

## Let's Go Deeper

September 7, 2016

Let's go deeper with the piece of music the choir sang as their anthem last Sunday.

The piece, Richard Smallwood's 1996 composition, "Total Praise," included a roaring, soul-stirring solo by Keith Dean. Chris Teesdale recorded it from the balcony, posted it to Central's Facebook page, and by Monday morning it had reached 8,072 people (because it has been shared by 27 people) and had been viewed 2,900 times.

View it here: <https://www.facebook.com/CentralChristianLex/>

The lyrics are from Psalm 121:

*Lord, I will lift mine eyes to the hills  
Knowing my help is coming from You  
Your peace you give me in time of the storm*

*You are the source of my strength  
You are the strength of my life  
I lift my hands in total praise to you*

*Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen*

"Total Praise" came to Smallwood during a difficult time in his life:



My god brother was terminally ill with brain cancer and I was caring for him. At the same time my mother had a stroke and my baby brother had a mental breakdown. I was basically going house to hospital taking care of my loved ones. I felt like giving up. [I was] feeling helpless that I couldn't help my loved ones.

One day I was sitting at the piano and the song ["Total Praise"] just started coming out like a waterfall. It was like God was speaking to me saying, "I've got this, I got your back. I've got you. But, even when you're in the hardest times I still deserve the praise, I'm the one that deserves the glory. Praise me in all seasons."

I think that is why the song speaks to so many people; because it came from a real difficult time in my life.

"Interview: The Songs Of Richard Smallwood" by Tiffany, January 30, 2011  
<http://thefabempire.com/2011/01/30/interview-the-songs-of-richard-smallwood/>

Smallwood has openly shared the darkness he has faced himself. A July 23, 2015, *Washington Post* article by Keith L. Alexander titled “Millions of gospel fans know Richard Smallwood’s music. But not his struggles” chronicled Smallwood’s bout with depression:

In the late 1990s, Smallwood found himself having difficulty getting out of bed. He wouldn’t bathe. Wouldn’t shave. Couldn’t write music. He’d be alone, sobbing, not wanting to leave his house. He thought about ways to kill himself.

“I had no desire to live,” he says. “I was consumed with suicide most of the day.”

In 2002, he was finally diagnosed with clinical depression.

“I had no idea. I just thought I was unhappy a lot,” he says. “It was debilitating. I knew Jesus probably longer than some folks have, and I suffered. It’s an illness, like cancer, or diabetes. You can’t just say, ‘Pray about it.’ You gotta get help.”



With its roots in lament, “Total Praise” takes its place alongside other classic hymns that were born in composers’ times of distress. Thomas Dorsey wrote “Precious Lord, Take My Hand” after his wife and child died. Horatio Spafford wrote “It Is Well With My Soul” after his four daughters died in a shipwreck. “Now Thank We All Our God” was written by a pastor who witnessed unimaginable suffering and loss during the Thirty Years War.

“Total Praise” was sung by the choir of Emanuel A.M.E. Church to begin its first service after the Charleston shooting that took the lives of nine church members. It was sung at the funeral of one of the children killed in the Sandy Hook shootings, and most recently, at a citywide memorial service in Dallas for the police officers who were slain. Such is the efficacy of a song born in suffering to minister to others in the midst of their season of darkness.

Thank you, Keith, Michael, and choir for preparing and presenting music each and every Sunday that taps into our very marrow and reminds us “from whence our help comes” (Ps 121:1).

When we, like Richard Smallwood, are able to share the good news of the God who meets us in the depths and ministers to us there, there are at least 2,900 others facing the same travail who are grateful for our testimony.