

"I love Dennis—his words, his music, his story. My hunch is—if you don't already, you will soon."

—MAX LUCADO

GIANT

KILLERS

CRUSHING STRONGHOLDS, SECURING FREEDOM IN YOUR LIFE

Dennis
Jernigan

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GIANT KILLERS

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PREFACE

David, aiming his sling at the towering Goliath, set the pattern for every one of us. Oh, you and I don't face real giants who threaten our physical well-being. But then, giants don't always have to be physical.

- Are you overwhelmed by a craving for alcohol, drugs, or food?
- Does your desire for sexual fulfillment take you places you were never meant to go?
- Are you bogged down in depression and despair?
- Is fear or anxiety paralyzing you?
- Is anger, pride, or laziness spoiling your relationships?

If in honesty you would have to answer yes to one of these questions, or to a similar one, then you are facing a giant, and this book is for you.

- Are you aware of a spiritual problem in your life, and do you want to fix it, if you can?
- Do you feel as if you're getting nowhere in life—and hate that fact?
- Are you weary of the failures of your past dictating your present?
- Do you have visions and dreams and want to see them come to pass?
- Do you sense that the answer to your problem might lie outside yourself—in God?

If any of these questions resonate in your spirit, then you are ready for victory, and again, this book is for you.

If you will dare to read this book, I will challenge you to apply godly principles of freedom to your own giant, whatever it might be. Why? Because the strategy for defeating the giants in our lives is always

the same: relationship with God Almighty through the redeeming power of Jesus Christ and the constant companionship of the Holy Spirit.

Does that sound thrilling to you? Or maybe a little like a letdown?

Today, it seems that most people want a quick fix—a fast-track how-to guide that will let them “get on with life.” But if you’re like me, you have grown skeptical of self-help guides that promise much and deliver little. While step-by-step instruction can be helpful, it can also be misleading. How many times have you gone through all the steps, only to find yourself just as entrenched in your problem as when you began the program?

Although this book will provide practical help along the way, it is primarily intended to draw you nearer to God in a devotional sense, for He must be the source of your victory. Approach the reading of this book, then, as a spiritual exercise. Don’t rush through it, but instead consider each of its brief chapters as a morsel to be mentally savored.

To help you use this book for your spiritual good, each chapter ends with three spiritual exercises. The first, called “Truthstone,” offers a set of related Scripture passages that you can read in your Bible and meditate upon. The second, “A Look Inside,” provides a few questions that you can ask yourself to start applying the point of the chapter to your own life. The third, “Even in Their Sleep...” is based on Psalm 127:2, which says, “[God] gives to His beloved even in his sleep” (NASB). This section offers a thought or prayer idea that you can keep in your mind as you go to bed so that even as you are sleeping, God can be molding you into a giant killer.

By the grace of God, I have slain more than one giant in my life, and you will learn much of my story in this book. But the point you need to hear now is that on each occasion my spiritual healing has come about by virtue of my having an intimate relationship with

Jesus Christ. I want that same kind of healing for you! It will come through the same kind of relationship.

The only way God can help you is if you agree that God is God and you are not. Therefore, I suggest that before you read this book, you make the commitment to place your own agenda somewhere below God's. Lay down your own shaky conception of what is true, and stand upon the solid foundation of what your Creator calls truth, because as simple as it sounds, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32).

Are you tired of the giants in your life winning all the battles? Would you like to slay some giants? You can. I say this not because that's what happened for me (though it has) but because I know God loves you and wants nothing but the best for you. Read on and begin now to trust God, allowing Him to replace the lies you have believed with His own glorious truth.

You have nothing to lose but bondage—and everything to gain of life and freedom!



PART

I

GIANTS IN THE LAND

Believing a Lie

You read about them in the pages of Scripture. You learn their stories in biographies of great Christians. And if you are like me, you have been privileged to know some of them personally. They are giant killers, men and women armed only (*only*—ha!) with faith in an almighty God and who have, in boldness, brought down the spiritual foes in their lives.

Some have felled sin, once looming tall and solid as Colossus. Some have quelled an anxiety that troubled their souls like a gale upon the water. Others have “done in” doubt, despair, or even the fear of death, our last enemy. What heroes, these! What heroines!

The stories of many of these giant killers will continue to be retold for generations to come, so thrilling are they. You may have your own stories of defeating the giants in your life, even if another behemoth stands before you now, and those stories mean so much to you. Every story of giant killing is valuable; every one inspiring, every one instructive.

Let me now tell you my own story of defeating a giant. My giant may be different from yours. Surely the way in which it grew in my life and the way in which God enabled me to defeat it are different from what you have experienced or will experience in giant killing. But I trust that as you hear my story, God will be at work in your heart, filling you with the confidence that you can overcome the giant challenging you now.



I was born in Sapulpa, Oklahoma. Soon after my birth, my parents moved to the farm my grandparents Samuel Washington Jernigan and Myrtle Mae Snyder had built—the farm where my father was raised. We lived three miles from the small town of Boynton, Oklahoma (population four hundred), where my brothers and I attended school.

The Lord gifted me from an early age to play the piano. By the time I was nine, I was playing for the worship times at First Baptist Church. This was also the church my grandfather Herman Everett Johnson had pastored. This was the church where my parents, Samuel Robert Jernigan and Peggy Yvonne Johnson, had met. My father had also “led singin’” there from the earliest I can remember (as he still does today).

When I was six or seven years old, my Grandmother Jernigan moved back to the farm, living in a trailer next to our farmhouse. Each day after school I could be found at my grandmother’s house practicing piano (and conveniently forgetting about my chores). My grandma taught me how to play by ear and how to “chord” for “church playin’.” She was always kind and supportive of me.

By contrast, over in the Jernigan household, we were not an affectionate family. While I did feel affection from my mother, I never remember receiving physical affection from my father or my brothers. In part, this was how families tended to act back then. And in part, the emotional distance was due to my daddy’s working so hard. In addition to working the farm, he was employed by a utility company and worked as a mechanic for many years.

Since I have gotten older, God has reminded me of many ways my father expressed affection and love for me as I was growing up. My problem was not my father; my problem was that I believed a lie. Once Satan got his foot in the door of my heart, I perceived any rejec-

tion—no matter how big or small—as a lack of love from my dad (or whomever I thought was rejecting me at the time).

While from an early age I felt worthless, I discovered something: If I performed well, people would like me. So I tried to be the best in whatever I did, including schoolwork, basketball, and music. In the process I became a selfish person, usually at the expense of others.

It wasn't long, however, before I became frustrated, because no matter how well I performed, it never seemed to be good enough. What people thought was good—my outward performance—hid the deep hurts and failures of my heart. (And I must add that my daddy and mama never missed a single event I was involved in while growing up. This should have revealed a lot to me about their love.)

Now I need to tell you about the most painful part of my life, a part I long tried to hide. I allowed a sense of rejection to permeate every aspect of my life. (What I didn't realize was that Satan was lying to me, trying to keep me from God's plan for my life.) This included the sexual aspect of my life.

As a boy I needed a role model to show me the way to manhood. But because I felt rejected by the main man in my life, my father, I began to yearn for intimacy with other men in perverse ways. I remember having feelings of attraction toward the same gender from an early age. I hid this from others as best I could through my school and college years.

I attended Oklahoma Baptist University, and I look back on my four years there with fondness. Because of my lack of musical training while growing up, my musical studies at OBU were like learning a whole new language. But despite all the good that happened during those college years, that was also a time when I was secretly involved in homosexuality and was filled with confusion.

Being a young man in need of male affirmation, I was overwhelmed when an older man I respected began paying attention to

me near the end of my time at college. As a “Christian,” he said that he approached me from an attitude of caring about my well-being. To have someone like this call and ask how things were going for me made my life more bearable.

After many weeks of going out for a soda or simply riding around town and having him ask me how he could pray for me, I grew to trust this person immensely—so much so that I came to the point of asking him if I could share my deepest secret. I unloaded my burden about my sexual identity and immediately felt the weight lift from my shoulders. It felt wonderful!

The sense of lightness lasted only for moments. It came to an end when I realized this person was making a sexual advance toward me. And in those next few minutes, I felt utter despair as I gave up hope of ever getting help for my problem.

I came away from that encounter feeling so used and worthless that I decided to take my own life. I wanted peace more than I wanted to live. So I went home, turned on the gas stove, and lay down to die.

While thinking about how this outcome would be better for me as well as for my family and friends, my thoughts were interrupted by questions like *What is eternity really like?* and *Am I ready for what's out there?* I could not go on with the suicide. I got up from the floor, turned off the gas, and decided to live as I was obviously created to be—as a homosexual.

For the rest of the summer after my graduation, I traveled with a group promoting the university, and I lived in perverted relationship with another man. I thought I knew misery before, but this summer proved even more painful. I had given myself to what I perceived as my true identity and became more miserable than ever.

What was I going to do? Sometimes I thought I should go back to my plan of suicide. Other times, being a good Baptist boy, I decided that I should give God every opportunity to heal me. To me,

that meant I should go to seminary. Yes, in my mind, it was either suicide or seminary!

But God had other plans.



Truthstone

Galatians 5:16-25

1 John 3:1-3

A Look Inside

1. What is the giant in my life?
2. Who provides a good role model for me as a giant killer? Why?
3. As I read the story of the growth of the giant in Dennis's life (even though his giant may be very different from mine), what does it suggest to me about the origins of my own giant?

“Even in Their Sleep...”

Tonight, spend some time thinking about your own life story as it has played out up to this point. As you do so, ask God to give you insights that will help you better understand—and heal from—whatever damage you may have in your life.

Crying Out to God

Have you noticed that God has a habit of thinking that He is in charge? If it suits His purposes, He has no hesitation about stepping into our lives and sending us in a very different direction from what we have planned. I have experienced this behavior of His on more than one occasion, including when I was a young man.

Upon my graduation from Oklahoma Baptist University, I applied to seminary, assuming that since I had no direction for the next step in my life, I might as well pursue further education. I felt no peace about this decision, but I didn't know what else to do. Then three days before I was to leave for seminary, a former friend from OBU called and began to share some interesting ideas with me.

This friend had graduated a year before me. In the time between his graduation and mine, God had begun to impact his life greatly. As he sought God, he experienced deeper and deeper levels of intimacy with the Father. He told me of many of the things God had been doing in his life. I could tell from the passion in his voice that this was something different—or deeper—than I had ever known. He had my attention.

The conversation turned to the reason for my friend's call. God had been speaking to him—about me! He told me that God had come to him in a dream and had shown him many things He wanted to do in my life. In the dream, God was giving me many songs, and

my friend and I and another alum from OBU were standing around a piano singing them.

I was moved by what my friend shared because his words had touched something deep within my heart: a longing to release the music I knew was in there. But he didn't stop there.

My friend went on to tell me that, in his dream, I was living with him and his mom. He further told me that he felt led to invite me to come and live with them. This in itself was overwhelming, but what he shared next awed me still more. He told me that his mother had been visited by the Lord with the *same dream* and that they both wanted to invite me to come and live with them and see what God would do.

This idea sounded just crazy enough to be God's will! Three days later, instead of starting at seminary, I was living in Del City, Oklahoma, beginning the fulfillment of a friend's dream and embarking upon a spiritual journey of my own.

In Del City my first priority was to find a job. Having my church music degree in hand, I quickly found a job—driving a school bus! That's right. The only job I could get was that of a school bus driver. (If you have ever worked toward a music degree or know someone who has, you will recognize God's sense of humor.)

In the mornings I had two bus routes with twenty-five minutes between them. During those twenty-five minutes, I would park my school bus in an abandoned housing subdivision and write in my journal. Journaling was the method I found most helpful in getting my most intimate thoughts out in the open before God. Day in and day out, I wrote of hurts, disillusionments, failures, emotions, and any other "soul data" that needed to come out. Later in the day I would go to the piano and write down my prayers, which for me happened to come out in the form of songs.

What I discovered in this process was that God really *was* concerned about my feelings, whatever they might be and however dark

they might seem to me. I found the Father approachable and desiring *my* presence. In fact, I began to understand that God took more delight in my presence than I could possibly take in His.

After that first year of journaling, I felt God impress upon me that I should burn my writings. Page by page I burned my deepest heart cries and most horrendous secrets. Gently and tenderly the Father taught me that just as this picture of my past was being burned away, so too He had cleansed my past—and present and future—and had forgiven the wickedness of my heart.

In addition to the ways God was working in my life through my private times with Him, He began to move in other supernatural ways. I learned that a group called the 2nd Chapter of Acts was going to be in concert in Norman, Oklahoma, and somehow I knew that I was supposed to go.

As I listened to Annie Herring (one of the members of the group), I was overwhelmed by the love she spoke of. This was the love I had dreamed of but still couldn't believe was available to me. So I listened with great expectation—until she came to the song “Mansion Builder.” This song caught my attention because of these simple lines:

Why should I worry?
Why should I fret?
I've got a Mansion Builder
Who ain't through with me yet!*

All of a sudden Annie stopped in the middle of the song and said, “There are those of you here who are dealing with things you have

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never told anyone about. You are carrying those burdens, and that's wrong—that's sin, and you need to let those hurts go and give them to the Lord. We are going to sing the song again, and I want you to lift your hands to the Lord. And all of those burdens that you are carrying, I want you to place them in your hands and lift your hurts to Him."

This was all new to me—worship and praise. I had always thought before that this sort of thing was just an emotional response that didn't really mean anything. But do you know what it did for me? As I lifted my hands, God became more real to me than I had ever imagined. The lifting of my hands was more than a physical action; my hands were an extension of my heart.

I cried out, "Lord Jesus, I can't change me or the mess I've gotten myself into—but You can!" I acknowledged that I was totally helpless, and I turned everything in my life over to Jesus—my thoughts, my emotions, my body, my past. That night, November 7, 1981, I took responsibility for my own sins and yielded every right to Jesus, including my right to be loved and even my right to life.

At that point something wonderful began to take place in my life. I heard the Lord speak to my heart, "Dennis, I love you. Dennis, you are My child. Dennis, I will always love you."

It was then I lost the need to be accepted or loved by others in unhealthy ways, because I realized that Jesus would love me and accept me no matter what, even when I was rejected by others. It was also at this time that my perverse thoughts and desires were changed, and God began to replace them with holy thoughts about what sexual love is all about.

It was no coincidence that Satan attacked me at the point of my sexual drive. The sexual drive is a creative drive, and Satan knew that if he could pervert that drive in me, he could kill the creativity God had given me. He knew as well that if I were healed in my sexuality, I would spend the rest of my life praising my Father, his enemy.

Poor Satan. He lost on that one.



Truthstone

Psalm 34:12-19

Psalm 141:1-4

A Look Inside

1. How is God working in my life now to bring me near to Him?
2. When it comes to the giant in my life, how honest am I prepared to be with myself and with God?
3. Have I finally and completely given myself over to Jesus? If so, what was that like? If not, why not now?

“Even in Their Sleep...”

As you go to bed this evening, pour out your deepest feelings to God. Expect Him to dry your tears and to give you comfort as you sleep.

Helping Others Who Hurt

The songs began to flow, and I looked for others to sing them to and to sing them with. Two things quickly became apparent to me. First, I realized that my job was simply to seek God's heart. Second, I understood that the Good Shepherd never beats His sheep or forces them to worship Him. As I became more and more free in my expression to Him, others seemed to be drawn to Him *with* me.

Remember the dream my friend had? Just as in his dream, he and another friend (an alto) began to learn the songs with me in—you guessed it!—three-part harmony, much like the 2nd Chapter of Acts. Soon people were asking us to sing for meetings around Oklahoma City, then statewide and beyond. I sang with this trio for two years and can honestly say that those will always be some of my most precious memories.

But even as I was learning how to serve God with my gifts, I still had to face the truth of my past. Knowing I needed healing, God would not let me merely cover up my sin or try to forget about it. One stage in this healing occurred around this time—yet another divine setup.

A close friend found out about my former involvement in homosexuality and chose to speak to me about it. Instantly I knew I would be disgraced and rejected. When he confronted me, I ran from the house and continued to run until I could run no more.

Out of breath and out of hope, I cried out to God to speak to me.

At the same time, I looked into the evening sky, where I saw a puffy white cloud. This cloud looked like an old man with a beard and outstretched arms. Near this cloud was a smaller cloud in the shape of a lamb. As I watched, the bearded man engulfed the little lamb in his arms. I knew immediately that God was speaking to me, that this was what He wanted to do for me in this time of need. I returned to the house to face the music.

But that's not what happened. This friend was a true friend. He told me he loved me and was willing to stand with me as I walked through this time of deliverance in my life. And do you know what else happened? God began to bring others into my life who were willing to love me unconditionally and to walk with me through the trials of my life—no matter what—for my complete healing.

Foremost among those who came alongside me and loved me was Melinda Marie Hewitt, whom I married in 1983. Our marriage was the fulfillment of a dream for me. More than that, it was the beginning of the fulfillment of a promise God had given to me long before.

When I was about nine years old, I felt the Lord telling me that I would someday have a large family of my own—with nine children. By that age I was already identifying myself as homosexual. So I prayed, *Lord, You must be crazy. How can I have children if I have unnatural desires?* Yet the promise remained in my heart.

Today Melinda and I have nine wonderful children who fill our home and our hearts with joy.

When I married Melinda, I assumed that since I was healed, there was no need to share my past with her. But I soon realized that I was really still trying to hide, which meant that I still carried a burden and that I was still more concerned with what man thought of me than with what God thought of me.

As long as I hid these things from others, my relationships could never be what God wanted them to be, because in true love there is

no fear. I was afraid to tell anyone because I thought no one would love me.

Why am I telling you this now? On July 18, 1988, I realized that God wanted to take the greatest failures and weaknesses of my life and make them my greatest strengths. I also realized that Satan wanted me to keep them hidden so he could use them against me. Not only this, but I knew that if I confessed my past freely, Satan would have no ammunition to use against me. So I shared what I have just told you with my church.

What do you think happened? Something beautiful. People who had been hurting just like me—and even more so—began to approach me. Men and women who were involved in homosexuality, women who were abused by their fathers, those who had been raped and had never told anyone, and those who had had abortions. As they confessed their sins and hurts, Jesus began healing their pasts.

On that day I publicly laid down my life and my reputation to serve Jesus in an awesome way. I want my life to be broken and poured out like the perfume the sinful woman used to wash Jesus's feet, even though others said she was foolish. Imagine this: The perfect King of the universe humbled Himself and gave up all His power and glory because He loves me. I can do no less.

Since the day I first shared my past publicly, God has called me to tell others what He has done for me—to lead others into intimacy with Jesus through music and worship. I hope that, in a way, this book will serve the same purpose. I am praying that this book will lead *you* closer to God.

Your circumstances, your sins, your wounds may all be different from mine, but the answer is still the same: Jesus. You may have been sinned against and wounded deeply. For those experiences, you are not guilty! Do not receive the false guilt that Satan would try to put on you because of circumstances that were beyond your control. I urge you

instead to deal with your own heart and the things you were (and are) responsible for, such as attitudes, actions, thoughts, and feelings.

There is hope for the hurting. I've been there and found the way out, and I must share my story—the story of Jesus—with those who are hurting. Aren't we all hurting in one way or another?

The bottom line is this: I can't make it one day without the Lord. I ask Him to fill me with His Spirit day by day and moment by moment and to lead me. You see, we are all helpless and in need of a Father to care for us. And He is the Father who will never leave us or forsake us. He is the Father who enjoys our presence more than we could ever enjoy His.

Because of my relationship with Jesus, my healing will be a continual process until the day I die and see Him face to face.



Truthstone

Luke 7:36-50

John 10:1-18

2 Corinthians 1:3-7

A Look Inside

1. Am I hiding anything? If so, what harm might I be doing to myself by hiding?
2. What might God be doing right now to heal me, and how can I submit to Him?
3. When my giant is at last lying dead before me, how might I be able to help others who are facing similar giants?

“Even in Their Sleep...”

This evening, pray to the Father: *Lord, help me destroy the giant in my life, not for my sake, but for Your glory and for the good of others.*