

## 5. Making Difficult Decisions

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The Schaeffers intended to obey God always, but that did not make the decision to go to Europe easy. In 1948, on the last Sunday Francis Schaeffer preached as the pastor of the Bible Presbyterian Church in St. Louis, Edith Schaeffer prayed and wept over his decision to leave the pastorate and become a mission administrator overseas.

She envisioned him traveling, speaking, conducting meetings, and writing endless reports. She fervently prayed for the Lord to intervene and keep them in America, because she believed God intended Fran to use his gifts in serving churches and preaching the Bible. As she reasoned with God, she pointed out that Fran loved people and really helped them, so why would God want Fran to be an administrator?

The Lord did not intervene and keep them in their church or find them a new church in America. Literally, God's answer to her prayer was a definite "No." They first went to Holland and then to Switzerland with the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions. By starting "Children for Christ" classes in churches all across war-torn Europe, they achieved one of their major goals. But if God had answered her prayer literally, the work of L'Abri would not have begun in 1955, and Dr. Schaeffer would not have developed his influential ideas through his study and discussions with people from all over the world.

God looked at the intention of Edith's heart and did not answer her prayer to the letter, but according to her spirit. In her pleading, Edith revealed her strong desire for God to show her husband how and where to serve Him in the best possible ways. The spirit of her prayer indicated that she did not want Fran's good influence diminished, but increased. She wanted him to be more than an administrator, and in answer to prayer he did become far more. Were her motives pure? Were they unmixed with respect to her also desiring not be uprooted from home, friends, and family? Perhaps not. But primarily, she wanted Fran empowered to serve Jesus Christ and meet people's needs in God's place for them, and she firmly believed America was God's place. She wanted God to put her husband where people would benefit from his compassionate care and solid Biblical teaching, and she knew how badly this was needed right where they were. As for herself, she did pray that God would help her be submissive to the will of God and to her husband. Although God did not give her exactly what she prayed for by keeping them in America, He did fulfill the intention of her heart or "the spirit of her prayer" by empowering Fran to help people as a pastor in Europe. Later, God enabled him to help Americans in Europe and America. If God had granted her request "to the letter," they would not have received something far better, the blessing of helping greater numbers with serious intellectual questions.

As they prepared to go to Europe, God expressed His gracious love when Priscilla entered the Philadelphia Children's Hospital. Although her first doctor thought she wasn't really sick, her condition worsened. Then Dr. C. Everett Koop saw her "by accident," and noted that she needed surgery as soon as possible. Hence, as early as 1948, the Schaeffers came to meet Dr. Koop, who had recently become a Christian. God planned for Koop to meet the Schaeffer's then, because He knew Koop needed their teachings immediately. God also wanted Koop to play a large part in the Schaeffers' lives and in the life of L'Abri. 1. While Priscilla had surgery, Fran served as the moderator of the Bible Presbyterian Church Conference which was meeting in Nashville, Tennessee. Fran's thoughtfulness of his daughter at this time made a lasting impression upon Dr. Koop, as he saw the practical expression of the Christian faith that characterized Schaeffer's ministry.

On many occasions Francis and Edith Schaeffer experienced the truth of Romans 8:28, "all things work for good to those who love God, and who are called according to His purpose." God used Priscilla's illness to bring Dr. Koop into their lives, and God managed for each person to find the exact help they needed. God called them according to His purpose to go to Europe when they did, but that also meant that Satan increased the fierceness of his attacks against them. When they left for Switzerland, a more intense spiritual warfare began that lasted all their lives. Satan hurt them with real pain that left lasting scars, but in everything God worked for His good as well as theirs and others. The good that God worked for churches and individuals through them far outweighed the price the Schaeffers paid as the result of their resolve to obey God and go where He sent no matter what the consequences.

The Schaeffers arrived in Europe when Fran was thirty-six years old, and he spent the next thirty-six years as a missionary. God prepared him for thirty-six years to go to Switzerland, and Fran did not waste those years of preparation. After they arrived in Amsterdam, Schaeffer became the recording secretary for the founding conference of the International Council of Christian Churches. Here, Fran met a young art critic, Hans Rookmaaker. As they talked outside the conference during one of the meetings, Rookmaaker was captivated by Fran's understanding of the Christian faith and its relationship to art. Their conversations at the conference led to a lasting friendship between Hans and Fran.

Shortly before Hans died in 1977, he helped Fran create his monumental film series, *How Should We Then Live?*

In St. Louis the entire Schaeffer family spent many Saturdays in art museums learning how to appreciate and evaluate art. Sometimes the children sat and drew the pictures they studied. But with Rookmaaker to stimulate his interest, with Fran seeing the need for more Christian involvement in the arts, and as he toured museums all over Europe, he began to promote more avidly the arts as a valid enterprise for Christian involvement. Fran loved art, and throughout his years in Europe often stopped at a museum to study art and history as he returned home following a Bible study. His friendship with Rookmaaker inspired Fran to write the book, *Art and the Bible*, for young people who struggled with how to express their artistic aspirations.

After the International Conference, the Schaeffers moved to Lausanne, where Fran began contacting all the people he had met the year before. They began "Children for Christ" in earnest. They wrote Bible studies for children and sent them all over Europe. The Rookmaakers began teaching and translating the lessons. Other European Christians translated them into their own languages. Theological liberalism and Barthianism so dominated the churches of Europe that children were not taught that the Bible is true. Children for Christ materials taught that the Bible is true in the historical areas as well as in the religious and theological areas. Fran and Edith wrote "Children for Christ" materials for homes and churches in order to provide a Christian alternative to the liberal teachings that were infiltrating the churches.

Fran needed to spend much of his time studying and evaluating a variety of councils of churches and synods all over Europe so he could make recommendations regarding future relationships with them. In the summer of 1949, he attended the Reformed Ecumenical Synod of Amsterdam for two weeks in order to determine their stand on Bible-believing Christianity. With disappointment, he reported to the Bible Presbyterian Church that they should not become a member. He advised that churches and ministers in America should be warned about the synod's rejection of historic, orthodox Christianity.

In Switzerland, the whole family did evangelism as they prayed for the Lord to open doors for them. During their first year in Switzerland, little Priscilla Schaeffer knew French well enough to act as a translator for prospective renters in their boarding house. One evening, Priscilla rushed to tell her family that she had just translated from English into French so a German Jewish woman from Jerusalem could rent a room from Madame Turrian, their landlady. When Fran and Edith met the woman later, she bubbled over with excitement as she spoke about the re-establishment of Israel as a nation. She told about the great expectations of those who believed God might be doing something new in their midst.

In the coming days, God used the perfect timing of these events in Israel to give her a receptive mind for what the Schaeffer family had to tell her about Jesus the Messiah. And as the time for her return to Israel approached, the Schaeffers longed to give her a gift, a special Prophecy Edition of the New Testament. However, they did not know where to find one in Switzerland, and they knew they could not send to America and get one back in time. So they prayed fervently for a Bible to give, and trusted in God as they went about their daily tasks.

A few days later, on the last afternoon of a conference, Edith heard a man from the Million Testaments Campaigns give a lecture. Afterward, she hurried to the platform and asked him, "Do you have a Prophecy New Testament?" He smiled, reached into his coat pocket, pulled out and gave her exactly what she wanted. What a wonderful, specific answer to their prayers. 2.

The day the Jewish woman left, the Schaeffers gave her some gifts, including the Prophecy New Testament. They showed her why she should study it, and with a glowing face she accepted the Bible and promised to read it. The Schaeffers continued to pray for her, but they never saw her again. Because of God's perfect timing for her to meet the Schaeffers and receive her Bible at that time in Israel's history, we can hope that she eventually accepted Jesus as the Messiah and her personal Savior.

After living in their tiny apartment in Lausanne for several months, the Schaeffers learned that their girls needed to go to the mountains for their health, so they rented a chalet in Champéry for the summer. Here, they entertained a host of people going to the Second Plenary Congress of the International Council of Christian Churches. Fran himself spoke at the Congress on "The New Modernism (Neo-orthodoxy) and the Bible." He visited with Karl Barth prior to the meeting to make sure his interpretation of Barth was accurate, and the speech was later published as an article. Barth taught neo-orthodox theology in an attempt to overcome some of the problems of liberal theology, but he did not believe that the Bible was true in all that it affirms. Neo-orthodoxy is contrary to sound Christian doctrine, which the church had always called "orthodoxy." The name "neo-orthodoxy" sounded contemporary, "new," "relevant," and appealed to many who were misled by its teachings.

After the Schaeffers moved to Champéry, Dr. Otten became their family physician and friend. He was an unbeliever who did not see the value of spiritual concerns as he carried on his busy practice. He did not have time to attend Bible studies or talk much with Fran about Christianity. However, something about the Schaeffer family drew him to them, and his highly intelligent mind began to appreciate Fran's wisdom and approach to faith. The whole family began praying for Dr. Otten and asked God to help them find a way to reach him with the truth. He had already told them that he did not have time to go to Fran's home for Bible Study, and he gave the excuse "I wouldn't understand it anyway." Finally, the Holy

Spirit moved Fran to ask Dr. Otten if he would read some Bible studies that Fran would write personally for him. He could read the studies at his convenience rather than come to his home for Bible studies. Dr. Otten agreed to read the Bible studies, so Edith typed them and Fran delivered them to his office. The Holy Spirit began to move on him as he studied Fran's lessons, but he made no commitment to Christ.

As time passed, Dr. Otten got to know the Schaeffer family even better. He saw how they cared for the villagers and the international students attending the schools around them. He learned that a pastor cared for his parishioners much like a doctor cared for his patients. They not only shared their faith, but they practiced their faith by helping the needy. From some of the villagers, he learned about a Christmas Eve when the Schaeffers had taken a complete American Christmas dinner to an old woman who lived in a small, drafty, broken-down chalet and existed only on bread and cheese. She was amazed to see foods that she had never eaten before and kept asking, "Is this for me? Is this for me?" They explained the meaning of Jesus' birth, and told her the meal was a gift from God to her for Christmas. As Dr. Otten learned about their expressions of love in the village, he began to take Fran's lessons more seriously. He treated them more as friends, but still chose not to follow Christ.

After more than two years, the truth they shared and the example they set influenced Dr. Otten to come to their home for a serious after-dinner discussion with Fran. Edith needed to leave the room, and later she wrote home, "I knew they had Bibles out and that Fran was progressing toward asking Dr. Otten for a decision...I prayed fervently that this might be the night of salvation for dear Doctor Otten. I had a strange experience, because as the voices were low, I could not know what was being said, and during my fervent and earnest pleading with the Lord, I suddenly was filled with a peace--and even as I attempted to continue my praying--my mind was filled with the phrase, 'It is finished.' I became convinced that the Lord had answered and the need for that particular prayer was finished." 3. Fran later reported that Dr. Otten had given his life to Christ.

The time that Fran and Edith spent praying for Dr. Otten and preparing his lessons drew their hearts closer to him. He could sense their sincere love for him and saw their concern for his salvation. He was not just another number to be won to the Lord, but a real person whose eternal salvation meant much to them. Their prayers enabled him to sense the personal love and concern of Jesus Christ for him through them. Much prayer for sinners brings about a bond of unity and love that nothing else will. In every case where people came to believe in Christ through the Schaeffers' ministry, the unbeliever heard them share the truth and also saw them live according to that truth. This was the case with Fran's father and also Dr. Otten.

If you think about why we must often pray a long time for some things, remember that receiving speedy answers all the time can make us arrogant and fill us with pride. The Schaeffers prayed for more than two years for Dr. Otten, and sometimes many years for other things. We can be tempted to believe that God's answers to prayer are our accomplishments, that the conversion of sinners is our work, that our faith is the basic reason for God's answers instead of His love for us and others. When God delays in His answers to prayer, He helps us avoid thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought. When God moved and Dr. Otten accepted Christ as Lord, the Schaeffers praised God instead of complimenting themselves.

God had plans for Fran's Bible studies beyond helping Dr. Otten. By helping one person, God enabled Fran to help many. When Fran dictated the studies to Edith, she typed them up with multiple carbon copies. When others wanted the study too, Fran and Edith passed out the carbons to them. When all of the copies were gone, Edith typed them up again with multiple carbons, and these too were given away. Finally, Edith typed stencils and they used a mimeograph machine to make multiple copies of the book. When the stencils wore out, she typed more stencils. In 1972, Basic Bible Studies was published as a real book. What Fran and Edith were willing to do and did do for one person resulted in many people learning the Bible's teaching and accepting Christ as their Savior. For more than twenty years Basic Bible Studies has been used by groups meeting in homes and churches to introduce non-Christians and new Christians to the Bible. 4.

American military personnel have been stationed in Europe since the close of World War II, and servicemen visited the Schaeffers as soon as Fran and Edith moved out of the city and into a Swiss chalet. Visits by the servicemen convinced them of how much God wanted to do in their lives in answer to prayer. God prepared them well in advance for each new step that He intended for them to take. One Sunday afternoon a young American soldier visited the Schaeffers, and their conversation turned to a pastor in Zurich that the young man knew personally. The Schaeffers had never met the pastor, who had a young family like their own. He had been voted out of his church for emphasizing God's grace and some other essential Biblical "orthodox" doctrines. At first, the pastor tried some secular jobs to support his family; then, God led him into teaching the Bible in homes, traveling to other countries to preach, and in supporting his family by faith through prayer. As they discussed this pastor and his problems, they heard a knock at the door. After opening the door, they saw the very pastor they were talking about. The pastor spoke only German and the American soldier interpreted so the Schaeffers could understand. Without God's perfect timing, the Schaeffers would have had great difficulty in understanding their unexpected guest or talking with him about all that needed to be said in a short period of time.

God orchestrated this encounter to help the pastor from Zurich who needed to know that there were many others (especially Americans) who still believed as he did. And God wanted to impress upon the Schaeffers how He could provide for a pastor and his family if they took a stand for God and truth in spite of the cost. God's teaching the

Schaeffers about courage, obedience, and prayer through this man made such an impression upon Edith that when she wrote home she asked people to pray for him. Years before they needed this lesson and the comfort it could bring in a time of uncertainty and trial, God brought this pastor to the Schaeffers' home to teach them more about the power of prayer.

Edith asked others to pray for their new friend in the ministry, and the Schaeffers learned to depend on the prayers of many people to help them do their work. They did not take the prayers of others for granted, but praised God that others who lived far away could enter into their work with them through prayer. They believed prayer was real work, just as many other types of Christian work and physical labor take great effort. Believers never rise above the need for the prayers of others, and our prayers for others will benefit them in more ways than just giving them a psychological lift. God acts in answer to prayer. Our prayers often free God's hand to work in others' lives according to the principles He has revealed in the Bible. And in many cases, God will not join with us in our labors until we fulfill His condition of praying for His blessing and support.

The Schaeffer family eventually made the decision to live by prayer and faith alone when they founded L'Abri in 1955, just as the Zurich pastor and many others had done before them. But in 1949, six years before they founded L'Abri in the midst of a crisis, God demonstrated to them through this Zurich pastor that He could provide for their needs and the needs of others simply through prayer and doing the work that He wanted done. Our God is a good and gracious Master who takes care of His servants by anticipating their needs, whatever they may be.

The Schaeffers' contacts with American servicemen opened new doors for them. In 1950, about four years after the liberation of the Germans' prisoners from the death camp Dachau, Fran and Edith went to Dachau to teach a two-week Vacation Bible School for the American children of the soldiers stationed there. They wept when they saw the actual gas chambers and torture cells run by the German medical doctors before everything was cleaned up and Dachau was made into a museum. Man's inhumanity to man was graphic, as some people still lived in a displaced persons camp. The Schaeffers returned there again for the filming of *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* when they compared the holocaust to abortion, infanticide, and "mercy killing" now going on with government sanction in many countries around the world. The low view of human life in Germany during Hitler's rise to power prepared the way for the atrocities of his government. Schaeffer knew that the low view of human life in America and around the world, the low view that allowed the murder of one and one-half million unborn American children every year, would lead to even greater atrocities, especially with the new medical technologies that can be used for either good or evil. Schaeffer taught, and he has been proven right, that legalized abortion would lead to an epidemic of child abuse and murder by parents who did not understand the value of all human life as created in the image of God.

The Schaeffers' continued to help military personnel in Europe seeking to know Christ and what it means to obey Him in the totality of life. But even during the war, when Schaeffer was a pastor in America, he talked to the men going overseas and reminded them of the ungodly attitude they could develop when placed in situations where they would need to take the lives of their fellowman. They must not hate their enemies, but must realize the need to defend freedom and truth in a fallen world. Fran continued to remind those who fought on the side of right not to aim at "getting rid of the negative at any cost--rather than praying that the negatives might be faced in the proper attitude." 4.

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