would be happier without me, other thoughts began to creep in.

"Are you sure you're ready for this?"

"Do you know what's out there?"

"Are you prepared for eternity?"

These thoughts (which I now realize were the voice of God to my mind) frightened me so deeply that I jumped up, shut off the gas, and made this declaration:

"This is simply who I was born to be. Instead of fighting same-sex attraction, I will embrace it. This is *who I am*." I had been pushed to the edge of a cliff…and I felt I had been forced over the edge. I could no longer fight…and it felt good to be falling. At least I had some direction in my life now. Surely things would get better for me…

Questions For Meditation

•Do you believe in God?

•Do you believe He can take even the most hopeless of situations and bring something good from them?

•Have you ever been betrayed?

•How does betrayal affect your relationships with others? With God?

•Would you be open to seeing even deep wounding betrayal as something God might be able to use to eventually bring you to a place of healing…so much healing that you could trust again?

Listen to the song "If I Could Just Sit With You Awhile" again. Now you will understand a little more of the story behind the song. Can you believe someone who had experienced what I went through could write such a song…and believe it…and live it? You can, too. Don't give up. Help really is on the way…

DJ's Thought For The Day

True intimacy is born of complete honesty. Complete honesty is born of trust.

The Day Everything Changed

Listen to the song "I Give It All"

After my betrayal and the suicide attempt, I simply decided I was just *born that way*. Looking back, I realize at that point in my life it was just easier to give in to the temptations rather than to go on fighting. My emotions had been spent and I had reached the end of my rope…and I was only 21 years old. Logic based on hurts and the fear of rejection will always lead us down the wrong path. My logic told me that rather than warring against my true identity I should follow that identity and never look back…and there I would find peace. I believe peace comes from knowing one's true identity…and I thought I had finally found mine.

During my final semester I became involved with another young man who shared the same tendencies toward emotional dependency as me. Still too fearful to become sexually involved with another man after the encounter with my mentor, I became emotionally involved to the point that every decision I made hinged on what my new friend thought. Because I sensed he knew my struggles and did not reject me I felt drawn to him like a magnet. His companionship seemed to meet some deep need in my life. The only problem was that I constantly felt I had to perform for his approval even though I felt accepted…mostly.

Our relationship continued through the summer after graduation…and eventually became sexual in nature. It was during this time that I began to become disillusioned with homosexual relationship just as I had become disillusioned with relationship in general. It seemed that the more I gave in to his desires the more I felt used…and if I did something that he disapproved of I was punished emotionally. It soon became very apparent that this one who professed total acceptance and unconditional love was actually using me…just like I had been used in every other same-sex encounter I had ever experienced in the past. I had no understanding of what real relationship actually looked like since every major relationship I had ever known was based on my performance…and on what I thought others wanted from me…what they thought of me.

By the end of that summer I had become so emotionally numb and at the same time so full of despair that I felt I was losing my sanity. I finally had enough of feeling

used by my companion (and other homosexuals who all seemed to be in the same boat as me) that I ended the relationship. I felt better but I was still alone. Because I was too fearful of eternity to take my own life I honestly did not know what I was going to do with the rest of my miserable life.

Out of desperation, I finally decided to go back to school…to seminary actually. My thinking? I had given up on God in many ways when I went full-fledged into homosexuality. It dawned on me that it was *I* who had given up on God…Maybe He had not given up on me like I had reasoned for so long. Leaving the homosexual friends I had made was actually rather easy. Feeling used all the time has a way of making one steer clear of hurtful situations…and hurtful people. And I was just so tried of being hurt. My same-sex attractions did not stop…but I forced myself away from them simply because of the pain. At least in seminary God might unlock some secret to overcoming my hurts that I had not seen before. I was actually excited for the change.

Three days before I was to leave for seminary I received a phone call that would forever change my life. Like the first in a series of dominoes, my life began to fall into place and out of my control all at the same time…all because of these simple words spoken by a friend I had not heard from in a year…

"Dennis. God's been speaking to me about you…"

This scared me to death. God did not speak to me so what was He saying to my friend? I suddenly felt naked yet affirmed all in the same instant. If what my friend said was true, then God was actually validating my very existence…there really must be some purpose for my life beyond the constant torture my mind had experienced since my youth. He went on…

"The Lord spoke to me in a dream. In this dream He was giving you many songs…and we were singing them back to Him in worship…and people all over the world were singing the songs as well."

I had written maybe three songs up to that point in my life. During my sophomore year at OBU I had felt that maybe I could write music. Something seemed to be stirring in my heart in that area…so much so that I got up the nerve to ask the head of the Theory and Composition department for a place in that field of study. Her words? "We reserve those few places for people we see promise or potential in. We see none in you. I'm sorry." Those words suddenly flooded my mind and filled my heart with doubt about what my friend had just shared with me. He sensed my hesitation and went on…

"Dennis. My mom had the same dream this week. We feel this is a confirmation that God is up to something here. Would you consider moving to Oklahoma City to live with us…and give God the chance to work these things into your life?"

When I shared with my parents what my friend had proposed, I went into even more of an emotional joyride when they told me they felt that I needed to take time off from school. (My mom told me in later years that she had suspected homosexuality in me. She wasn't sure…but she felt this was the case. She simply began to pray for me). They felt that with my degree in Church Music I would quickly find a job in Oklahoma City…and they were right. The only problem was that God had other ideas concerning what that job would be. Never in my wildest dreams would I have chosen *school bus driver* as the vehicle God would use to slow me down long enough to hear His voice.

With no homosexual influences around me, I found myself thrust into a place where spiritual talk and concerns took center stage. My friend and his mom were so patient with me. They were excited about what God was showing them about me and about how God could use the music to minister to others. Funny. I still had no music…except in the realm of their faith. And their faith was contagious. Still, I felt I would lose my mind! Here I was humiliated having to drive a school bus – and I was a college graduate (can you say pride?)! Temptations told me one things about who I was…and my friend told me what God wanted to do with my life. I constantly felt torn in two opposing directions…darkness vs. light…good vs. evil…destiny vs. despair. It was not lost on me some of the lessons I had learned and forgotten from my Bible teaching from my younger years.

"A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways…(a DJ paraphrase!)" James 1:8

That was it. I was double-minded and to find relief I would need to choose which way to go – once and for all. But how could I calm my emotions and keep my mind focused on making right choices? Then it hit me one day. I remembered the story of King Saul who had been overwhelmed by evil spirits. His courtiers sent for the shepherd boy David to come and play his harp for the king. The evil spirits would flee as the boy played…so I decided I would do that for myself.

After my morning school bus route and before my afternoon routes, I would rush home to my friend's house, run to the piano, and fling my Bible open to the Psalms. I began singing the Psalms of that shepherd boy (and the other psalmists), often singing completely through the entire book of Psalms week after week. I began writing down some of the melodies I would sing and then sing them with my friend when he came home from work. My friend's dream was coming true…and my mind began to have longer periods of peace…and in the midst of peace, wrong choices are more easily seen for what they are: a road paved with disappointment – a road which leads to utter destruction.

I remember how well those first few weeks went. The joy. The peace. The satisfaction that things were finally turning around for me…that I might just have a grip on reality. And then the bottom fell out from under me the night my friend sat me down and told me he knew what I was hiding…and told me he knew I was struggling with homosexuality.

Horrified and humiliated, I ran from the house and down the street. I needed to get as far away from the rejection as I could…so I ran and I ran and I ran…until I could run no more. Suddenly it dawned on me to ask myself just where I was running. In sheer desperation I asked the Lord to speak to me:

"If you are real, speak to me. If I ever needed to hear you it is now!"

Call me crazy, but this really happened. My eyes were drawn to the moonlit sky above where two puffy clouds glowed from the bright moon-glow. Like a child who tries

to find shapes in clouds, I found myself seeing the larger of the 2 clouds appearing to be a wise old man with a beard. The other cloud morphed into a little lamb…and soon the wise old man cloud embraced and completely engulfed the little lamb cloud…and in my heart I felt God was saying, "This is what I will do for you, son, if you will simply let me hold you. Go back and face your friend. It will be alright." So I did.

I walked in the door, still fearful, but at least trying to obey what I had heard. And you know what my friend said to me?

"Dennis. I don't know necessarily how to help you walk out of homosexuality, but I do know the answer. Knowing Jesus is the answer…and here's how much I love you and believe God can help you and heal you. However long it takes…whatever struggles you must face…I will walk toward the Answer with you. I will walk with you toward Jesus. Will you let me?"

What do you think was the right answer? I couldn't resist. Finally someone who loved me enough to put aside his own pleasures and needs to meet *mine*. I melted into tears…and the stage was set for my true destiny.

Questions For Meditation

•Do you believe God, being God, may know just a little more than you or I about what is best for us?

•Do you believe that maybe, just maybe, God might be engineering even the hurtful storms of life to bring us into a place of understanding His love for us?

•Have you ever stopped to look back at your hurts and failures and, once again, try to see them from God's perspective rather than your own?

•Have you ever truly experienced an absolute, pure love that has absolutely no conditions other than your surrender to that love? Be honest…

•Would you like to know how I found that truest of all loves? I can't wait to tell you! But for now, finish the journey for today and take up where you left off tomorrow…Okay…go ahead and read on!

"…Even in their sleep…"

As you prepare to sleep tonight, ask the Lord to begin preparing your heart to receive His absolute and purest of love. Anticipate peace and expect healing.

DJ's Thought For The Day

Peace comes from knowing one's true identity. One's true identity comes from knowing God.

Listen to the song "I Give It All"

Everything Changes

Listen to the song "Passionate Obsession" and hear it from Father's perspective as He sings it over you

Since the encounter with my mentor during my senior year in college, I had just about written off most Christians as being fakes and charlatans…especially pertaining to the Christian musical artists of the day. Contemporary Christian music was, in many ways, in its infancy. From my point of view (a good friend in college had been the student concert series coordinator so I got to see a side of the artists that was generally hidden from public view), I felt it would have been more honest to call themselves entertainers who happened to be Christian. My honest opinion was that these were good people who loved God but their main goals were selling records and being famous. Their were two rare exceptions that God used in a huge way in my life.

During my freshman year at OBU, a friend handed me a record album (it's like a giant CD only you can play it on both sides!) by a trio called *The 2nd Chapter of Acts*. Up until that point in my life I thought that contemporary Christian music was the Southern Gospel Quartet led by Grandpa Jones on the television show *Hee Haw*…or the recording *Peace in the Valley* by Elvis Presley! I couldn't believe people could sing such beautiful songs to God – and they weren't in the hymnal! It was as if the music of Annie Herring (lead singer for *2nd Chapter*) had written from my hurts and struggles. She had captured my heart. I heard that she had been part of the drug scene in southern California and had been a CBS Records protégé' – the next Janice Joplin. I heard she had given 2 children up for adoption, having given birth outside of marriage. I had heard that she had married a man named Buck and that he had received Christ and then led her to know Him as well…and that God had begun pouring music out of her broken heart. Deep down in my heart of hearts I hoped beyond hope that perhaps the Lord would do that for me someday…set me free.

During that same year (1977), a new artist by the name of Keith Green came to our campus. With only about 200 people in attendance, this man began to share from his heart all God had done for him…and he had been just as messed up as Annie Herring had been! Then he would sing the most amazing songs. These songs weren't just *about* God.

Many were sung directly *to* God! I had never really heard anything like that in my life! But more importantly, as Keith sang to the Lord, it was as if he was in a very private and intimate conversation with a dear friend…and this left me feeling that maybe I shouldn't be listening! But the effect was that his intimate, unashamed worship of God drew me right into God's presence like I had never felt before. Although I didn't really see how God could love me (there I was telling God what He could and couldn't do again!) because I felt my sin was too vile for God to deal with, the music of Keith Green helped get me through the next 4 years of college without completely losing my mind.

Here I was in Oklahoma City driving a school bus and pouring out my heart to God in the only way I knew how. Though feeble in practice, I was so sincere in heart. I needed intimacy and affection and affirmation and real relationship. Still being fed by the music of Keith Green and *2nd Chapter of Acts*, I was beyond ecstatic when I heard the news that Annie and her siblings would be in concert at the University of Oklahoma! Driving my friend's car to the concert, I'm sure I made him a nervous wreck because I wanted to get there before everyone else in order to get a prime seat…and so no one would see me sneak my tape recorded and three blanks tapes in! Hey, I drove a school bus ad was trying to pay off student loans! I couldn't afford their albums…so I had made plans to get a three album set via the three blank cassette tapes I had managed to scrounge up! Little did I know that God would use even my sin of illegally taping a concert for good in my life! Little did I know that I was about to record my own redemption…

The concert progressed with great joy and anticipation as the trio went through many of my favorite songs and then I began to feel overwhelmed at the new songs they shared. I think just knowing someone else had *come through* their hard times gave me hope that perhaps I would one day make it through mine. And then they stopped singing…

Annie Herring began to share something God had placed on her heart - something that would lead to the greatest transformation of my life. Following is a transcript of that moment, reduced for brevity but exactly what was shared. I will attempt to interject the thoughts and feelings I went through in those moments:

She said, *"I don't know why it is…we always go to the Lord as a last resort…but He has never hurt us…"*

Was she serious? God has never hurt us? I felt abandoned by God and felt He hated me for my wickedness. For some reason, I laid that thought down and decided I would believe what she had just said…even for a few moments. Could I really trust what she was saying? Could I really trust God?

"…and He only wants what's best for us…."

He wants what's best for me? Then why did He allow me to go through all the chaos, confusion, and isolation in my life? Again, I calmed down and decided to believe…even if for only as long as she spoke…

"I know there are many of you here tonight that have gone through things that hurt you deeply…and it's not like you've not wanted to give those things to Jesus. It's just that you've never had the opportunity to…Well, tonight we're going to get rid of all our hurts…

My heart began to feel the pressure of 22 years worth of hurts as she spoke. No one had really ever asked me what was wrong? No one had ever asked me to show them 'where it hurts'…and it was as if someone finally *got it*…

"Tonight we are going to allow Him to take up residence in areas where we have kept Him out because we weren't aware of the fact that we were closing Him out…"

In that moment, I remember a flood of shock – I felt numb yet thoroughly warmed through and through. It was as if she were telling me that God sees all the hidden places of my heart…and loves me anyway….loves me *no matter what*.

"…but I believe the Holy Spirit has done a work in your heart…to open up areas where His light hasn't shined for a long time…or never has shined.

It began to come into greater and greater clarity…that I had been so wounded by the circumstances of life that I had not only shut out people, but I had shut out the most important relationship of all! There were so many hidden places that I had closed off…yet God saw them and loved me anyway?!?!? I realized that all those places in my heart that I told myself didn't hurt anyone else really hurt everyone…including me! A heart that does not function to capacity is a heart that life cannot flow through. In those moments my heart began to come alive in places I thought would be forever dead. It was as if I were totally naked…yet unashamed. Hadn't felt that – ever…

"We are very complex people, but we need to choose to let His light shine in all those rooms in our hearts."

How was it that she so easily saw through my facades? How could she have known how complex and complicated my heart and mind had become? And as if I had been bowled over by a huge ocean wave that sent me reeling head-over-heels, I came to the understanding that I had to make a conscious choice to *let Him in*. I had to choose to finally be honest…

"And I know that the Lord is showing me that there are many of you tonight that are broken-hearted…and many of you have gone through things that you never thought you'd have to go through and you need to be set free tonight. The Lord wants to heal your mind and your heart. And the way that we're going to get rid of all the things inside of us – and we all have something to get rid of because we are all being built."

Broken-hearted. That was me. Yes, I had experienced things I never in my wildest nightmares would have thought I would have to go through in this life. Some of those experiences had been beyond my control…but many had been as an act of my will…by my own choices. If anyone needed to be set free that night, it was I. If anyone needed healing for their heart and mind, that was me. When she made the statement about *all* having something to give up, I was set at ease. You mean I wasn't the only loser in the crowd (I still had a lot of work to be done!)?

"The way we're going to get rid of those things tonight is we're going to put our hands out before us – and we're going to place those things right there…and we're going to give them to the Lord while we sing this song. We're going to lift those things to the Lord and give them away…and while our hands are up and empty (lifting our hands is a sign of surrender) we're surrendering those things to the Lord. And after we give them to Him and our hands are empty we're going to receive from Him whatever gift it is that He wants to give us tonight…and I guarantee you it's a good gift."

Could it really be that simple? Could I have been striving in the wrong direction in the wrong way for the wrong reasons all my life? The answer was a resounding 'yes'! I had been so used to deciding if God could love me that I was never able to let Him love me! Suddenly, it was no longer about me…it was quickly becoming about Him…

"You have nothing to be afraid of…He only wants what's best for you…"

God's love suddenly became apparent. He could love me while bestowing worth upon me. He *wanted* me for His own. He wanted me so much He had been willing to leave the riches and glory of heaven. He desired a relationship with me so badly that He had been willing to suffer every temptation I would ever suffer (yet without sinning in the process!). He loved me so much He had been willing to suffer the punishment I deserved because of my sin. And He loved me enough to take homosexuality upon Himself at the cross…something I had never been able to see before. His perfect love took away every fear in that moment.

"So it's sort of like Christmas. We're going to give away something and we're going to receive a gift…and there's a gift for each one of us with our name on it. So let's prepare ourselves and let's let Him have our hearts. You ready?"

Something was coming. I could feel it in my heart…could feel it permeating my body, mind, and soul…

"You choose. We are a people of choice…and you choose to get rid of these things…and you receive from Him tonight. You ready?"

And they began to sing…

Why should I worry?
Why should I fret?
I've got a MansionBuilder
Who ain't through with me yet…
©Latter Rain Music/Words & Music: Annie Herring
Used by permission

In those brief moments of singing, my heart began to break…not from the weight of the burdens of my hurts, but by the magnitude of true love and acceptance I had honestly never ever felt in my life before. Even if you do not understand the spiritual ramifications of what I am about to share, please read on and be patient with me. You will come to understand what I am talking about in subsequent devotionals.

As they sang, I saw myself make the choice to place homosexuality on the shoulders of Jesus. What a burden was lifted…to finally have someone help me carry that burden. The sacrificial death of Jesus was required for my eternal salvation. At the same time, by faith, I saw myself – Dennis Jernigan – crucified with Christ. I had not been able to take my own life, but I made the conscious choice to give it up to Him. The old *me* died that night (again, by faith) and I was buried with Christ. Dead. Gone. The next thing I know, Christ had risen and He was calling me to rise again, saying, "Dennis Jernigan. Come forth!"

In that instant (by faith), I was given a brand new identity. All I had been, all I had experienced, and all I had done against God's will were eradicated in that moment. I was made a brand new creation. I determined that night that I would no longer rely on my gay friends for help with my identity. My help would come from the One Who created me. That night saw the beginning of an incredible journey towards wholeness. My goal was not heterosexuality. My goal was to know my God – and to let Him know me. As a

new creation, I decided to allow God to wipe the slate clean and learn to *be*. Did I suddenly forget all my hurts? No. Was I somehow instantly and mircaluously immune from my former temptations? No…but I somehow *knew* that those things could not define me. I wanted to know what my *Maker* had to say about my identity…even my sexual identity. My desire was to discover who *He* says I am. And that is exactly what I want for you. Are you ready?

"You have nothing to be afraid of…He only wants what's best for you…"

Listen to the song "Passionate Obsession" and think about all God has done to get to you…to make you His own.

Questions for meditation

•Do you believe God is good? Why or why not?

•If God is good, who do you suppose has been tempting your mind to believe He is *out to get you*?

•If you had the chance to go back to your mother's womb and be born again, would you choose to be heterosexual or homosexual?

•If you found out you had believed many lies and that you had built your entire identity upon those lies, would you be willing to go through the necessary steps to tear down those lies…and the necessary steps required to rebuild your life based upon the real truth?

•Would you be willing to decide that Jesus is Lord of your life and Lord of your identity? Would you be willing to believe that God raised Him from the dead to teach you how to *rise again* in your own life?

•What inner rooms have you never allowed God to look into?

•Would you give your hurts to Him right now? He can handle them…whatever they might be.

"…even in their sleep…"

As you fall to sleep tonight, allow the Lord access to your deepest hurts and give Him the freedom to comfort and minister to those wounds…

DJ's Thought for the Day

I am not who my circumstances say I am. I am not who my temptations say I am. I am not who past failures say I am. I am who my Father says I am.

Dealing with Past Hurts

Listen to the song "I Cry Holy" before you read this devotion.

It seems that so much of my life has been filled with hurt and disappointment. If I focused on those things for too long I believe I would lose my mind! After the Lord set me free to walk down the road of recovery, I still seemed to not be able to let go of all the times I had felt rejected or abandoned. It seemed impossible to let go of the memories of times when I had been used and cast aside. If God had made me a brand new creation and was in the process of setting me free, why was I still battling depression and fear of rejection…and still harboring unforgiveness (bitterness) in my heart and mind?

So much healing had come into my life between 1981 and 1983 that the Lord allowed me to do something I had all but given up on ever happening in my life. He gave me a wife. I had gone into our marriage without divulging all I had dealt with in my life concerning same-sex attractions (I'll share more on that later) but I actually felt mostly free from my past. But I had to admit, I could never shake all the memories of times I felt God or people had abandoned me in the past…and those memories continually dragged me down to self-pity, despair and depression. It was as if I was swimming with huge stones tied around my neck…and could barely keep my head above water. Had it not been for practicing daily times of intimate worship with God I think I would have surely drowned during those days.

There came a point in this process where it dawned on me that if God had redeemed me – rescued me – from a life of homosexuality, then surely He could redeem and rescue me from all my past hurts. So what did I do? I simply made a list of all the times (an actual list of memories) when I felt I had been abandoned. This list also included times when I had failed morally as well as times when I was wounded emotionally in some way. After all, my sin had left me separated from God…and His Word tells us that He will not leave us or forsake us. My desire was simply to take God at His Word, allow Him to show me His perspective on every hurt or failure I had ever encountered. I was so tired of carrying all that extra weight around. I gave that list to God and asked Him to reveal His perspective in His time.

About two weeks later I found myself in my hometown leading worship in the local community center. After the service, a little gray haired lady – June Smith – approached me. She was so excited and gracious as she exclaimed, "Isn't it wonderful how your grandmother's prayers have been answered?"

I was taken aback a little because I honestly had no idea of what she was talking about. I asked her to go to please tell me what she was talking about. She said, "Remember when you were a little boy and you'd go to your grandmother's house and play the piano?"

"Of course," I replied. "Those were some of my most precious memories!"

June went on. "Did you know she would stand behind you and ask the Lord to use you in the areas of worship and music for His kingdom and His glory? Then she would come to our women's prayer meeting every week and ask us to agree with her in prayer. And Dennis – we still do. In fact, your first grade teacher Mary Ross and I continue to lift up your grandmother's request to this day."

I was blown away! I had felt so abandoned by God when He took my grandmother away. Only being 13 at the time, I had no real clue as to all God was up to…until the moment June Smith re-entered my life. Immediately I was reminded of the list of hurtful memories I had recently written and given to God. And in this moment, the Holy Spirit began to rush into my mind and wash over me with a brand new perspective of my grandmother's death…a perspective that left me full of hope and full of anticipation of what else God might be doing in my life in the area of healing my hurts!

What did I hear in that moment? It was as if I could hear the Lord saying, "See, son. I did not abandon you. You will see your grandmother again. I did not forget you or forsake you. I took your grandmother's prayers and I multiplied them…and son, they continue to this day!" In fact, both these dear ladies still pray for me as of this writing – 35 years later!!!

This one event began the opening of a dam in my heart that had not been touched in years. Suddenly I could see the time I was 5 years old and that man had exposed himself to me. Someone had come between him and me. Someone had given me the

sense to run. Someone had been kept me from harm…and that Someone had been the Lord.

When my encounter with a mentor had brought me to the place of utter hopelessness in college, Someone had kept me from taking my life. Someone had spoken softly yet firmly into my mind… "Are you really ready for eternity?" And that Someone had been the Lord.

In the age of AIDS and many sexual encounters Someone had preserved my life. Someone had been there even in the midst of my sin – not taking part in my sin – but there just the same. He was the On saying, "Come this way, son. This is the way of escape." I just had not listened…or even known how to listen. That Someone? Jesus. Healing has not stopped since. It took 22 years to build that wall of hurt. I expect that just maybe it will take that long to tear it down…and all the while being rebuilt. I have been on this road of healing for over 25 years now, actually. I have learned to be patient and allow God to be Who He is…and for me to learn to simply *be* in His presence.

I shared the story of how God had redeemed the memory of the loss of my grandmother with a large group I was ministering to a few days later and received the following letter. Through the years I have received literally thousands and thousands of letters…but none have so adequately described what I am trying to convey to you right now. Read on:

> *At one point in the evening, you said something like, "Think back to a time in your life when you felt that God was nowhere around - yet know that He was there feeling your pain."*
>
> *The time I remembered was the stillborn birth of our first baby, Joshua John. My vivid memory of that day has always been of a cold delivery room. I was alone. My husband wasn't allowed to be with me. No family in town – only uncaring strangers shouting instructions at me. I was confused, cold, and afraid. I remember the delivery, of doctors whisking my baby away and hearing the report that he was dead. For fifteen years, that's how I remembered that day. And yes, I did not think that God was with me.*

However, thanks be to God! God gave me a new picture of that day. I saw the same room and people, yet this time upon my delivery I saw Jesus reach down and scoop up Joshua John in His arms. He held him lovingly and He laughed and danced around the room exclaiming, "It's a boy!" How proud He was of Joshua. What tenderness and love he showed as He received Him into His arms.

How I thank God for this new picture. How I thank Him for loving me and Joshua. How grateful I am for this healing in my heart.

What a wonderful picture of the spiritual reality of God's perspective. Whatever His enemy (*your* enemy) has meant for evil against you in your life, God has the ability to make something good of. Sometimes we have to take another look at the things that have hurt us in order to understand the way toward healing. Sometimes we have to endure the dry, harshness of a painful desert in order to enjoy and understand the sweet refreshing rain. As long as we have breath, we have hope. So take a deep breath and get ready to allow the Lord to begin showing you a brand new perspective on the wounds of your life.

Questions For Meditation

•Make a list of all the times you felt rejected, or forgotten, or forsaken by God and/or others.

•Would you be willing to give this list to the Lord and ask Him to show you His point of view?

•Would you be willing to allow Him the necessary time that may be required?

•Once you begin to see and understand God's perspective on your wounds, what do you plan to do with that information?

Listen again to the song "Watching Over You" and be ready to see God's perspective then listen to "I Cry Holy" and make it your prayer.

"…Even in Their Sleep…"

Mentally give your list to the Lord as your prepare to sleep. Allow Him the freedom to show you your life and your wounds from His point of view. Expect to wake up refreshed.

DJ's Thought for the Day

Life is best understood – and lived- from God's point of view.

The Process of Healing

Listen to the song "Mercy Me" before you read the following devotion.

After I made my list and gave it to the Lord, the healing did come in waves for me. So much healing came that I was able to marry (no, the temptations did not stop. They began to be redirected…we will discuss that in the next devotion). I loved being married. It was as if a dream had come true…like I was living a miracle. Melinda was beautiful. We were having babies left and right. I made very little money but we were so happy. Melinda and I were just grateful to have this opportunity for life! As I have already stated, I received counsel after I began my road towards wholeness that said, "God has forgotten your past. So should you. There is no need for anyone else to know what you've been set free from." That was how I had entered into my marriage.

Melinda and I were very intimate, sharing our feelings, our hopes, our dreams…but I had hidden the most crucial part of my joy from her (and, come to find out, she had been doing the same with me!). There came a time five years into our marriage where I confided in a friend that I had formerly lived a homosexual life…and of all God had done to bring about a healing change. His response? You need to tell Melinda. "Why?" was my reply as I explained the reason I had not shared with her already. He went on to quote one of my favorite Scriptures back to me.

"O, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good;
for His lovingkindess is everlasting.
Let the redeemed of the Lord say so…"
Psalm 107:1-2

He gently yet firmly explained that 'if I was truly redeemed, what did it matter *what* I was redeemed from? And if you don't *say* so, how will those trapped in the same lies know there is a way out?' I was stunned. Here, not five minutes before, my life had been great…and now it all flashed before my eyes. The old fears began to flood in.

"I'll be fired from my job at the church."

“My male friends will shun me.”

“My family will be humiliated and ashamed of me.”

“My wife will leave me…and I’ll never see my children again.”

Fear ruled the next few moments…until I realized that my friend – a man I respected and patterned my life after because of his masculinity – had not rejected me. Once again, love began to push fear aside and I was able to think coherently. If God’s Word was true, then my confession – my honesty – would lead to freedom. And if God is truly in control regardless of what I see or feel, then He can make a way through this mess I’ve made. Healing isn’t always easy, by the way!

The very next day, I asked Melinda to talk to me. Fully expecting her to leave upon hearing the news, I braced myself to receive God’s grace to get through this rejection that I had surely brought upon myself due to my lack of transparency. I began, “Melinda, you know God has done a deep work in my heart…but I’ve never been able to tell you what He set me free *from*. Did you ever wonder why I told you that I never wanted to see you again when we graduated from college?”

She nodded in fear…but her eyes told me to continue.

“For all of my life I struggled with…”

My strength had suddenly left me and I begen to fall apart.

“For all of my life I struggled with…with…I don’t know if I can say it.”

“It’s going to be alright. I can handle it,” she said.

“For all of my life I struggled with attraction to men. I struggled with…homosexuality.”

It felt so good to finally tell the one person I should have trusted the most…the one I shared true intimacy with…or so I had thought. Her response?

"Thank you. I've been waiting for you to open up to me. Is that all?"

Is that all?!?!?! After many shared tears of gratitude and relief, she began to tell me of the many hurts she had suffered and had wanted to tell me for years. We thought we had known intimacy before that night. Suddenly we both realized that, up until that moment, we had shared a *measure* of honesty – but that the things we had hidden were like a thin wall between us that had finally been breeched. We both acknowledged that this is what it must feel like to know and to be known by somebody without fear of being rejected. What a monumental moment in our lives, our marriage, and in our spiritual journeys!

I used to ask the Lord for instantaneous healing…but most often, true healing requires time. Time invested in the healing process helps us build a firm foundation from which to live our lives…and is time well spent. God's Word tells us in John 8:32 that we will 'know the truth and the truth will set us free'. I believe we can know the truth and still not be free. Why would I say that? Because that was my personal experience. I had grown up hearing that truth and believing that truth and even quoting that truth…but I had forgotten one key aspect of that truth. The first step truth requires is my own honesty! When I finally got honest about several key things, God was able to work freedom into the equation! When I got honest that I did not want to live a homosexual life…and honest that I could not *fix* myself…and honest that I needed help…and honest that I had tried man's ways and fallen far short of the mark…and honest that God was God and I was not…then God was able to bring the power to walk into the freedom He offered.

A few years ago, God gave me a wonderful physical example of what spiritual healing looked like in my life. One day, I inadvertently dropped a very heavy piece of farm equipment on my right leg. After 2 surgeries, the flesh over the gaping wound died due to the fact the implement had severed the blood supply to the flesh. I was left with e hole in my calf about 2 inches across! I assumed that the doctor would perform a skin graft. I assumed incorrectly. His words?

"For this kind of wound to heal properly, it must heal from the inside out."

It was with these words that I knew the Lord was about to show me what the *process* of my spiritual healing looked like.

Cleansing is required…

Literally able to see the tendon and muscle, I was told to soak the wound in a solution of *Tide* detergent twice a day. For a wound to heal it must be cleansed and it must be kept clean. In my spiritual healing process, I daily had to cleanse my mind of wrong thinking and replace it with right or godly thinking. Part of that right thinking was that I needed to receive God's forgiveness for my sin…and had to forgive myself for my failures…and had to forgive those who had hurt me. What I discovered was that as long as I allowed bitterness (unforgiveness) a place in my heart and mind, I could not be as clean as my wound required for proper healing. Besides, *not* forgiving those who have wounded us is like holding them captive in our hearts. We don't really hurt them…we just add *more* hurt to our already wounded souls. God forgives. We can do no less. As I forgive and as I receive forgiveness, cleansing comes…and healing begins.

Life in the blood…

In addition to the need for cleansing, I was told that I needed to make the open edge of the wound bleed as much as possible. Why? There is life in the blood. As I washed the wound I rubbed the edge until blood began to seep out…and with that blood came the granules of life that our blood carries. In a spiritual sense, the blood of Jesus Christ was required to pay the debt we owed because of our sin. We could not pay that debt. Jesus could – because He was perfect and sinless…even though He had been tempted in every manner just as we are! When we place our faith in the redeeming blood of Jesus Christ, we actually are bought by that blood and are given eternal life. Life comes through the blood…and as I made my wound bleed, life came. Again, this is also a

great picture of honesty. Honesty is like opening a wound and allowing all that does not belong in the wound to flow out, which brings me to my next point.

Deep wounds require a pure packing material…

Each day I was told I needed to pack my wound full of a long strip of sterile gauze. My physician told me to pack it in tightly so as to completely fill the wound. The purpose? The sterile material that filled the wound also served to keep germs out. In addition, I was instructed to pull that material out daily and repack it. Whenever I pulled that gauze out, everything that did not belong in the wound would be pulled out…the debris of the wound, so to speak. As I pondered what the spiritual equivalent might be, the Lord began to place these thoughts in my mind…

"Son, when I first set you free but you were still attacked with lies and fears and temptations, what did you pack in those wounded places?"

When I had first walked away from homosexuality, I had begun memorizing Scripture that would reinforce the truths God was trying to build into my life so I could more easily withstand the lies of the enemy. "What shall I say then? Shall I continue in sin that grace might increase? May it never be! How shall I who have died to sin continue to live in it?" That was Romans 6!

"Son, when the enemy would tempt you and you would fail, what did you pack in that wound?"

I remembered that I had put this verse in my heart. "Do not rejoice over me, my enemy. Though I fall, I will rise. Though I dwell in the darkness, the Lord is a light for me." That was Micah 7:8. What I realized was that whenever I had begun my journey toward wholeness, the Lord always seemed to have averse for me to combat the lies with. As I learned to put off the lies and put on the truth, God's healing began to flow deep into my heart and mind. My life was never the same again because as soon as the enemy

would come and try to re-injure that old wound, I would simply remind myself of the truth…and he cannot stand in God's truth!

As with my physical wounds, God showed me that true healing involves a process…and that it is best to go through that process or we wind up with un-confessed or unexposed areas of spiritual infection…areas where perhaps we have allowed an area to scar over, but in reality the wound is still there…just hidden away.

In 1995, my wife was severely injured in a skiing accident. After 6 hours of surgery, she emerged with two 6-inch metal plates and 13 screws holding her knee together. After a few weeks, the wound healed over and an 18-inch scar remained. Everything looked fine, but she kept having these recurring staph infections. These infections became a scourge in her life – a real nuisance. How could she continue to have these infections in her knee if her knee was healed?

Her knee wasn't healed after all. Yes, the bones had mended – but the metal parts which remained inside, though *good* things, were not meant to be there. These objects were foreign to her body and actually harbored the infection…just like scarring over our souls may make us look good on the outside. We took steps to have the hardware surgically removed…and guess what never occuured again? That's right. The infection had no place to hide because it had been exposed. Once it was exposed, healing – deep and true healing – could take place. So it is with our souls. For true and deep healing to occur, we *must be honest* and expose the hidden hurts, failures, and wrong thoughts to the pure healing light of God's love for us!

The purpose of scars…

Why do I share my story of healing with you? When I was a little boy, we had a horse named *Big Red*. One day when I was about five, I went out to the pasture to pet *Big Red*. He began to bite me, so I ran towards the mulberry tree (*PF Flyers,* you know!) and quickly climbed up away from the nipping teeth…only to discover that he could still reach me! He was called *Big Red* for a reason! My only option? Put on the mind of *Superman* and jump out of the tree and over the barbed wire fence. If only! I straddled the fence perfectly – and it's a wonder I lived to sire 9 children! After being sewn up in the

ER, I was left with several amazing scars…one being almost 4 inches long with tons of stitches. My first thought upon emerging from the ER? "I can't wait to show my brothers!"

What does that mean? To a little 5-year-old boy wants scars represent something greater than the wound itself. Scars represent some great victory or accomplishment. Scars mean something great has happened and I have lived to tell about it! In a spiritual sense, my emotional scars represent the place where God has done a healing work…and I just couldn't wait to show you! What is my hope and desire for you? That you would one day be able to show off your scars and testify to the healing power of Almighty God because of all He has done to heal your wounds.

Questions for Meditation

•Have you received forgiveness for your sins?

•Are you able to forgive yourself for past failures?

•Are you able to forgive those who have wounded you?

•Have you taken steps to allow the Lord to bring cleansing to the wounded places in your life?

•Have you placed your faith in the healing power of the redeeming blood of Jesus Christ? Do you belong to Him? He wants you for His own…

•What truths do you need to pack into the wounded places of your life?

•Are there any hidden or un-confessed areas of your life?

•Would you be willing to be honest with God and others and expose them to His truth and love?

Listen to the song "Mercy Me" before you go to sleep

"…Even in Their Sleep…"

Allow the Lord to bring cleansing to your mind as you sleep.

DJ's Thought for the Day

Truth sets us free. Honesty is the first step in the journey toward freedom.

The Battle's On!

Listen to the song "There is No Chain"

It has been over 25 years now since the Lord set me on the path toward wholeness. People who hear my story for the first time often believe – mistakenly – that my healing occurred *all at once.* That is simply not the case. It has taken me that long to recognize many of the lies I had believed…that long to build on a sure foundation of truth…that long to learn to recognize wrong thought patterns and to replace them with right thought patterns…and the work's not done!

One of my heroes of the faith is the ancient King of Israel, David. Here is a man who committed adultery and murder and had a horrible family life…yet he is remembered in God's Word as being *a man after God's own heart*. That's how I want to be remembered. David was a worshipper of God…so I became a worshipper of God. What I discovered is that worship requires my entire being. When I worship my mind is engaged, my will is engaged, my emotions are engaged, and even my physical body is engaged…and focused on God and others. What I recognized early on was that if my entire being was focused on God and others, temptation was severely weakened! (More on the *joy* of temptation in the next chapter).

Of course we can't walk around singing and praising God all the time can we? I believe we can. Since God is God and I am His child, I want to be like Him. He is about healing, serving, comforting, building up, and, of course, loving. I made a conscious decision years ago that I would worship Him with my actions, my attitudes, my thoughts, and even my physical body. After all, I had used all those same parts of my being to willfully sin against Him. In a sense, I had allowed the very attributes God had blessed me with to be used in less than holy and eternal ways. The enemy had taken good things and had led me to use those attributes in a perverted form. When I came to realize this, I decided that all these things were like ground the enemy had stolen in my life…and it was up to me (by God's grace) to take back that ground.

King David had faced a giant named *Goliath*. I had always thought Goliath meant *huge* or *big*…but Goliath actually means *naked and ashamed*! For far too long I had allowed the giant of same-sex attraction to shame me into dishonesty. He had been there

all along saying things like, "If anyone finds out, you'll be humiliated. If anyone finds out, you'll be rejected. If anyone finds out, you'll never be loved or accepted." On November 7, 1981 I put that giant down for the first time by finally getting honest and walking toward the freedom offered by Jesus Christ. Reality is that I've had to put him down many, many times…along with many of his brothers like confusion, fear, habitual sin, perverted thinking, selfishness and self-focus, etc. When you begin to mess with the enemy he is not going to go down without a fight. But let me clue you in: his *only* weapon is deception. He is a liar whose bark is worse than his bite. When we learn to recognize then put down his lies, we will see victory upon victory in areas we never thought possible. I believe I will have to fight until the day I die to some degree…but I tell you this: knowing Christ intimately is worth every single battle…and I proudly let the world see my scars – because they declare the power of God's love better than any sermon!

Are you going to kick the giant's butt or is he going to kick yours?

I have met many people who seem to be fighting the same battles over and over again. One friend told me the drugs that he was addicted to were just too difficult to overcome. He also found it difficult to believe people cared about him. Yet he was always boasting about how tough he was and how he wasn't afraid to fight anyone. After weeks of this same conversation – me telling him how to be an overcomer and him wallowing in self-pity – I finally looked him in the eye and said, "Are you going to kick the giant's butt or is he going to kick yours? You talk about how tough you are yet you let a subtle little lie of the enemy eat your lunch. If you're so tough, then be tough on the lies!" He told me later how he had wanted so badly to punch my lights out…but at the same time had recognized how *right* I was about him.

When we take back ground the enemy has stolen from our lives we must understand what our rights are as children of God. "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." It all belongs to Him. My body belongs to Him. My thoughts and attitudes belong to Him. Even my *sexuality* belongs to Him. All I am belongs to Him. So

what does that mean? I need to take back my thoughts, attitudes, body, and every aspect of my life and use those things in the way God intended them in the first place.

Putting off and putting on…

When we become new creations through relationship with Christ, we must understand that we have to put the old ways and old thinking to death…and be comforted in knowing that God will raise us up in newness of life. I am reminded of the story of Lazarus – a friend of Jesus. Lazarus had died but Jesus had not been there to speak life into him…so he laid in the grave for 3 days before Jesus was able to arrive. At the entrance of the tomb Jesus shouted, "Lazarus, come forth!" and Lazarus walked out of the tomb. He rose 100% alive…but not 100% free. How do I know? Jesus commanded those around Lazarus to 'remove from him the graveclothes'. And what were those graveclothes? These were the burial cloths that had been wrapped around the body of the dead man. He came out of the grave alive but not completely free. Just as they began to remove the things that bound up Lazarus, we must learn to remove the graveclothes that bind us to our old lives. It may be as simple as this… "Dennis, you don't look good clothed in that selfish pride. Let's rip that away. There. See the humility I planted in your heart? That is who you are. Let it grow. Just *be* that!'

One of the first things I began to do after that night in 1981 was to take an honest look at the things that tied me to my past…and there were many. There were pictures of me and men whom I had been involved with in a sexual manner. I burned them one by one so I could consciously remember that God had literally cleansed me of this past indiscretion. There were gifts I had received from these same relationships – some of great value – that I destroyed or sent out with the garbage. As with the pictures, each item I released reminded me of how great the forgiveness of God really was. These items were costly in a monetary sense – and in an emotional sense as well. The moment I would release an object, the emotional ties were broken...and I could see a little more clearly without wondering about *what might have been*. I even made a commitment to give up going to old familiar places that had emotional ties to my past. I even went so far as to commit to clear my mind in every way – including music. From 1981 through 1993 I did

not listen to secular *or* Christian music so as to learn how to hear the voice of God for myself without unnecessary influences (even *good* influences. I was after the *best*). At that point I also came to realize that it was not up to me to help deliver those former friends. I was nobody's savior! My first objective was to seek God and get well…and trust that the God who was helping me would also be doing the same for those I had known in wrong ways in the past.

One of the most difficult moments of giving up the past came as I thought about the incident with my mentor back in college. It dawned on me one day that if he had done what he did to me then he had probably acted in a similar manner with other young, vulnerable, emotionally needy men. Through a trusted counselor, I made contact with the authorities in this man's life and alerted them to what had taken place in my life. My desire was to seek restoration and healing for the one who had used me…I knew that was the right thing to do. I was asked to give a legal deposition which consisted of an attorney asking me the most humiliating series of questions requiring me to give every intimate detail of what had taken place. I had asked a friend to sit in with me…and cannot begin to communicate to you the utter disgrace, embarrassment, shame, and dishonor I felt as I emptied my heart that day. After the deposition, my former mentor was confronted and counseling was offered. I could do no more.

I left that deposition numb and mortified…but somehow clean and a little more healed. Absolutely nothing had been hidden in that interview...and my friend had not forsaken me. Had it been worth the anguish and heartache to get to that place? Definitely. I felt clean and justified. I felt that I had taken steps to help protect other young men from the same heartache…and began to suspect that God had allowed me to go through all I had gone through for the sake of others…and to help me understand the depth of His love, grace, and commitment to *me*.

Getting rid of the past is not easy sometimes. I recently met with a dad whose daughter was going through a rebellious phase. He had divorced his wife and moved out of the state to find a better job in order to support his family. As we talked, it became apparent to me that his daughter did not feel very important to her dad…that his job was more important than their relationship. I asked this father what his daughter was worth to him. His reply? "Everything!" To which I countered, "Worth you giving up your job to

move back to the same city she and her mother live in? Again I ask you, what is your daughter worth to you?" A few weeks later I received word that he had indeed left the out-of-state job and returned to a lower paying job in order to be near his daughter…and that 'miraculously' the daughter had begun to settle down in her rebellion!

When we cut off emotional ties to our past failures, we are effectively practicing honesty. Honesty is the first step toward truth – and truth leads to freedom. Why in the world would we willfully allow ourselves to be dragged down to our spiritual death by maintaining emotional baggage? That would be the equivalence of having stones tied around our necks and then expecting to not sink. It just doesn't work. We must be willing to let go of our past ties if we ever expect to walk in freedom from them. Just as I asked this dad whether his daughter was worth giving up his job for, I ask you, "Is your freedom and sanity worth giving up the emotional ties to your past?" I think you know the answer to that one. Let me assure you: the life that is found on the other side of emotional dependency is worth whatever we must give up to get there. I am living proof. I'm not there yet – but I'm well on my way!

Questions for Meditation

•Do you have any old photos or gifts or other items which emotionally link you to detrimental points or relationships in your past?

•Would you be willing to break these emotional ties by ridding them from your life?

•What is your freedom from the past worth to you?

•As you let go of these things, ask God to replace each one with a holy counterpart. When we put off the old, we must take measures to put on the new. I took photos with my new friends…I cherished gifts that reminded me of my new life…I found new places where my true godly identity would be bolstered and not torn down.

•Is your life worth fighting for? Is God's best for you worth fighting for? Don't settle for being someone less than God says you can be.

Listen to "There is No Chain"

"…Even in Their Sleep…"

As you fall to sleep tonight, see yourself taking back the stolen ground of your life and ask the Lord to let you see the possibilities of your future life in Him.

DJ's Thought for the Day

We must be willing to let go of our past ties if we ever expect to walk in freedom from them.

The Joy of Temptation

How God Uses Daily Temptation to Build Intimacy and Freedom in Our Lives

The following material was written for my sons. I approach the subject of temptation in a manner that I believe anyone can relate to, regardless of whether they struggle with same-sex issues or not. The question of 'how did a man who had not been sexually attracted to women suddenly have the desire for sexual relations with the opposite sex? All I can say is this, which I learned from a friend: when I was a young man, I hated broccoli. Wouldn't touch it. Couldn't stand the smell, much less the taste. As I grew up, I made a mental effort to learn to like broccoli…because I knew it was better for me than putting the poison of fast-food into my body. Eventually, I came to savor and enjoy immensely the taste of broccoli. Not only did my taste change, my desire for that vegetable became the norm. So it has been with my sexual appetites. I simply decided I would believe that God originally intended that I have sexual relations with a woman rather than a man. And I have grown to desire it and to love it…and I honestly DO NOT miss my former sexual reality. Read on for more insight into the role of temptation in our lives.

Begin this session by listening to "This is My Destiny"

The *joy* of temptation?!?! What do I mean by that? When we think of temptation, we think of it in terms of being a bad thing…and that is good! But through the years, I have learned to see temptation in a whole new light. What I am about to share with you will bring much freedom and creativity into your life and will serve to keep you safe from harm and deliver you from the consequences of sin.

Have you ever wondered why you are tempted to look at certain things or to touch certain things or to taste certain things that somehow you know really aren't good for you…but you know to look or taste or feel would make you feel good? To be drawn to something – to be tempted – is not necessarily a bad thing. How we respond to the temptation or how we direct our desires toward *right* things makes the difference between sin and righteous/manly living.

Of course, this begs the question 'are you still tempted with homosexual thoughts?' And the answer would be 'yes'. Before you write me off as a failure there are a few things you need to know. As my friend Tim Wilkins reminds me often, *we don't get to decide what we're tempted by*. We only get to decide how to respond to temptation. One of my personal mantras is *temptation does not define me*. I am who my Father – my Maker – says I am. That being said, the material that follows has been born out of over 25 years of walking this path toward freedom and wholeness in Christ. At this point another question seems to be in order. How did you learn to become attracted to your wife – sexually tempted by her? We'll discuss that in a later chapter! For the time being, I will approach the subject from the perspective of what I want my own sons to know concerning temptation. The principles hold true for any of us.

As a man, I am drawn toward or attracted to my wife in a sexual manner and God calls this good. In other words, that attraction is natural and it was placed inside my being as a man in order to bring about new life. When my wife and I have sex, babies are produced and life is the result. If I allow my natural desire to be served in an unnatural way, death and destruction are the result. When I go outside of that which God has ordained as right, I bring death to my marriage. I break up another man's marriage. I destroy the trust my wife placed in me. And I carry all that damage with me the rest of my life. These are just a few of the consequences of giving into temptation.

Just as with sex, we are drawn to need food and water. Without these things we die…but when we try to use those things or to meet those desires in unnatural ways, we have the same results as the man who seeks sex outside of what God calls right. I overeat or eat the wrong things, my body suffers and I walk in poor health. If I drink nothing but sodas or consume mass quantities of alcohol, my body suffers and I risk major health issues. Whenever I seek to meet god-ordained needs in ways other than He has ordained, I run the risk of not only hurting myself, but hurting others I am involved with in life.

What is sin? Sin is an act, a thought, or behavior that goes against the will of God. When I act in a manner that goes against God's nature, I sin. I must also remember that sin *always* has consequences. Always. And sin always finds us out – one way or the other. Reality is that God sees our sin whether anyone else does or not. God's Word calls homosexuality sin (regardless of what the culture of the world says). Therefore, when I

acted in a homosexual manner, I was in sin. God's Word says in Proverbs 23:7 says, "…as he [a man] thinks in his heart, so is he." When I allow myself to think of myself in ways other than God thinks of me, I have sinned. When I allow myself to use my mind in a manner other than the way God would have me use my mind, I have sinned. You get the idea. God calls sex and eating and drinking good…but we pervert those natural desires by trying to meet them in unnatural ways. But I have good news for you. God has made a way to deal with sin and to help us use temptation as a tool for His glory!

Everyone alive has sinned. Sin separates us from God. Jesus – the Son of God – was sacrificed in our place and paid the debt for our sin. We are forgiven. Our salvation from eternal separation from God comes when we place our faith in Christ. If you haven't done that yet, I urge you to place your faith in Him right now. How? It is so simple. God's Word says in Romans 10:9, "That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be **saved**." Just do that. Confess that Jesus is Lord. Believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead…and you are saved by faith in Jesus Christ. Another cool thing about what you've just done is this: you have been given a brand new identity. 2Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a **new creation**; the old has gone, the new has come!" Simply begin believing what God says about you! More about that later in the devotional!

How about some more good news? Life is hard and sometimes we feel overwhelmed with all the temptations swirling around us…but God has set us up to win! Rather than temptation being a thing to dread, I can show you how to use temptation to bring strength into your life. Let's cover some basic ground about what God says about temptation:

*No **temptation** has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can*
stand up under it.
1Corinthians 10:13 NIV

He will make a way of escape out of every temptation.

How? As a new creation, God tells me I can learn to hear His voice. Whenever I am being tempted, I must immediately cry out to God to show me the way out…and then I must obey immediately! If He says 'leave this place now' I must leave. If He prompts me to call a friend, I should call that friend. If he tells me to go to His Word and read, I had better go then. To hesitate is not obedience. I believe that every time I have been tempted He has been there calling me to follow Him away from that temptation. I just didn't listen! In other words, when we are tempted and we allow ourselves to give into that temptation, we have chosen to not listen to God. The problem is on our end, not His!

He won't place more on us than we can bear.

When temptation comes, I must always remember that God's Word is true and right in spite of my own feelings in the moment. I remember feeling so weak and helpless whenever I was tempted with sexual sin. Because my sin was so wrapped up in my need for male approval, I often felt that any male attention was better than none. I also remember feeling as if I could not control my own body. What I did not realize was that God wanted to teach me self-control – but, once again, I refused to listen…because I thought I knew what was best for me…that I knew better than the One who created me! Whenever I am tempted and I feel overwhelmed, I must mentally put on the truth that God will not put more on me than I can bear. If this is true, then this trying time *will pass!* I must trust God and receive His grace (His strength and desire to do what's right) and get to know Him better in the process.

Jesus was tempted in very manner as we are yet without sin. He understands.

I used to get so bummed out because it seemed I was tempted *all the time* in a sexual manner. Reality is that men are wired to be sexual aggressors. Reality is that men have sexual thoughts or urges every few seconds. God ordained this…and if He ordained it, He can help us use those thoughts and urges in the way He intends their use. Understanding this helped me understand that temptation can be a good thing. More about that later…

Another thing that helped me tremendously concerning sexual (or any) temptation was understanding the truth that God's Word says that Jesus (who was perfect and sinless) was tempted in *every manner just as we are!* What does that mean? Temptation does not define who I am! Just because I'm tempted to think homosexual thoughts does not make me a homosexual, just as being tempted to hurt someone does not make me a murderer. What I do with that temptation – how I respond – makes the difference between sin and victory, between being a man of God or a man who desires to live life his own way. Now I get to tell you wonderful things about how God has taught me to see and use temptation from a different point of view.

Questions For Meditation

•What are the main temptations in my life? Mental (the way I think of myself)? Physical?
•What would be a way of escape from these temptations?
•What truth must I *put on* in order to battle this temptation?
•How does it make you feel to know that Jesus was tempted in every manner just as you are?
•Would you be willing to learn to see temptation as a means of drawing closer to God? As a means of understanding your true identity as a new creation?

End this session by listening to "This is My Destiny"

"…Even in Their Sleep…"

As you prepare for sleep tonight, allow the Lord to *sing over your mind* with thoughts of what He thinks of you.

DJ's Thought for the Day

Temptation brings me thought of joy. Why would the enemy fight so hard for my thoughts unless He is trying to keep me from something good God has for me?

Temptation and Intimacy

Temptation – an opportunity for intimacy with God.

Begin this session by listening to "I Don't Want to Move"

If God is holy and I am His child, why do I have so many thoughts that seem to be contrary to His nature? God has an enemy called Satan or the devil. He desires to take God's place but that can never happen because his only power is deception. Since He cannot defeat God, his goal is to do the next best thing – drag as many people to hell with him as possible! 1Peter 5:8 says, "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."

The thing about a roaring lion is that this lion is old and weak. His job in the pride is to scare the prey into running away from safety and into the waiting jaws of the younger lions. In other words, his bark is worse than his bite. There is no power in his roar – nothing to be afraid of! Whenever I begin to hear the lies of the enemy – whenever I am tempted to think less about myself than God does – I do a couple of things:

Submit yourselves, then, to God.
Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.
James 4:7

I. If the enemy is trying to divert my attention, what is he trying to divert my attention from? I realize that God must be trying to say or do something in my life…and the enemy is trying to make me run the other way – away from life and safety! What I am about to share with you will revolutionize your life and the way you view temptation:

a. When tempted, I begin to talk to God and ask Him to show me what He wants me to see. The enemy wants me to focus on me and *my* needs. God is always about meeting the needs of others. I have learned to seek God in intimacy by saying during times of temptation "Lord, here is my heart. Into-me-see." In that moment, by faith, I hear Him say to me, "Son, here is My heart. Into-Me-see." I become

intimate with God and begin to get *His* perspective on the temptation. I then write down what I see or hear…and have written hundreds of songs by following this simple practice of intimacy with God.

"…Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light."
2 Corithinans 11:14

b. The enemy's main goal is to get us to take our eyes off of Jesus and to place our focus on our own needs. If he can keep us self-focused and self-centered, he has us by the balls, boys! What do I do when that happens? When tempted, I begin to take my eyes off of me and my own needs and to focus on the needs of others. When I am tempted to be depressed, I look for someone who is depressed and seek ways to encourage *them*. When tempted sexually, I look for my wife or call a buddy and ask for prayer. When tempted to worry about my financial needs, I look for someone who is in financial need and secretly bless them in a financial way. You get the idea! Often, I sing my prayers for that person to God and in the process have a song that I then turn around and use in ministry to millions of others! Temptation becomes an opportunity to be intimate with God and to bless others…and the enemy is defeated in my life!

Temptation does not determine our identity.

I have already mentioned this, but I will repeat it briefly. Just because I am tempted in a certain manner, does not mean that is who I am! I am who my Father says I am. What He thinks about me overrides my own feelings, experiences, thoughts, or the current worldview. I seek to know God and in the process I find out who I am. Pretty cool, huh? The next time someone tries to make you think otherwise (whether that be a *well-meaning* friend or Satan himself) you put on the truth by putting right thoughts – God-thoughts – into your own mind. This is how we renew our mind…by putting *off* what God calls wrong and putting *on* what He calls right in its place. In the computer world we call this 'garbage in/garbage out.' In other words, whatever we put into our

mind is what will come out…so it stands to reason that the wise man is going to fill his mind with wisdom by believing God's truth about their identity.

Self-control Brings Strength

"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."
1Peter 5:8

Like a city whose walls are broken down
is a man who lacks self-control.
Proverbs 25:28

What is self-control? In worldly terms it means the ability to control your own behavior…but we know how well *that* works! I challenge you with a new definition of self-control. For me, self-control means submitting my will to the will of God in any given moment. When I am tempted to think sexually wrong thoughts, I ask the Holy Spirit (God in Spirit) what He would have me think. When I am tempted to lash out in anger at someone, I ask the Spirit to show me how *He* would respond. In any scenario like that, I must allow Him the freedom to help me make wise decisions in any given moment. A man who lacks self-control is like a fortified city whose walls have been broken down. Once those walls are down, the enemy can rush in like a flood and leave that city – that life – in ruins. Practice self-control by giving your entire being in submission to God…and watch the freedom and creativity flow in your life.

Proper perspective on temptation leads to endurance.

By seeing temptation as a way to draw closer to God and to meet the needs of others, we actually build endurance into our lives. Because we are tempted so much each and every day, we have many opportunities to practice a godly perspective. Just as with the runner who practices for a grueling marathon, we must see that going through the daily grind of the 'temptation workout' prepares our hearts for great feats of faith in this life. I have been through so much and coming out on the other side by God's grace that I

honestly think I can face anything – not in my own strength – but in His. I want to be strong and I want to be prepared…so I choose to see temptation as a means of greater intimacy and ministry to others.

Temptation reveals our weakness and our need for God.

The truth is, I am a child of God. I want to be like Him…but reality is that I serve him in a world that is racked with sin and I live in a body that is dying more each day. In my flesh, I am weak. If not for the presence and love and grace of God, I would surely fall away. Without Him, I am nothing. Temptation reminds me of this daily. But again, this is actually a good thing…to be reminded of how desperately I need my God…how much failure I would walk in apart from Him. A wrong response to temptation leaves me focusing on *me* and focusing on me leads to anger when I don't get my way. Focusing on me leads to fear when I feel like I am not in control. Focusing on me leads to envy when I don't feel like *I'm* getting equal attention. Focusing on me leads me to despair because in my strength there is no way out. Focusing on Jesus and others will always lead to victory over temptation. Always.

Questions for Meditation

•What must I do to submit my thought to God?

•How can I renew my mind?

•How can I get my eyes off of *me*?

•What can I do to minister to another in these moments of temptation? What can I do to bless God in these moments of temptation?

•What is the truth about who God says I am? How does that affect my own thoughts about who I am? What must I do to change the way I think about myself to come in alignment with who God says I am?

•How can temptation keep me aware of my need for God?

•How can I take my eyes off of me and my own needs without falling apart?

End this session by listening to "I Don't Want to Move"

"Even in Their Sleep…"

As you go to sleep tonight, allow the Spirit to show you others in need. Pray for victory in their lives as you fall to sleep.

DJ's Thought for the Day

My needs get met when I seek to meet the needs of others.

Temptation: What Would Jesus Do?

Begin this session by listening to "See the Lamb"

When tempted, what did Jesus do?

In Luke 4, we find the story of how Jesus Himself handled temptation. He had fasted and prayed for 40 days and just as he finished His fast (going without food to help Him sharpen His sensitivity to spiritual matters), the enemy began to tempt Him to disobey God in exchange for temporary pleasures. How often have we been tempted when we are at our weakest place mentally, physically, spiritually, and emotionally? Haven't you ever wondered why that is? (Our enemy is real). So what did Jesus do?

He used the Word of God as a Weapon of Truth

God's Word is truth. Truth brings freedom and life. When we speak God's Word into a situation such as temptation as Jesus did, we are able to see the lies for what they are. When we see the lies we are more apt to see the consequences of taking the step of sin. If we see the consequences, we are less likely to react in a sinful manner (one of the steps I practice when tempted is to see the consequences of how my sin would affect my wife, my children, my friends, my ministry, etc….and the temptation loses its power every time!). By reminding ourselves of the truth by using God's Word, we actually speak strength and hope into the situation.

He Focused on Worshipping God

Jesus and the Father and the Spirit are One, but Jesus lived in a fleshly body just as we do. In His wisdom, He knew temptation could be a springboard into focusing on God rather than focusing upon Himself in that moment. One of the best tools I have found to battle temptation is to simply begin worshipping God whether at home or driving down the road. The devil cannot stand the name of Jesus and he cannot stand for us to worship the One who bears that name! In fact, God's Word tells us that He inhabits or is enthroned upon the praises of His people! Give God a place to sit in the midst of your temptation by worshipping Him! Worship God to overcome temptation! And think about this: to worship is to focus one's entire being on God. If my entire being is focused

on God temptation cannot be my focus. I sing to God. This engages my mind. I bow to my knees or lift my hands. This engages my physical body. I respond to Him in love and adoration. This engages my emotions. I purposely make my *self* come into focus on Him. This engages my will. He inhabits the praise of His people. That means He actively takes part in the act of worship as an *act of relationship and intimacy*! We can take this a step further when we see that meeting the needs o others is actually an act of worship toward God! Worship requires my entire focus and being. Temptation loses its potency when I engage God!

He Focused on Others

Jesus came to seek and save mankind from sin! If that isn't focusing on someone besides Himself I don't know what is! Overcome temptation as Jesus did by focusing on the needs of others. Trust me. This is a vital key!

He Knew His Identity

Jesus knew who He was and was confident in His identity. When we are convinced that we are who God says we are, we are not so likely to be swayed by every little temptation that the enemy throws our way. Do not worry about self-esteem. We ought always to esteem others as more important than ourselves. I personally believe self-esteem is over-rated. If we worry so much about whether our feelings get hurt or about what people think of us or about what we think of ourselves (there's that me, me, me way of thinking again) we never allow ourselves to feel pain. If we never felt pain we would never know the true value or worth God places upon us. Yes, we are to love ourselves but we are to never see ourselves as more important than those around us. We, as men, are to have the attitude of an overcomer. That is who we are called to be. That is how we ultimately overcome temptation. It is already in us! We are designed to win!!! As you read on you will discover more about who God says you are. I encourage you to allow the Lord to help you grow into your *true* identity as a man or as a woman…a man or woman *after God's own heart*!

Questions for Meditation

•What is your weakest place mentally? Physically? Spiritually? Emotionally?

•What are some truths from God's Word I could use to battle temptation?

•How can incorporate worship of God into my life in moments of temptation?

•How can I incorporate worship of God in the way I minister to the needs of others?

•What is your identity from God's perspective?

End this session by listening to "See the Lamb"

DJ's Thought for the Day

Worship requires my entire focus and being. Temptation loses its potency when I engage God!

Understanding Our True Identity as a Male or Female

Listen to "All I Used To Be"

My sense of identity became very warped at such an early age. By the time I went to first grade, I loved drawing and painting. Piano was a passion. When people were emotional, I became emotionally sympathetic – feeling what they felt. These were all gifts from the Lord…but as I have already mentioned, the enemy came along and tried to get me to use these gifts in ways God never intended. My artistic skills and flair were seen as effeminate. Playing the piano was seen as effeminate. Those touchy-feely emotions were perceived as effeminate. As a result, I began to view myself in these terms…without even realizing what was going on. It was during this period of life that I began to internalize my responses to what people said about me. Yet these internalizations resulted in outward manifestations…dead giveaways of what I truly thought about myself.

Inwardly I felt that I was less than a boy…girlish attributes in attitude and sensitivities, but boyish in appearance physically. To compensate, I excelled in sports, in scholastics, and in my music. My mind was at war with itself! I felt like a mistake in so many ways. Inwardly I needed male affirmation and attention. Outwardly I was so ashamed of who I was that I would not even allow myself to put my hands in my pockets because that is what guys did…and the guys certainly reminded me often that I *was not like them* Of course, this also had the affect of making me very self-focused and self-centered…and as we will discuss later, self-focus is one of the most depraved places of existence known to man in my opinion. So how did I learn to change what I thought about myself? How did I change my identity?

When I gave my heart and mind and body to Christ, I decided I had played God long enough in my life. In other words, I decided *He is God…and I am not*! My decision was based on my own track record of failure. I had tried to overcome homosexuality by myself. Failure. I had tried to embrace my homosexual identity and find peace. I was miserable. I had tried to hide from everyone and effectively cut off life from everyone I craved relationship with. When I finally came to the realization of what I was doing to myself my only recourse was to simply let God be the Potter and I would become his

clay. This sounds funny but it began to dawn on me that I had been going to the wrong places for help all along. If we have a problem with our computer we don't take it to the local ice cream shop for repair, do we? We don't look in *Outdoor Life* for technical support, do we? No! When we have a problem with our computers we go to the manual or to the manufacturer. With my own life, I decided to go to my Manufacturer/Maker (God!) and His Manual (Bible!). I would no longer listen to my own warped way of thinking (*stinkin' thinkin'* as one of my mentor's, Jack Taylor calls it!). I would no longer rely on my gay friends to give me advice since I discerned they were no more stable than I. I decided I would throw out everything I thought I knew about God…and I would go directly to Him!

If He is God and I am not, then I would allow Him to tell me who He says I am…and I would *be* who He says I am…in spite of my past…in spite of temptations…in spite of feelings or circumstances. I had put the wrong information into my mind for so many years, I reasoned it might take years to reprogram my way of thinking. And I was right. But knowing Christ intimately has truly been worth every struggle I have had to face. There is a story in the Bible of a man named Lazarus. Lazarus was a friend of Jesus, but he died one day. Jesus had not been there to raise him up…and he laid in the grave for 3 days before Jesus could get there. When the Lord arrived, he called Lazarus to life. Lazarus walked out fully alive…but not fully free. How do I know this? Because the Word tells us that Jesus told those around Lazarus to 'loose the graveclothes' from him. I imagine Lazarus walked out wrapped in the cloth wrappings much like a mummy. Baby steps. Arms and legs bound. Alive but not completely free. That sounds so much like the way I felt when I was first set free!

For over 25 years now, I have been simply trying to walk towards the sound of Jesus' voice. In the process, He has been unraveling the clothes of my former life revealing my true identity! "Dennis, you do not look good clothed in that self-centeredness. Let's rip that away (a hand goes free). See what's exposed there in your heart? That's selflessness and compassion for the needs of others. That is the seed I planted in you at the beginning. That is who you truly are. *Be that*." Honestly, that is how I have tried to live my life. I have had people from my past tell me I will be back or that I was never truly gay (I love that one…if I were making up a testimony it would have been

much more dramatic than the one I actually lived!) or they tell me I was brainwashed. The latter being much more accurate! In many ways I really have had my brain washed. As I have allowed the Lord to show me the lies I have believed about myself, He has graciously helped me put them off and so lovingly and patiently helped me put on the right way of thinking where my true identity is concerned!

Listen to "All I Used to Be" to end this session

Questions for Meditation

•What are my earliest thoughts concerning my identity?

•Would I be willing to allow God to show me who He says I am?

•Would I be willing to allow him to expose the lies and then be willing to put on the truth of who He says I am…in spite of my past, my temptations, my feelings, or my circumstances?

•What are some of the lies I already know I believe?

•What are some of the identity issues I would like to see God settle in my mind?

"…Even in Their Sleep…"

As you sleep tonight, anticipate all God desires to do as He leads you to discovery of your true identity!

DJ's Thought for the Day

Self-focus is one of the most depraved places of existence known to man…

The Maze of Self-focus

Listen to the song "It's All About You"

One of the greatest enemies of freedom I have ever faced – one of the hugest giants – is one I call *self-focus*. One could interchange the word self-focus with the word self-centered and the meaning is quite the same. According to *Encarta World English Dictionary* the word self-centered means *tending to concentrate selfishly on your own needs and affairs and to show little or no interest in those of others*. I choose to use the word self-focus simply because the word focus gives a connotation in my mind of where my thoughts and eyes tend to be directed. When we tell a young boy who is trying to learn to hit a baseball to *focus* on the ball, we are literally telling him to place all his attention and effort on one small point of reference…as if all the importance of the universe was focused there. What do we say? "Keep your eye on the ball."

When playing sports or performing brain surgery, staying focused is of utmost importance. As I have sought to seek God for more and more freedom, focus is of vital importance. Where I tend to get off track is when I focus in the wrong place – or when I give all my focus to my own needs without regard to the needs of others around me. Self-focus can be beneficial, but it *must* be seasoned with proper use.

For so many years I was so very intent on discovering the roots of where my homosexuality developed that I often became unaware that the world did not actually revolve around me at all times. I suppose that when one experiences deep and abiding pain and rejection, habitual self-focus becomes a safety mechanism. "I hurt. I cannot let you get close to me or I will be hurt again. What's wrong with me? How can someone else understand how I feel? You don't love me. I hurt…" and here we go again. After a few years of going through that cycle again and again, it finally dawned on me that I had become so self-focused that I had actually cut off any help that may have been offered! I felt like a rat trapped in a maze…I knew the cheese (freedom and acceptance) was out there, I was just too hurt and afraid to go down certain paths for fear of being rejected all over again.

Have you ever seen a young child shopping with a harried young mother and watched that child beg for a certain toy only to be told 'no' by the mom? The ensuing

tantrum, if not dealt with, brings about utter frustration for the mother…and a lack of discipline for the child, which in turn creates an enabling moment that actually encourages the wrong behavior in the child. The child is only acting as a child: selfish and immature – it's all about *me* in the mind of that child. As the mother learns to address the issue in love and firmly teaches the child that 'no means no' that child will eventually learn to control himself…or face the consequences! To be self-focused is to lack self-control. That sounds so contradictory but it is actually true. When I act in immature and selfish ways, totally focusing on *me* and *my* desires, I actually weaken my ability to make wise choices. Wisdom comes from knowing that my Maker knows better than me!

Let me also add here that self-focus is not categorically a bad thing. When one is experiencing pain in their physical body it is wise to become self-focused and tend to that pain. When one experiences emotional wounding and pain it is wise to attend to that pain and determine the root cause. Healing comes as we face our pain. Healing comes as we apply the proper salve to the wound, but healing does not come if all we ever do is focus on the wound and never take the appropriate steps that healing and freedom require. This is what I mean when I am discussing the trap of improper self-focus.

When I was five and was approached sexually I began to think about why that man had approached me, asking myself, 'What's wrong with me that would make that man do such a thing?' When I didn't get what I wanted for Christmas (I wanted an Elton John record. My parents bought me a country record by Faron Young!), I felt rejected and unloved. When I heard grown men describe what they thought should be done to a homosexual (I was about 9), all I could think about was protecting myself and hiding my own struggles all the more. When my grandmother died I felt abandoned and wondered why God didn't love me. There were many times when other guys would tease me about certain effeminate mannerisms they saw in me. Whenever this would occur, I secretly self-examined every thought, action, and mannerism to the point of driving myself crazy. I was quickly becoming an *over-thinker*…one who thinks so much about themselves and what everyone else is thinking that they miss most of life. Over-thinking is a sign of self-focus.

Even though many of the hurts of my life were born out of victimization, I carried the resulting self-examination and scrutiny to the brink of insanity. From the time I was a

young boy through my college years I would never place my hands in my pockets as most men do. I reasoned that others might think I am simply compensating to try and fool everyone into thinking I am straight. How convoluted and inane is that!? By the time I graduated from college, I could not walk out the front door without wondering what people were thinking of me. If I passed the mailman, I made sure I was walking in a masculine way. If a waiter provided poor service during a meal, I assumed it was because of me…somehow. If I didn't know the answer to a question, I felt hot all over because I thought somehow my performance in life was being gauged and judged by every single person I ever came in contact with! What a miserable life! A famous quote sums up the futility of such a life. *"You probably wouldn't worry about what people think of you if you could know how seldom they do."* (Olin Miller). "God's Word says it like this in Romans 1:21: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified [him] not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their *imaginations*, and their foolish heart was darkened."

Another way in which self-focus can become a detriment to our lives is in the way we choose to use our intellect. In our "modern" world, conventional wisdom says there is no God…that man is the highest being in the universe. If man is the highest being then man's logic and ability to reason become supreme. The only problem with that is that a man who thinks this way has set himself up as god…and, whether he believes it possible or not, a god who will eventually fall far short in his ability to adequately alter his own mortality. I was valedictorian of my senior class in high school (from a class of 12) and did very well in my studies at OBU. There came a point in my life where I, due to the many circumstances of my struggles, felt I needed to be in control…and if I was truly in control of my own life then what I thought was best for me was *what was best*. God had failed me as far as I was concerned.

This way of thinking all came to a head for me the day I realized my attitude of 'Dennis knows best' had failed me miserably. Everything I reasoned to be *truth* left me very disillusioned. My truth? This is who I am (but I was more miserable than ever). My truth? Everything wrong with my life is the fault of others who have mistreated me (I had still not accepted responsibility for my own choices through the years). I had learned to blame even my wrong choices on the actions of others! My intellectual choices may have

seemed wise to me in the moment I made them, but the reality was simply that I was doing what *felt* best in the moment. I was like that mother who lets the tantrum-throwing child have his way…and I was doing that to myself…I was at the same time behaving like that spoiled child who only wants what *he* wants! I had also become disillusioned by those in the gay community who told me they loved me and cared about me only to be cast aside once they had used me sufficiently for *their* own selfish purposes. I had become so focused on me, me, me that I also became an emotional burden to those around me. Many of my friends had grown so tired of my emotional complaints and whining that they stopped coming around. Once I became tired enough of this cycle (maze) of intense self-focus, I came to some hard but right-thinking decisions about my own life.

Number one? Either God was God or He was not. I decided I would believe Him and His Word…and that I would trust Him even if I didn't fully understand His ways. Next, I decided that if He was my Maker then it was He who gave me my intellect…so I decided to give *that* back to Him as well. Once I had reached those points of decision, I was able to believe and receive what God Word had to say on the subject. Isaiah 55:9 says, "For [as] the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." When I decided to believe that His thoughts and ways are much higher than mine, a huge burden began to lift from my life. Once I decided to let Him be God (and me *not*) I freed Him to love me, to lead me, and to empower me to be free from wrong thinking and self-focus.

When I stood back from my own pain and gave it an honest look, I realized that, yes, I had been victimized in many ways…but I quickly realized as well that God did not want me to live as a victim, but as a *victor*. What this meant to me was that in order to be free of that victim mentality I would need to address the root causes of the pain I had endured and the poor choices I had made. Same-sex attraction is born out of a very real need for a nurturing connection between same-sex parents. God had made me heterosexual, but my need for male affirmation and bonding had not been met for some reason (due in large part to my wrong perceptions of reality which creative people often battle their entire lives). As I grew, physically I had not grown emotionally, mentally, or spiritually as a man…so, in a sense, I was still that little child with real needs who had

learned to throw emotional tantrums to get what he wanted…and since what I wanted was what felt best I had missed the reality of what was actually the *tangible best* in my life.

Instead of focusing on what I did not have I began to re-focus on what I truly needed. Since I had never recognized myself as a masculine being and had missed out on true male bonding and identification, I began to seek out godly masculine role models who could teach me how to think, act, and reason like a man. Soon I found myself *feeling* masculine feelings I had never experienced before…and I *liked* it! Since I had never fully accepted the musical and emotional gifts I had been born with as gifts from God (even though I studied music in college I had assumed I knew what other men thought of guys like me), I began to see that God could re-focus my gifts in a masculine and holy way – towards Him and others! Because I had become so blinded for so long by my own hurts and needs I had neglected to realize that everyone around me had wounds and needs in their own lives…and maybe, just maybe, I could find ways to meet *their* needs! I discovered that I was growing up in many ways. Having been so afraid to face my own responsibility for the choices I had made through the years had actually kept me in a 'little boy' mentality for far too long…and now, finally, 1 Corinthians 13:11-12 began to make sense. "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known."

As I began to look outward, my heart began to break to the needs of others. As I sought to meet the needs of others, my own needs began to be met in those same moments of ministry to others. I had had such a deep desire to be known and to be accepted for so many years and had sought to meet that need in unnatural and unholy ways. When I began to seek out godly relationships with others based not on what I could gain from them but based on what I could do to minister to their needs I discovered a level of being known that I thought unattainable in this life. I was becoming the man I had always wanted to be…and all it took was that first step of honesty where I admitted *it's not about me*.

We are not placed in this world for our own pleasure. We were created for the pleasure of God and to be vessels of His love and grace to this world. Ephesians 2:10 says, *"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."* God ordained - intended and designed – our very existence. When I decided to live my life according to that existence I discovered that the world was so much bigger and more beautiful than my small, feeble point of self-focus! Before I made this discovery, my life was lived as if I was in a small lifeboat set adrift on the sea. All I could do was hide in that self-contained small world and hope for the best. Little did I know that there was a magnificent world both below and above the surface of the ocean that awaited my moment of outward focus.

Do I still tend to over-think? Sometimes. Do I still battle moments of vain imagination? Occasionally. Do I still have times of behaving like that tantrum-throwing spoiled child? Every once in a while. But I have learned that if I am to be happy and live a life of joyful abundance (regardless of my circumstances), I need to live my life focused on praising my God and ministering to the needs of others around me. My focus is more outward these days. I focus on my pain and circumstances only long enough to correct the problem. In the process I have learned it is possible to have my needs met while focusing on the God Who meets my needs…and by extending the grace He has given me to those around me. *"Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,* ***looking unto Jesus****, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."* Hebrews 12:1-2 NKJV

The bottom line is this: I was created for God's good pleasure. My desire is to be like Christ. What was He like? The Apostle Paul wrote, *"[Let] nothing [be done] through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind* ***let each esteem other better than themselves****. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and* ***took upon him the form of a servant****..."* Philippians 2:4-7. Jesus came to set the captive

free. I cannot do that as long as I have my own mind held captive to self-focus. “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” Luke 19:10.

Listen to “It’s All About You”

Questions for Meditation

•What thoughts most consume my mind?

•What is the main focus of these thoughts?

•Do you battle imagining what others are thinking of you?

•What will it take to get to the roots of your pain?

•Would you be willing to take the proper steps out of that pain?

•What are the needs of those around you?

•What are some creative steps you could take to meet some of those needs?

•What are some ways to re-focus your thoughts toward God?

“…Even in Their Sleep…”

As you prepare for sleep tonight, direct your thoughts toward God and the needs of others.

DJ’s Thought for the Day

When I act in immature and selfish ways, totally focusing on *me* and *my* desires, I actually weaken my ability to make wise choices. Wisdom comes from knowing that my Maker knows better than me!

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Who is God?

Listen to "I Stand Amazed"

In coming to understand my true identity in Christ, I have had to put off some very deeply engrained ways of thinking about myself. And I've also had to put off some wrong thinking about Who God is. In finding out who I am called to be, I must learn about the One I am called to be *like*. What compelled me to keep on going in the journey of transformation? Simply God's unabashed love for me. Bottom line: I do not have to perform for His love - ever again (Ephesians 1:6)! Who I am – who I am becoming – is based *not* on my own strength but, rather, on the foundation of *Who God is*. That is the best place on which to begin rebuilding my identity. So, just Who is God?

The sheer awesomeness of God goes far beyond our feeble human comprehension. We must establish in our minds before we go any further, that God is God and we are not! No matter how much progress mankind makes in technology, the sciences, or the arts, God is still God. Who is the Giver of Creativity? God. Who is the Inventor of Ideas? God. Whose thoughts are higher than our thoughts? God's. Whose ways are higher than our ways? God's. We were the lost sheep. He is the Shepherd who found us. We were the condemned souls. He is the Savior Who made a way when we could not save ourselves. We were the captives left powerless over our sins. He is the Victor whose Spirit empowers us to be overcomers. We were the children abandoned by the empty promises of this world. He is the Father who graciously takes us in when no one else will have us. We are the ones in need. He is the Need-Meeter who sets us free to become vessels of His glory whom He chooses to use to bring other lost and hurting children into His arms.

Why so many pictures - so many names - for the same God? Because, again, we are human and He is God. Whether we like it or not, there are no analogies which truly and adequately describe the real depth of His character. But the beauty of Who He is is that He gives us many different ways of seeing who He is. He is God the Father Creator. He is Jesus the Son, the Savior. He is Holy Spirit, the Teacher Who Comforts. He has always been. He will always be. And He is here right now! Father-Jesus-Holy Spirit has given us spirits (our core identity) with which we find ultimate communion with Him. He

has given us a soul (our mind, will, and emotions) with which to sense His presence. We can think His thoughts and explore His mind. We can choose to know Him (remember, He does not force us to love Him), and He has given us emotions so we might be able to feel what He feels. He has given us our physical bodies with which to carry out the work of ministry here on earth and also as a means of expressing the depths of our spirits and souls in a tangible way. God created all of our components and made them to work together to enhance our fellowship - our intimacy - with Him.

Because of the nature of my testimony (freedom from homosexuality), I often hear pro-gay propaganda which says, "The God of the Old Testament may have spoken against homosexuality, but Jesus, in the New Covenant, never did." For this reason and because I believe it is important for every believer to know, I love to begin any discussion on the nature and character of God with this basic truth: Jesus Himself said, "I and the Father are one." (John 10:30; John 14:7). When we speak of God the Father, we are also speaking of God the Son. When we speak of God the Son, we are also speaking of God the Spirit. They are all one and the same (John 16:5-15). Not only does Jesus declare that He, the Father, and the Spirit are one, He also declares that His desire is that we be one with Him and with one another (John 17:21)! This is the ultimate communion with God! Us in Him and He in us! What great joy we should all walk in knowing that this communion does not have to wait for some future culmination. It can begin right now! Are you ready?

I think we need to be reminded often of Who He is and what He is like. In so doing, we understand not only more about Who He is in us, but who we truly are in Him I will not attempt any exhaustive study on the subject of God's character (what He is like). I simply want to refresh our memories as to how awesome He is. Think about it. He is Holy and to be feared, yet loving and approachable. He is mighty and terrible in vengeance, yet tender and gentle in His care for us. He is wild as a Lion in His passion, yet tame as a Lamb. He is the King Who is a Servant to His subjects. He is greater than our imaginations can conceive, yet knowable in this moment. He is God. Who can know His depths? Like the iceberg which only reveals a portion of its nature above the water line yet hides its vast bulk beneath the waves, there is so much more to God than we have ever seen or imagined (Isaiah 55:8-9). Who does God say He is?

He is Jehovah (I Am Who I Am; Self-existent: Exodus 3:14). When I was a boy struggling with same-sex attractions I had an innocent awe of the *bigness* of God. I lost that awe the day I heard men I respected describe what should be done to a homosexual (like me). As a result, I had a warped sense of Who God is. The love of God changed everything. Jehovah is the God Who was and is and always will be - and He lives in us! Remember, Jesus said that He and the Father are one and that He would send us the Holy Spirit. This is part of our heritage, being His children, created in His image, redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, filled with the power of the Holy Spirit to be conduits of God's love and blessing to others. This name, Jehovah, when coupled with other descriptive names of God, reveal His true nature. As endless as He is, so are the names we could use to describe Him. For brevity's sake, we will use just a few of the names God calls Himself in Scripture.

He is Jehovah Tsidkenu (I Am: Righteous; Life; Redemption: Jeremiah 23:5-6). This is the God who revealed Himself to us in righteousness, Who is our life-giver, and the One Who redeems. Jesus was revealed to be our righteousness in 2 Corinthians 5:21:

"For He hath made Him (Jesus) to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

As a boy, I had needed someone to redeem me…to make a way out of my hopeless situation. I never remember feeling *righteous* or *good enough*…and in fact, I was not righteous or good. I needed Someone who knew no sin to show me the way to righteousness. Jesus came as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He came as Redeemer, making a way for us to be restored to God.

He is Jehovah Rohi (I Am Shepherd; Guide; Protector; Exhorter: Psalm 23). When I was struggling with my sexual identity in high school I honestly felt like I was out of control. It was as if I could not help myself when it came to sexual temptation. There was no one to guide me…no one to protect me…no one to bind up my wounds. I needed a shepherd because I had become one wayward, lost little sheep. We were all like sheep, gone astray (Isaiah 53). God painted this picture beautifully for us through Jesus as He gave Himself for us, the sacrificial Lamb who washed away the sins of the world

(John 10:11). This same Lamb is also our Shepherd who leads us through the valley of the shadow of death…the same One who leads us to refreshing green pastures and cool, clear refreshing waters…the same One who binds up the wounds of His sheep…as we let Him.

He is Jehovah Rophe (I Am Healer; Health; Healing; Physician: Exodus 15:26). Many times throughout Scripture, Father came as Healer. Nothing changed with the advent of Jesus. Nothing has changed today. Healer is Who He is (Acts 3:6)! I had become so wounded in my life that I would never let anyone close enough to even try to bring a measure of healing to me. I had been deeply hurt…and hurt people hurt people. I remember as a boy when a car had hit my precious dog Tillie. She immediately hid herself away so as to avoid further injury. I went to try and comfort her…and she bit me! This was the dog who only a few minutes before had been lavishing in my outstretched arms. Because she had been gravely wounded she would not let me near her. As I look back I realize I had become so much like Tillie. It took the adamant love of Christ to bring me to the place of healing…and that is Who He is!

He is Jehovah Nissi (I Am Banner; Victory; Flag; Covering: Ex. 17:15) Aaron and Hur lifted the hands of Moses as a banner over the battle with God's enemies, just as He instructed Moses to lift the brass serpent in the wilderness as a sign of healing and a foreshadowing of the crucifixion, Jesus was lifted up as our banner oself to be Provider to that multitude on the hillside there by the Sea of Galilee (John 6:1-14)? Christ was lifted up as a flag of victory. Just as the flag was raised over Iwo Jima in WWII, Christ was raised up as Victor over sin, death, and the grave forever sealing my identity as a new creation. His victory upon the cross paid the debt we owed for our sins (John 12:32)! When it came to my same-sex struggles as a young man, I felt powerless and defeated most of the time. I talked a good talk and played all the outward games to prove myself worthy, but inside I felt utterly impotent over temptation and sin. Victory began to invade my life as I allowed Him to *be my Victory*!

He is Jehovah Jireh (I Am Provider; Provision; Source; Sufficiency: Genesis 22:14) How can we forget the countless times God provided for His children in the wilderness? In college I felt so devoid of hope – bankrupt in spirit. Nothing was being done to feed my true identity and sin was seeing to it that my life was being sucked out

by utter self-focus and self-reliance. It was not until I gave up to God that I was able to let go of the junk I was clinging to and trust Him to meet the deep emotional needs of my soul. He made a way through the darkness and provided sustaining life every step of the way!

He is Jehovah Shalom (I Am Peace; Comfort; Security: Judges 6:24). Who can truly know security and peace apart from the Lord? Can human invention and wealth bring lasting peace? Even as a young boy my life was anything but peaceful. I was too busy playing too many games to keep people from seeing the real me! Peace cannot come in the midst of a mind that is tossed around like a rowboat in the middle of a stormy ocean! I never really understood peace until I was bathed in the peace-bringing love of God. We can all know His peace now if we will accept Him for Who He truly is (Philippians 4:6-7).

He is Jehovah Shammah (I Am Omnipresent; God Is There; Friend; Faithfulness; Strength: Ezekiel 48:35). As the psalmist so eloquently reminds us in Psalm 139, where can we go from His presence? Will He not be able to protect us from the ravages of this life? Can the hands and powerful medicines of the earthly physician truly give us hope and security for the whole of eternity? Who is the One who calmed the raging sea in Scripture? Was it not Jesus? Where can we go that He cannot reach? Just as the Father is always there, Jesus in us is our hope of glory. He will not leave us and He will never forsake us, no matter what (Colossians 1:27; Hebrews 13:5, 8). As I was growing up, I was a loner. Never had any friends – couldn't afford for anyone to get too close. As a result, I was miserable. Even when I gave into my homosexual temptations after college, I came away from every relationship feeling used and cast aside. When God bathed me in His love I finally realized what faithfulness and fidelity felt like…and my heart began to grow in leaps and bounds concerning my *true* identity!

He is Jehovah M'Kaddesh (I Am Holy; I am Sanctified; Sanctity; Light: Leviticus 20:7) We have each, as believers, been set apart, sanctified, for His purposes in and through us. We belong to Him (1 Peter 2:9-10). Jesus alone, through His shed blood, makes us holy. He is the light which reveals not only our way in the darkness but our deep need for Him and His power (1 John 1:7). He is our salvation. He *set me aside for Himself*! I am His and He is mine. When I began to be transformed by the love of Christ I

began to feel clean for the first time. Instinctively I knew I needed to set apart my mind for Him…my emotions for Him…my will for His…my hands, feet, eyes, ears, and even my genitals for Him. Sounds pretty radical, huh? I figured if He had set aside His own life for me, I would do the same for Him…and in so doing began to discover even more of my own identity! Even the parts of my physical body which had formerly been used for sin He had cleansed and had called me to use for a holy purpose. What a transforming concept!

He is El Shaddai (All-Sufficient One, Lord God Almighty: Gen. 17:1). The Hebrew word *El* is often translated as "God" and is used many times in conjunction with other names of God to aid in understanding the amazing depth of His character. The word *Shaddai* means "breast" which is understood to mean "Nourishing, satisfying, and supply just as a mother's breast would meet the needs of her child. In other words, God is the Sustainer of Life.

When I came to the point of falling apart emotionally and mentally concerning my desire to be free from homosexuality, God met me at that very place. My mind was so tired of trying to figure everything out…and He was there with arms to hold me through that time. His care was so patient and tender with a heart that had become so wounded and bitter and afraid. His very presence sustained me through many sleepless nights. Because He is my Sustainer, I have no doubt there is not anything I cannot face because I know He will be there with me sustaining me through whatever comes my way.

Listen to "I Stand Amazed"

Questions for Meditation

•How do I need God to prove Himself as Jehovah to me?

•How do I need God to reveal Himself as my righteousness?

•In what ways do I need this Shepherd to guard over my life?

•In what areas do I need God to be Healer?

•In what areas do I need to see God as my Victor?

•What do I need for the Lord to provide in order for my emotional needs to be met?

•In what areas of my life do I need peace?

•In what areas do I need to know God's friendship and faithfulness?

•What areas of my life and body do I need to set aside for His holy purpose? How will doing so aid in the discovery of who He says I am?

"…Even in Their Sleep…"

Allow the Lord to take you on a journey of discovery concerning who He is. As you fall to sleep, focus on one of the names of God and see where the Spirit takes you!

DJ's Thought for the Day

Who I am is utterly dependent upon Who God is.

Who Am I?

Listen to "All I Used To Be" and "This is My Destiny"

I am His child. That means He is my Father and that I can expect to be loved and nurtured by Him (1 John 3:1)! That truth alone took me light-years ahead of where I ever thought I would be. God has set me free from the old ways of thinking I was unlovable and has revealed to me so many of the things that have kept me from fully realizing my potential for relationship with Him and with others. Do you desire to worship Him - to know Him? I am well on my way as I thank Him for His redeeming love, which in turn, only acts as a springboard into deeper places in His heart. I see my need for Him...and the cycle begins again. Fresh. New. Day by day. Relationship. Worship.

Just as with God, the vast expanse of who He has called us to be as individuals and as unique cells within the body of Christ is beyond our comprehension. I will briefly share some of the obvious observations I have made concerning my own life. Some tell me I have a profound grasp for the obvious - usually when hit over the head with it! As with God, we need to be constantly reminded as to who we truly are in Him. This is how we renew our mind: we put off the old thoughts concerning ourselves and put on thoughts of who He is and who we are called to be. I need Him. I call to Him. He meets me. His light shines upon my heart revealing dust. I confess that dust is there and ask Him to cleanse me and take me higher. I get higher into Him as I thank Him for His redeeming love. Because I am in Him, that is also my heart and my joy as I seek to lead others to know and worship Him.

I am loved. I was worth His life even though I was worthy of death (John 3:16; Romans 5:8). Who can explain God's ways. I was unworthy, yet He purchased me – paid my ransom – by the blood of Jesus (Acts 20:28). If I belong to Him, there is nothing anyone can do to harm me. I may suffer and even die physically, but the true reality is that I belong to Him - signed, sealed, and delivered (Romans 8)!

I am a new creation. Someone brand new (1 Corinthians 5:17). All I used to be was crucified, buried, and left in the grave. Someone brand new rose up with Jesus! Me!

I am royalty, called to rule and reign with Christ (1 Peter 2:9). I need to see my place in this life as one of the highest purpose and calling...as a King who would lay

down his life for his subjects. People need the Lord. I know the way. There is no higher calling than to lead others to know Him.

I am a priest. I no longer have to go through a priest to meet with God. I can now face life knowing with full assurance there is nothing I cannot do through Him and His strength.

I am a warrior. We will stand (Ephesians 6). I've looked ahead to the end of the book. Guess what? We win! Christ has provided us with the armor necessary to face life and with which to do battle with the enemy. What and who I used to be have been transformed, changed. What was bound is now free. With freedom comes the ability to make right choices. What was once bitterness is now forgiveness. What once seemed hopeless is now redeemed! I am a new creation! That is who I am! When I was set free from the old, new flooded in. The things I used to think about myself had to be replaced, though, with the truth of who God said I was. I was worth giving up the riches of heaven for! I was worth His life. He is worth mine! Satan is the father of lies. We need not be overcome by his deceptions. We need not live in fear of 'what if'. We follow the Captain of the hosts, the Commander in Chief, the Lord Jesus Christ who has already won the victory for us!

God delights in me. I believe He takes more delight in me than I could possibly take in Him! He is God! He is able! He thinks of me constantly (Psalm 139). Who I used to be is gone now. I have learned to put off the lies I used to believe about myself and have replaced those lies with the truth. We call this the renewing of the mind. And I do this daily. Some in the gay community have told me I've been brainwashed. I no longer argue with them – because they are right! I have allowed the Lord to cleanse my mind of wrong thinking and replace that wrong thinking with His way of thinking.

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable, unto god, which is your reasonable service (of worship). And be not conformed to this world: but be ye ***transformed*** *by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what [is] that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. Romans 12:1-2 KJV*

Think about where we would be without Him! He who sees he has been forgiven much, loves much (Luke 7:47). As I have sought to make the most of the freedom I have found in Christ, I have come to realize He wants me to know Him – and what makes me want to know Him (and to forsake my sin) is the fact that He sees my weaknesses, frailties, and failures…and loves me anyway! We must store up eternal treasures and see the value in knowing Him. Gratitude is the key to my 'staying' power! It has become one of the constant keys to the successes I have found in life…and one of the keys to that intimacy with Christ I have always craved. When I put on this truth, I was transported into the arms of a Father I always thought before was distant and too busy for me.

I belong to Him. He chose me! I could not pay the debt I owed because of my sin, so He purchased me as if I was the most valuable treasure to be found, giving everything He had and was *for me*. "*He had Dennis in mind, had settled on me as the focus of His love. Long, long ago He decided to adopt me into His family through Jesus Christ. (What pleasure He took in planning this!). He wanted me - Dennis - to enter into the celebration of His lavish gift-giving by the hand of His beloved Son.*

Because of the sacrifice of the Messiah, His blood poured out on the altar of the Cross, I am a free man - free of penalties and punishments chalked up by all my misdeeds. And not just barely free, either. Abundantly free! He thought of everything, provided for everything I could possibly need, letting me in on the plans He took such delight in making. He set it all before me in Christ, a long-range plan in which everything would be brought together and summed up in Him, everything in deepest heaven, everything on planet earth."

It's in Christ that I find out who I am and what I'm living for. Long before I first heard of Christ and got my hopes up, He had His eye on me, had designs on me - Dennis - for glorious living, part of the overall purpose He is working out in everything and everyone.

It's in Christ that I, once I heard the truth and believed it (this Message of my salvation), found myself home free - signed, sealed, and delivered by the Holy Spirit. This signet from God is the first installment on what's coming, a reminder that I'll get everything God has planned for Dennis Jernigan, a praising and glorious life. Ephesians 1:3-14 The Message (Paraphrased by DJ)

I am accepted in the beloved. . I, as a priest, can approach God through my High Priest, Jesus Christ. I now have direct access to God through Christ (1 Peter 2:9; Hebrews 4:14-16)

I am an overcomer (Revelation 12:11). Just as Christ overcame sin, death, and hell for me, I can overcome – soar over – the temptations of life as I learn to walk with Him in intimacy. Because He overcame, I can overcome! I mean, think about it! Here's a guy (me!) who says he used to be homosexual but is no more! What and who I used to be have been transformed, set free…and in the process, changed.

How can we not love Him? He does not need me (Psalm 100:3; Isaiah 64:8) yet He chooses to have fellowship with me! He saw me and wanted me as His own. I believe He looks at me and says, "Look. There's Dennis, my favorite child." But here's the coolest thing about God's love: He is able to think that way about each and every individual. Amazing!

Knowing God is overwhelming at times, yet simple. Believing who He says we are can be just as overwhelming, yet just as simple. Learn to receive His love. Believe it by faith – even if no one else goes along for the ride. My God is magnificent. I am His child. That is indeed amazing.

Listen to "All I Used To Be" and "This is My Destiny"

Questions for Meditation

•What are some changes in your way of thinking you will need to make in order to allow your true identity to be nurtured?

•Go through the area of this chapter that speaks about what your nature is. What would your life look like if you truly believed those things about yourself?

•Dwell as long as needed in this chapter. I've been resting here for over 25 years now…and have only touched the tip of the iceberg!

"…Even in Their Sleep…"

As you prepare to sleep tonight, focus on one aspect of your nature as a new creation and allow Him to reveal more understanding of your identity as you sleep.

DJ's Thought for the Day

I am His child. That means He is my Father and that I can expect to be loved and nurtured by Him.

The Need for Masculine Influence

Listen to "The Measure of a Man"

Even if you are a woman, what I am about to share will go a long way in helping you understand the way a man thinks…and why men need to be around other men (and why women need to be around other women). What I have discovered about my role as a man is that God has given me the role of *Identity Giver* or *Identity Bestower*. What does that mean? Men and women, I believe, have been given specific roles in life and relationship. One of my primary roles in life as a husband, father, and friend is to remind those around me of their true identity (besides all the other roles God has ordained for my life such as protector, provider, and all-around good guy!) The role of my wife is balanced perfectly with my role. She provides nurture and emotional care for our children and me. She requires intimacy even more than I do. She, too, bestows identity, but from a different perspective. Her role is to reinforce the identity I bestow upon my children and others we minister to relationally. I tell my children what it means to be a Jernigan. To be a Jernigan is to be passionate for Christ and compassionate toward others. To be a Jernigan means to be a servant and to always seek to bless others and, in so doing, we bring God glory. I use this illustration a lot: when my girls were younger, they would typically dress up for church or have a make-believe, dress-up session approaching my wife with the question, "How do I look, mom?" She would reply, "You look beautiful!" Then they would come to me, I would respond exactly the way their mother did, "You look beautiful!" While they beamed at their mother's affirmation, something in their eyes told me they absolutely believed it when they heard it from me.

Another way I practice bestowing identity upon my children and others is to remind them of their identity in Christ. The way in which I discipline my children is to address the attitude and not the action. In addressing the attitude I appeal to their identity as a new creation in Christ. "Son, that attitude is not who you are. That is not how a new creation should respond in this situation." Because this is the way I have trained my children, they readily respond by *putting on* the truth of who they really are. Our specific roles as givers of identity make a difference in the way I discipline my boys versus the way I discipline my girls. Boys are wired with a need for honor and respect. Girls are

wired with a need to be cherished and for intimacy. When my boys require discipline, I do not require them to look me in the eye. I allow them to feel the shame caused by their failure and then I lead them through repentance and restore them to honor…and then they freely look me in the eye. That is a man's way. With my girls, I get close to them, look them in the eye and speak with gentle yet firm truth in love and they are restored to intimacy *through* intimacy. It's amazing how well this approach works. I believe it would do us all well to approach godly discipline in our own lives from the understanding of our own genders. Think about it…

Whether we like it or not, men and women each have different roles in life…both needed…both equal in value…both necessary to healthy life and healthy, thriving relationships. When our roles become confused or those roles aren't displayed in the life of a child, very real needs get met, one way or another, much like water rushing downhill. That water will find a way to the sea or it will become stagnant. Either way, it goes somewhere. Just as that water finds a way, unmet needs always get met. Unmet needs tend to get met in unhealthy ways – even in the best of homes. Boys and girls need a mother and they need a father. In our day and age, the role of the father has been dangerously minimized to the detriment of our children.

When I was a young boy of 5 or 6, I already stood on shaky ground concerning my masculine identity. Watching my little brothers vie for my dad's attention and feeling (wrongly so) that he loved them more than me only reinforced the self-impressions I was already forming in my young mind. Of course, as little brothers do, they clamored noisily for dad's attentions – as little children do. Like the squeaky wheel that gets the grease, they got dad's attention. Already feeling that something was wrong with me, any small perception that my dad was rejecting me was blown out of proportion because of my tendency to over-think every situation. One time, my dad was getting ready to feed/hay the cows. This was always fun when we were small because we were allowed to ride on the hydraulic lift where the hay was placed for distribution to the herd. Having not heard my dad call to us, I watched in utter panic as the tractor made its way toward the pasture – with my younger brothers reigning in triumph as they rode on the neatly stacked bales of hay. I began to race after them, screaming to my dad to please 'wait for me'. Jealous of my brothers to be sure, my real reason for such panic was my fear of being rejected and

abandoned by my dad. For years I remembered that episode in exactly those terms. My dad had not rejected me and he had certainly not abandoned me…but that was my very real perception.

Every person, whether male of female, has basic needs for survival. Basically, we need to eat, drink, breathe, and we need to breed to survive as the human race. But our needs extend far beyond those most basic of physical needs. I contend that our truest needs are actually spiritual and emotional. I need to know I was created with a purpose. This gives me hope to continue my journey through life. Hand in hand with this need is the most basic of human needs…the needs to *know* and to *be known*. My term for this concept is intimacy. My freedom has come from me allowing God to look into me…and from Him allowing me to look into Him. As a male, I require this in a masculine sense as well. When I was a boy, I needed for my dad to know me as much as I wanted to know him. I used to beg him to play basketball with me because I knew he loved basketball. On those rare occasions when he wasn't too tired from working so hard to provide for us and he shot baskets with me, I was in heaven…like I had been visited by one from the mythical kingdom of manhood! One of my favorite memories from childhood is the day he saddled up a horse for himself…and one for *me*…and we rode together through our pasture and into the freshly dug depths of our neighbor's new pond. It was as if he had allowed me into a glimpse of his world. Always before I had watched him ride away into that mysterious *beyond* and I was always left wondering what that place was like…that *man* place. That day on horseback he had let me see in…and I felt that masculine connection. I felt like I *knew* my dad.

Listen to "The Measure of a Man"

Questions for Meditation

•What would being known by another man/woman (taking sexuality out of the equation) look like to you?

•What does it mean to *know* someone?

•What would you like others of the same sex to know about you?

•How would this knowledge that someone else knows you and still loves you make you feel?

•How does it make you feel to know that God knows everything about you yet continues to love you unconditionally?

•What would it take for you to love another whether or not you benefited from that knowledge?

•Who are those in your life of the same sex you could benefit from knowing…benefit from their influence?

•In what ways could your influence benefit the lives of others?

"…Even in Their Sleep…"

As you prepare for bed tonight, ask the Holy Spirit to show you positive same-sex role models you currently have that perhaps you had taken for granted.

DJ's Quote For the Day

I need to know I was created with a purpose. This gives me hope to continue my journey through life. Hand in hand with this need is the most basic of human needs…the needs to *know* and to *be known*.

Why We Need One Another

Listen to "Life is Meant For Living"

When I was about 12 years old, I went to my dad with a sexual question…and he became very embarrassed. Talk about an awkward moment! I needed to *know* what a man thought about sexuality. My confusion over sexual identity was only exacerbated by my dad's fear of the subject. This moment was a defining moment for me in my sexual identity. Now shame had been applied to my already weak perception in a very liberal manner. It was in that moment – already feeling utterly different from *real* guys – that my perception of how far short of masculinity I felt was legitimately confirmed. I must add that in my need to know and be known by my dad we have since talked about that moment. When I was 35, I took my father on a road trip with me and I asked him many very deep questions about why he responded to the sexual questions the way he had when I was younger…and why he had never touched me except to discipline me…or why it had taken so many years for him to verbally tell me he loved me. His reply? "My dad had never talked with me about sex – and never told me he loved me. I just didn't know how to tell you." Deep, *deep* healing moment…due to an intimate moment of risking being known and allowing my dad to let me know *him*.

In order for a man to become all he can be in a masculine sense, relationship with other men is required. To grow up without that masculine influence is to be left deficient in our identities. In the animal kingdom we find a very compelling picture of what such a deficiency might look like. We often hear tales of African villages being devastated by rampaging *rogue* elephants. The reason rogue elephants develop is due to the lack of influence from a mature male elephant. Around 2 years of age, male elephants separate from the herd and join bands of male elephants. As a young male joins the herd, his tenure there is bathed in learning what it means to be a mature male elephant. Trouble develops when, for some reason, a young male does not join a herd of males. Without the influence of age and maturity and maleness, that young elephant goes about undisciplined and immature and becomes a lone, *rogue* elephant, commonly running amok simply because he has never been taught to relate in a mature, masculine way. Sound familiar?

If we, as males or females, desire to grow and mature in a healthy manner, *healthy*, proper relationships with those of our own sex are required. If we ever hope to know and be known we must understand that true growth and maturity comes *only* through relationship with others. Growing up used to rejection and used to being used, I developed a deep lack of trust. That lack of trust became a strong roadblock to healthy relationship. As a result, I became very closed and guarded. I tended to suck up life from those I came in contact with simply because I was so starved. *Giving* to that relationship was not on my mind simply because I was so very needy. A great picture of what relationship *should* look like can be found in the physical world. In the land of Israel there are 2 major inland bodies of water. In the north is the *Sea of Galilee*, a living, thriving body of fresh water that sustains life for those who come in contact with it. This water comes from runoff from the surrounding hills and mountains. This water that runs *into* the Sea of Galilee also runs *out* of the Sea of Galilee. This water then makes its way southward via the Jordan River all the way to the *Dead Sea*. The same water that gives life in the Sea of Galilee becomes saturated with minerals and salts at the lowest point on earth. Same water. Absolutely no life. Why?

Simply put, the Sea of Galilee both *receives* life and *gives* life. The Dead Sea, on the other, fully *receives* life…but gives nothing back. As a result, having no outlet, that water becomes a place of death and stagnation rather than life and sustenance. Which way do you suppose is the best way to live our lives as men or women? I learned a long time ago that for me to live a full and abundant life I *must both receive and give life*. As a man, I need masculine relationship to have the greatest potential for that full life. Just as with the young male elephant, I need healthy male relationship to mature to my highest potential as a male. To miss out on such relationship or to have the wrong perceptions of a male relationship causes me to have wrong perceptions of my identity and, as a result, I develop *unhealthy* self-perceptions concerning my masculine identity. We need same-sex relationships…we just need them to be lived out in the way God intended. One other aspect of relationship with other men is simply giving one another a safe place to unload or detox our minds. I have one friend I can say anything to. He doesn't always try to fix me. He simply allows me to vent…and in so doing, keeps my mind flowing like the Sea of Galilee…and protects the world from my Dead Sea moments!

When I was first set free, I was scared to death to approach other men relationally. Still too afraid of rejection, it took me about 7 years to realize I still had great need to understand what healthy male-male relationship looked like. Until I developed those relationships I remained stunted in my growth…and that became old and stale very quickly. What did I do? I decided I would pursue other men in a godly fashion and learn *how* to relate to them. I intentionally pursued men who had never struggled with same-sex attractions. My growth rate shot up exponentially to the degree I sought out these relationships. At first it was awkward for both parties since, in those days, this was uncharted territory! But we worked through it. What helped me so much (even when other men did not pursue me for relationship) was that I realized one day that if I desired healthy friendships, I would need to *be* a healthy friend!

From the beginning of this process I placed boundaries upon myself. My masculine relationships needed to be based on godly pursuits. In the process I began to learn how to relate to men on a mental level…an emotional level…and a spiritual level. In the process, both parties began to realize our deep need for one another. As relationships developed I realized in deeply moving ways how my sexual needs had not been the primary needs of my masculine nature. My most basic genuine needs were for branding my mind with what it means to be a man. Little boys are naturally aggressive. That aggression needs to be channeled toward godly pursuits. Little boys are adventurous and creative. Those attitudes need to be directed toward godly endeavors. Little boys are in need of honor. The pursuit of honorable things should be placed in a godly perspective. In building relationships with like-minded men I discovered an ocean of identity and subsequent health I had only dreamed of.

Part of my identity as a man is that of *pursuer*. My natural tendencies as a boy were to pursue adventure and creativity. Even playing war games and pretending great battles are all born out of a man's nature. As a man matures sexually, that God-given desire to pursue becomes directed toward the opposite sex if nurtured and perceived properly. Even if we get sidetracked with homosexuality in our early years we can learn to pursue the opposite sex in a healthy sexual manner. Take it from me – a father of 9 – change is possible in even this area! That being said, we are not all called to be married…but we are all called to be holy.

To have an attitude of being a pursuer is actually the most godly of traits. I used to become very depressed if I felt that my godly male friends were not pursuing me…especially when freedom was brand new to me. Through the course of time and healing I have learned to simply communicate to my male friends my need for interaction with them. Many are the seasons when I am not actively pursued. In those times I tend to allow old feelings to rise that aren't actually part of my true masculine, redeemed nature. During those times I remind myself of the simple truth of the golden rule: treat others as I desire to be treated. In other words, to have a friend, *be* a friend. To pursue good masculine relationship is to have the heart of God. When man sinned and turned his back on his Creator, Who made a way for man to be redeemed? Who pursued us? Who came after us with a heart that communicated such worth that said, "I want Dennis Jernigan for My own. I will give everything I have and everything I am to purchase Him"...? I have learned so much about what it means to be a man by simply learning to pursue what I see my God pursue. After all, His number one priority was in restoring me to a *right relationship* with Him!

Bottom line? We need to be fathered as young boys. Fathering is a lifetime need. Just because I grow older does not mean I don't need other men. My earthly role may change. I'm no longer the little boy. I am now the father – and someday will be the grandfather. My role and greatest joy will be in bestowing identity on my grandchildren just as I have done for my sons and daughters…but I will always be *the* Father's boy…and to be the best husband, father, and friend I can be I must daily rest in being *His* son.

Boys need godly masculine role models (and girls need godly feminine role models). I missed out on learning what it means to be masculine as a child…but God has faithfully helped me *catch up*. My spiritual, mental, emotional, and even physical health are dependent on my pursuit of healthy same-sex relationships…and guess what? All other relationships benefit as a result. As I become more and more whole in my masculinity, my wife benefits. As I become more and more whole in my ability to understand my maleness, my sons and daughters benefit. As I become more and more sure of who I am as a man, my friendships take on a whole new health and strength. As I simply discover who my Father says I am and walk in that truth, the old things that used

to define me slip away and are replaced by new definers of *me*. I am who my Father says I am…and He calls that good!

Listen to "Life is Meant For Living"

Questions For Meditation

•What are the unhealthy relationships I am currently in?

•What can you do to bring health to those relationships?

•Would you be willing to cut off unhealthy relationships and begin pursuing healthy ones?

•What are the boundaries that must be in place for healthy same-sex relationships to thrive?

•Are there any godly men/women you feel led to seek a healthy relationship with?

•Would you be willing to allow God to open the doors to a proper relationship?

•Would you be willing to learn a whole new way of thinking concerning your masculinity/femininity?

"…Even in Their Sleep…"

Allow the Lord to show you ways to bless others you are in relationship with…and be willing to receive nothing in return except the satisfaction of knowing *who you really are*.

DJ's Quote of the Day

In order for a man to become all he can be in a masculine sense, relationship with other men is required.

How to NOT Lose Heart

Listen to "Devastated By Your Love"

If you have gotten through to this point of the book I would imagine you are facing circumstances that you have faced for quite some time now…and the resultant continuous bombardment from the enemy has left you feeling exhausted and near burnout. You are about to lose heart. From time to time we all face such moments. My belief is that we've strayed so far away from what the church is really supposed to look like and we have lost our kingdom focus, which has left us out of focus and operating in our own strength. If we are striving to fit God and His kingdom into a box where He will not fit, losing heart is inevitable. Sometimes we face burnout due to our calling. Sometimes we face burnout due to others letting us down. Sometimes we face burnout by simply losing sight of the goal due to all of the above!

Some of you have been so wounded by the circumstances of life that you cannot begin to understand how a God of supposed great love could allow such painful things. The end result is that a once powerful heart for ministry has been irreparably (in your eyes) damaged beyond repair. Time will tell a different story. We say we want to be like Jesus…but we don't want to suffer…or feel betrayed…or be cast aside…or be wounded by those we have laid our lives down for…yet that is what we must be willing to face if we are to ever understand the nature of Christ. We want to be like Him – and He was betrayed by those He came to bless.

In my spirit I know that some of you reading this have been very faithful to lay down your lives for the sake of Christ and others in your local bodies…bodies that were once vibrant and Spirit-led in worship and ministry…but due to current trends in the church the Holy Spirit has been sort of relegated to the back-room of ministry while new programs have been ushered in to take His place. We should always welcome change…just not at the cost of losing the power of God.

Some of you (just as I was) were betrayed in a sexual manner by someone you trusted…and the resulting damage has left you feeling broken beyond repair. Some of you have tried again and again to overcome the ensuing feelings of hopelessness due to your own failures. Many of you have even been in places of ministry and have seen some

success but due to guilt and shame have felt like you have been operating under the old adage ‘fake it ‘til you make it’…and that just doesn’t always work the way we want. You may even find yourself constantly mad at those who have hurt you…or angry with yourself because of your consistent failure.

Some of you have been faithful to minister in your local bodies and have been successful for years…but time has caught up with you and you along with your years of wisdom have been pushed out to pasture while younger ministers (with very little life-learned wisdom under their belts) have been ushered in to take your place…and you feel betrayed, unnecessary, and cast aside. We should be training up the next generation from within the body. Just not at the cost of losing decades of godly wisdom.

The very ones you have laid your life down for have betrayed some of you. For others of you, that time spent in ministering to the needs of others represents decades of investment. You have given and given and given, never expecting anything in return. Yet, you watch as others have stepped in to take credit for things you have spent years building. As the body we should always honor those to whom honor is due. Gratitude should be the attitude of every believer because gratitude sometimes saves the lives of those who minister (think about it) and because gratitude is a *kingdom* attitude. *"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."* (Matthew 6:33-34 NASB)

Joseph was betrayed by his own brothers. He was sold into slavery and became a trusted member of Potiphar’s staff…only to be betrayed once again and thrown into prison! Finally getting out (by the power of the Holy Spirit!), he was placed in a strategic position in which God allowed him to save a nation! Instead of becoming bitter, he was able to see *the big picture* (the kingdom picture) and God received all the glory! In fact, when Joseph’s betraying brothers came to him seeking forgiveness, Joseph replied with such grace and vision that an entire nation was preserved. *Then his brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? "As for you, you meant evil against me, {but}* ***God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve***

many people alive. *"So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.* (Genesis 50:18-21 NASB)

If anyone had a right to feel bitter and to lose heart it was Joseph! Yet he responded in grace and forgiveness! I believe the reason for Joseph's wisdom can be found in the writings of the apostle Paul. I'll keep this brief (this is what Jack shared with me and it has helped get me through a recent episode of losing heart). 2 Corinthians 3 reminds us that the glory of God cannot fade away – or burnout! Verse 17-18 says, *Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, {there} is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.* Could it be that God really is in control and could it be that He is using the very things that bring pain to transform us into the likeness of Christ? Could it be that He does not desire that we stay in the same place our entire life and could it be that He uses those same hurtful circumstances to nudge us toward a new level of glory? I believe that if I walk in the power of the Holy Spirit that my ministry cannot possibly *burnout* because *He* cannot burnout…and the result of walking in the power of the Holy Spirit takes us to new levels of maturity and glory in Christ.

The keys to not losing heart? Our ministry as new creations is given of God. If it is from God we know that it is a *good* gift. 2 Corinthians 4:1 says, *Therefore, since* ***we have this ministry****, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart…* He has given us His power and called us to be ministers in this life…and He calls it a *treasure*. 2 Corinthians 4:7-10 NASB says, *But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of* ***the power will be of God and not from ourselves****; {we are} afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body*. His glory cannot fade. He and His glory live in us and this is a priceless treasure…but the real key to never losing heart is this: we must not stare and glare at our circumstances…we must only glance at them. We must focus like a laser on what God focuses on…the big picture…His kingdom…what is eternal!

Therefore ***we do not lose heart****, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while* ***we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen****; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.* (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

How to not lose heart? Don't glare at the circumstances or the betrayals or the disappointments. Remember Who and Whose glory lives in you. Remember you have a ministry from God and it is a treasure. And most of all, ask the Lord to give you the eternal perspective He has and maybe, just maybe, we can get a better understanding of just what made Joseph forgive…a better understanding of how Jesus could say this from the cross: *"Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."* (Luke 23:34 NASB). Do you think maybe He saw the big picture of salvation coming down through the ages? You already know the answer. Let's live in that eternal perspective right now. I think your heart will be emboldened as you do. I know mine has been!

How do we respond as Christ on the cross who forgave His very executioners? How do we react as Joseph who obviously forgave his own brothers who had sold him into slavery? If we really do want to learn to see *the big picture*, we must follow a simple commandment. "You shall love the Lord your God…love your neighbor as you love yourself." Loving God is obvious. He first loved us and laid down His life for us. But we cannot truly love others until we learn to love ourselves. What does that mean? Place the same value on our identity as an individual as God does. We cannot constantly put ourselves down and expect to get the results of attitude God desires for us to walk in! If the Lord says we are valuable, that is what we should proclaim. When we believe that about ourselves, we will value others in a righteous and holy way. When we truly love as Christ loves we will then be more ready to forgive those who hurt us. Remember, unforgiveness does not hurt those we are angry with. It only keeps us in bondage. To release someone from the anger of our own hurts is to find freedom for our souls…and the flow of love does not stop! Here's the bottom line: we cannot change the past…but we can determine how we will respond to it. I choose to forgive and *go on* with my life. I cannot keep someone else from hurting me unless I live my life devoid of relationship…which is futile because life without relationship is simply *death*.

Forgive. Move on. Love. Relate. Seek truth. Don't settle for anything less than God's best. Hurt will always come until the day we are with God in heaven. Our plan as relational beings should be to do whatever is best to keep relationships alive and well…and when hurt comes, we put on forgiveness and move on to ever-deepening relationships as the Lord leads. This really is life. And this life is more abundant than we realize now…and is really worth everything we go through to attain. Lose heart? How can we. We are Kingdom people who have learned to look at life from a different perspective…the *big picture*!

Listen to "Devastated By Your Love"

Questions for Meditation

• In what areas have you experienced *losing heart*.

• What are some moments in your life when you felt there was no way out? How has the Lord used those moments to get you where you are today?

• How can you give glory to God for these moments of devastation?

• How could you use these moments from your own life to bring hope and life to others?

"…Even in Their Sleep…"

Ask the Lord to bring you to moments of gratitude as you sleep…as you ponder all He has brought you through so far.

DJ's Quote of the Day

Devastation of soul, when placed in the hands of Jesus, becomes a place of memorial to God's great healing power.

The Life of Christ

Listen to "You Are My King"

We've already faced the realities of how our same-sex attractions develop. What we need to face as believers – as new creations – is the reality of Truth versus honesty. Honesty is good…but only so far as it allows us an accurate assessment of our thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. Honesty is trumped (and brought into proper power and focus) by the place of truth in our lives. Truth is simply what God calls reality. What is true is what God calls true. What is true is eternity. What is true is the spiritual realm. The physical realm is simply a shadow of what is utter truth and absolute reality. What is true is often referred to as the Kingdom of God. His Word admonishes us to 'seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness…' It is then that our true and deepest needs are adequately and wholly met. The bottom line is this: God made us for His pleasure. We are His workmanship. We have a destiny and a purpose. By His love and by His hand we are being transformed into the likeness of Christ!

So often in the body of Christ we hear people say that want to 'be like Jesus'. Then only problem with that statement is usually meant to mean that they want the *good* parts about being like Jesus. Another way to make that statement is to say we want the *life of Christ*…we just don't want the suffering! We desire peace, and joy, and to be trusted…but we absolutely want it without the chaos, the despair, and the betrayal that Jesus experienced. According to Isaiah 53, these are the things Jesus experienced in bringing us salvation:

> *He was despised and forsaken of men*
> *He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; He was without esteem; He bore the grief of all mankind; He carried our sorrows; He was afflicted on our behalf; He suffered our pain and our wounding and paid the debt we owed; He was physically pierced; His emotions were crushed; He was physically whipped; He was oppressed; He was judged guilty because of our sin yet He Himself was without sin; His soul was in anguish; He poured Himself out in order for mankind to be saved…all*

with great depth of love as demonstrated when He forgave those who put Him to death…those who mocked Him…those who reviled his name…the very ones He came to bring hope to. (Highlights of Isaiah 53)

What was His destiny? What was His purpose? According to Luke 19:10 we know this about the destiny of Christ. "…the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." Pure and simple. Matthew 20:28 says it like this: "…the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." So if the destiny and purpose of Christ was to serve and to give Himself as a sacrifice, what does that mean for us? What is our ultimate destiny and purpose? If we are in Christ we are new creations. "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, {he is} a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all {these} things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation… (2 Corinthians 5:17-18 NASB). Christ came to reconcile sinful man to God. We are His sons and daughters, created to be conduits of God's salvation…created to tell forth the Good News we have received! Ephesians 2:10 says, "…we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." What are those good works? I believe it is simple: Jesus said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you…" (Matthew 28:19-20 NASB).

I was allowed to go through all I went through for God's glory. Pure and simple. I responded to His grace and found freedom and hope and a more abundant life than same-sex attraction could offer. The price has been high, though. I had to give up friends, places, practices, thoughts, and attitudes. I had to give up the hope of ever changing my past. What was done was done…and forgiven! The slate was wiped clean and I was given a brand new identity…and I was called to share that hope of redemption with others that are trapped in the same web of lies and deception I found myself in. Looking back all the way to my childhood I have to wonder what my life would have been like if I had simply heard that someone else had struggled with my same struggles and had found a way to freedom. I don't want others to go through life with that same sense of hopelessness I felt

as I was growing up. If that means I will face the same trials Jesus face, then so be it. His grace is sufficient for anything I face…and He will not allow me to bear more than I can endure.

I want to be like Christ…and the trials of life become like sandpaper which smoothes away the old outer layer that used to define me. Not always a joyful process…but a worthwhile one if it means others come to know Christ. I do not like to suffer. Who does? I have suffered the humiliation of other men finding out about my past and then backing away from me emotionally. I have suffered the mocking of those in the gay world. Those who call themselves believers, telling me that I have no business telling someone else they don't have to be gay, have castigated me! To be quite honest, I often feel like giving up simply due to the seemingly constant bombardment of the words of men and the darkness of our culture. But I cannot give up whenever I think about someone out there who simply needs to hear there might be hope for them. As long as I receive letters like the following I will continue:

I just wanted to let you know that a little over 8 years ago I wrote to you about my feelings of "homosexuality" and how I was fighting it. You emailed me. I still have that letter. Six years ago I came to a conference you were holding in Ft. Worth - a life changing conference. You sang over me and sang from God's heart to my own. I met a man there that had lost his wife and family because of a "gay" scandal. I knew that that was not for me. I found some peace and the courage to keep on fighting my battle at the altar where you were singing. I married my best friend who knew me inside and out, up and down and all around - I mean everything. [I now have] a concert/worship ministry. I love to sing your songs. I love to teach people to sing your songs. Thank you for telling your story. I pray often that I won't have to tell my WHOLE story...but if that is what God would have me do I will do it. I know that there is a good chance that I would not be here in this house with my wife and two kids writing this email if you had not had the guts to tell your story. Thanks again for "risking" your life to change someone else's.

What else is there to say? Are stories like this worth the things I endure in order to share my faith…in order to be like Jesus? Absolutely. I am often attacked verbally

because of my faith. I am often attacked via e-mails and letters. I have endured editorials written about me and have undergone physical intimidation because of my faith. I have been insulted and ridiculed and have heard all manner of untrue things hurled my way. I would place all these things under the banner of persecution for the sake of righteousness. My joy is in knowing that others are coming to know Christ and ultimate freedom as a result. My personal hope is found in the promise of God's Word:

"Blessed are those who have been
persecuted for the sake of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
"Blessed are you when {people} insult
you and persecute you, and falsely
say all kinds of evil against you
because of Me.
"Rejoice and be glad,
for your reward in heaven is great;
for in the same way they persecuted
the prophets who were before you.
Matthew 5:10-12 NASB

When I was overwhelmed by the love of Christ, I was compelled to follow after Him. After all, I had heard the condemnation of the religious world and knew well I was going to hell. It was the love of God that said, "Dennis, I love you *right where you are*…but I love you enough *to not leave you there*" that led me to salvation and gave me the power to walk in freedom toward wholeness. Reality is what is eternal. I may well lose my life in the process. When we take up a cross, we take on the responsibility of bearing not only the name of Christ but the mission and passion of Christ as well. It is in the laying down and losing of life that we truly find it…and we find it abundantly.

Then Jesus said to His disciples,
"If anyone wishes to come after Me,

he must deny himself, and take up his
cross and follow Me.
"For whoever wishes to save his
life will lose it; but whoever loses
his life for My sake will find it.
Matthew 16:24-25 NASB

As new creations, we will be betrayed…just as Christ was. As believers, we will suffer…just as Christ suffered. As children of God, we are called to be like Him. The joy of knowing Christ is found in the journey…in the process.

See how great a love the Father has
bestowed on us, that we would be
called children of God; and {such} we are.
For this reason the world does not know us,
because it did not know Him. Beloved, now
we are children of God, and it has not
appeared as yet what we will be.
We know that when He appears,
we will be like Him, because we will
see Him just as He is. And everyone
who has this hope {fixed} on Him
purifies himself, just as He is pure.
1 John 3:1-3 NASB

True joy is found in knowing we have a purpose and a destiny that is not determined by our feeble earthly perspectives or even by those things that tempt us. My destiny is determined by who my Father says I am! If He is the Bestower of identity then even the experiences we are allowed to go through are for the benefit of the Kingdom and others.

Consider it all joy, my brethren,
when you encounter various trials,
knowing that the testing of your
faith produces endurance.
And let endurance have {its}
perfect result, so that you
may be perfect and complete,
lacking in nothing.
James 1:2-4 NASB

As those who have gone through many hurtful and damaging experiences that same-sex attractions can bring…as fallen mankind, indeed, experiences simply by virtue of being born in sin…it is of the greatest essence that we learn to allow the circumstances of our lives to have their perfect work in us, transforming us into the image of Christ. We do this by learning to *not* conform to the ways of the world…the thought patterns of the culture…the *progressive* mores of society. As new creations, we have a higher calling. Renewing the mind is hard work…but it is worthy work…work of highest calling…holy and sacred and utterly human in the hands of God.

Therefore I urge you, brethren,
by the mercies of God, to present
your bodies a living and holy sacrifice,
acceptable to God, {which is} your
spiritual service of worship.
And do not be conformed to this world,
but be transformed by the renewing of
your mind, so that you may prove what
the will of God is, that which is good
and acceptable and perfect.
Romans 12:1-2 NASB

Remember, we must…MUST…walk as sons and daughters of the Kingdom. Eternity has already begun. We are BIG PICTURE people, seeing life and its many twists and turns from God's perspective rather than our own. You are not here just to fill space! Your life has a purpose and that purpose is to go and make more disciples of Christ…through the very unique and precious gift that is *you*.

For our citizenship is in heaven, from
which also we eagerly wait for a Savior,
the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform
the body of our humble state into conformity
with the body of His glory, by the exertion
of the power that He has even to subject all
things to Himself.
Philippians 3:20-21 NASB

I, for one, do not wish to remain at the same level I was yesterday. I don't want to rest on the laurels of yesterday's accomplishments. My desire is to go from this level I presently occupy to the next – whatever that is. I want to go further up and deeper in. I want to go from glory to glory. It is in this glorious journey that we ultimately discover our true identity and find some semblance of order I the midst of the chaos and despairs of life.

...we all, with unveiled face, beholding
as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being
transformed into the same image [of Christ]
from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.
2 Corinthians 3:18 NASB

Do you really want to be like Him? Then you will suffer. But with that suffering will come a deeper understanding of life and reality. Peace will be sweeter when it comes and your soul will have an ever-deepening capacity for hope.

Do you really want to be like Jesus? Then you will be betrayed…but with that betrayal will come an ever-deepening ability to forgive and to lead others to the place of finding their ultimate forgiveness. Trust will be more satisfying because the realization that the One you trust will never betray you, making the betrayal of others into an opportunity to demonstrate how great and deep and wide and powerful the love of God really is.

Do you want the life of Christ? Then learn to see every experience of life from God's perspective and learn to disallow the lies of the enemy that keep us wallowing in the miry pit of self-pity and despair. You cannot change your past. You cannot hope to find abundant life in perversion. Our hope and our freedom are found in Christ alone.

Listen to "You Are My King"

Questions for Meditation

• What are some of the ways you have experienced suffering since giving your life to Christ?

• What about betrayal? Injustice? Pain?

• What would you say might be the purpose behind why God would allow you to go through these hurts?

• How have I allowed these events and feelings to influence my life and self-perception?

• How might I take these sufferings and trials and allow the Lord to bring glory from them?

"…Even in Their Sleep…"

As you prepare for sleep tonight, ask the Lord to show you His perspective on the sufferings that have come to your life due to your faith.

DJ's Thought for the Day

The sorrows and suffering I must endure in this life is worth seeing the light of hope and salvation 'come on' in the hearts and minds of others around me.

Where Do I Go From Here?

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Great question! My freedom was worth giving up wrong relationships. My freedom was worth ridding my life of all the reminders of my past life where possible. My freedom was worth never going back to places that enabled my wrong ways of thinking about myself. My freedom was worth giving up television and music from 1981 until 1993. My freedom was worth the humiliation of facing my own failures. My freedom was worth facing the giants head on…and worth executing the fatal blows. And most importantly, my freedom was worth the life of Jesus Christ, sacrificed on my behalf.

As a boy, I had no choice concerning my circumstances. I had no choice concerning my own personality. I had no choice concerning my emotional, mental, and spiritual gifts. I absolutely had no choice concerning what I was tempted by. Even though I had so many factors that helped pull me into thinking I was homosexual in the deepest core of my being, there came a day of reckoning where I was eventually given the freedom to make wise choices about who I truly am made to be. How did I get to that place of *choice*? How do you get to that place of choice?

For too many years I believed I was born with same-sex attractions. That way of thinking had become engrained in the depths of my mind. After years of hurt and failure and ultimately of simply accepting that this was just the way I was, there came a day when I gave myself to my homosexual identity. Expecting peace, I became even more despairing when the peace one expects from resting in their true identity *never came*. This final disillusionment drove me back to the starting place.

We have often heard (even if we were not raised in a Christian environment) that truth will set us free. In my mind, I determined that I needed to get back to the place where truth begins…the Giver of Truth…my Maker. In November of 1981, I found myself in the midst of that journey back toward God and made my way to a Christian concert. It was during the course of this concert that Truth hit me squarely in the face (and heart!). That night I realized God saw the depths of my heart – all the failure, deceit, hurt, and sin – and *loved me anyway*! During the course of the concert I was overwhelmed with God's love for me. I saw the same-sex attraction placed upon

Christ…realized that He was paying the debt my sin had incurred. I also realized that He was actually taking *my place* on that cross and ultimately bridged the gap my sin had left between me and the God Who loved me.

Simultaneously, it was as if my eyes were opening and my perceptions were suddenly and dramatically changing. What was taking place? God was giving me a brand new identity – making me a new creation! During the moments of the concert in which these events began to take place in my mind, I began to put on truths I had never been able to put on before. *God was God and I was not*. For years I had lived as if I was my own god…and I understood that He was much better and capable than I at this job! *I decided to agree with Him regarding what He called sin*. Related to me acting as god on my own behalf, I suddenly became aware that I needed to agree with God concerning what He called sin. If He called homosexual behavior sin, then so would I. *If He calls something sin, then He has a remedy for that sin*. That sounds like a no-brainer, but it dawned on me at this epiphanal moment that God would not allow the temptation without providing a way of escape. I had simply never realized that the way of escape wasn't necessarily based on my power to obey rules. The way of escape from temptation was paved on the stones of intimacy with my God!

I had never been able to truly trust anyone due to the many times I felt used and betrayed in my past. It became very apparent that if I could not trust my Maker, I could never trust again…and trust is one of the keys to intimacy! The truth was that *I could trust God implicitly and completely*. That trust was born of the fact that He loved me right where I was – trapped in that same-sex attraction – yet loved me enough to *not leave me there*. In other words, if He could love me like that, I could follow Him with reckless abandon, just as a little boy follows after his daddy's footsteps trying to match every step because he wants to *be just like his daddy*, I began to feel that same wonder in my own life. I suddenly found myself wanting to *be like Him*.

If God created me, He had a very specific purpose for me and for my life. It took some time, but I eventually came to understand that even all the junk I had experienced in my life was a definitive part of that purpose. One which has become joyfully apparent is that I now have the privilege of telling those who had no idea there was hope for those who struggle with same-sex attractions that hope was indeed possible! Knowing I was

not randomly brought into this world but uniquely chosen and planned for bringing God glory and bringing hope to other strugglers had brought much growth and healing to my heart…and, I believe, great hope to the lives of many (not an arrogant statement…just reality born of the hundreds of letters I receive each year). One of my greatest joys? The adventure of *going after the visions and dreams He has placed in my heart as a result of His unique purpose for me.*

Without even knowing it, I was discovering a very vital key to the process of my own salvation and healing – faith. I had grown up in church but had no real understanding of what faith was. I often confused faith with wishful thinking and unrealistic expectations. What I was discovering was the key to faith. Faith is much simpler than trusting and obeying. Faith (according to Dr. David Forbes – and I agree!), in reality, is simply agreeing with God. Think about it. Without faith (agreeing with God), it is impossible to please Him. Faith (agreeing with God) is the substance of things we hope for. I don't have to understand God's ways to agree with Him! He is God, not me! His ways and His thoughts are so much higher than mine. Even my intellect was given by Him. I simply act in faith and give that Intellect back to Him for His glory!

The journey of faith has been worth the trials. I have learned to put on a *Lazarus* mindset. Lazarus came forth from the tomb alive…but not as free as he was going to be! I, like Lazarus, walk toward Christ and allow Him and others to help me remove the old grave clothes that used to define who I was. In loosing those binding old identifiers I am made more free with every step I walk in intimacy with Christ!

One of the things I did to help me put off the old and put on the new was to find godly role models. In my case, I simply decided to build relationships with men I considered godly and masculine who had never been involved in homosexual behavior. I began to seek their counsel and to walk and talk like them. I know that sounds overly simplistic…but that is what I did. I simply decided that seeking godly male friends was in my best interest…whether I was pursued by other men (in a godly way) or not. I soon discovered that most men – regardless of sexual orientation – suffer from intimacy needs! In pursuing these relationships I not only began to see changes in my way of thinking, but in my attitudes and behavior as well. Soon I was acting in naturally masculine ways that,

for so many years, had seemed so foreign! I was, through relationship, becoming the real man God made me to be!

My self-view became this: I am a Giant Killer. No giant, be it same-sex attraction, lust, deceit, anger, bitterness, or any other affliction was going to triumph over me. God gave me the necessary weapons to overcome any giant I might face in this life. But they do not work unless I use them!

By His Word I put down the lies. By His Spirit I receive power to discern and hear His voice. By becoming a worshipper – by living a life of worship toward Him – I absolutely overcome any giant! Worshipping God requires my entire being. I sing or lift my hands or serve someone in His name and I take my thoughts, my attitudes, my actions, and even my physical drives captive to the obedience of Christ. When I harness my entire being and use that power to worship God, how can temptation win? The worship of God, if I am to be a true overcomer/Giant Killer, must be first and foremost in my life.

Where do you go from here? From one level to the next. It's called maturity. Walk intimately with your God and watch the temptations lose their power…watch the failures of your past become beacons of hope to others…watch the hurts and sorrows of your life be transformed into tools of ministry to those around you…watch the suffering and pain become conduits of peace and trust to the hurting you come in contact with. Knowing Jesus intimately is worth every thing you have had to endure to this point. None of it is without value. True value and worth are found when we take all life has given us and give it back to God for His honor and glory. You want abundant life? Go with God!

Listen to "This Day"

Questions For Meditation

• What will it take in each area of your life for that area of your life to be a bold statement that says, "God is God and I am not?"

• In what areas of your life do you need to call what God calls sin, sin?

• If He calls something sin, then He has a remedy for that sin. What must you do to appropriate God's remedy for your sin?

• In what areas do you need to trust God implicitly and completely?

• What must you do to 'go on' from this point in your life?

"…Even in Their Sleep…"

As you sleep tonight, allow the Lord to give you a glimpse of your future with Him…your destiny as an overcomer.

DJ's Quote for the Day

The way of escape from temptation isn't necessarily based on my power to obey rules. The way of escape from temptation is paved on the stones of intimacy with my God!