Samuel continued as Israel’s leader all the days of his life. From year to year he went on a circuit from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah, judging Israel in all those places. But he always went back to Ramah, where his home was, and there he also held court for Israel. And he built an altar there to the LORD.

Other than a few significant highlights, like a personal visit by the Lord as a boy (Josephus estimated Samuel to have been 11 at that time), the anointing of Saul and then of David as kings of Israel, and leading a few key battles, it appears that the majority of Samuel’s life was spent going from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah, and stopping by his home in Ramah. From a map of that time, it appears that the full length of this circuit was about 60 kilometres. Hardly significant compared with today’s global travellers!

Surely Samuel, respected as a prophet, priest and judge by Christians, Jews and Muslims, must have had a more spectacular life than that. After all, we read in Chapter 25 that when Samuel died, all Israel assembled and mourned for him.

Why did the nation grieve as one at the death of this man? Because he was the king-maker? I don’t think so. I’m sure you agree that it was because “the Lord was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel’s words fall to the ground. All of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the Lord.”

Samuel walked humbly with his God, stayed true to the word of the Lord, dispensed justice and mercy, and embraced the humble routine of walking a circuit. So often our routines feel mundane, un-inspired, ordinary. And yet extraordinary seems to flow from doing the ordinary extra times. We remember the highlights, but are remembered for our habits. We gravitate to the adrenaline rush, but then we leave our deepest impression by the ruts in the path we travelled.

We just said good-bye to a contingent of Prairie students from bygone years who returned to campus for our Alumni Reunion. Among them were members of the classes of 1969, 1979 and 1989 who came to reunite with their classmates from fifty, forty and thirty years ago.

What a wonderful and inspiring time we had celebrating the re-graduation of the 50th anniversary class from 1969. These were the heroes among us, who, despite all their aches, pains, pills and scars, told stories of the paths they had walked. It seemed to me they had much in common, and deeply seated in their values was a determination to remain faithful to the One who had proven himself faithful to them.

I have only one objective in writing this little note…to encourage you to stay the course to which God has called you, to do the hard work of doing it again and yet again, to embrace the mundane. I believe that our objective as humans is to put a smile on the face of the Almighty and I believe that he who sees all smiles on the faithful, especially when they feel unseen.

May God bless you in your daily routines, may you feel his joy, and may his joy be your strength.
Thank you for the alumni testimonies in SERVANT. Let’s have more! I especially enjoyed issue #104 about the Prairie grad serving in the military. My husband was in the military, so we know the challenges.

Lois Wall, Clive, AB

I just read your “Coming Home” article and it reminded me of a funeral I attended recently. At the reception afterwards, I had a strange feeling that I didn’t belong there or anywhere else in this world. It wasn’t that I wasn’t welcome; it was just a feeling that this is NOT my home. As I thought about it, that’s really the way all Christians should feel if we’re living for the Lord, because this world isn’t our real home. It’s just a temporary place we’re passing through.

Michael Myers, Denver, CO

I was encouraged by Mark’s article in the Spring issue of SERVANT, “Supply Chain Evangelism.” At 81 I still haven’t discovered whether I have a spiritual gift, but along with my wife, we seek to be faithful in opportunities to serve, which are always there. We were also struck to read the testimony of Michael Hancock (“Full Circle”) and to learn more about him. His name and photo were sent to us early in the school year and we have been praying for him regularly, not knowing anything about him. What a joy to hear of the transformation that takes place in young people’s lives as they become acquainted with and obedient to God’s Word and the work of his Spirit in their lives.

Reg Friesen, Waldheim, SK
I REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME I SAW A LIVING CELL UNDER A MICROSCOPE. I HAD SNUCK INTO A COLLEGE LAB EARLY ONE MORNING WITH A TEACUP OF BRACKISH LIQUID I’D SCOOPED FROM A POND. BITS OF DECOMPOSING LEAVES WERE FLOATING ON TOP, EMITTING THE MUSTY ODOR OF ORGANIC DECAY.

No sooner had I touched one drop of pond water to a glass slide under the microscope than a universe sprang to life. Hundreds of organisms crowded into view: delicate, single-celled globes of crystal unfurling and flitting sideways, excited by the warmth of my microscope light. That busy, throbbing drop of water gave me a lasting image of the jungle of life and death we share, and beckoned me to further explore living cells.

Years later I am still observing cells, though as a physician I focus now on how they cooperate within the body. I have my own laboratory at a leprosy hospital in the bayou country of Louisiana. Again I enter the lab early, before anyone is stirring, and only the soft buzz of fluorescent lights breaks the quiet. This morning I will examine a hibernating albino bat who sleeps in a box in my refrigerator. He helps me understand how the body responds to injury and infection. I lift him carefully, lay him on his back, and spread his wings. I keep expecting him to open an eye and shriek at me, but he doesn’t.

As I place his wing under the microscope lens, again a new universe unfolds. The albinic skin under his wing is so limpid that I can look directly through his skin cells into the vessels underneath. I focus the microscope on one bluish capillary until I can see individual blood cells pushing through it. The pulsing fluid is like a river stocked with living matter: a speck of blood contains five million red cells and seven thousand white cells.

I am searching for the body’s elite special forces, which protect against invaders. Transparent, bristling with weapons, and possessing a Houdini-like ability to slip between other cells the white blood cells function as the body’s advance guard. Amorphous blobs of liquid, they roam through the bat’s body by extending a finger-like projection and hunching along to follow it. Sometimes they creep sideways on the walls of the veins; sometimes they let go and free-float in the bloodstream. To navigate smaller capillaries, the bulky white cells must elongate their shapes, while red blood cells jostle impatiently behind them.

One can’t help thinking them sluggish and ineffective at patrolling territory—until an attack occurs. I take a thin steel needle and, without waking the bat, prick through its wing to puncture a fine capillary. Instantly, a silent alarm sounds. Muscle cells contract around the damaged capillary wall, damming up the loss of precious blood. Clotting agents halt the flow at the skin’s surface. The most dramatic change, though, occurs among the listless white cells.

As if they have a sense of smell, nearby white cells abruptly halt their aimless wandering. Like beagles on the scent of a rabbit, they home in from all directions toward the point of invasion. Their unique shape-changing qualities allow them to ooze between the overlapping cells of capillary walls. When they arrive, the battle begins.

Although the battle often results in the white cell’s demise, its death has little significance. Besides the fifty billion active white cells prowling the adult human, a backup force one hundred times as large lies in reserve in the bone marrow. When an infection occurs, these reserves leap into action, like young recruits pressed into service. The body can thus mobilize a vast number of white cells;
Indeed, doctors use a count of them as a diagnostic test to judge the severity of infection.

If the body has previously identified a known threat, as in a smallpox vaccination, it imprints certain white cells with a death wish to target that one danger. These cells spend their lives coursing through the bloodstream, alert, scouting. If the summons to battle sounds, they hold within them the power to disarm a foreign agent that could destroy every cell in the body. If we as doctors were forced to choose either the human immune system alone or all the resources and technology of science but with the loss of our immune system, without a moment’s hesitation we would choose the former.

Though cells share a chemical makeup, they are as different from each other as the animals in a zoo. Red blood cells, discs resembling Life Savers candies, voyage through my blood vessels bearing oxygen supplies for the other cells. The muscle cells that absorbed so much of that nourishment they are as different from each other as the faces of my fellow worshipers, people who are shockingly different from each other and from me.

The body needs every single member for its proper health and function. More, the less visible members—I think of organs like the pancreas, kidney, liver and colon—may be the most valuable of all. Although I seldom feel consciously grateful for them, they perform vital tasks that keep me alive.

Human societies tend to assign worth based on a hierarchy of value, and living in such a society, my vision gets clouded. When that happens, I must turn back to the lesson from the body. Society confers loyalty and unity that my own body’s cells give to me. When I meet strangers in India or Africa or California who share my loyalty to the Head, ethnic and gender categories melt away in significance compared to the new identity that we share.

In the human body, the sense of belonging extends two ways: a cell follows orders from the brain, while also recognizing a bond with every other cell in the body. God calls me into an organic community, and I join a spiritual Body that binds me to other diverse cells: “We will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Eph. 4: 15-16).

No longer do I have to compete through life, looking for ways to prove myself. Instead, I have the singular goal of pleasing God, of living for an audience of One, and I can partner with other cells in the Body to accomplish his work in the world.

The church of Christ, like our own bodies, consists of individual, unlike cells that are knit together to form one Body.

During my life as a missionary surgeon in India and now as a member of the small chapel on the grounds of the leprosy hospital in Louisiana, I have seen my share of unlikely seekers after God. Most of my worship has taken place among people who do not share my tastes in music, sermons, or even thought. Still, over those years I have been profoundly—and humbly—impressed that I find God in the faces of my fellow worshipers, people who are shockingly different from each other and from me.

For kidney dialysis three times per week. However, recognizes that janitor cells are indispensable to overall health. If you doubt that, ask someone who must go in doubt that, ask someone who must go in kidney dialysis three times per week.

In a society that ranks everything, an attitude of relative worth can easily seep into the church. The association of people holding within them the power to disarm a foreign agent that could destroy every cell in the body. If we as doctors were forced to choose either the human immune system alone or all the resources and technology of science but with the loss of our immune system, without a moment’s hesitation we would choose the former.

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No longer do I have to compete through life, looking for ways to prove myself. Instead, I have the singular goal of pleasing God, of living for an audience of One, and I can partner with other cells in the Body to accomplish his work in the world.
I was waiting for a flight to Seattle when I got a call from Al Mertes, former youth ministries professor at Prairie. I was expecting his call and thought it was about speaking at the college, something my wife and I often did through our non-profit organization, Apprentice Ministries. I had no idea that Prairie was looking for a new director for that program.

When Al asked if I would come and take a look at Prairie and I replied that we would love to visit and do ministry, there was an awkward silence.

“Dan,” he said finally, “I don’t think we’re talking about the same thing.”

I was confused. “So, what are we talking about?”

Al laughed: “I’m looking for a new professor to direct our youth ministry program.” Now it was my turn to laugh!

I explained that not only did I not see myself as a professor, but I was far too busy sharing the gospel and equipping the next generation to lead well in their circles of influence around the world. I couldn’t possibly confine myself to a classroom.

We ended our conversation and I boarded my flight. When I called my wife and told her all about the conversation we both agreed that this was certainly out of left field. What a thought—me as a professor! But while I quickly dismissed the conversation, it somehow stuck with me and I began to pray.

Ten months later, after a few more conversations with Al and a lot of life and ministry, we sensed that change was coming and we were to begin seeking God for next steps. We thought he might be calling us into a possible ministry partnership. Several doors were open, but four of the five quickly closed. One remained, but the call would have to wait until morning, so we continued to pray together that night as a family.

The next day Gretchen and I sat together, coffee in hand, praying for God’s continued wisdom. We were just about to call “door number five” when the phone began to ring. It was Al. This time, as he described the vision and ministry of Prairie, inviting us to consider the possibility, I said yes. We agreed to come and talk face-to-face, but it still seemed so surreal. The Lord’s peace was very real, however, and we watched him orchestrate incredible things. In just hours plane tickets were booked and we were headed for Canada.

A simple visit to Prairie to “just check it out” turned into five days of interviews, teaching, touring the town and campus, and meeting the entire faculty. In that whirlwind of activity, something happened as I stood before a class of students and staff: I felt God’s pleasure as I passionately shared my heart! Over the next month, as we prayed and sought council, again and again God continued to lead, confirm, and bless in every step leading to our arrival in Three Hills this past May.

I had many different ideas on how to implement God’s calling on my life. But in amazing ways, like that turtle on a fence post, he placed our family here at Prairie, in his time and for his purposes. There is no other place I’d rather be than right here. God gets the glory and I still have the privilege of equipping the next generation of leaders who will transform the world with the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ! Yes, now even from a classroom.

Dan Jester is Prairie’s new Youth Ministry Program Coordinator and Instructor.
INVESTING WITH PURPOSE

As you have partnered with us in lowering the cost of training here at Prairie, more students have been able to stay in school and allow God to continue his work in their lives.

“Thank you for believing in Prairie College and in my potential. Your assistance is helping my family to continue our journey.”

YOU COULD BE THE ANSWER TO A STUDENT’S PRAYER  PLEASE SEE PAGE 8 TO DONATE

WE APPRECIATE YOUR SUPPORT OF THIS MINISTRY AND ARE PLEASED TO OFFER YOU ONE COPY* OF THE FOLLOWING...

SCOOT OVER AND MAKE SOME ROOM

By Heather Avis

In a world of divisions and margins, those who grow differently are all too often shoved aside. As God led Josh and Heather Avis to lay aside their expectations and adopt three children, one of mixed race and two with Down syndrome, they discovered priceless treasures and the “best of the best” in God’s plan for them. Heather writes with humor and honesty about the challenges and joys of parenting their unique family, knowing that paying attention to people we are prone to ignore will help us discover the extra-ordinary, abundant heart of God.

LAUGH AGAIN 2020 CALENDAR

Phil Callaway (One copy only)

This one-of-a-kind calendar from Laugh Again, Phil’s daily 5-minute radio program, features some of his favorite stories, a daily scripture reading that will take you through the Bible in a year, and the remarkably wacky artwork of Dennis Jones. Begin each day with great humour, inspiration, and a reminder of the hope we have in Jesus.

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☐ receive one of the following items:
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Prairie Bible Institute, in business as “Prairie College,” is a registered charity in Canada and the US and issues tax receipts in both currencies.
If not to God, you will surrender to the opinions or expectations of others, to money, to resentment, to fear, or to your own pride, lusts or ego. You were designed to worship God and if you fail to worship him, you will create other things...to give your life to. You are free to choose what you surrender to, but you are not free from the consequence of that choice.

"The wonderful thing about praying is that you leave a world of not being able to do something, and enter God’s realm where everything is possible."

Corrie Ten Boom

"God is not disillusioned with us. He never had any illusions to begin with."

Luis Palau

"We should not shrink from opportunities where our faith may be tried. The more I am in a position to be tried in faith, the more I will...see God’s help and deliverance."

George Muller

"The most glorious works of grace that ever took place have been in answer to prayer."

William Carey

"The wonderful thing about praying is that you leave a world of not being able to do something, and enter God’s realm where everything is possible."

NOW YOU KNOW

Many of the Easter Island heads have hidden bodies, measuring over 30 feet high.

Livraria Bertrand in Lisbon, Portugal, is the world’s oldest operating bookstore, opened in 1732.

The Mona Lisa has the highest insurance value in history for a painting, equivalent to $830 million today.

The African bush elephant only sleeps for about two hours a day.

From 1900 to 1920 tug-of-war was an Olympic event.

Hummingbirds can move forward, backward and upside down.

Guinness World Records

Guinness World Records

National Park Service

PLOS One
INNERVIEW

OFF THE BEATEN PATH

HEATHERAVIS

After years of trying to start a family, Josh and Heather Avis were forced to let go of hope as the devastating diagnosis of infertility was confirmed. They began to consider adoption and were suddenly faced with a choice between insisting on a healthy baby and accepting one who was medically fragile. As God turned their hearts upside down, the couple soon found themselves the parents of three chosen children—one of mixed race and two with Down syndrome. In her second book Scoot Over and Make Some Room, Heather, now a strong advocate for the marginalized, invites us to embrace the beauty in the often overlooked.

SERVANT: WHAT DID YOU BELIEVE GOD’S BEST FOR YOU WOULD LOOK LIKE WHEN YOU BEGAN PLANNING FOR A FAMILY?

HEATHER: I had my own idea of how life would unfold. I got married, had a career, and we were financially ready. I wanted three kids by the time I was thirty, all of whom I would give birth to, all of whom would be healthy and look like my husband and me. But the time came when we realized that it wasn’t going to happen.

YOU’VE CALLED YOUR THREE CHILDREN “WILDFLOWERS.” WAS THIS SOMETHING THAT YOU EMBRACED EASILY?

We knew our adoption agency had a baby born with Down syndrome but that had never been our plan so it wasn’t like we were being presented with this baby and said no. We had already said no on paper to a lot of what she was. When we ended up saying yes to adopting Macyn it was the scariest and the best yes of my life. She was so medically fragile that at some point we didn’t even care about Down syndrome anymore; we were adopting a little girl who was going to have to fight for her life. I was trying to create this perfect garden with my children, but instead there were these wildflowers blooming in the mud with so much beauty to offer. Parenting a child who has health issues is just a different kind of life and every moment brings a need to embrace it in a new way.

YOU’VE SAID THAT TRUE BEAUTY IS FOUND IN THE MUCK. HOW CAN YOU SAY THAT?

I can say it because I’ve lived it. I thought I knew what my life would look like until I found myself far from that path through adoption and special needs and my family just looked so different from what I expected. Then in the midst of the fog and the chaos I realized that there was so much beauty and richness in a place I had been trying to avoid all my life.

HOW IMPORTANT WAS IT THAT YOU AND JOSH WERE ON THE SAME PAGE WITH THIS?

It wasn’t as important that we were constantly on the same page, but that we were completely for one another. When I was feeling doubtful in the decision, Josh would remind me about all the truths I had already spoken about why we should adopt this little girl. Then he’d be feeling unsure and I could remind him what we had seen of God’s goodness and all that was happening. At the end of the day, though, when you’re bringing home a baby, then you both need to be in 100% agreement and we were.

WHAT WERE YOUR BIGGEST FEARS?

In the very early stages we didn’t know whether Macyn would live or die because she had a severe lung condition and a hole in her heart that would require open-heart surgery. We wanted to keep her alive as long as possible, but I knew I had no control over the days of her life. All of our
Somewhere off the rose-petal path where easy, normal, and nice bloom, true beauty lives in the muck. God picked me up off the comfortable path I had paved for myself and drop-kicked me into the mud. And the farther I stepped from that pretty path of easy, normal, and nice, the more clearly I could see the beauty he was creating all around me...I have heard the Lord’s heartbeat the loudest while walking in the wilderness, far from the easy path I stepped out on years ago.  

- Heather Avis
As reality began to set in, the young couple realized that it would be impossible to find work in their professions if they couldn’t speak the language, so they immediately signed up for a Hebrew class. It was there that they heard of an organization that offered assistance to new immigrants. They decided to inquire and were immediately accepted into a program where they found help in adapting to the culture, food and supplies, and most of all, loving friendships. The manager even prayed regarding their deep desire to have a child.

One day at the shop where she worked, Rafaela met a young couple from Canada. She told them the story of how she and her husband had been successful in starting a new life all because of the kindness and support they had received—from a group of Christians! Rafaela was astonished to discover that Peter and Deanna Fast were part of that same organization.

Involvement with the land of Israel was not something new for the couple. They had met as students at Prairie Bible College and midway through Peter’s studies he had interned in the Holy Land for eight months with a ministry called Bridges for Peace. A love for history and a family heritage that included a deep affection for the Jewish people had fostered a lasting passion for the land. As he spent hours with elderly Jews doing much-needed repairs in their homes, that passion became even more personal.

Deanna knew very little about the importance of Israel and the Jewish people, but through her study of the Bible at Prairie and the influence of friends, her heart was being touched and she knew that God was leading her into overseas ministry. After she had transferred to the University of Lethbridge to study music, she and Peter began dating and in 2006 they were married. A few years later their growing interest in the nation of Israel prompted them to step out in faith and move there as volunteers with BFP. The mission’s goal was to build relationships between Christians and Jews in Israel and around the world, and that was exactly what Peter and Deanna wanted to do.

Immediately they found themselves immersed in a culture that, compared to life in Canada, was less convenient, more congested, infinitely busier, amazingly diverse, more fun to drive in, and almost completely without personal space. Their home was on a busy street in the centre of Jerusalem in an orthodox neighbourhood made up of Jews from France, Russia and Ethiopia as well as native-born Israelis. Learning Hebrew seemed like a good way to break
down social barriers, so the Fasts plunged ahead, learning how to barter at the market and strike up conversations with local merchants. Their neighbours helped them practice Hebrew in exchange for English lessons and it was a pleasant surprise to find people eager to talk about God and matters of faith. Deanna’s musical talents made her a welcome guest at a bar mitzvah and wedding, and when she joined a leadership course, she found herself the first Christian the other students had ever met.

For twenty-five blessed hours on Shabbat (Sabbath) every week, stores closed, public transportation ground to a halt, and peace reigned. It was an oasis of quiet in the midst of the craziness of everyday life and Peter and Deanna looked forward to that time when they could meet with fellow believers and refresh their souls in the Word of God.

Living in Israel through all the seasons allowed them to experience the biblical feasts and cultural and national observances. They learned to build a sukkah (booth), witnessed the breaking of the fast of Yom Kippur at the Western Wall, dressed up for the feast of Esther, walked the streets of the Old City with the golden glow of candles from the hannukiah, and were invited to observe and participate in Passover Seder meals.

Life had its somber moments as well: praying with others for needed rain, reflecting with Israelis during the blaring sirens on Holocaust Memorial Day, racing to bomb shelters during rocket and missile attacks, keeping gas masks at the ready. Neighbours were amazed that the Canadians stayed even when there was danger. Their commitment during the tough times as well as the good became an encouragement and a witness to everyone who knew them.

As volunteers, Peter and Deanna soon discovered significant needs everywhere they turned. Poverty was a reality for thousands of school children and many Israeli Jews, including the elderly, so every month BFP teams dispersed over sixty tons of food out of their foodbanks in Jerusalem and Karmiel to communities throughout the country. They repaired badly deteriorating homes and apartments for those who had no resources to help themselves, comforted Holocaust survivors, helped new immigrants get on their feet, and stood in solidarity with terror victims in their time of grief, helping to rebuild shattered lives.

After centuries of anti-Semitism, violence and terrible persecution, even in the name of Jesus, the chasm between Christians and Jews is vast and deeply ingrained. An Orthodox friend of Peter’s once commented, “You’ll never meet a thirty-year-old Jew or a fifty-year-old Jew or an eighty-year-old Jew. We’re all 3000 years old. We pass down our history, we cherish the good and the bad, and we never forget.” After 74 years, the wounds of the Holocaust are vivid, as if it happened yesterday. Every year on Tish b’Av (9th day of the month of Av) Jews all over the world still mourn the destruction of the First and Second Temple. They are a people who clearly remember and have been shaped by their history—the good, the bad and the ugly. And the pain remains.

But there is hope. The stories are multiplying of people who were spared during terrorist attacks or who could never have made a life for themselves in Israel without believers coming alongside in their hour of need and demonstrating godly compassion in practical ways. When that happens, it radically changes the perception of what a true Christian is and what they believe, and the barriers of history begin to topple.

After three years in Israel, the Lord clearly and unexpectedly let Peter and Deanna know that their time in this fascinating country was finished. Trusting that new doors would open, they returned to Canada in 2013 and Peter was soon offered a position with Bridges for Peace Canada as the National Development Director. Sensing that God wanted them as a family to invest in a longer-term commitment, he later accepted the role of Deputy National Director and then National Director in 2019. The Fasts now live in Winnipeg with their two young children, Judah and Naomi.

In addition to dealing with budgets, strategies and the everyday responsibilities of overseeing an office, Peter also spends much of his time teaching and speaking at different events across Canada and internationally, supporting the mission and vision of BFP. At any given time they may be coordinating 60 to 70 volunteers serving in Israel from countries around the world, followers of Jesus who have a heart for Israel and the nations and a desire to reach people with the love of God.

Peter and Deanna often lead tours to the Holy Land and it was on one such journey that they crossed paths with Rafaela in her shop. The young woman was obviously pregnant and it was a thrilling confirmation of their efforts to hear how prayers had been answered and love and grace had made a difference in Jewish lives.

Israel is not immune to challenges. It is almost always a politically charged country and the threat of terrorism and unfriendly neighbours requires constant vigilance to ensure the nation’s survival and future. Complicated political and national issues remain a reality with no easy answers and as immigrants arrive from all corners of the earth, individual cultural identities struggle to blend with little in common but their faith.

At the same time, God is moving powerfully, bringing the Jewish people home and slowly turning them back to himself as they witness his care in action. The Promised Land, reclaimed, but deeply wounded made a difference in Jewish lives. The Fasts were named 2019 Distinguished Alumni for Early Career Excellence. Visit Bridges for Peace at www.bridgesforpeace.com
The family farm in Manitoba was my home until we moved to Alberta and I began attending a Christian school. It was there that I heard a presentation by a student who had attended the Explore (Wilderness Leadership) program at Prairie College. She talked about the physical and mental stretching she faced and how God had used that environment to challenge and grow her.

My parents had encouraged me to go on to higher education, but I wasn’t really interested and went back to work on a bin building crew in Manitoba. After about eight months on the job, I began to feel a need for more depth in my walk with Christ and that student’s words came back to me. I too wanted to grow and be challenged, so I applied to Prairie for the fall of 2013. My plan was to stay for just one year, but the next September found me back on campus and God used those two years to do some foundational work in my life. By the spring my future wife and I had started dating and she continued with her studies while I returned to construction.

Then Prairie began a Global Social Justice Program and that interested me, so I went back—until one day at volleyball practice I suffered a concussion that forced me to drop out of school. After seven months of healing, Madison and I were married in July of 2017.

We began to prepare for Globe-TREK, Prairie’s intercultural internship, where students spend the better part of a year experiencing missions around the globe. After travelling as a team to different countries and cultures, each student then spends six months in the location of their choice. Madison and I wanted to serve our internship in Mozambique, but ran into visa problems. We missed the first leg of the trip with our team and after trying for two months to get a visa we began to think that God was closing a door. Finally we were asked to consider going to Nepal and by then anywhere sounded great, so off we went.

The experience was a bit surreal for me. We were welcomed warmly by the missionaries there, but very little was familiar as we learned our place on the team. It was a time of cultural discomfort and stretching; a time of seeking and dependency as we saw how futile our plans were if God was not involved.

At the same time it was encouraging to see God’s light shining in a dark land overshadowed by Hinduism as we watched local believers pray against a background of idol worship for the freedom of their people. We saw hope in the eyes of individuals and families who were the only believers in their villages, and observed their faithfulness in the face of discrimination and abuse. Times of hardship were covered in God’s grace and mercy as we found gifts he left for us to discover.

After leaving Nepal we met up with the rest of our team in Kenya for a time to rest and share experiences. Each one had faced their own trials, grown and changed. From there we travelled as a group to Ethiopia, Egypt, Greece, Jordan, Israel, and Turkey.

Now Madison and I are at Prairie once again for my final year of studies. Looking back to when I first arrived at school and the chapters of life that have gone by, I am amazed at the many experiences God has used to change me into the man I am today: still fallen, still broken, and in need of mercy with so much more to learn.

Lance and Madison Parrott: “We wondered if God was closing a door.”

I had just returned to school when a concussion forced me to drop out."

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The summer of my sixteenth year I landed a job on a pig farm hoping to bring home the bacon. Forgive me for wallowing in puns, but the work bored me. Each morning I prayed for rain or snow—anything to keep me from that job. But God didn't answer. I think it was one of the driest summers on record.

We built a pig barn, which wasn’t really my God-given talent. Jesse, my boss, was a hard-living farmer whose eyes were tobacco yellow from smoking a pack of cigarettes before lunch. He wanted me to smoke too. “It'll build up an immunity to disease,” he said, which was the deepest conversation we had that summer. But my attitude changed the day Jesse handed me a nail gun. I loved that thing. You just lined up a wooden stud, rested the nail gun against it, and pulled the trigger. Whamo! A nail came flying out. What could possibly go wrong?

An hour after introducing me to that nail gun, Jesse held a wooden stud while I nudged the gun up against it, pulled the trigger, and missed the stud. The sharp nail stuck into the poor guy’s shoulder. Jesse looked down, stunned, as if he’d just been shot with a nail gun.

“Ow!” I said. “Sorry.” He’s gonna kill me, I thought. Then he’s gonna keel over and die. He did neither. Just pulled out the nail, cursed a blue streak, then asked, “Well, who is the stupid one here, you or me?” I have learned never to answer this question. But I did that day.

“Do you wanna quit,” said Jesse, “or can I fire you?”

It was my last day on the pig farm. But not the last I would see of Jesse.

Few things in life determine our level of joy quite like our attitude toward work. I regret having such a lousy one that summer. I wish I had viewed each day as a chance to brighten the workplace and work whole hog. “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men,” says Colossians 3:23, which changes everything because it turns work into worship.

Today I sat down and came up with a few things I love about being a writer:

- You can live anyplace you like.
- The writer has the freedom to starve almost anywhere.
- You can stare out windows without your spouse asking what you’re up to.
- You don’t develop knee problems, just a sore rear end.
- Overhead is cheap. Lincoln's Gettysburg Address was written on the back of an old envelope.
- You can work in your bathrobe without being charged with indecency.
- Your career is not over at thirty like most professional athletes.
- You can get your picture in the paper without being charged for a criminal act.
- You can speak your mind long after you’re dead.
- You can receive notes like these: “My toddler chewed most of your book. I need another one,” or, “I’m a mother of five. Each day I lock myself in the bathroom and read your book. When I come out I feel like I can face the world again.”

Whatever work you're involved in, give thanks that you have some. My friend Daryl stuffs insulation into nooks and crannies and, frankly, I don't know a more purpose-filled guy. People love him. His work is worship.

I was signing books after speaking at a men's conference a few hours from home. A tall, lanky, clear-eyed guy handed me one and I looked up. “Jesse!” I blurted out. “No way!” It was my former boss.

“How have you been?” I asked.

“So good,” he said. And tears started down his face. “I came to Jesus a few years ago.”

I asked Jesse what he’s up to. “I own that pig farm now,” he said, “and I’m loving it.”

“How’s your shoulder?”

“Fine. A little stiff when the weather changes.” Then he laughed and said, “Boy, you really nailed it.”

Visit Phil at philcallaway.com. To order your copy of his hilarious and hope-filled 2020 calendar with artwork by Dennis Jones, see pages 7 and 8.
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