The big picture

As we often tend to do at the start of an untried new year, I find myself wondering where my focus should be, what goals are appropriate for Prairie and which ones I ought to be choosing for myself.

There’s at least one thing I know for sure: I would like to become a more faithful follower of Christ. Like Beth.

Perhaps this has been prompted in part by the challenging and thought-provoking chapel series on Hebrews 11, 12 and 13 that we did last fall where our speakers focused on individuals included in the “list of the faithful.” As I turn to the dictionary for definitions of the word “faithful” I find terms like loyal, devoted, staunch and steadfast expanded by firm conviction, resistance to change of allegiance and constancy of character. That’s a tall order and when the writer of Hebrews informs me that “a great cloud of witnesses” is observing my progress, I feel woefully inadequate.

How can I possibly match the accomplishments of Enoch, Abraham and Moses?

But I am coming to realize it isn’t only the feats of the mighty that demonstrate faithfulness, but rather the simple daily steps that we take in godly obedience. After all, Daniel had already demonstrated his loyalty to God on a regular basis long before the lion’s den. Fortunately, throughout Hebrews 12 and 13 we are given a step-by-step description of what faithfulness actually looks like as we live it out in practical ways, regardless of where we are or under what circumstances.

We are invited to strive for the things that matter, like peace, holiness, purity and contentment. To show brotherly love and practice hospitality. To choose the release of bitterness instead of holding onto anger and revenge, believing that God is bigger than our injustice. We can likewise opt to set aside our comfort and convenience and identify with those who suffer, whether through fault of their own or innocently. And where the rubber really “meets the road,” we can choose joyful submission to those over us, trusting God to work even in their mistakes. To the extent that we are willing to make these things a part of our daily lives, to that extent God is able to use us to accomplish his purposes.

These challenging chapters have encouraged us to see the big picture, to let go of the things—even good things—that hinder and distract. Esau (12:16) failed because he chose short-term gratification over a far more significant long-term vision.

I am so prone to do the same. Jesus kept his eyes on the larger goal, enduring pain and hardship because of the eternal joy that he knew was ahead: the glory of his Father’s presence and the deep satisfaction of seeing our salvation accomplished. It is a proven truth that those through whom God works in large ways are most often those who have endured through difficult times, trusting him to be their anchor in the storms of life.

In stark contrast to the terrible desert mountain that the Israelites were forbidden to approach (12:18-21), we are encouraged to remember that our heavenly home is a place of loving welcome where we will enjoy the results of a faithful life.

Our beloved staff member Beth MacKenzie has just reached that heavenly home. We celebrated her thirty-seven years of service to Prairie and when I asked our staff what they will remember most about Beth, the response was a list pages long. It includes things like dedication, gentleness, helpfulness, encouragement, humility, a servant heart, a quiet trust in God. But the quality mentioned most often? Faithfulness. I guess that’s another reason why I’m thinking along those lines these days.

I would like to be remembered like that. Wouldn’t you?
Thank you for the *Servant* magazine. It is the one periodical that I read from cover to cover every time and am blessed by it. We are so sorry to hear that Phil Callaway is leaving but we know it takes time to be a grandparent! May the Lord’s blessing continue to be upon those who take the time and make the effort to produce such a fine publication.

**William & Adina Hartin, Surrey, BC**

Your jarring juxtaposition across the centerfold of *Servant*’s autumn issue shouted volumes: on the left page, the five young men who famously (within the church, at least) “gave that which they could not keep to gain that which they cannot lose” contrasted so starkly on the right-hand page with the confused young “mega pop-star” who so famously (within the world) is giving away that which he should keep to gain that which he will lose.

**Pastor Arlyn vanEnns, Ft. Chipewyan, AB**

I was thrilled to read “Embracing the Mystery” in Issue 94 of *Servant*...It is amazing that all sorts of theologians think they can comprehend the Godhead (so fully) that they can put their theology in a neat little box. I came to Prairie from a very evangelical Lutheran background but my thinking was sorely tested by a very strict Baptist teacher. This was good for me because it made me question the dogmatic theologies that were all around me. Since then I have fellow-shipped with believers from many different churches who were serving the Lord on the mission field and bringing the gospel to those who had never heard and they are all my brothers and sisters in the Lord.

**David Sand, Sequim, WA**

Mark Maxwell’s fine article on “Embracing the Mystery” and that of David Platt, “God’s Grand Design,” approach the area I have struggled with for years. In his little book “Evangelism & the Sovereignty of God” J.I. Packer helped me across the chasm which I had built up. Like most North American Christians I thought that I was a pretty good find for God and that he had found in me a treasure which could be used for his glory. I am now starting to understand, along with Paul, that in me there is no good thing and that my calling is to obedience. Thank you for your devotion to God’s work at Prairie.

**Bruce Sticklee, Barrie, ON**
SAYING GOODBYE TO THE FEAR-DRIVEN LIFE

PHIL CALLAWAY
When I was a child the government instituted a mandatory drill for us first graders wherein the teacher interrupted math class and commanded us to lunge beneath our desks and place our hands over our tiny heads. This terrified many of the kids. Not me. School inconvenienced me, so the drill was the highlight of my day. I lacked the good sense to be frightened out of my mind.

As a six-year-old, I had no idea that world leaders were experiencing itchy trigger fingers around nuclear weaponry and that some bureaucrat had the bright idea that we would be safest beneath wooden desks. Yes, this would be the key to survival in the event of a nuclear attack.

The day would come when we would tell our grandchildren, “There was a nuclear attack but we were fine. Others weren’t. But we had very solid desks and we hid beneath them.”

Fear was nothing new, of course. Louis Pasteur had such an irrational fear of dirt and infection that he refused to shake hands. President and Mrs. Benjamin Harrison were so intimidated by this newfangled thing called electricity that when it was installed in the White House they didn’t dare touch the switches. If there were no servants around to turn off the lights at night, the Harrisons slept with the lights on.

In 1955 more than 20 percent of Americans thought humans would disappear from the planet by 1960. That didn’t stop them from building houses, acquiring mortgages, and investing in pension plans, but many thought it was the end. By the 1970s books like *The Late Great Planet Earth* were flying off store shelves, and when the year 2000 arrived despite the Y2K scare, my saintly mother observed with obvious disappointment, “We never thought we’d see the year 2000. I can’t believe it. I fear for our grandkids. I fear for you.”

Fast forward to 2015 and fear has reached epidemic proportions. Turn on the television and the news anchor smiles a “Good evening” then spends an hour telling us why it isn’t. As I travel, western Christians confide that they’ve never been more frightened. Terrorism. Radical Islam. Ebola. The economy. It seems we are still plunging beneath our desks, putting our hands over our heads, allowing fear to steal the life and joy God wired us to experience.

Fear and worry are co-conspirators and I have spent more than enough time in their company. I am guilty of worry. As a humorist, I worry that the gentleman who invented rap music is out there working on something new. I fear having a heart attack during the game “Charades.” Imagine clutching your chest and falling to the floor only to have people guessing, “Love. It’s love. No, seal. You’re pretending to be a seal. That’s it. Okay, whose turn is it next?”

Has any culture been able to readily access more paranoia than ours? Rumors on the Internet claim that cold water causes cancer, that we should never combine shrimp and Vitamin C, that holding your cell phone to your left ear is fine, but not the right as this will directly affect the brain.

Fear can be a healthy thing, of course. For some, fear of jail is the beginning of wisdom. Fear of lung cancer helped a friend kick a pack-a-day habit. Fear of licking metal doorknobs in winter has kept my tongue intact since that fateful January day in 1965.

When the Moscow Circus came to New York, a fearless and beautiful lion tamer performed an astonishing feat. She walked into the cage of a fierce lion, and headed straight toward it. The lion humbly wrapped its paws around her and nuzzled her with affection as the crowd thundered its approval. All except for one Midwesterner who hollered, “What’s so great about that? Anybody can do that!” The ringmaster laughed. “If you’d like to try, step into the cage.” The man replied, “Sure. But first get that lion out of there.”

If you’re climbing over a zoo fence late at night, it’s good to fear lions. But most of our fears give small things big shadows. The fear-driven life defeats the Christian in a hundred ways. It chokes our courage, invites inactivity, and steals our joy.

A friend has taken to forwarding every frightening email he can lay his mouse on. His latest obsession is a YouTube video on how Muslims will take over the world.

I phoned him after watching it. “I got your video,” I said.

“Yeah?” He was excited. “What did you think?”

“I think that God must be really, really worried.”

There was an uncomfortable pause. Then he said, “Oh…I get it. You’re being sarcastic, right?”

I told him the story of a man I met from the Middle East. When he turned from Islam to follow Jesus, four friends showed up at his house, held him down and yelled, “Recant or we’ll kill you.” Knowing the end was near he called on the name of Jesus and later said, “I saw a white figure coming toward me with outstretched arms. The men must have seen it too, because they dropped their knives and fled.”

David Garrison, a former missionary to Libya and author of *A Wind in the House of Islam: How God is Drawing Muslims Around the World to Faith in Jesus Christ*, says, “We’d be very hard-pressed to nail down specific numbers, but certainly hundreds of thousands have walked away from Islam and come to faith in Jesus Christ.”
Yes, these are dark times, but God has always done amazing work in the dark. Whatever times we are given, we are not called to worry but to trust, to pray, to love.

During World War II, when the famous General George Patton was praised for his courage and bravery, he replied, “I am not a brave man…The truth is, I am an utter coward. I have never been within the sound of gunshot or in sight of battle that I wasn’t so scared I had sweat in the palms of my hands.” Yet when Patton’s autobiography was published, he wrote: “I learned very early in my life never to take counsel from my fears.”

Taking counsel from our fears chokes courage. General Patton’s comments remind me of the advice God gave Joshua, “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9).

Dining on paranoia saps our courage and stokes our fears. Focusing on God’s presence helps courage return and brings lasting peace. David knew this when he wrote, “I have heard the many rumors about me, and I am surrounded by terror. My enemies conspire against me, plotting to take my life. But I am trusting you, O Lord, saying, ‘You are my God! My future is in your hands’” (Psalm 31:13-15).

We are unaccustomed to images of health workers clad in head-to-toe protective gear. Emergency response teams loading and unloading patients into waiting ambulances. A journalist kneeling in the desert wearing an orange jump suit and somber face. Standing over him, a man in a mask wielding a blade; then using it to do the unthinkable.

Prayer leads to peace.
According to the Apostle Paul, the first fruit of prayer is peace:
“Let your requests be made known to God and the peace of God will guard your hearts” (Phil. 4:6-7).

Let’s take a stand against panic. The best decisions are made in an atmosphere of calm. Prayer helps create this atmosphere.

Prayer moves the heart of God.
“The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16).

“…if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven” (Matt. 18:19).

Your prayers matter. Most likely you won’t be researching ways to cure the virus or defeat the terrorists, but you can do this: you can lift your prayers to God. Let’s join our hearts and pray.
As Christians we have incredible resources that we can draw upon in times of fear, including prayer, reading scripture, the comfort of the Holy Spirit and the friendship of other believers. I agree with Paul in 2 Timothy 1:7 who reminds us that “God gave us a spirit, not of fear, but of power and love and self-control.” Sometimes our human reaction is to avoid our fears at all costs, but this verse reminds us that God has a better way. Two things that we can do when a spirit of fear overtakes us are to both identify and ‘call out’ our fears. By identifying and facing them—talking about them and observing what happens when these emotions arise—we lessen their power over us. Secondly, recognizing that there are things beyond our control, but fully under control in God’s eyes, we can focus on what we do have influence over. The Serenity Prayer expresses this well:

**GOD**

GRANT ME THE SERENITY TO ACCEPT THE THINGS
I CANNOT CHANGE
THE COURAGE TO CHANGE
THE THINGS I CAN
AND WISDOM TO KNOW
THE DIFFERENCE

**WHILE FEAR IS A COMMON EMOTION THAT EVERYONE FACES,** as Christians we have incredible resources that we can draw upon in times of fear, including prayer, reading scripture, the comfort of the Holy Spirit and the friendship of other believers. I agree with Paul in 2 Timothy 1:7 who reminds us that “God gave us a spirit, not of fear, but of power and love and self-control.” Sometimes our human reaction is to avoid our fears at all costs, but this verse reminds us that God has a better way. Two things that we can do when a spirit of fear overtakes us are to both identify and ‘call out’ our fears. By identifying and facing them—talking about them and observing what happens when these emotions arise—we lessen their power over us. Secondly, recognizing that there are things beyond our control, but fully under control in God’s eyes, we can focus on what we do have influence over. The Serenity Prayer expresses this well:

**FACULTY FOCUS**

RITCHIE WHITE

Professor of New Testament

As a professor, one of my greatest fears is being unprepared for class—which is why I often over-prepare. I can even recall a disturbing dream of an auditorium filled with students waiting for class to begin, but by the time I find my tie and appear it’s an hour late and most of the students have left.

AL MERTES

Associate Professor of Youth Ministry

Even though I’ve been involved in youth ministry for almost all of my adult life there is still a fear of not being accepted by the teens that I speak to. I’m truly afraid that one day I’ll get up and my words will fall on deaf ears or worse they’ll ignore me and all text and Facebook each other instead.

MELODIE DIEMERT

Associate Professor of Old Testament

One of my fears is of tight spaces! I can recall a family outing to some caves in Oregon. The trek started out nice and roomy, but the deeper we went, the tighter it got. Armed only with a couple of lanterns we eventually had to crawl army-style and the feeling of the corridor all around me—the weight of the mountain—caused me to panic. I’ve not been spelunking since.

PETER MAL

Managing Director – Communications & Technology

Having come from India, my mother always told us stories about snakes, so naturally to this day I am afraid of them. When I was about twenty I remember discovering one on our back deck. My father, forty-nine years older than me, saw me turn white and freeze so he quickly took care of the “deadly” two-foot long garden snake like it wasn’t even there. Go, Dad, go!

KEVIN PETERS

Associate Professor of Sociology & Psychology

As a professor, one of my greatest fears is being unprepared for class—which is why I often over-prepare. I can even recall a disturbing dream of an auditorium filled with students waiting for class to begin, but by the time I find my tie and appear it’s an hour late and most of the students have left.

Commonly Listed Fears

01 Public Speaking
02 Spiders & Critters
03 Flying
04 Tight Spaces
05 The Dark
06 Heights
07 Death
08 Rejection
09 Crowds
10 Hospitals
The Bible in the News

Prairie alum editor of King James Version update

In the culmination of a nine-year process, the Modern English Version, an update of the King James Version, was released September 2, 2014. The New Testament was finished in 2011 for the 400th anniversary of the KJV, with the entire Bible reaching completion this past year. Realizing the need to update the King James Version for the twenty-first century, forty-seven English and American translators representing multiple churches and some of the world’s leading colleges, seminaries and universities joined forces to produce an edition based on a modern English vernacular while preserving as much of the original wording, rhythm and flow as possible. Chief Editor of the project was Southern Baptist scholar Jim Linzey, who attended Prairie High School in 1974-75. The MEV uses the Jacob Ben Hayiim edition of the Masoretic Text for the Old Testament and the Textus Recpetus for the New Testament, both of which were used for the KJV, and also includes a concordance, references and book summary for each book.

www.modernenglishversion.com

New modern Persian Bible launched in UK and Turkey

A major new translation of the whole Bible into modern Persian was launched in London and Istanbul in September 2014. Its publishers are Wycliffe Bible Translators and Elam Ministries. Elam was founded in 1990 by senior Iranian church leaders with a vision to serve the growing church in Iran. At the time of the Islamic revolution in 1979, there were no more than 500 Christians in the country. Now Iran is thought to have one of the fastest growing churches in the world with estimates ranging from a conservative 100,000 believers to 370,000 and more. “Though the event was joyful, we are sad it had to take place outside Iran,” said Sam Yeghnazar, founder and director of Elam. “This event proves the worldwide church will always bring the Scriptures to people, however closed a country is meant to be.” Despite restrictions from the Iranian government, Elam aims to print and distribute at least 300,000 copies over the next three years. The venture was named The Michaelian Project in honor of Iran’s most notable Bible translator, Tateos Michaelian, who was shot dead twenty years ago.

www.modernpersianbible.com

Incredible Islands

It is estimated that 70% of all decisions for Christ are made between the ages of four and fourteen, and yet just 3% of the church’s resources are focused on this age group. The Canadian Bible Society has partnered with OneHope in the US in releasing a new children’s video game as a part of their response to the recent, concerning Bible Engagement Study results. If parents aren’t engaged with the Bible, it stands to reason that their children aren’t either. Incredible Islands is already changing children’s ministry paradigms by presenting Scripture and biblical principles in a familiar and entertaining way. This new ministry tool is designed to help the church extend its impact beyond on-site programming to disciple children throughout the week and engage them where many of them already are—online. To learn more about how Incredible Islands can enhance your current ministry, visit www.incredibleislands.com

Meditation

“I find most help in trying to look on all the interruptions and hindrances to work that one has planned out as...trials sent by God to help one against getting selfish over one’s work. Then one can feel that perhaps the true work for God consists in doing some trifling haphazard thing that has been thrown into the day. It is not a waste of time...it is the most important part of the work of the day—the part one can best offer to God. After such a hindrance, do not rush after the planned work; trust that the time to finish it will be given and keep a quiet heart about it.”

APRIL

Published in 1611, the King James translation introduced eighteen classic phrases into the English language and made famous some 240 more from earlier English translations. These include such well-known sayings as:

“The root of the matter”
Job 19:28

“Set thine house in order”
Isaiah 38:1

“A thorn in the flesh”
2 Corinthians 12:7

“How are the mighty fallen”
2 Samuel 1:19

“Turned the world upside down”
Acts 17:6

“Beat their swords into plowshares”
Isaiah 2:4

ANNIE KEARY
1825-1879
ONLINE

Quoteworthy

MARTIN LUTHER

“God does not need our good works; our neighbor does.”

MATTHEW McCONAUGHEY actor

“Every hero doesn’t do this great big hero thing. They do the simple thing over and over…and they stick to it.”

MICHAEL HORTON in Ordinary

“The gospel makes us extrospective, turning our gaze upward to God in faith and outward to our neighbor in love. This is true freedom—freedom from sin’s guilt and tyranny, so that we can actually love people as gifts instead of debts.”

ROBERT FARRAR CAPON Episcopal priest and author

“Jesus came to raise the dead. He did not come to reward the rewardable, improve the improvable, or correct the correctable; he came simply to be the resurrection and the life of those who will take their stand on a death he can use instead of on a life he cannot.”

Recommended

Chris Tomlin Love Ran Red (sixstepsrecords)

Referred to by TIME magazine as “likely the most often sung artist anywhere,” Chris Tomlin celebrates Jesus and his sacrifice in this worshipful new cross-focused album. In his 11th project to date, Tomlin, among the most well-known and influential artists in contemporary Christian music, offers some of the strongest songs of his career. Worship has always been his heartbeat and this latest CD affirms his calling all the more. Love Ran Red will go down as yet another success in Tomlin’s growing body of work as his songs become woven into the fabric of the church around the world.

Nabeel Qureshi Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus (Zondervan)

“I had lived my whole life with a vibrant confidence…Now I was a shell, outwardly clinging to Islam while inwardly a torrent of confusion.” This powerful book tells the story of the clash between Islam and Christianity in one man’s heart and of the peace he eventually found in Jesus. Providing an intimate window into a loving Muslim home, Qureshi shares how he developed a passion for Islam before discovering, almost against his will, evidence that Jesus rose from the dead and claimed to be God. Unable to deny the arguments but not wanting to deny his family, Qureshi struggled with an inner turmoil that will challenge Christians and Muslims alike.

Now You Know

The number of children living in poverty in the developed world, according to UNICEF: 76.5 million

(Half of American sports fans believe supernatural forces are at work in sports, either praying for their team or believing they’re cursed)

To boost the use of public transport, authorities in Dubai are giving out prizes worth more than $270,000 to commuters who ride trains and buses

(American tax-filers donated 1.33% of their aggregate income to charity last year. Canadians donated 0.64%)

Cost of the new, solid titanium Reinast luxury toothbrush: $4,000. A custom-built, diamond-encrusted version is also available.

Annual salary for hairdressers in Italy’s Parliament: $125,000 The average Italian nurse or high school teacher earns $30,000.

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Well-known speaker and author Francis Chan has teamed up with his wife Lisa to offer a larger perspective on how we view one of the most important relationships in our lives. In *You and Me Forever* they share what it means to have a marriage with eternal significance that satisfies the deepest parts of our souls. These days the Chans are working to start a church planting movement in the inner city of San Francisco. SERVANT recently caught up with them at their California home and learned more about the difference between boring and biblical marriages.

**SERVANT: WHY DID YOU FEEL THAT A BOOK LIKE THIS WAS NEEDED?**

**LISA:** Francis is usually the visionary of our family so it started with him. But he’s always been very good about encouraging me to speak into women’s lives. Over twenty years of being in ministry and both being leaders of a church, we saw so much heartache in marriages and a lot of our time was spent in counselling and encouraging couples and helping them discover what God wanted for them. We both had a desire to see a radical change in Christian marriages, that they would look so different from the world. It all started out of our heart for people and feeling like God was asking us to speak into their brokenness.

**YOU MENTION “WASTED MARRIAGES.” IS IT POSSIBLE TO HAVE A LONG MARRIAGE BUT STILL CALL IT WASTED? WHAT DOES THAT LOOK LIKE?**

**FRANCIS:** It’s like wasted money. We’ve all wasted money that could have been spent saving a life instead of on something meaningless. The same thing is true about our time and our marriages. We could have rescued so many people out of slavery, used our home to disciple so many people, to give shelter to those who needed it. But instead we just decided to spend it on ourselves. To me that’s a waste. We’re just not that important. God says what you’re willing to give up, in eternity you’ll be rewarded for a hundred times over and we’ll wonder why we spent it all on ourselves.

**HOW DID WE AS BELIEVERS COME TO THIS PLACE OF HAVING SUCH MEDIocre MARRIAGES THAT YOU CAN’T REALLY DISCERN THE DIFFERENCE DIVORCE-WISE BETWEEN THOSE IN THE CHURCH AND THOSE OUTSIDE?**

**FRANCIS:** It begins with our understanding of who God is and what we’re created for. I think the church has almost reduced Christianity to praying a prayer and knowing you’re going to heaven so just have a happy marriage and try to get along. That’s boring. It’s not biblical. Christ called us to something greater. If you lose your life, you’ll find it. The core of it is making the decision to follow Jesus, trusting him for a life of adventure, trusting him enough to let go of our comforts, because if we don’t have that vision for our lives, we won’t have it for our marriages. We’ll just try to please each other and ourselves, which is no different from the world. When two people understand what they’re put on earth to do and they pursue that mission together, the bond becomes so tight.

**LISA:** There’s nothing new under the sun. It’s not like suddenly we’re born more selfish than they were a hundred years ago. And yet we’re living in a very narcissistic culture and the messages are so much louder and coming from every direction. The enemy has always been here but he...
has such a strong presence now through media and every other outlet that the fight becomes so much more real and we need to put on the armor of God and be aware of the battle and ready for it. I think that need has grown because I feel like the enemy has grown in his power and control over the world and we have to think seriously about what needs to change in our life. The message will always be: Do what you want, it’s all about you. And that is the exact opposite of what God says will bring us life.

WRITING A BOOK TOGETHER MUST HAVE BEEN INTERESTING. WAS IT EVER THE CAUSE OF A FIGHT?  
FRANCIS: I thought we were going to fight because you think Satan will attack the marriage and you need to be ready for it and also because this was the first big project we’ve done together. When I got married, people told me: this first year is going to be tough. But it wasn’t. It was awesome. Wait until you have kids. The kids have been great. The terrible twos were our favorite years. So, uh-oh, you’re going to do this big project with your wife? It’s been great and I feel like we’re so much closer after having done this together.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY IS THE PURPOSE OF A MARRIAGE?  
LISA: God outlines it in Ephesians 5. It’s a picture to the world of Christ and the church. We literally can display the gospel and what it looks like to follow Christ just by the way we live out our marriages. That’s why in the book there’s such an urging that we want our marriages to be worthy of the calling we have received. Right now there is so much ugliness and hypocrisy. Why not just say, I’m going to choose in my marriage to show people what it looks like to love God and pursue him, to display the gospel starting with this one other person?

WHAT ABOUT THE WOMAN WHO WOULD LOVE TO GLORIFY GOD IN HER MARRIAGE BUT HER HUSBAND IS FAR FROM THAT?  
LISA: I’ve spoken with so many women in that position and cried with them. God’s best design, obviously, is for both people to be on board because that’s the most accurate picture of his church. But I would say, don’t underestimate what he can do through you and your obedience and the picture you’re going to give, not only to your family and your children, but to others around you. People are watching and there is still so much that God can accomplish through one woman’s willingness to obey and follow with abandon. I can choose to follow Christ today and love the way that he wants me to love and take my hurt and disappointment to the Lord. Believe that God is still going to do something in your willingness to let go of that good desire to have a husband who’s right there with you. You can still choose to be a beautiful picture to the world of what it looks like to follow Jesus.

YOU SAY THAT HAPPILY EVER AFTER IS POSSIBLE BUT NOT THE WAY THAT FAIRYTALES TALK ABOUT. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO THE TWO OF YOU?  
FRANCIS: I dream of the day when we stand before God and hear him say, “Well done. Come on in. Inherit the riches of the kingdom prepared for you from before the foundation of the earth.” And I picture seeing Lisa and the kids and I’ll say to them, “I told you. I knew this was going to be worth every time I trusted God on earth, all the sacrifice, everything. Look at this place, look at what we have forever!” To me that’s a happy ever after moment.

LISA: In an earthly sense it also means to me that if we died tomorrow and people were gathered at our funeral, they would be thinking I hope there’s a heaven because their lives didn’t make sense unless there is one. That’s how we want to have lived our lives, that we gave up things or we were radical and did things that didn’t make sense to people. But it won’t matter when we’re in the presence of God and experiencing the riches of the kingdom and the joy of just being with Christ. I’m looking forward to that.

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE REMEMBERED?  
LISA: As someone who loved God and people. Someone who tried to follow the two greatest commandments.

FRANCIS: That I loved Jesus passionately and joyfully and served him no matter what anyone else was doing. [5]

To request your copy of the Chans’ book You and Me Forever please see the enclosed envelope.
ALUMNI IN ACTION

CROSSING THE RIVER RON BROWN

I WAS A FIFTEEN-YEAR-OLD MK LIVING WITH MY PARENTS IN A SMALL TOWN IN NORTHEAST CONGO (LATER ZAIRE) WHEN LIFE TOOK A DRASTIC TURN.

The country had gained independence from Belgium in 1960 and leadership changed frequently during the initial years. By mid-1964 a rebel group called Simbas (lions) had formed in opposition to the national government and beatings, killings and imprisonment were the order of the day with foreigners being particularly at risk. It was a tense and terrible time, especially when we learned of the deaths of fellow missionaries and friends. On the very day that our family was scheduled for execution, God intervened and sent mercenary rescuers. Little did I think then that I would spend much of my life back in Africa; for now it was enough just to feel safe.

We returned to Canada where I finished high school and enrolled at Prairie Bible College. Those four years became my season of discipleship, fanning the flame of missions in my heart and broadening my exposure to the work of Prairie grads across Africa. University, marriage to Myra and seminary training followed and by 1979 we were in France for language study. Ultimately, our missionary career in Africa would span a total of twenty-six years.

In 1991 Myra and I had just returned from a home assignment and were getting settled in the city of Kinshasa. We enrolled our older daughter in first grade at the American school and, as days turned to weeks, life began to take on some routines.

By September, however, the military were restless. Salaries had been delayed, government accounts were empty, and tensions began to rise. Businesses, stores and even private homes became targets for violent looters. One morning a horde of angry men descended on our neighbor’s house, shouting and banging as they dismantled the place and carried everything down the street. We were terrified and wondered if our home would be next. As the yelling reached our front gate, I hid our computer and other valuables in the attic. Just in time, one of our quick-thinking African workers stepped in and we were spared from the tide of destruction. Others were not so fortunate.

Word of an evacuation plan came over the radio network and we gathered at a meeting point. As events unfolded throughout the city, we heard via cell phone and shortwave radio that various governments were arranging special flights to pick up their citizens if people could get across the river to Brazzaville. The following day everyone congregated downtown near the Belgian embassy where French soldiers stood guard as we piled on the back of pickup trucks and made a dash for the ferry. Once across the river we waited for a plane chartered by the Canadian government to arrive at the Brazzaville airport and pick us up. It was a relief to return to family in Alberta, but we were exhausted and frazzled, reeling from the loss of our job and our function, our friends and a part of our identity. All of our belongings were later looted, including my 300-book library. Personal possessions were gone. While these losses didn’t compare to our lives being saved, they were hard to take and it hurt.

A HORDE OF ANGRY MEN DESCENDED ON OUR NEIGHBOR’S HOUSE, SHOUTING AS THEY DISMANTLED THE PLACE AND CARRIED EVERYTHING DOWN THE STREET.
Zaire. This was the land of my birth. I had raised my young daughters here and spent three terms of a missionary career in this place. The hardships we had endured passed through my mind and I falsely reasoned that the people of Zaire had turned on us, looting our home and invading our space. It felt intrusive and wrong; we were unappreciated and victimized.

After the evacuation from Kinshasa, a root of bitterness crept into my heart because of my perception of the treatment I received from the Zairian people. My family had been traumatized by a city gone mad, by those who took advantage of a foreigner. If this was the reward for all we had given, I would never come back to these people again. My soul became dark as a curtain and started to close, shutting out those I had once loved. I was a missionary casualty in the making.

Throughout my career I had faced political evacuations, medical emergencies, numerous robberies, and the deaths of missionary colleagues. My fellow workers had gone through similar experiences but I noticed that many of them did not quit or return to their home countries. Intrigued by this, I eventually made it the topic of my doctoral research. As a mission administrator by then, I longed to see attrition rates decrease. What enabled some to stay on the front lines even in the face of spiritual and physical attack while others retreated?

Seeking answers, I interviewed missionaries throughout West Africa, finding myself often on the verge of tears as they told me their stories. Armed robbery, rape, carjacking, home invasions, hostage taking—they had suffered so and yet they still had their hand on the plough. I began to analyze the data and discovered some common factors.

Almost all of those interviewed had a strong personal conviction of God’s direction in bringing them to their place of ministry and it gave them a sense of steadfastness and calming comfort in the midst of storm. Others recalled specific times when God had spoken to them through Scripture or a message or premonition that gave them an anchor point when difficult things happened. They knew God as their keeper and understood suffering as a means to help build endurance into their character. Some had a sense of duty that enabled them to put up with hardship or a nature that could bounce back after being stretched. And there were the risk takers: those who ran toward challenge instead of away from it.

On the practical side I found that people moved on more easily when leadership came alongside and help them make good decisions in times of crisis. Finding a new ministry also helped keep them on the field. If the worker doesn’t soon find something to do after a short stabilizing period, they will easily default to giving up. People in limbo need purposeful activity to bridge to the next assignment.

Team relationships were important. An individual surrounded by caring colleagues was able to meet trauma from a position of strength. Larger relational networks that provided things like a safe place to stay, communication with family, home and churches, logistics and pastoral care allowed victims to regain equilibrium and bounce back sooner.

Five years later I found myself once again on a ferry crossing the Congo River from Brazzaville to Kinshasa where I was to teach a course at the Boma Seminary. It wasn’t until we were in the middle of the river that I suddenly realized the significance of this trip. I was actually returning to Zaire after vowing I never would. What had happened to change my mind? Looking back, I realized that I had been the recipient of those gifts of strength that had allowed me to heal and take up the challenge of Africa once again. A strong mission team had been there for us to lean on and new assignments had rejuvenated us and given hope and direction for the future.

The next few minutes turned out to be a very spiritual experience. My mother gave birth to me in this country that she had adopted in answer to God’s call. My father was the bearer of good news to the people of Zaire during a lifetime of missionary work. My own calling to return as an adult with my family was part of my spiritual journey and I had seen people respond to the preaching of God’s Word.

As the ferry plowed across the river, I began to understand forgiveness. My misplaced anger really had no human target; I had simply fallen victim to ugly circumstances that were common to many people during that 1991 Kinshasa upheaval. In fact, I remembered fondly many of my Zairian friends and realized I looked forward to being with them again. My mind cleared and I sensed a work of God’s grace as the root of bitterness dislodged and I began to anticipate my ministry week in Zaire. It turned out to be a wonderfully fulfilling experience. $]
The unexpected gift

After a heavy term of classes and schedules, we were looking forward to the prospect of a Thanksgiving holiday with my parents.

I’m a full-time student in the Humanities and Pastoral program at Prairie Bible College and my wife Stephanie is a swim coach and piano teacher. Our boys, three-year-old Reuben and one-year-old Isaiah, couldn’t wait to see Pop-pop and Grandma so after a stop in Red Deer for coffee and ice cream, we headed north to Edmonton.

It was dark on the freeway except for the headlights and I saw the moose only moments before we collided. The huge animal rolled over the top of our car, smashing the windshield and caving in the roof. I managed to steer off the highway before blacking out momentarily and came to as another motorist reached my door and began to call 911. I looked into the back seat and was profoundly relieved to see that Reuben and Isaiah appeared to be unhurt.

Stephanie was another matter. The shattered windshield lying between us hid her from view so I hurried around to the passenger door to find my wife unconscious and bleeding heavily. The highway was soon bright with emergency lights as ambulance and fire fighters responded and a STARS helicopter lifted her to a trauma unit in Edmonton.

Once my injuries had been treated, the boys went with their grandparents while I hurried to the hospital to find Stephanie. The news wasn’t good. She had sustained a deep cut to her forehead, whiplash, a subdural hematoma, severe concussion and injuries to her jaw as well as memory loss. Two days later my in-laws arrived from Winnipeg. They had already scheduled a month’s holiday and were prepared to care for our boys, making it possible for me to stay in school and Stephanie to be discharged early, even though she was still suffering the effects of brain injury.

That was just the beginning of the amazing ways that God provided for us. When we heard that Stephanie’s jaw was likely broken and several teeth would have to be removed, the elders from our church came to pray for her healing. Later she told me of her experience in those moments. It was like being cradled in the heavenly Father’s arms and showed her the peace and joy that God intended for the Body of Christ. Days later a second X-ray revealed that the jaw was not broken and the teeth might be saved.

We also quickly discovered how God demonstrates his love through his people to those who are suffering. That love was tangible in the gifts of time and presence that our brothers and sisters brought to the hospital, and our community, college and church literally surrounded us with sacrificial support when we returned home. As we looked back on God’s protection and provision in answer to the prayers of numerous people on five continents, Isaiah 43:2 took on new meaning: “When you pass through the waters I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.”

We have been through a difficult time of physical and emotional vulnerability and are still recovering. My course load had to be scaled back and our timetable readjusted. Detours aren’t easy to accept but we are coming to see that the accident was simply the wrapping on a precious gift.

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I never expected a 9-pound dog to teach me about such a wide spectrum of life. Like parenting, for instance.

From a dog you learn that things will get messy, noisy, and covered in guck. Expect it. Embrace it. Relax about it. I’ve noticed that the most ineffective parents are the ones who are uptight, tense and anxious.

With our first child we had all the parenting books arranged alphabetically. We bathed this wriggly little guy each night, video-taped his every gaga, and consulted medical books for hiccups. By the time our third came along we were so exhausted we let him chew and rearrange the parenting books, bathe himself in mud puddles, and somewhere we have a few pictures to prove he did just fine.

If I had to parent again, I would pray more and not fret about spilled root beer, scratched cars or enrolling my kid in every soccer/football/sumo match within forty miles. I would celebrate grass stains and when my daughter buried the remote in the sandbox, I would give her a high five and leave it there a week or two. I can’t look at my dog without hearing almost audibly: “Chill. Loosen up. Relax.”

This dog taught me other things too. To sit a little longer by a crackling fire. To stretch out a walk by stopping and talking to people I might otherwise ignore. She gave me perspective. I don’t have to understand everything to be happy; I should live life right now. And a bad hair day? Who cares? In fact, when people hold you down and fix your hair, just rub your head in the carpet. You’ll be fine. I learned that there is a time for making your point with great fanfare, but mostly silence is golden. That I should judge not. And be tolerant—except in the face of evil.

Two doors down lives Sidney, Mojo’s sniffmate. Life dealt Sidney the meanest of cards when his parents—a terrier and a dachshund—got together and said, “Hey! Let’s start a family!” Sidney’s belly rides an inch above the grass, his eyes droop, his black ear shoots straight up, his gray one straight out. His bark sounds like people’s names: Raul! Ralph! He doesn’t care. Nor does Mojo. Each day Sidney waddles to our doorstep and lets out a muted “War-roo!” Mojo sprints to the door and the two dance and cavort. Mojo taught us about acceptance, that the best vitamin for friendship is B1.

This little pup taught me to forgive more easily and keep short accounts. Life will smack you, but get back up, wag your tail, and move on. Sometimes you should roll on your back and kick your legs in the air.

From Mojo I learned about persistence. If you stare at someone long enough, they will let you in, maybe feed you some cheese, and everything can be cleaned up—even your life. She taught me to stop looking for perfection. That people are like pizzas: most are marvelous, but sometimes they come with anchovies. So focus on the good stuff and roll with the rest.

And she cured me of pretending. What you see is what you get and if I’m not the sort of friend they’re looking for, I’d better save them some time in making a decision. A dog may be a lot of things, but he’s no hypocrite, so be who you is, because if you ain’t who you is, you is who you ain’t.

Mojo taught me to wake up excited each day. To move on after mistakes. That when you mess up, apologize and don’t lug it around with you. And although we should rarely eat an entire cheesecake all by ourselves, when we do, just sit there and look cute. Cuteness covers a multitude of sins.

My dog has taught me to protect those I love. She reminds me of the saying popular in Uganda during the reign of dictator Idi Amin: “If you love someone, tell them quickly.” In her fifteenth year Mojo still meets me at the door and although she can’t jump as high, she puts everything into each greeting. And I think to myself, I get it. Thanks for showing me. From now on—with the exception of salesmen—no one gets out of this house without a hug. And no one leaves here on a trip without an arm around their shoulder and a prayer for their safety. Like my dog, I will enjoy small pleasures and the people in my life will never doubt that I loved them. And when possible, I will take pictures to prove that it happened.
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