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## James R. Phipps

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## Interview with James Phipps

February 14, 2018

Speaker 1: Dr. Phipps, thank you for being here today. I would just like to ask you a few questions about your time here at Cedarville. I'm very curious about just the experiences you've had, the people you've gotten to know, and just how it's impacted your life. Just to kind of start off, can you tell me the story of how you came to Cedarville?

Dr. Phipps: Well, that story has a lot of different ramifications. My father was a pastor on the west coast in the General Association of Regular Baptists. From the time I was about the eighth grade up, I was hearing about Cedarville. A good friend of mine was a fellow named Dennis Frank, whose brother, Dwayne Frank, had come here to college and later taught here as well. And so, the Franks had an influence on me as well. From Idaho, where that was, we moved down to California and really during my high school years, I changed my focus altogether.

Dr. Phipps: My plan was, I was a member of a thing called the California Scholarship Federation, and they gave scholarships if you stayed in the state of California. My major emphasis at the time was debate, so I was looking quite seriously at going to Stanford University with a scholarship there. And probably after that, going into law. I got to say things got interrupted along the way. As I look back on it now, I understand it. Back then, it wasn't the easiest kinds of decisions.

Dr. Phipps: Just a little side story on that. I had to make a choice. I had a car that really wasn't all that spectacular when you look back at it, but I put a lot of time, energy, and mechanics, paint, and all that stuff into it. Cedarville didn't allow freshmen or sophomores to have cars at the time. Not only that, I couldn't afford to keep the car, pay the insurance, and all that, and come here. I really one day, it was a Wednesday afternoon, I made the decision and I remember saying it out loud while I was driving back from a job that I had. I was working on painting a gas station out in the countryside there in northern California.

Dr. Phipps: Coming back, I remember saying, "Lord, I've made my decision. I'm going to keep the car and I'm going to go to Stanford." Probably somewhere in the next three miles, the front tire blew out in the car, I flipped it end for end, wrapped it around a tree, and that was the last of that car.

Speaker 1: That's kind of crazy and cool.

Dr. Phipps: It was another way of saying, maybe I'd made the wrong decision, I guess.

Speaker 1: Yeah, yeah.

Dr. Phipps: But, I'll not forget, I was at the hospital. I had done some damage to the top of my head. I was at the hospital and the biggest highway patrolman I've ever seen walked in, at least that's the way he seemed where I was laying down. He just looked at me, big gruff

voice and he said, "Son, you got to have some reason for living because you shouldn't be." And he walked out.

Speaker 1: So, it was bad. It was a bad wreck.

Dr. Phipps: It was a bad accident. He'd been on the force for some 20 years, he couldn't identify the make of the car.

Speaker 1: Oh, my gosh.

Dr. Phipps: This was pre-seatbelts and everything. Literally, I walked away with stitches in my head from some banging my head into the rim of the windshield, but that was it. It was a complete change, I think, from that point on. My focus moved to here and literally, I wound up here. I believe it was that fall because I believe that happened in the spring of my senior year. I'd have to go back and look at exact timing on that, but it was that way. Getting here in those days was interesting because we couldn't afford ... Dad was basically what you'd call a mission pastor. He didn't make much money and he couldn't pay for much, but he helped every chance he could. They put me on a bus in Sacramento, a Greyhound. Three days, three nights to Ohio.

Speaker 1: And you would just stay on the bus for three days and three nights you were on the bus.

Dr. Phipps: Yeah. I made shifts here and there from bus to bus, but I knew exactly how Jonah felt in the belly of the whale. It was not a pleasant trip. In Saint Louis, this load of army recruits got on. They were all smoking cigars. That was legal at that time.

Speaker 1: Yep.

Dr. Phipps: By the time I got here, I probably looked more like a leprechaun than anything else. A little green man. But, the Lord brought me here. That was 54 years ago. I can't say it was a bad decision because Cedarville's been part of my life, a major part of my life ever since.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Dr. Phipps: Short question, long story, but that's how I wound up here.

Speaker 1: That was great. Did you know anybody when you came to Cedarville?

Dr. Phipps: Not here.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Dr. Phipps: Now, I knew Dwayne Frank had been here.

Speaker 1: But, he was gone.

Dr. Phipps: He had graduated.

Speaker 1: So, it was just you. It was brand new, everything was new.

Dr. Phipps: It was brand new. I had never seen the campus. My high school chemistry prof had grown up in Jamestown, which is just seven miles south of Cedarville and when I told him I was coming to Cedarville, he looked at me and said, "You're crazy." He said that would not be the place to go with my academic credentials and whatever, which weren't too bad.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Dr. Phipps: He said, you'd be just wasting your time. I came here sight unseen and I can't say I regret it.

Speaker 1: Yeah, okay. Thanks. What was it about Cedarville that attracted you to it? So, I guess the Franks kind of, but what else?

Dr. Phipps: The Franks and even then, Cedarville's statement of faith, its doctoral position and all of those things were important in our family. I had the privilege of growing up in a Christian home with a pastor. I know a lot of preachers kids don't see that as a privilege, but I did.

Speaker 1: Good point.

Dr. Phipps: The result of it was that there was a lot of consistency between Cedarville's stance and the things we believed.

Speaker 1: Yep.

Dr. Phipps: I knew they was not a problem from that standpoint. And then, that attracted me as much as anything. It's humorous now to look back at Stanford, Cedarville, Stanford, Cedarville, oh yeah. There's an awful lot of things that would've tipped the scale the other way, but.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Dr. Phipps: Like I said, I can't regret it. There's been too much happened here for good.

Speaker 1: Yep. Can you tell me about any relationships that have meant a lot to you here in the Cedarville community? It could be faculty, students, townspeople, friends or family, whatever, whatever. So, any relationships that have meant a lot to you here in the Cedarville community.

Dr. Phipps: That's probably way too long a story. As you know, I met my wife here. That's the major one and in June it will be 50 years of marriage.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Dr. Phipps: That's a pretty good thing.

Speaker 1: Oh, awesome.

Dr. Phipps: A pretty good thing. That's a great thing. My family's grown up here. My kids all went to Cedarville. Probably the greatest influences on me early, though, were people like Dr. Jeremiah. I was totally impressed with his dedication and his work here. Dr. Jeremiah went well above and beyond anything that could be expected, in terms of how he treated both faculty and students. He was a man of principle, a man of strength, but he also was a compassionate person. And then, there have been a lot of others. You've got names all around you out here that have been that have influenced me. Murdoch, Monroe, Johnson, Maddox.

Speaker 1: all the ones ...

Dr. Phipps: Just about everything that's got a name on it around here is somebody I knew.

Speaker 1: That's what I was going to say. Yep.

Dr. Phipps: And has been part of my life as well.

Speaker 1: That's cool.

Dr. Phipps: And of course, you know, I was 30 years public administration downtown here, so many townspeople have been part of my life here too. That's all been I think positive. It's allowed me to meet people even beyond here, in terms of some political leaders in the state of Ohio and some others. All of whom have had influence. The relationships, I think have been good. Paul Dixon was a stellar example to me. I really came to care about that man from the standpoint of how he led for his 25 years here.

Dr. Phipps: I've been friends with administrators all the way through, as far as I know. I think Dr. White is doing an exceptionally good job right now with his leadership too. Those are relationships that are important. But, probably my family the high point and certainly wouldn't go back and change any of that.

Speaker 1: Okay and well you've had so many different responsibilities with being mayor, with doing sports broadcasting, with doing teaching. I feel like you've just touched every little group. Do you know what I mean? And since you've been here for so long, you just know so many people.

Dr. Phipps: I've been cursed with the inability to say no and even cursed with the interest in trying a lot of things.

Speaker 1: Yep, yep.

Dr. Phipps: One of the things that always challenged me was a quote by Will Rogers, he said, "I never met a man I couldn't learn something from". That's always been important to me. No matter what side people are on, or no matter where they're from, or what their educational level, there's always things you can learn from them. That's been part of my life. I love sportscasting. I did that for, was that, 35 years. I was 40 years as the faculty athletic rep. The Lord's allowed me to interim pastor. I'd have to go back and look. I think about five churches, sometimes for as much as two years, while here. It's just been a lot of places. Plus, right now, I'm working with the Community Action Partnership for the Miami Valley, that's an eight-county board. We work with low income, elderly, and homeless. A tremendous opportunity to minister outside of our Cedarville bubble.

Speaker 1: Did they reach out to you?

Dr. Phipps: I first got on the board when I was the mayor, here in Cedarville.

Speaker 1: Oh, okay. Okay.

Dr. Phipps: I've never left the board since then.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Dr. Phipps: I chair the board now.

Speaker 1: Oh, very cool.

Dr. Phipps: That one and the Greene County Board too. I've been able to meet a lot of people in the county.

Speaker 1: Yes, yes. Thank you. Are there any particular moments in your experience here at Cedarville that helped define what Cedarville means to you? They could be small events, they can be big, so any moments.

Dr. Phipps: Well, as a student, of course, meeting my wife was a pretty important one.

Speaker 1: Pretty important, I guess.

Dr. Phipps: Pretty important one. There have been a lot of other moments that mean a lot. I think they hit me every year when we sit, whether on the platform or beside and watch you guys cross for graduation. I see two, three, four years of investment in lives that I say are going to do all right.

Speaker 1: Yeah, yeah.

Dr. Phipps: Those moments are important. I really value those. I'm going to miss some of that. I'll have to watch from the back of the auditorium now, after this year. At the same time, those kinds of moments are important. There have been a couple of times when I've had offers to leave here.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Dr. Phipps: That were pretty attractive offers, always something stepped in between. I think it was the Lord.

Speaker 1: Yep, yep.

Dr. Phipps: Those moments were formative too. Never have I had the day when I felt like I didn't want to come to work at Cedarville.

Speaker 1: Wow.

Dr. Phipps: That's with the people I work with and around. Those have been very important things too. Plus, just the factor of all the stuff we've got here. You will understand when you graduate, the value of chapel, and the value of a steady influence from our leaders, and some of those kinds of things. The fact that in class you can pray for your classmates, your friends, your family, and whatever else.

Speaker 1: Yes. It's special.

Dr. Phipps: All of those are formative.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Dr. Phipps: All of those are important.

Speaker 1: Can you tell me a little more, if you don't want to, that's okay, but like go into detail about one of the times where you had an offer to leave and you didn't.

Dr. Phipps: Well, very early in my career here, I got a call from a radio station, a very well-known Christian radio station in the northern Midwest. The manager had found out about me through several channels.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Dr. Phipps: He called and asked me to come up and be his program director. That was attractive.

Speaker 1: Yep.

Dr. Phipps: But, just timing wasn't just right at the time.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Dr. Phipps: I had an opportunity once. A scout was going through from the Cincinnati Reds and he listened to one of our ball games. I got a call making an offer to come down and try out. It's when Al Michaels left the Cincinnati team and went to San Francisco. I got a chance

to come down and try out. I didn't do that for a number of reasons. Sometimes, I wish I might have tried out to see what happened.

Speaker 1: Yes.

Dr. Phipps: It didn't go all bad because the guy that did the job, it's a guy named Marty Brennaman.

Speaker 1: Na-uh.

Dr. Phipps: Uh-uh.

Speaker 1: That was who you were up against.

Dr. Phipps: Well, I wasn't really up against him. I had just had the offer to come and try out.

Speaker 1: That's so cool.

Dr. Phipps: There was no offer beyond that.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Dr. Phipps: But, it would've been interesting.

Speaker 1: And you turned down the offer. You said, "No, I'm not coming."

Dr. Phipps: I called a couple of friends of mine who were already in major sports, that I had met at conferences and things and every one of them was divorced. Every one of them said you got to give up everything else because you're on the road 360 days a year, the banquet circuit and all of that kind of thing. He said, "You got to weigh the business against your family, and your family is going to lose." They were very clear and blunt about it.

Speaker 1: Which is good, that they were clear and you knew it.

Dr. Phipps: Yeah, and I hung up the phone saying, "I'm not interested."

Speaker 1: Okay. It was an easy decision.

Dr. Phipps: And I've been stuck with you guys ever since. It turned out to be an easy decision.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Dr. Phipps: Yeah, there were a couple of other opportunities to go teach at other places, but you know, the Lord kept me here for some kind of reason. Maybe that's so I can retire here.

Speaker 1: Were any of them really hard decisions to make? Was it ever like, ah, I don't know what to do. I don't know if I should take it. It sounds like the first one was pretty easy, and the second one.

Dr. Phipps: Yeah, they were ... well, it was still hard to not even look at it.

Speaker 1: Try it.

Dr. Phipps: You know?

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Dr. Phipps: I had one come later and it hasn't been that long ago that I got within a few weeks of probably being at another institution. They just called and said, "We got a national candidate and we're going to take him."

Speaker 1: Okay.

Dr. Phipps: That was after all the interviews had already happened. That one was harder, but again, I didn't make the decision. It was made for me.

Speaker 1: True, yeah.

Dr. Phipps: Hard to make? Not in the long run.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Dr. Phipps: I never really had a day I woke up and said, "I got to get out here."

Speaker 1: Okay.

Dr. Phipps: Or, I want to get out of here.

Speaker 1: That's pretty amazing.

Dr. Phipps: That never happened.

Speaker 1: That seems rare to me, for someone to feel that way.

Dr. Phipps: I'm a country boy at heart.

Speaker 1: Yeah and you have a good attitude, I think.

Dr. Phipps: Cedarville's country.

Speaker 1: True.

Dr. Phipps: Talk about opportunities around here. People joke about the cornfields and all of that, but you know, we're not far from Dayton, Columbus, Cincinnati.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Dr. Phipps: There's arts and all of those things. I can come to great music concerts here. I can come to great athletic events. I can come to conferences, and come to presentations, and all of that, and all I got to do is really walk across the street.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Dr. Phipps: You know?

Speaker 1: Good point. You just love it.

Dr. Phipps: I love Cedarville, the town, the area, and I guess I'd have to say the university. I begrudgingly say, and you students.

Speaker 1: I know that pains you to say.

Dr. Phipps: Just pains me to say that, you know?

Speaker 1: Yeah, yeah. The last question, are there any events or moments in your time here at Cedarville that have helped shape you into the person you are today?

Dr. Phipps: Oh, there have been several.

Speaker 1: For sure your wife, again, I think.

Dr. Phipps: Oh, yeah.

Speaker 1: She's kind of all of these answers.

Dr. Phipps: She's the kind of person that keeps me together when things are maybe falling apart a little bit.

Speaker 1: Which is how it should be.

Dr. Phipps: Yeah, she's done very well at that and managed a lot of things. Made it possible.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Dr. Phipps: There was a time when, you know, despite wanting to be here and all that, there was a time of some discouragement when some events happened. It was a major discouragement.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Dr. Phipps: I said, "I just don't know about that." There were people involved and other things that made the decisions. I look back on that now and I realize, I've had a lot of those events. I wrecked a car. I tore up my knees. I had a couple of opportunities that I couldn't or didn't take. This particular one was a real blow because it was here and it was

something special. Now I look back on it and say, you know, the Lord was just opening up other opportunities. What I tell my students in my leadership class regularly is, when one door closes for you, instead of sitting and moping, you want to be asking the Lord, what new opportunities are being opened up for me.

Speaker 1: Yep.

Dr. Phipps: I look back on it now, and almost all those things that seemed terrible at the time, turned out just to keep me in the right place. I suppose that's where I am now. Yeah, that probably has shaped me as much as anything else.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Dr. Phipps: Plus, the leadership, like I say, that I've seen from people here.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Dr. Phipps: All of those have shaped me as well.

Speaker 1: Okay. This is just something I thought of when you were talking. What advice would you give to me or anybody, when they're going through major discouragement and you can't see what you see now? Like, when you're in the moment, what would you say?

Dr. Phipps: Yeah, because most of the time, I had to wait for hindsight, which is why I say to people like you, when that moment comes, and it will, there will be discouragements. Instead of just being devastated, instead of being crushed, instead of making bad decisions, just sit back from it. At that point in time, you go to the Lord and say, "Okay, what opportunities, what kinds of things, where do I need to be?"

Speaker 1: Okay.

Dr. Phipps: Sometimes, it's a corrective thing, you know? I don't think the Lord ever wanted me, for example, in professional sportscasting because that's totally inconsistent with what I believe about life in terms of family and those things.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Dr. Phipps: I just have to ... now, I'm much more prone to just say, "Okay, Lord. We went through that. That wasn't fun. What do we need to learn from it?" I think that's important. That's the advice I'd give to any of you. I suppose that's the advice I give too often in class.

Speaker 1: I feel like you can't hear it enough, so that's good. Okay, well, thank you so much.

Dr. Phipps: Glad to do it.

Speaker 1: That was fun to hear from you and hear some of your stories. I appreciate it. That's all I've got.

