

3. Serving God Together

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Francis Schaeffer graduated in early June from Hampden-Sydney College, and Edith and he were married on July 6, 1935.

During their first summer together they served as church camp counselors in Michigan and began their early work with children. They learned more about each other and how to deal with their imperfections; especially with Fran's temper, that could flare so easily, and Edith's stubbornness once she made a decision. On one occasion she slightly dented their car and Fran got so angry with her, she vowed (and kept the vow) never to drive a car again. After years of married experience, Edith later taught that marriage is a 90 percent and 10 percent relationship. At times, you give 90 percent and the other gives 10 percent; then the other gives 90 percent and you give 10 percent: at some moments in history we are just not able to give what is needed in a marriage. When reflecting upon marriage and illness, Edith learned: "Pain and discomfort need to be shared. One person may be the well one, and one the ill one, but both are involved, which, after all, is what the oneness of marriage--the 'for better and worse, in sickness and in health'--is all about. In spite of being two separate persons, there is a reality of sharing life together which the modern 'scream of rights' or 'scream for independence' knows nothing about!" 1.

Since Edith earned much of Fran's tuition at Westminster Theological Seminary by making clothes for others, she stayed up late at night and sewed in order to share with him the ideas he learned in class. In this way, and also with her own avid reading, Edith acquired the equivalent of a seminary education without the benefit of formal classroom attendance. If you think that Edith must have gotten very little rest, you think right. For most of her life, Edith only needed about 3 hours of sleep at night. While others slept, she spent the late evening or early morning hours at work, often writing family letters, then L'Abri Family Letters, and finally books. You can see from her later work as a writer and speaker that God used their times of study and discussion together to prepare her for helping others too. They learned the importance of discussing ideas together as a family, and the discussion of ideas became a vital part of their family life as well as in L'Abri with students around the dinner table. When Fran wrote his books, he said that his and Edith's books formed a unit and must be read together.

After Fran's second year at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, and following the death of Dr. Machen, the new Presbyterian denomination split. Fran left Westminster, and helped found Faith Seminary in Wilmington, Delaware with Professor MacRae and others. The summer of 1937 found Fran and Edith busily getting the living accommodations ready for staff and students to open Faith Seminary in the fall. Here Fran's background made him a tremendous asset to the endeavor; for example, he salvaged old bathroom fixtures from junk yards to remodel the apartments he was in charge of restoring. He also arranged for his capable father-in-law, Dr. George Seville, to join the faculty and teach missions and introductory Greek. Edith's father continued to teach there for the next seventeen years, until he was eighty. In the midst of all these busy preparations and the founding of a new seminary and denomination, Edith gave birth to Priscilla, their first child, on June 18, 1937.

Because of Fran's hard work and the cooperation of many others, seminary classes began on time in the Faith Bible Presbyterian Church. Fran was the first student to enroll, and he graduated in the first graduating class, maintaining an A average. He was also the first pastor to be ordained in the Bible Presbyterian Church.

Fran and Edith met at church in the midst of a theological battle, and theological battles accompanied them throughout life. Until parted by death, they stood side by side for the same truths. To understand their ministry and mission work, two major problems they faced must be comprehended. During their years in seminary and following, these two problems plagued the Schaeffers as they sought greater reality in their Christian faith and strived to draw closer to God. The first problem became a keynote of Dr. Schaeffer's teaching and private conversations; that is, Christians must always stand for holiness and love at the same time. After study and prayer, he came to believe that this can never be done in a person's own strength. It can only be done through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in the Christian's life. God gave the Holy Spirit so He could help Christians live Christ-like. Fran's battles with his own imperfections drove him closer and closer to Christ and the indwelling Holy Spirit. When he talked to others who disagreed with him, he faced the difficulty of making "a simultaneous exhibition of the holiness of God and the love of God." In his early ministry, he stood for God's holiness and for orthodoxy; but sometimes he did not display the love of Christ for others as he spoke. This serious problem marred his relationship with some. After Fran's "hayloft experience" (which will be explained in chapter 7), he challenged people to stand for God's holiness and truth, and at the same time show the love of Christ for others.

The second problem that disturbed them was the notion that every action or decision people make is in some way

caused or predetermined by God. If this is the case, choice is not real choice. Pushed to extremes, this view says that prayer makes no difference, because in some mysterious way God has already determined what He is going to do or not do anyway. With this concept, people cannot pray to God and expect their requests will make any real difference in history. People can only make prayers of thanksgiving or confession. The Schaeffers believed that people make real choices, and these choices make a real difference in history. You write your own autobiography by the choices you make and the things you do; even as God works, makes choices, and does things in history that affect your life. People are accountable for their choices. God holds people responsible for what they say and do. Because people are responsible and accountable for their actions, sin is real and they are guilty of committing sins against a holy God. Because they are truly guilty, they need Jesus Christ as their Savior. Human life is not "just a piece of theater" with God pulling all the strings, or with people living out a script written by God before they were born. By trying to understand and explain how people's choices are real and make a significant difference, the Schaeffers helped many confused people.

The Schaeffers started L'Abri in 1955 to demonstrate the reality of God answering prayers, and to show that believers have every right to make requests of God as they seek His direction for their lives. God met all the needs of L'Abri by answering their prayers and those of others. They proved that praying or not praying made a real difference in God's relationship with them. Later, Dr. Schaeffer carefully wrote: "God, being nondetermined, created man as a nondetermined person. This is a difficult area for anyone thinking in twentieth-century terms, because most twentieth-century thinking sees man as determined." 2. In other words, God created human beings in His own image, with the ability to reason, feel, and make significant choices. As God worked in their lives, Fran and Edith were keenly aware of the tough choices they made. They prayed fervently to be totally submissive to God and His leading, rather than be disobedient in any way, especially as they faced decisions regarding their denomination and seminary education. God did not cause them to choose as they did, He led them (which shows much greater wisdom, love, and respect for people He created in His image). The Schaeffers sometimes faced different views of theological determinism: whereas twentieth-century unbelievers often think in terms of people being determined by chemical, psychological, or sociological factors. They knew that God answered prayer, and that prayer made a difference. Edith reminded Fran of the many answers to prayer that Hudson Taylor and others in the China Inland Mission had received when praying for God to meet all their needs. They refused to bow to pressures from the theological right, left, or middle. For Fran and Edith, the Bible had to be their guide as the Holy Spirit led them in its proper interpretation. With Fran's study of Greek and Hebrew and the writings of many great Bible scholars and theologians, God prepared them to chart a different course--that course has affected millions of believers.

Fran and Edith dealt with many problems presented by these two perspectives. How can believers show God's love and holiness in their lives when they fight for truth? How can believers uphold the sovereign glory of God and at the same time hold themselves and others accountable for their decisions and behavior? In very practical ways, by their lives and prayers, the Schaeffers sought to demonstrate the presence of God and the truth of God to their generation. Because they decided to stand for God and His way as revealed in the Bible, they often paid a price for these decisions when others got angry with them.

From time to time Fran and Edith became involved in theological controversy. As their faith matured, they learned how to disagree with someone else and at the same time show that person that they actually cared for them. One theological professor, who for years often publicly criticized Schaeffer's way of helping people become Christians, retired and then wrote a long critical treatment of Fran's view of the Christian faith and evangelism. Dr. Schaeffer responded privately to some in L'Abri and said, "I would hate to think that I might spend my retirement doing something like that!" Still, he kept all of this professor's works available for study at L'Abri, while withdrawing his own tapes that discussed this person's views and their disagreements. Dr. Schaeffer learned that a public response to his critics seldom helped, and he simply did not have the time--he preferred to discuss ideas rather than personalities or personal differences. 3. After he began L'Abri, Dr. Schaeffer preferred to deal with his critics on a private level through careful correspondence and discussion. In this way he hoped he could show the love of Christ for those who disputed with his ideas. But he did not carry controversial discussion on for long when he felt the issues and differences of theological opinion had been fully discussed and understood by all parties involved.

Following graduation and ordination, Fran, Edith, and eleven-month-old Priscilla left for Grove City, Pennsylvania. The Covenant Presbyterian Church had called Fran to be their new pastor. The new church consisted of eighteen adults, and on their first Sunday morning few children attended. The parents in their new church believed their children needed to be in a larger Sunday school than their new church could provide.

In their first church, Edith began praying without ceasing for her husband while he preached from the pulpit. As the wife of the pastor, she knew this was one of her most important responsibilities. They worked hard together. Using skills he learned from scouting, Fran prepared hot dog roasts in the park to meet new children and eventually win them and their families to Christ and their new church. Edith helped organize and teach in their summer Vacation Bible School. Their first summer, in a church with no Sunday School, seventy-nine children attended the first day of V.B.S., and by the end more than one hundred came. They strongly emphasized the necessity of the believer's involvement in leading people to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, and some people became Christians in their very first Vacation Bible School.

However, not all of their efforts in Grove City were successful. They tried to reach out to college students at Grove City College, but failed. They little realized at the time that they would soon be reaching college students from all over the world when the students travelled to L'Abri in Switzerland.

From Edith's background in the China Inland Mission and from the inspirational biographies they read, Fran and Edith recognized the importance of prayer. Fran asked a bedfast woman, the wife of an elder in their church, if she would pray for special church needs, hurting people, and his ministry. He went to her house and shared his prayer requests with her, and he always believed that her prayers were an important reason for many wonderful things that happened at Grove City. Fran gave everyone who loved the Lord, no matter what their abilities, an important role in his churches and in L'Abri.

Covenant Presbyterian Church grew so fast under Fran's ministry that in less than three years they built a new building and the membership reached 110. When you consider that Fran had only recently graduated from seminary, this rapid growth seems almost incredible. God blessed their faithfulness, prayer, and hard work, and He called people into the Covenant Presbyterian Church at a time when believers needed to take a courageous stand for the truth of God's Word. Fran also served as moderator of the Great Lakes Presbytery of the Bible Presbyterian Church, quite an honor and responsibility for such a young man. In the midst of this success, however, with new people coming to church every Sunday, one of Fran's elders suggested that after three years a minister ought to move on to a new church. He felt Fran had said probably all that he had to say! So, Fran and Edith began to pray for God to open another door of service for them.

While in Grove City, on May 28, 1941, Edith gave birth to their second daughter, Susan. A few months later, Fran began serving as the associate pastor of the Bible Presbyterian Church of Chester, Pennsylvania, south west of Philadelphia. Working with Dr. A. L. Lathem as the senior pastor, Fran continued serving the Bible Presbyterian Church as a whole. They served the church in Chester for less than two years. Fran helped them complete a church construction program, but he did not want to be involved in building any more buildings where he thought no more were needed. When he arrived in Chester, the church needed Fran's expertise. Because of his education in the trades, his past work with his father, and his experience building a new church in Grove City, he helped with the plans. He climbed up on the scaffolding to work side-by-side with the members of the church who volunteered their time after work to do much of the actual construction. God is economical when He works in the lives of believers, so He did not waste any of the education and experience He gave Francis Schaeffer. Likewise, Fran used all the knowledge God gave him in many different areas to help the church and others.

The Bible Presbyterian Church in Chester had more than five hundred members, and Fran's background enabled him to talk with shipyard workers and farmers, with professional businessmen and intellectual professors, with young mothers and their children. Fran learned that people around the world ask essentially the same questions about life and about God, and we just need to learn their language. Learning another's language is a part of what it means to love them. Just as some might learn a foreign dialect to translate the Bible into that language for the first time, so others must learn the language of the farmer, the dockworker, or the philosopher so they can share the gospel with them in their own language. Fran and Edith learned the language of searching young college students and those the Lord sent them, so they could share the good news of Jesus Christ with them in terms they would understand. Fran never looked down upon another person's calling. He never thought that a doctor might be a more important person than a welder. He did insist, however, that believers be sure of their calling: God calls some to be dockworkers, some to be teachers, some to be carpenters, others to be preachers. The important thing is living as a consistent Christian in whatever vocation God has called you, realizing that God can place people where He wants in the spiritual battles He calls them to fight.

Because Fran knew that people live in the midst of spiritual battles, he dealt with difficulties and unexpected "moves" in life without being completely shattered by them. The battle between Satan and God in the unseen world affects us. We can be wounded in the battle, and we can wound Satan in the battle. In the spiritual warfare we fight, Jesus Christ is the Commander, and He has the right to place us in the battlefield wherever He sees fit, and wherever He believes we can do the most good for the Kingdom of God. For these reasons, Fran tried not to complain against God, but looked upon his difficult times and places as opportunities to give the most to God and learn the most from God in the midst of spiritual warfare. Some warfare involves our reactions to others and how we handle temptations. No matter what happened to them, Fran and Edith wanted to maintain integrity, honesty, and truthfulness before God and others. Rather than try to impress people, they wanted to ground their lives in what is real and true. They learned to express their true ideas and feelings, without expressing these in ways that were inappropriate. Over time, God taught them how to express their anger when necessary, and how to control it so they did not damage people or property.

By 1942 Fran's father had become a Christian. He saw the practical application of the Christian faith in Fran's and Edith's lives, something he had not seen before as Christianity had always appeared irrelevant and Christians had always appeared to be hypocrites. Fran showed him that the ministry can be practical and that many ministers actually do contribute to society instead of being parasites.

The Schaeffers saw the value of people, no matter what their place or position in life. While in Chester, Fran began working with a child with Down Syndrome whose parents could not afford any special education for her. Later, another

child with Down Syndrome joined them. The parents of the children and many in the church were amazed at what these children accomplished. Children with special needs had a special place in Fran's heart, and this is one of the reasons he worked so hard against abortion and infanticide.

At Chester, Fran and Edith continued praying for the grace that would empower them to obey the Scriptures in everything. One day a very poor family learned that their little girl had an incurable tongue disease, a disease that would very soon take her life. Her parents came to Fran and asked him to anoint their child with oil and pray for her healing. They came to Fran believing the Bible when it declares: "Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms. Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him" (James 5:13-15). Fran prayed for their daughter in obedience to the Scriptures, and the Lord miraculously healed her.

The Schaeffers believed that Bible-believing Christians should practice living in the supernatural world on a daily basis. For them, Christianity was not just a way of thinking or something special to believe. Christianity was a special way of living based upon a true understanding of reality. They acted on the basis that the Bible is true, so they received many answers to their prayers. They strived to maintain a close and personal relationship with God, so God could use them in any way He saw fit.

During his long ministry, Fran prayed at other times for people to be healed. Sometimes people were healed and at other times they were not. He never claimed to be a faith healer; he only tried to obey the Word of God and leave the results to Him. Just as humility and the primary call to preach and teach prompted Jesus not to place an overemphasis on His healing ministry, so Fran felt called primarily to preach the truth and emphasize practicing God's Word. He quietly demonstrated the truth of Proverbs 11:30, "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise." Fran knew that God had called him to practice evangelism and study to win souls. Later, when Edith wrote *Affliction*, she explained why God answers some prayers for healing but not others. 4. All through their lives Fran and Edith combined prayer with obedient hard work, and God blessed their consistency. They became a clear and open channel for the flow of God's grace into the lives of those about them.

By faith, Fran and Edith lived in the presence of God. They knew they lived in both the natural and the supernatural world. Fran taught that just as Jesus Christ lives in those who have come to Him by faith, and just as He also lives in the presence of His Father in heaven, so God calls believers to live in the Father's presence too. Faith involves believing in the Word of God and trusting God to keep His Word: faith should move the believer to live in the supernatural now, in authentic communication with God.

The Schaeffers believed in the specific promises of God given in the Bible, and in faith they acted upon those promises. But they also knew that God sometimes has His own reasons for not answering a prayer for healing or some other request, and that His reason will never contradict His revealed Word or promises. If they were ill, they saw no inconsistency between praying for healing and at the same time taking the best medicine or seeking the best doctors. They believed in using all of God's gifts (the gifts of faith, prayer, physicians, and medicine) in the battle to defeat Satan, sickness, and death. Trouble and sickness are not always a sign of a lack of faith or disobedience. Believers do not need to throw away their medicine to prove their faith in God before He will heal them. The believer's troubles often come from living in a fallen world, from Satan's attacks, and from the sins of others. Perfection will not come until the next world, after Jesus Christ has returned.

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