

A Song of Hope

By Dennis Jernigan

I hid my same-sex desires from others all through high school and college. Even though I was a Christian, I was tormented by feelings of rejection and hopelessness.

From my earliest memories, I felt different from other boys. I was gifted musically, and labeled “sissy” by other boys. By the time I was nine years old, I was playing regularly for the worship times at First Baptist Church in Boynton, OK.

I learned to play the piano from my grandmother. We lived far from any town with a piano teacher, so I learned to play “by ear” by listening to melodies and mimicking them without seeing any music. Grandma was very patient with me as I practised daily at her house, and I grew close to her.

I didn’t feel as close to my parents. We were not an affectionate family and I never remember receiving physical affection from my father. I found it hard to believe that he loved me, and I felt worthless.

When I was nine years old, Jesus began calling me to Himself. On Sept. 8, 1968, I asked my mother how to be saved. She explained that we were all sinners and that we deserved to perish in hell. But, through the death of Jesus on the cross, we could come into a relationship with God. I asked Jesus into my life that afternoon and was baptized that evening.

But, not perceiving love from my earthly father, I couldn’t fully receive God’s acceptance and forgiveness. So I tried to earn love by being “the best” at whatever I did. I made straight A’s in school; my basketball team played in three state tournaments; I was valedictorian of my high school class. But what people thought was so good—my outward performance—only hid the deepest hurts of my heart.

Rejection permeated every part of my life, including my sexuality. As a boy I needed a role model to show me the way to manhood. I began to yearn for intimacy with other men in perverse ways. Because of this wrong thinking, I came to believe that I was a homosexual.

At the same time, I knew God had something else for me. After I first became a Christian, I sensed Him telling me that someday I would have a large family of my own ... with nine children! *That’s crazy*, I thought. *How can I have children if I’m a homosexual?*

At church, I heard people say, “All homosexuals should be shipped out of the country—they deserve to go to hell!” I felt condemned by their remarks, and had no idea where to turn for help. So I hid my same-sex desires through high school. In college, I discovered other students who were also struggling with homosexual desires. We gravitated toward one another, and I became entrenched in the physical and emotional aspects of homosexuality. But the more I believed homosexuality was my “real” identity, the more miserable I became.

During my sophomore year, I met the woman who would

one day become my wife. I thought Melinda was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. Some-

thing drew me to her, something I had never felt before. But, even though we dated on and off through college, I still had sexual encounters with other men on the side.

By my senior year, I was totally confused and frustrated. I decided that my life was not worth living. After all, I had begged God since childhood to remove these feelings and it seemed like nothing had happened.

One night during my last semester of school, as I sat in my little apartment alone, I decided I would rather be dead than living “this life.” After extinguishing the pilot light, I turned on the gas in my little heater, lay down, and waited to die.

However, after a few minutes, I grew very fearful and turned off the gas. *What does eternity hold?* I wondered. *Whatever it is, I’m not ready.*

Soon afterward, I broke up with Melinda and told her I never wanted to see her again. That summer after graduation, I fully embraced my homosexuality and plunged into a three-month relationship with another man.

“This is who I am,” I told myself. “I was born homosexual, and this kind of life is what God intended for me.” But, instead of finding happiness, I just became more miserable.

I applied for seminary, thinking that more schooling might provide some answers. But three days before seminary began, a friend phoned me. “Dennis, God has brought you to mind a lot lately. In fact, I had a dream about you this week.” In the dream, he explained, God was giving me all kinds of songs. I thought he was crazy, but was startled by his next remark: “What’s more, my mother had the same dream this week!”

I abandoned plans for seminary and accepted this friend’s invitation to live with his family in Oklahoma City. With my music degree, I had trouble finding a job, finally becoming employed as a school-bus driver. Between my morning and afternoon routes, I had several free hours which I used to cry out to God.

At first I set my Bible on the piano and would sing the Psalms of David back to God. I saw that David had an intimate and honest relationship with God—something I had desired my whole life. David exposed feelings and attitudes that I thought “good” people would hide. Yet God called him “a man after My heart” (Acts 13:22). Soon I was singing my own thoughts and prayers, emptying my soul to Him as I exposed the hurts I had

