

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: You Are My Strength when I Am Weak

Lesson: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

⁷ or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. ¹⁰ That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

You are my strength when I am weak

You are the treasure that I seek

You are my all in all

I'm seeking You like a precious jewel

Lord, to give up I'd be a fool

You are my all in all

Jesus, Lamb of God

Holy is Your name

Jesus, Lamb of God

Holy is Your name

This hymn is a familiar one to all of us. It's a classic hymn. The title of Day 26 of Dynamite Prayer, which we are reading together during the Lenten season, is "My Weakness." While reading that devotional, the song "You are my all in all" came to mind. This hymn was one of the songs I enjoyed listening to and singing even when I was in Korea. Although I've been listening to it for a long time, I've always just enjoyed it without really thinking about who wrote or composed it, or the emotions behind its creation. However, this time, for the first time, I became curious about who created this hymn, and I looked it up.

The hymn "You are my all in all" was created by a person named Dennis Jernigan. As I read about his life journey, it was his story, his testimony of

faith that I discovered. And I learned that all his hymns stemmed from the weaknesses he had in his life.

During his childhood, Dennis carried the misconception that he was unloved and rejected by his father during his childhood. This false belief deeply influenced his sense of identity, particularly regarding his sexual orientation. Unable to confide his concerns and struggles to others, he grappled with internal conflicts surrounding his sexual identity. Unfortunately, he also found it challenging to form strong connections with his peers. However, from a young age, he had a love for the piano and displayed a remarkable talent for playing music by ear after hearing it just once, even without sheet music.

His grandmother was his rock, both emotionally and spiritually. Whenever he endured bullying from his peers or faced hardships, he turned to her for comfort. With unwavering faith, she guided and reassured him, saying, "Sweetheart, your friends may not understand. Your talents are gifts from God. One day, you'll see the purpose behind the gifts He's given you."

During his school days, he was deeply involved in church activities, all the while wrestling with persistent internal turmoil about his homosexual identity. Despite the many twists and turns of his childhood, Christian music became his refuge. Reflecting on the messages of God woven into the lyrics, he found comfort in knowing that God uplifted him and helped him endure through moments of despair, never allowing him to give up on life.

Yet, his internal conflict about his sexual identity persisted deeply. He found himself unable to confide in anyone about it. The more he engaged in conversations about homosexuality with others at church, and the more he listened to sermons from his pastor on the subject, the more he began to harbor self-loathing feelings.

As time went by, he entered college and found himself meeting a well-respected Christian leader from the local community on his university campus. They quickly developed a deep bond. Eventually, he opened up to his friend for the first time about the struggles he had faced due to his sexual identity. However, from that point on, his friend began to see him in a sexual way. This came as a devastating blow, leaving him feeling shocked, betrayed, and used, and causing him to contemplate giving up on life in his dorm room.

Then, in that moment, certain thoughts crossed his mind: "Are you prepared to die?" "What awaits you after death?" He couldn't answer these questions. So, he made a decision to live instead of dying and, at the same time, resolved to accept and embrace his identity.

From then on, he began to live according to his desires. However, the more he lived as he pleased, the more he felt a sense of emptiness growing within him. He had been planning to enroll in seminary to escape his situation when he received a sudden call from one of his friends. The friend said, "Dennis, God showed me a strange dream. In that dream, people from all over the world were singing songs you had written." He didn't believe his friend's words, but his friend insisted that the dream was not a coincidence but rather part of God's plan.

One day, while dedicated to his songwriting, Dennis attended a concert by the Christian musician group "Second Chapter of Acts." During the performance, one of the singers said, "There may be people here who have long-held struggles they haven't shared with others. But God knows everything, including your weaknesses. Yet, despite it all, God loves each and every one of you."

In that moment, he had a profound realization upon hearing the singer's words. Until then, he had felt that his sexual identity was a great sin, making him a perpetual sinner in the eyes of God. However, he understood that God loved him unconditionally and, therefore, would not leave him in a state of sin. From that moment on, he surrendered all his weaknesses, worries, and fears to God and experienced a profound transformation in his life, undergoing an experience of being crucified with Jesus on the cross.

He always felt unloved and rejected by his father since childhood. This lack of love became a traumatic chain that constantly tormented him. As a result, he struggled to connect with his friends and only faced harassment. He felt self-loathing, seeing himself as an unlovable being. However, when the Holy Spirit opened his eyes and ears, he accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior for the first time. He realized that despite being weak and sinful, Jesus still loved him and died for him, embracing his weaknesses, brokenness, and sins. That day, he was able to break free from the trauma that had haunted him all his life. He confessed that although he had weaknesses, he could

experience God's grace even more because of those weaknesses.

After this spiritual experience, his life changed dramatically. The love he had yearned for was now fulfilled through Jesus Christ. He no longer struggled with his sexual identity, found a wife, and built a joyful family with nine children. Additionally, his hundreds of hymns are being sung by people worldwide.

I'm not very knowledgeable about homosexuality, so I approach mentioning it with caution. However, my main focus on Dennis's story isn't about his sexual identity. Instead, it's about how he, someone trapped by trauma, self-hatred, and weakness, encountered Jesus Christ and completely transformed his life, starting anew.

The Bible is filled with remarkable stories that may be challenging for us to understand logically. Think about the story of David and Goliath. Goliath was a skilled warrior, strong and imposing. On the other hand, David was just a young boy who, instead of armor and a sword, faced Goliath with a sling and stones. However, David believed in God, and with God by his side, he fought and defeated Goliath.

Let's think about Moses. People tend to admire Moses for parting the Red Sea, but it wasn't Moses who did it. It was because God was with Moses that he was able to part the Red Sea. Abraham and Sarah were able to have a son at ages 100 and 90, not because of their physical abilities, but because God was with them. What about Lazarus? Lazarus even died. After four days, his body started to emit a bad smell. But when Jesus approached him and exclaimed, "Lazarus, come out!" he was brought back to life.

The characters in the Bible often encounter the limitations of their abilities in their circumstances. Within these constraints, they face their weaknesses and realize their inability to do anything. And through their weaknesses, they come to trust and accept God. They pray to God in the face of their weaknesses, and God answers their prayers.

The limitations and weaknesses we all face vary. However, when we believe in God and entrust our limitations, weaknesses, traumas, and concerns to God and ask for His help, He will always be by our side. Trust that our weaknesses can be opportunities to experience God's strength.