

AN EXCITING NEW ARRANGEMENT!

Stephen Prendergast

NCM will be blessed with the addition of addictions and family counselor Steve Prendergast, of Eganville, Ontario. Prendergast, 53, brings a remarkable testimony of our Lord Jesus' grace and offers a perspective drawn from a harrowing journey filled with irony and miracles. This husband and father of four sees the hand of God in all that has transpired in his life.

"Connecting the dots," is how Prendergast describes God's modus operandi in reaching him after a long hiatus from Christ. In a life of twists and turns, he once walked with God, turned away from God, and then returned to God all within twenty years.

Prendergast was born in Southwestern Ontario and raised in Norwich, a small town near Brantford. He was raised by a mother who—along with an aunt—prayed for him on a regular basis. He looks back at a childhood built on a sturdy foundation of faith in Christ, and even remembers reading his bible daily, building a secure relationship with the Lord. By the age of fifteen, he had read the entire Bible twice. But sadly, that would change for the worse. In his teens, he became disillusioned with Christianity because of the scandals that were erupting at that time with notable televangelists such as Jimmy Swaggart and Jim and Tammy Baker.

He remembers watching Swaggart every Sunday before going to church and attending a Swaggart service at Maple Leaf Gardens in Toronto at age twelve. He recalls pointing out to his mother the hypocrisy of Christian leaders to justify his own hypocrisy for wanting to see what "the world" with all its sinful pleasures, was experiencing. This planted the seeds of his eventual departure from the faith. He says his friends did not pressure him to experiment with drugs because they knew he was a Christian; it was a choice that he made. This surprised his friends when he asked for that first hit off a joint, and that first beer that sent him hurdling into a life of rampant substance abuse.

By the time he was nineteen he was already an alcoholic, and by his early twenties he was a “full-blown addict and fornicator” choosing to abandon God altogether. For the next decade of his life, he would relentlessly pursue a life of wanton carnal pleasure, with illicit sex, heavy drinking, injecting cocaine and crystal meth and smoking crack.

But drugs, sex and motorcycling were not his only interests in life. He was a passionate devotee of professional wrestling, and in October of 2003, after discovering that he had an opportunity to pursue a lifelong dream to enter professional wrestling and try out for a TV show in Michigan, he recounts jumping on his Harley Davidson motorcycle to go pick up a large quantity of cocaine and alcohol to celebrate. In the fervor of his revelry, he rounded an S-bend, was blinded by approaching car lights, and fell by the side of a car, losing his foot in the process, which resulted in an amputation of his left leg below the knee.

“My dream was crushed and that’s what drove me deeper into my [drug] addiction harder than before,” recalls Prendergast. He explains that after the motorcycle accident that cost him his leg, he was unable to return to his landscaping job at a local cemetery he had had since 1990. In addition to his inability to work, he also had to relearn how to walk, which frustrated him. So, on the weekends, friends would drive to his home and pick him up to party in his perpetual attempt to relieve that frustration. In his reckless pursuit of the optimum buzz, he hoped to escape the depression and hopelessness he felt in the doldrums of physical inertia brought on by his newfound disability. However, the higher he got, the emptier and angrier he felt. In 2006, his mother noticed that he was spiraling downward in a whirlwind of heavy drug use and forced him to go to her church with her to listen to the Teen Challenge (TC) choir perform and give testimonies. She later coaxed him into visiting Teen Challenge in December of that year. Although he was reluctant to go at first, he says that after the visit, he decided to apply because the staff impressed him by remembering his name. After that, he waited six months before being accepted into the program, but in the meantime, continued to abuse drugs. Just prior to his entry to TC, enraged and high on cocaine, he jumped on his motorcycle to take the lives of some of his drug cohorts who had badly betrayed his trust.

But unbeknownst to him, God had his own plans and Prendergast found himself arriving at his mother’s house with no recollection of deciding to go there. Like other watershed moments that preceded a monumental shift, Prendergast attributes his unintended change of itinerary to divine intervention. After a couple of days’ rest at his mother’s home, a bed was available for him to enter Teen Challenge.

It was a miracle of circumstances that brought him there on May 17, 2007.

Shortly after entering TC, this stubborn atheist who had no interest in God, and only wanted to get off drugs, was surprised by irony when he attended a church service in St. Thomas, Ontario that initiated an encounter and subsequent reconciliation with the Almighty. Expecting to hear a dry sermon by a reserved Southern Baptist, he was instead startled by the thundering oratory of a fire-and-brimstone Pentecostal who donned a Roman Catholic clerical collar. The message was about “God reimbursing with interest, what the locusts have stolen.” It was in reference to the biblical account of Joel. For Prendergast, it was a long time coming for a man whose own life was marked with spiritual contradiction that brought this prodigal son back to a relationship with Christ. As the fiery discourse pierced his callous heart, warm tears cascaded down this once-cynical face.

For the next year Prendergast would rekindle his lost relationship with Christ that had been stolen by the locusts of disillusionment and substance abuse. On May 30, 2008, he graduated from TC, and, despite a six-month delay, served a one-year internship for TC, and then worked for them as a groundskeeping contractor for a year. For a few years following his graduation from TC, Prendergast toured with the TC choir as a drummer and spokesperson across Canada to promote the ministry on weekends while he worked during the week. He was very driven at this time and believed it was God's will for him to take on such a heavy workload, but it was taking a toll on him, psychologically and spiritually. He started to burn out and then crashed, leaving him wondering about the purpose of his life.

He recalls it being a very dark time and says that "I just wanted the world to stop and let me get off." This disillusionment with life brought him to the precipice of eternity while he sat in his car in an empty parking lot in a suicide attempt with a syringe that packed a lethal dose of cocaine. He says at the time, he was unable to complete the injection because the plunger in the syringe felt plugged up and would not push the barrel far enough down to dispense the drug into his vein. Despite almost bending the plunger arm of the syringe as he attempted to deposit the barrelful of death into his handicapped body, he was unsuccessful. He later checked the syringe to discover it was not plugged at all. He believes to this day that God intervened that night and saved him from fatality. After his failed attempt at suicide, he called his mother and went to stay at her home and with the support of family, and friends in ministry, he recovered from that dark night and eventually resumed touring with TC.

By the fall of 2011, he stubbornly held onto touring for TC, and had no desire to enter ministry, but God had other plans and got his attention through another traffic accident, this time costing him a finger from one of his hands. This latest incident conformed to a pattern whereby a dramatic event would precede an obedient response to a call from God. It was a call-response dynamic that he compares to the biblical account of Jonah and his evasive response to God. So, in 2013 Prendergast enrolled in Emmanuel Bible College in Kitchener, Ontario for four years to earn a degree in counselling. It was there he met his wife, Rachael. By 2017, he was chosen to direct the Eastern Ontario TC in Renfrew at the site of NCM's former rehabilitation center that NCM gave to TC. Prendergast and his wife moved up to the area in April 2018 and after multiple setbacks and much fundraising effort by Prendergast, TC raised the 1.5 million needed to open the facility by January 2021. One year later, TC Renfrew opened its doors with Prendergast as its director. As with other opportunities in his life, he views this as another miracle of God in the face of impossibility.

After a year directing at TC Renfrew, God had new plans for him so Prendergast parted ways with TC and in the fall of 2022, he turned his efforts to street outreach in Pembroke, Ontario. That same year, God opened yet another door for him with Ottawa Inncity Ministries to do fundraising and communications, which he still does.

God continued to open new vistas of ministry for a man whose life has been punctuated by turbulence and change. An opportunity to use the counselor training he received at bible college opened with NCM's Liberty House this spring and Prendergast accepted it because God reminded him that his calling was to minister to lost souls caught in the same cruel grip of drug addiction he was once caught in and to point them to Christ, which he views with passion.

"I just want to see salvation come to men. The priority is the salvation of their souls."