

2. Do Opposites Attract?

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Thursday, 24 January 2008
Last Updated Thursday, 24 January 2008

God prepared Edith Rachel Merritt Seville to work as a missionary by bringing her into a world very different from Fran's. Her parents also had an opposite outlook on the Christian faith from his. Their parents valued entirely different goals for their children. You would find it hard to imagine how differently the two of them were raised. But God blended these differences beautifully into an effective missionary couple, giving each one abilities and backgrounds the other lacked so they could be true partners.

Edith's parents were of Irish-English ancestry. Her father's grandparents came to America from Ireland in 1844 and settled in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Her mother's ancestors came from England in the early 1800's, and settled first in Pennsylvania and then in Ohio. Her mother, Jessie Maude Merritt, was born in 1874. She married Walter Greene, and they planned to serve in the China Inland Mission, which J. Hudson Taylor had founded in 1865. Taylor's books on faith and prayer enkindled a desire in Walter and Jessie to join his band of dedicated workers, who dressed in Chinese clothing and followed Chinese customs. Taylor inspired them to love China's millions and seek their salvation. But in 1895, after one year of marriage, Walter and their baby boy died unexpectedly. As a woman of courage and devotion, Jessie left on her own to attend Toronto Bible College and prepare for missionary work with the China Inland Mission. In spite of her afflictions, she completed her schooling and left for Shanghai, China in 1899.

Edith's father, George Hugh Seville, was born in 1876. He loved to study languages, especially Greek and Hebrew. He graduated with the A.B. degree from Westminster College, New Wilmington, Pennsylvania in 1898. For two years he taught Latin and Greek in a boy's prep school, but as he learned about and prayed for Hudson Taylor's China Inland Mission, God called him to the mission field. He attended a Presbyterian theological seminary for three years, where he received high marks in the study of Hebrew, and then sailed for China in late 1902. In China, George met Jessie Maude Merritt. Jessie had determined that she would never marry again. She did not think anyone could replace Walter, and she convinced herself that she could serve God better as a widow. She thought marriage and caring for children might interfere with her ability to serve the Chinese people without distraction. George persevered in pursuing her, and finally won her heart. They were married on March 29, 1905, the same year Hudson Taylor died.

George and Jessie began their family in China, and their fourth child, Edith Seville, was born on November 3, 1914. A precocious and strong-willed child, Edith spent her early life in the missionary compound of the China Inland Mission. She observed her parents' love for Christ and the Chinese people. She learned Chinese and appreciated the work of the China Inland Mission. Her parents taught her how to dress like Chinese children, and encouraged her to love the little Chinese boys and girls around her. She even learned how to drink tea with rice packed in one cheek, not to be touched by the tea.

Edith Schaeffer was not accidentally born in China to parents who lived by faith as missionaries in Hudson Taylor's China Inland Mission. God taught Edith before her earliest remembrance about how He could provide for a believer's needs in answer to prayer. God's providential preparation of Edith included the Holy Spirit placing the desire in her heart to accompany Dr. Hoste (who succeeded Hudson Taylor as the director of C.I.M.) as he prayed by name for all the missionaries under his care. After admonishing her not to talk as they walked, he took little four-year-old Edith by the hand as he prayed out loud for the mission's needs and the definite needs of each missionary and their children. Edith heard Dr. Hoste pray for her specifically, and then she saw his prayers answered on her behalf. She heard others praising God for the answers to prayer that she had heard Dr. Hoste pray about earlier, and she praised God too. Some of her earliest recollections include hearing her parents pray and seeing God answer them in special ways. Very early in life, God impressed Edith's heart and mind with truths about His faithfulness and His desire to hear and answer prayers.

In 1919 the Sevilles came back from China, and Edith's dad continued working with the C.I.M. as editor of China's Millions. Later, he became the pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Newburgh, New York. He kept studying the Bible and theology, and maintained friendships with such great Christian leaders as Robert Dick Wilson and J. Gresham Machen, professors at Princeton Theological Seminary. The intellectual interests of Edith's father played an important role in her life, and while she was still in high school, her father gave her the books of these two great men to study so she could better prepare herself to defend the Christian faith.

After the Sevilles moved to Pennsylvania, Edith fought for the truth and defended the Christian faith in her high school classes and in church. Sometimes speakers in her church youth meetings denied Christian truth and the Bible's teachings, and Edith did not want others to be misled by false ideas.

Unlike Fran's family, Edith's parents raised her as a Christian, so she always trusted in God. This does not mean that she never sinned, but she never remembers a time when Jesus was not her Lord and Savior. If she sinned, she knew immediately to go to Jesus and with a repentant heart ask His forgiveness. If she needed to make an important decision, she knew to go to Jesus and ask Him for guidance. She loved to read the Bible and pray, and she blended Bible reading and prayer by praying over each verse of the Bible as she read. The Holy Spirit taught her what the Bible meant as she prayed about the meaning of every scripture.

While Edith attended high school and learned more about God from her parents, Fran faced hostile parents who opposed his plans for ministry. They fiercely resisted the idea, for they had planned for him to get a degree in engineering. He quickly discovered that he would need to go against his parents' wishes if he were to study and prepare for the ministry! He chose to obey God rather than man, but this meant he caused real pain to himself and both of his parents. In his later ministry, he remembered what choosing to obey Christ could mean in the life of any young person he counseled. His mother carried an unforgiving bitterness far into his years of ministry, and in many ways made life miserable for the entire Schaeffer family as they cared for her in her declining years of life.

After some Christian friends and leaders in his church advised him, Fran applied for admission to Hampden-Sydney College in Virginia. He thought it best to begin preministerial studies in the fall of 1931. He had no idea how he would finance his schooling, but he prayed and trusted that if the Lord had called him to the ministry, then the Lord would meet his needs. For Fran, this was a practical step of faith in his heavenly Father.

While working and preparing for college, Fran studied Latin and German in night school. During the day he worked equally hard to earn money for school. Fran believed that God would provide for his needs as he prepared for the ministry, but he also knew that God expected him to work diligently to prepare himself in every way for his calling---materially, intellectually, and spiritually. Students who later came to L'Abri quickly learned that Dr. Schaeffer expected them to do both intellectual and physical labor as they grew spiritually.

In September 1931, Fran began getting ready to leave for college. A little more than a year had passed since he had publicly professed his faith in Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. On the basis of the finished work of Christ upon the cross, God removed his guilt and filled him with His love. He felt joyful about going to school where he could learn more about the way upon which he had embarked. But still he didn't have his father's blessing or permission. As an obedient son, he did not want to go against the wishes of his father. He felt torn between his obligations to his earthly father and to his heavenly Father. He sincerely felt a personal struggle between God's call to the ministry and his father's call to work beside him.

The day finally came when Fran had to leave for college. His dad met him at the door as he was going off to work, and commanded his son directly: "I don't want a son who is a minister, and--I don't want you to go." 1. Fran told his dad to give him just a few more minutes to decide what to do. He went down to the cellar and prayed. He fervently sought the Lord's will once again, seeking a final confirmation that in this situation he could disobey his earthly father and prepare for ministry. Then, after God reaffirmed His will for him, Fran went upstairs to see his dad, who was waiting to hear his decision. Without a hint of rebellious spirit in his words and sorrowfully, Fran said, "Dad, I've got to go. . . ." 2. With that, his father slammed the door in anger behind him...but he also called out that he would pay Fran's school expenses for the first half year.

Years later Fran's dad did become a Christian, but if Fran had not made the decision to follow his heavenly Father, no matter what the personal cost in family and friends, his own earthly father might never have found Christ as his Savior. In his decision to follow Christ only, Fran also made a choice for his own children, that he would raise them in a Christian home even though at that time he probably had no thought of the ramifications of his decision. Literally thousands of others might never have come to a deep Christian faith if Fran had not chosen at that one moment in history to put God first in his life no matter what the personal cost. The decisions we make now cause ripple effects throughout eternity!

Believing in Jesus is no guarantee that this life will be easy for the Christian. Fran's arrival at Hampden-Sydney was not easy. He came from a working-class home, unlike his fellow students who came from the American aristocracy. He worked as a low-paid, blue-collar worker instead of a professional. They were rich, well-dressed, and often spoiled. He was a Northerner, a Yankee, from Philadelphia. They were Southern gentlemen, who gave him the nickname "Phily." They knew he was studying to be a minister, and many of them felt compelled to test that commitment. Fran had to demonstrate to them by the way he lived and studied that he had a heartfelt concern for God and people. Over the next four years, they learned that Fran had a real intellectual conviction about God and what it meant to serve Him only. But at first, they did not want to be near a person who might bother their conscience as they threw off the religious morality of their home life.

School authorities intentionally placed Fran on a dormitory floor with students who were especially belligerent toward ministerial students. In spite of this, Fran showed his strong religious convictions and refused to live hypocritically or compromise his beliefs. During his freshman year, the other students picked on him unmercifully, until one day he dished out a little of what he had been receiving. Before long, he had won the admiration of his professors and fellow students.

Even at this time in his life, Fran knew he needed to show Christian firmness according to the holiness of God. He never claimed perfection. He knew that his standing for the holiness of God was not on the basis of his own personal merit, but on the basis of the character of a holy God. His own life did, however, show substantial consistency in holy living, or he would never have had such an impact upon others: he would have totally discredited his work. As you study Francis and Edith Schaeffer's lives, you will find a substantial consistency between their lives and words throughout their lives, and this is one of the primary reasons for their success as evangelists and missionaries. They not only "talked the talk;" they "walked the walk."

While Fran stood for the holiness of God, he also needed to show the love of God and compassion for those who did not know the God of the Bible. At one point he made a pact with some students that if he helped them to their rooms after they came home on a Saturday night, then they had to go to church with him on Sunday morning. He hoped they might hear and respond to the gospel. He didn't mind this, and simply said, "It gave me time to keep up with my studies while the others were out." He started a prayer meeting and Bible study on his dorm floor, and many of the students attended. To hold their interest, he kept it short. At graduation, the school honored him for being the most outstanding Christian on campus during his four years.

Fran met his wife-to-be, Edith Seville, on June 26, 1932. He had finished his first year at Hampden-Sydney College and had returned home to work for the summer. One Sunday evening at the First Presbyterian Church, a Unitarian (who had been a member of the church) came to speak on why he denied the Bible's teachings regarding God, the deity of Jesus Christ, and other Christian truths. Following his talk, Edith started to argue against his ideas, using materials she had been studying. But before she could stand, Fran jumped up and began refuting what had just been said. Until that moment Edith had not known of anyone else near her age in the church who believed as she did. When Fran finished speaking, Edith stood up and made her position clear. Fran did not know of anyone else in the church who believed as he did. That night, following the meeting, Francis Schaeffer insisted that he accompany Edith home. They had met on the field of spiritual combat, both fighting for the same biblical faith, both with intellectual passion. That night in June of 1932, God began a partnership of learning and teaching that would mark their work together and eventually come to be known simply as "L'Abri," "the shelter," a family for those who had lost their faith and subsequently the meaning of life. Through L'Abri, the Schaeffers would present Christian truths by word and example so many people could come to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God.

Fran and Edith came from opposite backgrounds, but they united on the basis of a common Biblical faith. Francis Schaeffer's parents were not believers and had no interest in the gospel. Edith's parents were missionaries and knew the importance of Christ as Savior. Whereas Fran's parents were not well-educated, Edith's parents had excelled in college and had received the best education possible to prepare them for ministry. The Schaeffers wanted Francis to prepare for work in the trades. The Sevilles expected Edith to serve Jesus Christ and excel in intellectual and spiritual endeavors. God would use their opposite backgrounds in wonderful ways as missionaries together.

While Fran finished the next three years at Hampden-Sydney College, they wrote each other every day. Their romance included sharing spiritual truths as well as personal truths. Edith encouraged Fran to read J. Gresham Machen's *Christianity and Liberalism*, and then they discussed the devastating effects theological liberalism was having on the church and some of those around them. For Fran and Edith, Christianity was never an intellectual theory or game. They knew that God intended for people to live as Christians. Jesus was the Lord to love and serve. The gospel was a message to spread to as many as possible. Even after Fran became a noted Christian thinker, he never just "theologized" for the sake of argument or discussion. He believed that theological discussion could become just another exciting game to some people, and that playing that game could actually become a barrier to real and honest discipleship.

During Fran's sophomore year at Hampden-Sydney, Edith began attending Beaver College for Women, commuting daily to save money. Their college years demonstrated their commitment to serving Christ. Consistent with his concern for all people, Fran walked through the woods every week to teach the Bible to a group of poor black children. He knew no barriers of race or color in Jesus Christ, and he lived on that basis even when many had a deep-seated prejudice against their black brothers and sisters. Fran went to these little black children because he loved them and saw them as individuals before God. But at the same time, perhaps unconsciously, he made a social statement regarding every Christian's responsibility to love and serve those who are different in some respects from themselves, for all human beings are created in the image of God. Fran's early concern for all people, his love for all God's children from all backgrounds, became one of the strengths of his entire ministry. His consistent attitude in this regard made its impact upon L'Abri, actually making L'Abri a possibility, as people came literally from the ends of the earth.

Among his other college activities, Fran became president of the Literary Society and entered debates. He served on the cabinet of the Christian Student Association and became a member of the Ministerial Association. He joined Theta Kappa Nu fraternity and fulfilled his obligations, but later he resolved never again to join another secular organization. He said that at some point secular, "this-world," organizations always come into conflict with the Christian faith and practice.

While Fran studied theology, Edith studied home economics, a wide and extensive curriculum, covering many different practical areas. Her Christian commitment led her to start meetings of the League of Evangelical Students on campus. These were also difficult times for her, as she had to face the challenges of those intellectuals who had embraced and

were promoting communist positions regarding religion and social concerns. But God knew exactly what He was doing in preparing Edith for the mission field. She would help pay for Fran's seminary education by working as a seamstress. Later, she would make clothes for herself and the children, and decorate their homes economically and with real beauty.

Many things can be learned from their correspondence during this time. For example, Edith idealized that Fran would one day become one of the greatest men of God. She wanted to be his companion in everything. Fran remarked about the death of a fine professor and said that he would have been even greater "if he had had love in his life." At another time, they both rededicated their lives to God, to the point of being willing to part with each other if that were God's will for them. They both read Daily Light each day, to have a biblical and spiritual experience in common while apart. Their shared reading of Daily Light continued until the day of Fran's death.

In March of 1935 Fran applied for admission to theological seminary. As a straight A student, he graduated magna cum laude and second in his class with a B.A. degree from Hampden-Sydney. However, Fran and Edith did not find an easy glide from college to seminary. They never isolated themselves from the winds of change in their denomination. By April of 1935, Dr. J. Gresham Machen was on trial in the Presbyterian Church for his pioneering work in independent missions. Fran and Edith joined in prayer for him and their future. The result of that trial would affect their decision about whether or not to remain in the theologically liberal Presbyterian Church. When they learned that Dr. Machen had been defrocked (had his ordination credentials withdrawn), Fran wrote immediately and resigned from the Northern Presbyterian Church and went under care as a seminary student with the Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church of America.

Fran and Edith were partners in their decision to withdraw from the liberal Presbyterian Church. In looking back forty years later upon that decision Fran reflected that he was glad he has not spent the last forty years fighting a rearguard battle and being looked upon as a maverick within the denomination. Because we have just so much time and energy, he believed that if he had stayed, he would never have been able to achieve what he had. Because he recognized that the Church is the Body of Christ and not just another organization, he advised, "I personally would not belong to any denomination where there was no hope of recovering the bureaucracy or the seminaries for Jesus Christ."

God prepared Francis and Edith Schaeffer to work together as missionaries. He gave Edith the good example of fine Christian parents. He gave her the memory of J. Hudson Taylor's missionary endeavors in China. He gave her the opportunity to meet world-renowned Christian scholars, who stood up courageously and sacrificially for Biblical faith. Her completely opposite childhood from Fran's enabled her to give balance and stability to their ministry and growing family. Fran was an only child, Edith was not, so they learned as partners how to care for children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. They worked together to show each family member that he or she was loved and cared for as a valued individual. There were many things about a Christian family and witness that Fran had not personally experienced in his home, but wanted for his own family. Their opposite backgrounds gave them an understanding of the variety of ways people come to faith in Christ. They also felt great sorrow when they saw some, with every Christian advantage imaginable, turn from faith in Christ. Edith learned by experience and education how to rear a family in a Christian home. And she also gave hospitality and Christian family life to the strangers who would come to live in their midst. Their backgrounds complemented each other's strengths and weaknesses. God's preparing and bringing them together was perhaps the greatest miracle He performed in their lives, for many miracles followed from their life together.

The Schaeffers made these life-changing decisions prayerfully together, grateful that the Bible gave them truth--objective truth with absolute standards. The Holy Spirit used their Bible study to strengthen and enlighten their moral principles whereby they could, with a sound conscience, take the right stand in opposition to their denomination. As early as 1935, however, Fran also recognized the need in his life for more sweetness, gentleness, love, and kindness. He wanted to express the qualities of love as he stood for truth in the midst of the battle for truth. He battled his temper all his life, but he did develop the kindness that he sought. In all his struggles and decisions, Edith stood with him in prayer and sound counsel. They faced life's challenges together and with their God, knowing that they could trust the promises in His Word.

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