


# SERVANT

A person wearing a cowboy hat and a plaid shirt stands with their back to the camera on a winding asphalt road. The road curves through a dense forest of tall evergreen trees. The lighting is soft, suggesting a misty or overcast day. The person's hands are on their hips, and they are looking down the length of the road.

## **I LOVE JESUS, BUT...**

*WHEN HEALING  
DOESN'T LOOK THE  
WAY YOU EXPECT*

**SARAH J. ROBINSON'S STORY  
OF FINDING HOPE IN THE DARK**

## **TOP GUN?**

**MAX LUCADO ON THE  
SURPRISING PLACE WHERE  
GOD DOES HIS FINEST WORK**

## **MARK MAXWELL**

**HOW HARMONY CAN BE  
PROFITABLE**

# Harmony is profitable

Not long before Covid began, my wife and I enjoyed a Christmas concert put on by our community choir. Fifty voices blended together in beautiful harmonies, united in purpose to remind us of the miracle of the Incarnation.

Beautiful things happen too when we live together in harmony with a shared mission. Objectives are achieved, productivity climbs, expenses drop, revenue grows, people enjoy their work and their coworkers, and talk in the halls or around the water cooler is about the good things that are happening. Often, in a Christian business or ministry, God is given the credit and gratitude becomes the glue that builds the team.

Companies and ministries thrive when teams live in harmony, but a house divided against itself crumbles. Harmony is both missional and profitable. I believe that these are times when those of us who are followers of Jesus Christ must put harmony at the top of our prayer list and make it the primary priority in every strategic plan. Concerned for the welfare of your church? Ministry? Business? Pray for harmony.

Ten years ago, Prairie was splintered and disoriented in its mission and losing about \$1 million a year. We asked everyone on our team to pray for harmony while we set our course to return to our created purpose: teaching the whole of the Bible to every degree-earning student. Each one would study the entire Canon under great teachers while being equipped with career-launching majors.

God granted us a miracle, as remarkable as making a lame person walk or a blind person see. He granted us harmony, bringing peace to our campus. Morale and motivation escalated, murmuring diminished, and gratitude grew. Our revenue rose with increased enrollment and donations, and we began to make a small profit.



**Harmony is more than good business.  
It is the mortar God has chosen to build  
his Kingdom on earth.**

When asked what book I had read that gave me the strategy for this turnaround, my answer was Romans, Corinthians, Ephesians, Galatians and John—both the Gospel and the letters. Every passage I read seemed to cry out for harmony.

“Love one another,” Jesus said, and “do unto others as you would have them do unto you... Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind and soul. And your neighbour as yourself.”

Today our campus is divided over how best to respond to a recent critical rise in Covid cases and the government’s operational requirements for postsecondary schools. What started as a global pandemic, shutting down businesses and borders, has turned into a heated discussion about vaccines that is dividing churches, schools, families, and ministries.

Could it be that Covid has become a distraction to take us off mission, render us ineffective and destroy our harmony?

I believe John 17 is as vital as it was 2,000 years ago. While facing injustice, persecution and crucifixion, Jesus prayed

for us—his followers—that we would love one another in complete unity, because in so doing we would prove that he came from the Father and demonstrate God’s great love for the world.

Harmony provides more than great music and a good working environment. It’s not just good business; it’s the mortar God has chosen to build his Kingdom on earth. I’m still convinced that “in all things God is working for the good of those who love him” (Rom. 8:28) and I’m waiting to see what he does next.

This year uncertainty may loom over the Christmas concert. Yet we can still dedicate ourselves to this high calling. Living together in love and harmony will do more than any performance to proclaim to the world that the Son of God has truly come. ✚



**Mark Maxwell**  
President of Prairie College

@markmaxwell





## FEARLESS

Focused on the storm?  
Or the Storm Walker?



## INNERVIEW

Finding hope in the darkness of depression

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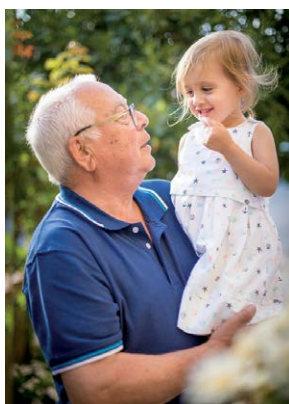
## ALUMNI IN ACTION

After thirty years  
the prodigal  
comes home



## LAUGHING MATTERS

What I learned from  
boys and cars and  
junior high



# LEGACY PLANNING

A meaningful legacy that will enrich our family and uphold the values we cherish doesn't just happen; it requires careful planning. Along with leaving a spiritual heritage, there are practical ways to **maximize your material legacy**. Broader than will planning, legacy planning involves techniques that can benefit you today as well as on your passing.

### GOOD PLANNING CAN:

- **increase income** and reduce taxes
- **empower causes** that are important to you
- **maximize stewardship**
- **bring peace of mind**
- **create financial security**

Prairie's Legacy Planning Consultant, **Tim MacKenzie**, is available to share his 20+ years of experience through workshops in your area (Canada only) or one-on-one consultations.

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For more information see:  
[prairie.edu/alumni/legacy-gift-planning](http://prairie.edu/alumni/legacy-gift-planning)



# ANXIOUS FOR NOTHING

MAX LUCADO

THIS MAY BE YOUR FIRST FLIGHT.  
BUT IT'S CERTAINLY NOT HIS.

*Before the flight, I'm a midlife version of Tom Cruise in Top Gun: wearing an air force helmet, a flight suit, and a smile the size of a watermelon slice. After the flight, Top Gun is undone. I'm as pale as bleached bone. I list to the side, and my big smile has flattened as straight as the tarmac on which we just landed. Chalk the change up to sixty minutes of acrobatics at ten thousand feet.*

I occupied the cockpit seat directly behind Lt. Col. Tom McClain. One month shy of retirement, he invited me to join him on an orientation flight. The invitation came complete with

- a preflight physical (in which I was measured for the ejection seat);
- a safety briefing (in which I practiced pulling the handle for the ejection seat);
- a few moments hanging in the harness of a training parachute (simulating how I would return to earth after any activation of the ejection seat).

Message to air force public relations: any way to scale down the ejection-seat discussion? Turns out we didn't use it. No small accomplishment since we dived, rose, and dived again, sometimes with a vertical velocity of ten thousand feet per minute. Picture a roller coaster minus the rails. We flew in tandem with another T-6. At one point, the two wingtips were separated by seven feet. I don't like to get

that close to another person in the shopping mall.

I learned that the call sign of a fighter pilot is stenciled on

IT IS IN STORMS THAT HE DOES HIS FINEST WORK.  
FOR IT IS IN STORMS THAT HE HAS OUR KEENEST ATTENTION.

the back of his helmet. Mine was Max. Col. McClain responds to T-Mac. It appears on the back of his helmet just above the collar line. I know this well. For fifty of the sixty minutes, I stared at his name. I read it forward, then backward, counted the letters, and created an acrostic: T-M-A-C. Tell Me About Christ. I couldn't stomach looking anywhere else. The horizon kept bouncing. So did the instrument panel. Closing my eyes only increased the nausea. So I stared at T-Mac. After all, he was the one with nearly six thousand hours of flight time!

He's spent more time flying planes than I've spent eating pizza, a thought that occurred to me as I began regretting my dinner from the night before. Six thousand hours! Time enough to circumnavigate the globe 143 times. No wonder he was smiling when we boarded. I actually heard him humming during a near-vertical bank turn.

Didn't take me long to figure out where to stare. No more looking down or out. My eyes were on the pilot. If T-Mac was okay, I was okay. I know where to stare in turbulence.

Peter learned the same lesson the hard way. Exchange the plane for a thirty-foot fishing boat, the Texas sky for a Galilean sea, and our stories begin to parallel. "But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary" (Matthew 14:2).

As famous lakes go, Galilee—only thirteen miles at its longest, seven and a half at its widest—is a small, moody one.

The diminutive size makes it more vulnerable to the winds that howl out of the Golan Heights. They turn the lake into a blender, shifting suddenly, blowing first from one direction, then another. Peter and his fellow storm riders knew they were in trouble. What should have been a sixty-minute cruise became a nightlong battle. The boat lurched and lunged like a kite in a March wind. Rain fell from the night sky in buckets. Lightning sliced the blackness with a silver sword as winds whipped the sails. The disciples fought the storm for nine cold, skin-drenching hours until the unspeakable happened. Spotting what appeared to be a ghost walking toward them on the water, they cried out in terror. They didn't expect Jesus to come to them this way.

Neither do we. We expect him to come in the form of peaceful hymns or Easter Sundays or quiet retreats. We expect to find Jesus in morning devotionals, church suppers, and meditation. We never expect to see him in a bear market, pink slip, lawsuit, foreclosure, or war. We never expect to see him in a storm. But it is in storms that he does his finest work, for it is in storms that he has our keenest attention.

Jesus replied to the disciples' fear with an invitation worthy of inscription on every church cornerstone and residential archway. "Don't be afraid," he said. "Take courage. I am here!" Power inhabits those words. They change everything. Perhaps that's why God repeats them so often:

*I am with you always, to the very end of the age* (Matthew 28:20).

*I give them eternal life and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand* (John 10:28).

*Nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love* (Romans 8:38).

We cannot go where God is not. Look over your shoulder; that's God following you. Look into the storm; that's Christ coming toward you. Much to Peter's credit, he took Jesus at his word. "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." So he said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus" (Matthew 14:28, 29).

Peter never would have made this request on a calm sea. Had Christ strolled across a lake that was as smooth as mica, Peter would have applauded, but I doubt he would have stepped out of the boat. Storms prompt us to take unprecedented journeys. For a few historic steps and heart-stilling moments, Peter did the impossible, defying every law of gravity and nature. But suddenly he shifted his attention away from Jesus and toward the squall and when he did, Peter sank like a brick in a pond. Give the storm waters more attention than the Storm Walker, and get ready to do the same.

Whether or not storms come, we cannot choose. But where we stare during a storm—that we can.

I found a direct example of this truth while sitting in my cardiologist's office. My heart rate had the pace of a NASCAR race and the rhythm of a Morse code message. So I went to a specialist. After reviewing my tests and asking me some questions, the doctor nodded knowingly and told me to wait for him in his office. I went in, took a seat, and quickly noticed the doctor's abundant harvest of diplomas. They were everywhere, from everywhere.

The more I looked at his accomplishments, the better I felt. Then the nurse entered with a sheet of paper. "The doctor will be in shortly," she explained. "In the meantime he wants you to acquaint yourself with this information. It summarizes your heart condition." I lowered my gaze from the diplomas and as I read, contrary winds began to blow. Unwelcome words like *atrial fibrillation*, *arrhythmia*, *embolic stroke*, and *blood clot* caused me to sink into my own Sea of Galilee.

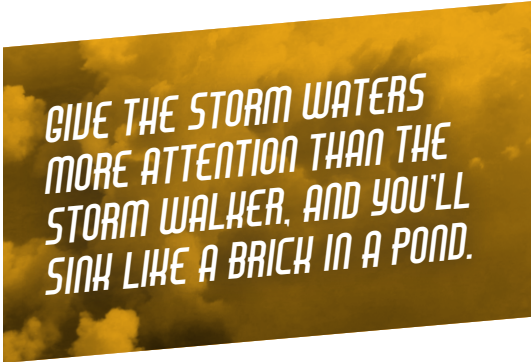
What happened to my peace? I was feeling much better a moment ago. So I changed strategies. I counteracted diagnosis with diplomas. In between paragraphs of bad news, I looked at the wall for reminders of good news. That's what God wants us to do.

His call to courage is not a call to ignorance. We aren't to be oblivious to the overwhelming challenges that life brings. We're to counterbalance them with long looks at God's accomplishments. "We must *pay much closer attention* to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it" (Hebrews 2:1). Do whatever it takes to keep your gaze on Jesus.

Feed your fears, and your faith will starve. Feed your faith, and your fears

will. Jeremiah did this. Talk about a person caught in a storm! Jerusalem was under siege, his nation under duress. His world had collapsed like a sand castle in a typhoon. He faulted God for his horrible emotional distress and even for his physical ailments. Jeremiah could tell you the height of the waves and the speed of the wind.

But then he realized how fast he was sinking so he shifted his gaze. "But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never



GIVE THE STORM WATERS  
MORE ATTENTION THAN THE  
STORM WALKER. AND YOU'LL  
SINK LIKE A BRICK IN A POND.

ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness. "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him" (Lamentations 3:24).

Depressed, Jeremiah altered his thoughts and shifted his attention. He turned his eyes away from the waves and looked into the wonder of God. The storm didn't cease, but his discouragement did. So did Peter's. After a few moments of flailing in the water, he turned back to Christ and cried, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him.

Jesus could have stilled this storm hours earlier. But he didn't. He wanted to teach his followers a lesson. Jesus could have calmed your storm long ago too. But he hasn't. Does he also want to teach you a lesson? Could it be something like this: "Storms are not an option, but fear is?"

God has hung his diplomas in the universe. Rainbows, sunsets, horizons, and star-sequined skies. He has recorded his accomplishments in Scripture. His résumé includes Red Sea openings. Lions' mouths closings. Goliath topplings. Lazarus raisings. Storm stillings. He's the commander of every storm. Are you scared in yours? Then stare at him. This may be your first flight. But it's certainly not his.

Your pilot has a call sign too: I Am Here. |S|

# Prison calling

*A DUCK-QUACKING RING TONE LOUDLY INTERRUPTS COLLEGE CHAPEL, PROMPTING A TALL, ORANGE-HAIRED PROFESSOR TO DASH FROM THE HALL TO ANSWER HER PHONE.*

As she slips out the door, I smile to hear her cheerful “hello” in a distinctly Swedish accent. I am one of the few who understands her seeming discourtesy, for I know that ring tone. It’s an inmate, calling from a nearby prison.

A few years ago, after a lifetime serving in and teaching international missions, Emma Emgård reached retirement age. Rather than heading for her easy chair, however, she decided to embark on a ministry to an entirely different culture, using her teaching skills in Canada’s federal prisons with Prairie’s Prison Bible Encounter Program.

In 2016, the inaugural cohort was made up of fifteen inmates from Bowden Institution about an hour’s drive from Prairie College. It was one of the fifteen who made Emma’s phone quack during chapel.

These students differed in almost every respect from the students she had taught for decades. Ranging in age from early twenties to early fifties, these men were not only older, they were world-weary. Every single one had expressed regret—if not complete remorse—for the crimes they had committed. Most had incurred significant losses as a result of these crimes.

The obvious losses were family and freedom, but beyond that, they had lost more intangible elements of themselves.

Cast off and marginalized by society, they had almost no sense of self-worth. Knowing that each man was made in God’s image, Emma journeyed with them, learning more about incarceration culture.

In time, she became not only a teacher, but a mentor and the sister that many never had. She attended parole hearings and wrote letters of reference to advocate for her students. Her growing involvement with the inmates was producing a type of jet fuel that re-energized all her efforts.

“  
**Her growing involvement with the inmates was producing a type of jet fuel that re-energized all her efforts.**  
”

Enter Covid-19. In March of 2020, all face-to-face instruction in prison was suspended. If incarceration was a difficult experience before, it became tortuous during the pandemic. The men were subject to unusually long periods of isolation in their cells. All programs were withdrawn, including the Bible Encounter Program.

Her heart was broken. Emma worked with program leaders to innovate alternate delivery methods so instruction could con-



Emma Emgård: *No ordinary volunteer.*

tinue during the pandemic. She redesigned her courses and recorded them on CD and DVD. Permission was granted by the warden’s office to send these recordings onto the units so the men could listen to the lectures and continue their classes. This was good news, but not good enough for Emma. She knew these students wouldn’t be able to cope with this kind of distance education. They would fall behind or worse yet, give up altogether. So, she asked if she could give the students her phone number.

Emma knew that volunteers are not permitted to be on an inmate’s phone list. But Emma was not just any volunteer; she was now a full-time faculty liaison for Prairie’s Bible Encounter Program. Prison administrators agreed and students were given phone access to their Faculty Advisor.

In no time, her phone began to ring with inmates needing prayer, wise counsel from God’s Word, or help with an assignment. The call during chapel was from Stan. He had just been diagnosed with a terminal illness. Later in the day Dan called, wanting prayer about a parole hearing. And on it goes.

As Emma’s boss, I have now developed a Pavlovian response: when a duck quacks, I smile and give thanks. It tells me God is at work in the most unlikely places!

— Gord Allert

Gord Allert is Director of Prairie’s Prison Bible Encounter Program, now active in four institutions. Emma rarely thinks of retirement.



**COME ON  
HOME**

**PRAIRIE  
COLLEGE**  
**100**  
JULY 13-17, 2022

In September, Prairie launched its 100th year celebration. We can't wait to welcome you back to campus this coming July 13-17 for "Joy in the Journey," five days of praising God for a century of his faithfulness. Come celebrate this once-in-a-lifetime milestone. Enjoy music and inspiring speakers. Reconnect with classmates and friends.

In the months preceding the festivities, we will feature special HyFlex events (online and in person). On social media and email, different Prairie decades will be highlighted (visit [prairie.edu/alumni-services](http://prairie.edu/alumni-services), subscribe your email, and enjoy).

Register now for this great celebration at [prairie.edu](http://prairie.edu), through the brochure coming to your mailbox, or call us at 1-800-661-2425 (ext. 282). Don't forget to book accommodations.

**For more info, visit [prairie.edu/centennial](http://prairie.edu/centennial)  
See you in July!**

# CENTENNIAL CAMPAIGN

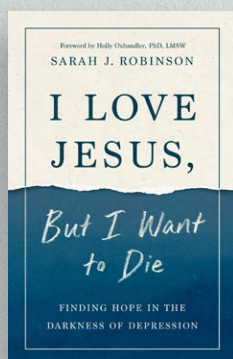
We thank God for our faithful donors. In this our 100th year, we are launching the Centennial Campaign, an opportunity to honor the accomplishments of the founders, staff and students, and to look forward to what God has in store for Prairie.

Gifts given to this campaign will contribute to the general ministries, scholarship awards, program improvements, and capital projects for campus enhancement. Those who commit to giving \$100, \$1,000, \$10,000 over the next 24 months will join the "Founders' Circle," either in a one-time gift or a new recurring monthly donation. Thank you for helping our college continue to grow and minister to future generations.

**\$42/month = \$1,000 over 2 years**  
**\$100/month = \$2,400 over 24 months**  
**\$417/month = \$10,000 over 24 months**

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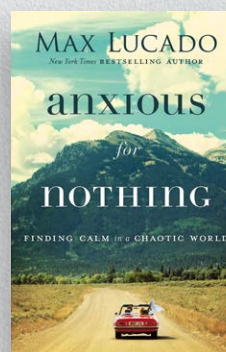


## **I LOVE JESUS... BUT I WANT TO DIE**

Sarah J. Robinson

What happens when loving Jesus doesn't cure you of depression and anxiety, or suicidal thoughts? Sarah J. Robinson offers a healthy, practical, and shame-free guide for Christians struggling with mental illness. Sarah shares

her story of battling depression despite toxic theology that made her afraid to seek help outside the church. With scriptural insights, mental health research, and simple practices, Sarah offers a path toward a hope-filled life in Christ even when healing doesn't look the way you expect.



## **ANXIOUS FOR NOTHING: FINDING CALM IN A CHAOTIC WORLD**

Max Lucado

We all encounter anxiety, but we need not let worry and fear control our lives. Join Max on a journey to true freedom in this roadmap for battling with

and healing from anxiety. You'll learn Max's recipe for CALM: Celebrate God's goodness, Ask God for help, Leave our concerns with God, and Meditate on good things. You'll experience joy, physical renewal, and contentment by the power of the Holy Spirit.

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☐ Prison Bible Encounter Program

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☐ Credit Card (complete the information above)

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*We cannot process your monthly gift without your signature here!*

*This automatic withdrawal can be canceled at any time by contacting our office in writing.*

*Spending of funds is confined to board-approved programs and projects. When the goal for the project has been met, the remaining contributions will be used where needed most.*

You can also **DONATE** online at **[prairie.edu/donate](http://prairie.edu/donate)** or call **1-403-443-5511**.

To donate by eTransfer, visit **[prairie.edu/donate](http://prairie.edu/donate)** for specific instructions.

## I would like to ...

☐ receive one of the following:

☐ *Anxious For Nothing* (by Max Lucado)

☐ *I Love Jesus, But...* (by Sarah J. Robinson)

As you request one of these items, we do ask your help in covering the significant costs of purchase and mailing. Thank you.

Offer is limited to *Servant* subscribers at North American addresses.

☐ receive Prairie's email updates.

☐ receive one receipt at the end of the year for all my gifts.

*Prairie Bible Institute, in business as "Prairie College," is a registered charity in Canada and the US and issues tax receipts in both currencies.*

# THE GOOD REPORT

## NOW YOU KNOW

The length of a human's blood vessels is 60,000 miles.

[livescience.com](http://livescience.com)

The average human heart beats 100,000 times a day. That's 36.5 million times a year.

[pbs.org](http://pbs.org)

Number of space launches last year: 1,282.

*Harper's Index*

Chance that an American aged 18 to 24 has sought mental-health counseling during Covid: 1 in 4.

*Harper's Index*

Canada's lowest-ever recorded temperature, -63 C (-81.4 F) is roughly the same temperature as the surface of Mars.

*Readers Digest Canada*



# “ QUOTEABLE ”



**DIETRICH  
BONHOEFFER**

“Your life as a Christian should make non-believers question their disbelief in God.”

## TWO NATIONS, ONE PURPOSE

ShareWord Global (formerly the Gideons) has received invitations from the governments of Nicaragua and Cuba to bring hope to their people. After decades of violence and economic uncertainty, “God is writing a new story,” says Nicole Victory, Artist Program Manager, “and it’s awesome.”

In 2015, ShareWord received an invitation from Edu Deo Ministries to distribute 20,000 Scriptures in schools. And now “God has opened the biggest door of all,” says Nicole. “The Minister of Education has invited us to distribute Scripture magazines to every school-aged child—that’s approximately 1.7 million children.” Families will be paired with a nearby congregation to help them explore what they are reading.

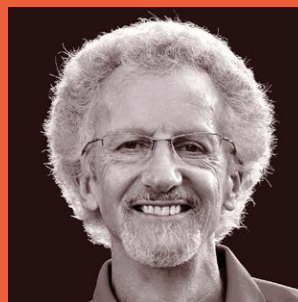
In Cuba, ShareWord plans to train churches in evangelism and distribute 2.5 million Scripture magazines over the next five years. “On their own, each of these projects is the largest we’ve ever embarked on,” says Victory. “It’s a bold, faith-stretching undertaking.” When pandemic restrictions lift, teams will come alongside local churches to train them in evangelism, equip them with Scriptures, and go into the community to share the gospel. More at [sharewordglobal.com](http://sharewordglobal.com).

## HAS GOD GIVEN UP?

**Afghanistan**—On August 15, when Kabul fell, a girl was born to Christian parents, in this country where religious minorities, and women in particular, live in fear. The parents believed the birth was a sign that God had not given up on their country.

For a time there was a media frenzy. But who will be there when the cameras are gone? Open Doors is one ministry supporting persecuted Christians in more than 60 countries for more than 65 years. It raised approximately almost \$100 million last year to provide practical support to persecuted believers.

“God cares deeply about women, and so must we,” says Patterson Sobolik of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission. “Our willingness to advocate on behalf of the most vulnerable and marginalized people speaks volumes to the watching world about who God is and what He cares about.”



**PHILIP  
YANCEY**

“A Muslim man said to me, ‘I have read the entire Koran and can find in it no guidance on how Muslims should live as a minority in a society. I have read the entire New Testament and can find in it no guidance on how Christians should live as a majority.’...In the words of Miroslav Volf, ‘Imposition stands starkly at odds with the basic character of the Christian faith, which is at its heart about self-giving—God’s self-giving and human self-giving—and not about self-imposing.’”



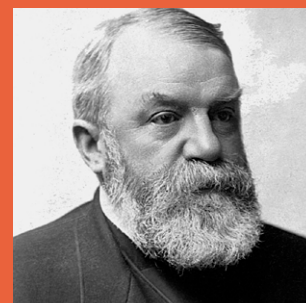
**GARRISON  
KEILLOR**

“Give up your good ‘Christian’ life and follow Jesus.”



**PRISCILLA  
SHIRER**

“We can see hope in the midst of hopelessness. We can see peace in the midst of chaos. We have a hope that the world does not have. We can see clearly that all things work together for the good of them that love Him and are called according to His purpose.”



**D.L.  
MOODY**

“Moses spent forty years thinking he was somebody; forty years learning he was nobody; and forty years discovering what God can do with a nobody.”

# I LOVE JESUS, BUT...

**SARAH J. ROBINSON**

**FINDING HOPE IN THE DARKNESS OF DEPRESSION**

"I was a Christian the first time I tried to kill myself," says Sarah Robinson, author of *I Love Jesus, But I Want to Die*. "I'd contemplated suicide countless times over the years but I never made an actual attempt until eight months after committing my life to Christ." Sarah had done all the right things. "I got baptized," she writes, "went to church every time the doors were open, swapped my old friends for relationships with youth-group kids, read my Bible, prayed and worshipped. I should have felt better. But I didn't."

Instead, the depression deepened. She felt like a failure. Finally one night in desperation she pressed a knife into her skin—but couldn't force herself to end it all. "I didn't want my family to find me [on the kitchen floor], so I got up and put the knife away. I climbed into bed, put on a worship CD, cursed God and went to sleep."

Sarah is not alone. During the pandemic, according to a *Household Pulse*

survey, about 4 in 10 adults have reported symptoms of anxiety or depressive disorder, and the number is far higher—54%—among young adults who report a 250 percent increase in suicidal thoughts. And though a *Gallup* report based on interviews with 550,000 Americans claims that the "very religious" are less likely to be diagnosed with depression, nearly one in six are.

"I believed it was a spiritual problem," says Robinson, "and felt that I had been walking with the Lord long enough that I should have been better by now." Instead she felt alone, unable to talk about it with anybody, lacking the words for the pain or the knowledge to process her thoughts and feelings in healthy ways.

Shame dogged her steps and one terrible night in a crisis of self-harm Sarah found herself on the doorstep of trusted friends.

Sensing her despair, the couple welcomed her into their home and said the

words that would change her life: "We're not disappointed in you. We don't think less of you."

Those words of acceptance gave her a glimpse of hope and began a long, slow journey to wholeness. "I was utterly pathetic when I showed up that night," she recalls, "but Michael and Angela's love could handle me even then. Did that mean the promise from Romans 8:39 that nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God could be something real and alive to me? Even after Adam and Eve messed up, God didn't want them to hide in shame. He still wanted them to come close to him, to bring their brokenness to him. I was a Christian for five years before I believed God really loved me."

Robinson's book doesn't offer easy solutions, but it rings with transparent authenticity, pairing her story with scriptural insights, mental health research, and simple practices to help us reconnect with the God who is present in our deepest anguish.

Author Kay Warren, who experienced the unparalleled grief of losing a son to suicide, says that Sarah's book "opens to us the journal she kept during some of her worst days, giving the reader a tender glimpse into her intense struggles and suffering, as well as the beautiful hope she has found over time, without trying to tie a pretty bow around serious depression." She recommends it for struggling friends and loved ones without the fear that the issues will be "minimized, medicalized, or over-spiritualized."

"When I'm drowning in the darkness," Sarah writes, "aching with indescribable pain, I don't need to hear that if I just pray or read my Bible, God will heal me. I need

to know, deep in my bones, that being a Christian doesn't automatically make me better, and that it's not supposed to. Jesus promised that we would experience trouble and that means there is nothing wrong with us when we struggle in the darkness.

**"I NEEDED TO HEAR THAT GOD WOULDN'T LEAVE ME AND HE WAS NO LESS PRESENT IN MY PAIN THAN IN THE TRIUMPHS OF OTHERS."**

When shame gripped me, I needed to hear that God wouldn't leave me and he was no less present in my pain than in the triumphs of others. Years of wrestling with depression, self-harm, and suicidal thoughts have taught me that sometimes the greater victory of faith is learning to walk with Jesus when suffering remains."

The book was researched and written during three years of ongoing battles with depression—even while Sarah worked as a

## "I WAS A CHRISTIAN FOR FIVE YEARS BEFORE I BELIEVED GOD REALLY LOVED ME."

youth minister. "In pews and pulpits, many believers simply assume all mental health struggles represent a lack of faith," writes columnist Terry Mattingly. "Strugglers will be healed if they dedicate themselves to Bible study and prayer while turning away from their sins. Church-based 'pastoral counseling' is an option."

Like many others, Sarah expected that pushing the right buttons on the spiritual vending machine would yield the right results. Instead, as she writes, the result was a devastating conclusion: "God is good—just not to us. God is present, but not with us. God is gracious, but not to us. These thoughts led to a cancerous self-hate, reinforcing the lie that our sickness is beyond God's reach." In hindsight, she would come to realize that it was her undiagnosed, untreated mental illness that made it impos-

sible for her to experience the abundant life that was supposed to be hers in Christ.

Some of us come from families that have struggled for generations with chronic anxiety, abuse, and bipolar disorder. Sarah believes this can lead to intense shame and requires qualified help. She is grateful for clergy "who acknowledge that some of these problems are outside our wheelhouse," and stay up-to-date with professional resources and partner with licensed counselors and doctors.

"We need our pastors to make this a normal topic in the life of the church," she says, "not something that is seen as abnormal or strange to talk about. People need to know there are all kinds of issues here, not just something wrong with your 'thought life.' We need a team. Churches have to know that they can't have a one-size-fits all solution to these kinds of problems."


As Sarah slowly came to terms with the reality that she was dealing with a genuine illness, it became harder to face the fact that depression might *always* be a part of her life. The turning point came one day when, on the edge of despair, she heard a gentle whisper in her heart: *The darkness may always be there, but I will always be there in the darkness.*

In shock, she realized that what might have sounded like a death sentence was actually a promise of hope. She could stop fighting to fix herself through her own efforts, stop burying the pain and trying so hard to make it go away. The second half of that whisper was sweeter still: God would always be there in the darkness.

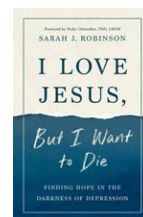
"It shook my soul like tectonic plates shifting," she remembers. "God wasn't disappointed in me. There's no countdown clock on grace, no limit on his love. He's not tapping his foot and looking at his watch, impatient for me to get it together."

Sarah has accepted that for her and many others, depression is a chronic illness: "I have good days and bad, times when I can keep pace and others when, like Jacob in the Bible, my limp is more prominent. I've had to learn to adjust, to slow down, and to listen to my own needs instead of trying to meet the expectations of everyone around me."

True faith, she believes, means trusting God even when he doesn't change our circumstances: "We don't have to be healed to trust him. We need not be ashamed because God is with us. Whether or not depression becomes a distant memory for you some day, you are not disqualified from the full, abundant life Jesus promised. When all seems bleak and the color is drained from your world, I pray you know that even if the darkness will always be there, God with Us will always be there too. He isn't leaving, he isn't giving up. He'll sit right there with us, holding our sometimes-desperate, flailing hearts. We won't be alone."

"Maybe that's all we need to know to get through." 

To receive your copy of Sarah's very helpful book, see the form on page 8.



## WHEN SOMEONE YOU LOVE IS HURTING



Sarah's book has plenty of practical advice for caregivers, including the simple act of **being present**. "As the body of Christ," she writes, "it's our honor to bear one another's burdens and enter into their suffering. Your hurting loved one doesn't need you to have answers or to handle this perfectly. They just need to know that they're loved, they're not alone, and someone will walk with them through the shadows."

**Know your limits.** "Unless you are a licensed and trained therapist, doctor, or psychiatrist, you are not equipped to provide medical or psychological advice. Encourage your loved one to get the professional help he needs and follow up. Remind him he's worth everything it takes to get better."

We should also **recognize warning signs**, like "Isolation, neglecting self-care, sadness, mood changes, giving away prized possessions, increased use of alcohol or drugs, anger and irritability—all can be signs of severe depression and suicidal thoughts. Take their comments about pain and hopelessness seriously and seek help."

We're better to **ask tough questions** than to wait and regret it later. "Listen well and make it safe for them to open up. Offer to go with them to find help for the problems that are making life unbearable."

God's example of care for his depressed prophet Elijah (1 Kings 19) should be ours. "God fed Elijah, made sure he got some rest, and acknowledged the truth that must have felt crushing: 'the journey is too much for you' (19:7). Later, God sat with Elijah and just listened to the anguish of his heart without trying to fix it...We can learn from this ministry of presence the Lord offers us."

# WHERE I BELONG

Gordon Utz

WITH PAT MASSEY

**T**he prompting was so strong, it couldn't be ignored. Digging out my long-buried Bible, I began to read, but the words on the page seemed meaningless so I headed for my bookshelf. For reasons I couldn't put a finger on, I'd purchased a devotional book several months earlier and now the same inner voice that had urged me to read the Bible led me to pull that unopened devotional off the shelf. It was March 13, but I accidentally opened the book to March 14, read the page—and scoffed at the fact that, once again, the words meant nothing to me. Suddenly I noticed my error and turned back a page. There in bold letters was the word: **FORGIVENESS**.

Only God could have known what that meant to me. Just days earlier, I had learned that my wife of twenty years was about to divorce me. It shouldn't have been a surprise. The last few years had been dreary, cold and unloving. In fact, my idea of love was far from the real thing. Oblivious to the fact that I was reaping the wages of a self-serving life lived in rebellion against God, I reacted in what I thought was perfectly justified righteous anger. How could she hurt our family like that? Forgiveness was the last thing on my mind.

Raised in a caring Christian home by missionary parents, I knew God was real. But my perception of him was that of a being who was holy, stern and judgmental, and no matter what I did, I would always fall short. The truth of his gracious, welcoming heart had somehow eluded me.

I craved a relationship with a God who loved me and cared enough to share

my life, but pride wouldn't allow me to admit it. My older brother Stan had attended Prairie High School, and Mom and Dad enrolled me there as well, perhaps hoping I might be able to resolve my struggles. But my longing to feel loved was overshadowed by an independent and rebellious spirit that resulted in my politely being asked not to return after Grade 10. The next year, chafing against my father's rules, I left home and struck out on my own.

**FOR MORE THAN  
THIRTY YEARS  
I ENJOYED THE  
PLEASURES OF THIS  
WORLD, REJECTED  
MY CHILDHOOD  
FAITH, AND REBELLED  
AGAINST HOME.**

After finishing high school, I entered the working world and learned to drink and party just like all my friends. This was the life I thought I wanted, but still it didn't feel like I belonged. Maybe God was the answer after all, so I tried Bible college back at Prairie where Stan had graduated, lasting only a semester before finding myself in the oil patch, living the fast life. Still longing to find a God who wanted to know me, I bounced back and forth between work and other Christian colleges but failed there as well. My whole life had been a struggle for identity. But while I didn't fit in the Christian world, I didn't fit among the "ungodly" either. Who was I?

After seven years in the oil fields, I married Jenny and we moved to Winnipeg, MB, where I entered the furniture business as a salesman. Intent on climbing the ladder, I soon found myself in management and was put in charge of my own store in the smaller town of Portage La Prairie. There we raised our son and two daughters on a twelve-acre homestead. Oddly enough, I made sure my children went to church and Sunday school. I even sent them to Bible camp so they could hear about God for themselves, even though I couldn't seem to relate to him. Perhaps they could discover what their father was so desperately seeking but was unable to find.

Several times throughout my life I had challenged God to show himself to me and he took me up on it. One day I asked him to do something “out of the ordinary,” just to show me that he was even listening. Several days later a man walked unannounced into my furniture store and handed me a sermon tape called “The Father Heart of God.” He was a local pastor by the name of Glenn Loewen and all he said was, “The Lord told me to bring this to you.” I was stunned, realizing God had answered my presumptuous request. But did it change my lifestyle? Not a bit.

The old patterns continued—work, drink, play—with all the toys a man could want. I had a nice family and a good career, but by the age of 48, I was an alcoholic with a heart filled with bitterness and resentment. Why had God even created me? All this was his fault. Alone with my bottle one night, I cried out once again for God to reveal himself to me.

A month later I awoke to that inner prompting to find my Bible and read that word.

## FORGIVENESS.

My heart seemed to stop as I clearly heard, “Gordon, if you ask for forgiveness, I will forgive you.” In shock, I began to weep. How could a righteous, holy God offer this arrogant, rebellious, sinful man anything other than judgement? Somehow I knew he meant it and so I asked and for the first time it was real. As I drove to work, completely drained emotionally, I sensed that I needed to tell someone what had happened to me or it would be meaningless.

At the store, I searched the Yellow Pages for churches, randomly picked Portage Evangelical Church, and asked to speak to the pastor. It turned out to be Glenn, ironically a Prairie grad, and the same man God had used to speak to me three years earlier. The tears flowed again as he talked and prayed with me, showing me that there was nothing I could do to make up for a lifetime of sin and guilt, nothing but accept God’s gift of new life. From then on there followed precious days of getting to know my Heavenly Father. I was no longer my own, but would walk by faith, totally dependent on him.

One thing still festered, however: I found it impossible to forgive my wife. But as I searched the Scriptures and got to know Jesus better, I saw myself in his light.

For more than thirty years I had been doing the very same thing to him, enjoying all the pleasures of this world, rejecting my childhood faith, rebelling against home, and yet he still offered me forgiveness. I fought for months, battling anger and self-righteousness until the Lord finally brought me to the place where I could forgive Jenny and ask her forgiveness for not loving her unconditionally.

I didn’t even know what that looked like until God offered it to me and allowed me to see my ex-wife in a new way. I began to pray—not for our reconciliation—but for her salvation. A year and a half after our divorce, as we met to discuss details of our daughter’s wedding, I said, “Jenny, if there’s even a glimmer of hope for us to be reunited, I’m all for it.” But she was in a new relationship and had no interest whatsoever in me being part of her life.

A month later, my brother Stan travelled with me to northern BC for a fishing trip. As we drove, we

prayed for each other’s families. Stan insisted on asking God to restore my marriage, but I told him we had both moved on and Jenny wanted nothing more to do with me. That didn’t faze him. He continued to pray. We had a wonderful time together enjoying God’s creation and netting some beautiful spring salmon. But for some strange reason, my thoughts settled on my wife. I missed her presence.

When my flight landed back in Winnipeg, I came down the stairs at the airport looking for my son who was to pick me up. To my surprise, Jenny was there instead. She handed me a bouquet of flowers with a note that said, “There is a glimmer.” I couldn’t believe it.

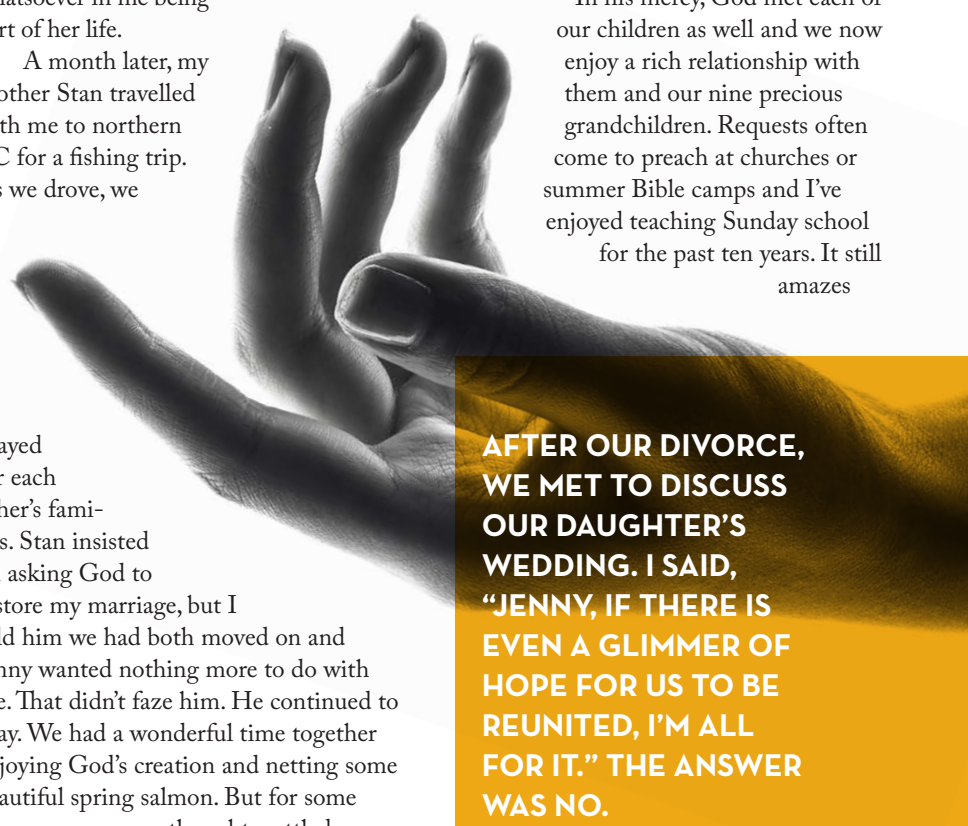
As we drove home, she told me about the night she tossed and turned, then finally surrendered and asked God



Gord and Jenny with two of their nine grandchildren.

for forgiveness. It was the same day my brother had prayed for her and it seemed the Lord had been preparing me even before I knew. We began getting to know each other all over again and six months later we were remarried in the church that had prayed for us for two years.

In his mercy, God met each of our children as well and we now enjoy a rich relationship with them and our nine precious grandchildren. Requests often come to preach at churches or summer Bible camps and I’ve enjoyed teaching Sunday school for the past ten years. It still amazes



**AFTER OUR DIVORCE, WE MET TO DISCUSS OUR DAUGHTER’S WEDDING. I SAID, “JENNY, IF THERE IS EVEN A GLIMMER OF HOPE FOR US TO BE REUNITED, I’M ALL FOR IT.” THE ANSWER WAS NO.**

me how God can use someone who was so lost and far from him for so long.

There are times when I feel unworthy of the opportunities that he brings my way or the joy he has poured out on my life, but from the moment I surrendered my will to him, I have known without a doubt that I am forgiven and valued as a son. No longer a man without an identity, I finally know where I belong. ❧

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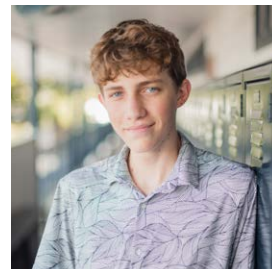
# Meet the students

## **Elijah Miller** Certificate in Bible

A favorite song: "Joy" (For King and Country)

**The most challenging season in my life:** "The year of lockdown in the Philippines. For my entire grade 12 year, there was no face-to-face school, no sports and no friends, unless you made arrangements at someone else's house. This was incredibly hard. Classes were tough. I desperately missed my senior season of sports, and I missed my friends even more. Midway through the first semester, I surrendered my frustrations to God, and decided to trust him for my future. Looking back, the year was hard, but God helped me see the bright side of my situation and gave me a new joyful outlook."

**Why I'm at Prairie:** "I wanted to attend a college with a healthy environment that will help me grow as a Christian. Obviously, being a follower of Jesus does not mean I solely rely on family or a college; I need to be intentional as well. Here, I am being introduced to mentors and friends who are strengthening my faith."



## **Naomi Froese** Associate of Arts in Mission Aviation

A favorite song: "I Know Whom I Have Believed"

**Why I came to Prairie:** "When I came to campus for a preview visit, I immediately felt a sense of community. I want to be a missionary and a pilot, and since Prairie has aviation and Bible in the same program, it was an easy decision. Another draw is the missions focus and the fact that most of the instructors have served overseas and gladly share their experience. The hardest thing about this past year was the waiting and uncertainty of Covid."

**The best things about this past year:** "Spending an unexpected 10 weeks at home with my family. Having a summer and winter of good weather for flying as well as just for life. Given the restrictions we were under, the mild winter was a blessing, as were the deepening relationships and the visits with friends and family over the phone or in person. Phone calls are not as scary as I once thought they were!"

**One thing God has been teaching me:** "To trust him with everything I have and with whatever is going on in my life. God has been reminding me that my time with him is important and must be a priority."



## **Emily-Joy Short** Explore Program

**What I have been learning:** "During my year in the Explore Program, I learned so much about God, myself, and other people. I found myself facing challenges and failures, learning to grow from my mistakes—even laughing in the midst of them. One day while mountain biking, I completely wiped out coming down a trail. At first, I was embarrassed and wanted to quit. But I got up and kept pedaling."

**What surprised me:** "Here I developed relationships with others that are for life. So many of my previous friendships were superficial, built on shallow things. The relationships I made at Prairie were built on Jesus, on a mutual desire to know more of him."

**How did this year change me:** "At times, I was homesick, cold, and tired of paddling in a canoe. Rather than complaining and grumbling, I learned the joy of being part of a team that encourages one another. I have loved my experience and will take it with me through life."



# Fix or repair daily

IN JUNIOR HIGH I WAS AS AWKWARD AS A GIRAFFE ON A SKATEBOARD. AND THIN. HOW THIN? I WAS SWIMMING IN A LAKE ONE SUMMER AND A DOG CAME OUT TO FETCH ME. THREE TIMES.

Of course, your peers are highly skilled at spotting shortcomings and pointing them out as if you had no idea. "I'm scrawny? You're kidding." I was also one of the shortest kids in our class. Almost overnight, the girls shot up about four feet, towering over us boys. We were bonsai trees in a world of old growth redwoods. If ever you need a sense of humor, this is the season. I was teased about everything. Clothes. Haircut. My sister's hand-me-down bicycle. Even my father's car. Dad was a Ford guy, and we had a maroon station wagon roughly the size of the Titanic. I think it came with a foghorn and three tugboats.

Most of my friends drove around in GMs and Chryslers. One day Raydean Keller, I think it was, found a *Reader's Digest* with acronyms for "Ford," in the joke section. "Your dad drives a Ford?" he said at recess, as every guy in my entire world stood within earshot. "Found On Road Dead." This was possibly the funniest thing said thus far in seventh grade. The guys couldn't stop laughing. Then Raydean added, "Ford: Fix Or Repair Daily." For two days, guys snickered, mostly at me.

And then I found that *Reader's Digest*. The following day, thanks to the miracle of memorization, I held court at



"...and I got that scar from the chairman of the Ladies' Aid Society during the second battle of Guitars in the Sanctuary back in '71."

recess. "What does *your* dad drive?" I asked. "Pontiac," said one. "Ha! Pontiac. Plenty Of Noises That Irritate And Clank." "Dodge," said another. "Dodge: Drips Oil, Drips Grease Everywhere." "Chev," admitted another kid. "Chev? Cheap Hippy Escape Vehicle."

In no time, all of us were smiling and next thing we knew we were playing soccer. Cars didn't seem nearly as important as joining together to beat the eighth

divided them. This sparked a historic revival, a 24/7, 100-year prayer meeting, and from there, the good news of Jesus spread around the world.

This unity comes only from the grace, power, and love of the One who calls us to it.

I spoke somewhere and mentioned that my parents were about forty when I was born. Two ladies came to me after. Both were upset and clearly disagreeing.

**"And then I found that *Reader's Digest*.  
The following day, thanks to the miracle of  
memorization, I held court at recess."**

graders. The great car debate resurfaced, I'm sure, but I don't remember it being such a big deal ever again.

Reminds me of things we Christians quarrel over today. Differences that seem so enormous that they eclipse what we share in common, most importantly a Savior who humbled himself and calls us in Ephesians 4:3 to "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."

In 1722, a group of Christians, persecuted and driven from their homes, found refuge on the estate of a German count. They were soon divided by differences of doctrine and practice. But, while gathering for communion, they were led to focus on what united them rather than on what

One said, "I don't think mothers should have children after 35. What about you?" "I agree completely," I said. "35 is a lot of children." They began to laugh and away they went, focusing, I presume, on things that united them.

I may have this wrong, but I believe they drove away together in a small Italian car. A Fiat. Which, if I recall correctly, stands for, "Fix It Again, Tony." ❧

Phil is a radio host and the author of *Laugh Like a Kid Again* (Harvest House). He drives a Hyundai—Hope You Understand Nothing's Drivable And Inexpensive. Visit him at [philcallaway.com](http://philcallaway.com)





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