

7. Living By Faith Alone

Contributed by LG Parkhurst Jr
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When Francis and Edith Schaeffer began L'Abri and chose to live on the basis of faith instead of a regular salary, they did not take a leap in the dark. For much of their ministry, and especially in the early years of the 1950's, they had been learning to walk in faith and truth one step at a time.

They had prayed for a place to live while on furlough, and God had given them an immediate answer. They had prayed for money to return to Switzerland, and God had provided the money in answer to prayer. A whole series of God's specific answers to prayer preceded their beginning of L'Abri. They remembered how God had met the needs of Hudson Taylor and other missionaries when they prayed. When the Scriptures also encouraged them in this ministry, they began L'Abri with good and sufficient reasons to think that this was God's will for their lives, and that He would be faithful in meeting all of their real needs for ministry. No leap in the dark was involved, but there was certainly a very exciting step of faith in totally relying upon God.

Even if you work forty hours per week and get a regular pay check, God still calls you to live by faith. If you have a traditional job, you need to thank God for a job and steady income, and also trust God and pray for His daily provisions as the Lord's Prayer teaches. If you are laid off, fired, or your company closes, and you do not know where your next job will be or when your next pay check will come, perhaps you trust in God with greater desperation, but trust in God you must.

Living by faith can also have a different meaning. A house painter, paper hanger, artist, or musician may only pray for work and never advertise their services or product to the general public. Another person may pray for work and God's guidance on where and how he will advertise and how much he will spend to promote his product. Neither way is necessarily more spiritual than the other way. Only God can determine who is living more by faith. Each person may be living equally by faith alone, allowing the Holy Spirit to lead them. Faith involves trust. Faith includes believing the Scriptures and following God according to the best understanding we have regarding God and what He wants us to do personally. Usually, faith does not mean simply doing exactly what God has led someone we admire to do; but it can, if we are certain that God is calling us to follow in their footsteps. Learning from the example of someone's consistent Christian character is usually far wiser than trying to be a doctor only because some Christian we know is a highly successful surgeon. Only after an evaluation of God's providential work in our lives and much prayer for His guidance should we go into any kind of work or ministry.

Ordinarily, when we think of living by faith, we think of missionaries, evangelists, pastors, and revivalists who trust solely in God for their food, clothing, shelter, and other needs, rather than relying on a church or missionary society to give them a regular salary. When the Schaeffers founded L'Abri in 1955, God called them to a new way of living by faith alone for them. However, before God called them to take this step of faith, He providentially taught them some lessons about prayer and gave them the courage to rely on Him alone and upon those God moved in answer to prayer to provide for them.

In January of 1955, Edith was reading from Isaiah as a part of her daily reading and time of prayer. When she came to Isaiah 2:2,3, she read: "It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.'" She believed God was speaking directly to her through Isaiah, that was His promise for a L'Abri in the mountains of Switzerland.

If you ask God to reveal His Biblical promises to you while showing you His providential work taking place around you, He will encourage you in prayer. You will receive God's guidance on how to pray. You can pray and plead for God to complete His work in the context of His promises and predictions. Pray believing that He is always faithful to keep His word. By enlightening your mind through His written Word, you will see more of his visible work in your midst. God will increase your faith, encourage you to pray, and deepen your fellowship with Him.

As you read the Bible, pray for God to speak to you through His Word. Sometimes He will make a verse, promise, or prediction stand out on the page as though He had highlighted or underlined it. In this way, God can guide you in your prayers and tell you what to do. As you read a verse, parable, or historical incident, the Holy Spirit may speak to your heart something like: "This Word is for you personally. This Word is My reply to your concern. This verse shows you what to pray and do. Keep on praying. If you want Me to fill this particular need, you will need to fast. Fasting will draw us

closer to each other and enable you to hear Me more clearly." Edith's Bible is a diary of dated prayers in the context of the verses she has read.

The promise from God's Word, given in the context of Edith's praying about L'Abri, sustained her and Dr. Schaeffer in the trying difficulties ahead. This type of answer to prayer while reading through the Scriptures guided Edith's work throughout the years. Prayer sustained them in their conflicts, and God answered prayer to support them in their daily walk. Real answers to prayer gave them courage to keep on following God in the midst of very real trials, as Edith tells in her books. For example, Edith explains about prayer in *The Tapestry*:

"Prayer is a moment-by-moment example of the reality of the validity of choice. God Himself has given us this communication for a diversity of reasons. One is that our calling upon the Father in Jesus' name, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, is time after time a slap in Satan's face, that proves the victory of Christ's death to defeat the primary purpose of Satan's temptation and the resultant separation of Adam and Eve, human beings, people, from communication with God." 1.

After his furlough there were many misunderstandings and personality clashes over Dr. Schaeffer and his public stands. Letters flew back and forth across the Atlantic, as Dr. Schaeffer tried to clarify his positions on sanctification, faith, the work of the Holy Spirit, and man's freedom and responsibility. Later some called him a humanist or a rationalist, because he tried to "think with" people and appeal to their reason to convince them to accept with the empty hands of faith the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. From battles such as these within the church and without, he wisely decided that talking about people and organizations (rather than about ideas) would not be helpful. In their discussions at L'Abri, and in their many group discussions over the years, Dr. Schaeffer and Edith insisted that organizations and personalities should not be discussed. To them, discussing ideas and thinking about the consequences of ideas would have a better and longer lasting effect for decision-making than criticizing organizations and personalities.

The battle is really for truth against falsehood, and the people who came to L'Abri needed to learn how to analyze the ideas that organizations or people expressed. At L'Abri, the Schaeffers did not just pigeonhole people into categories and escape responsibility for thinking about ideas. They did not want people to leave L'Abri saying, "The Schaeffers think this person or that group is wrong." Understanding how ideas influence the choices you make and the lifestyle you choose is of more lasting value as you analyze the world you encounter than judging individual personalities. Organizations and personalities change; they come and go. You become what we think about, and what you do relates to the way you think. Dr. Schaeffer did not offer easy outs to people who did not want to think. He believed that one of the most lasting effects of discussion and study should be the knowledge of how to think clearly and logically, and of how to discern right ideas from wrong ways of thinking.

Consequently, no ideas were off limits for discussions at L'Abri. Just as Dr. Schaeffer and his family were to help others from their understanding of God and reality as based upon the Bible, so they learned from the many people who came. Many came to discuss books of all types. They wanted to talk about music, the arts, philosophy, theology, science, ethics, politics, law, drug use, current events around the world, medicine, alternative lifestyles, and the different religions. All these discussions led some people to see how Christianity relates to the whole of life, to all disciplines and endeavors. Many of these discussions took place around the dinner table, as Edith made sure every person enjoyed a family atmosphere at L'Abri. Many who came to L'Abri had never known a real family. Other discussions took place as everyone pitched in to work in the garden or prepare dinner or clean the house and grounds. Some students learned to work with their hands for the first time, and every student worked four hours each day in addition to their studies. Those who took part in L'Abri learned practical life skills, the value of work, and the importance of balance in one's life.

The first four members of L'Abri, making up the official board, were George H. Seville, George Exhenry (who had been converted in Champéry and was willing to take the persecution which came from his being a Christian publicly), and Francis and Edith Schaeffer. The children became a vital part, as the whole family shared in the work of L'Abri and as they prayerfully made the decision to begin L'Abri together.

It would be impossible to say everything that could be said about L'Abri. All that can be done here is to open a door to understanding Dr. Schaeffer and his work. However, there are certain key events and dates that should be briefly summarized. These will help you see that God had led them for several years to begin this work. They did not do so out of a sense of desperation, even though their mission board had placed them in a desperate situation. They founded L'Abri so they could keep on teaching the truth.

Notice how the Schaeffers did not make a leap in the dark to found L'Abri, but took a step of faith based upon God's work in their lives up to that point. As early as 1949 the Schaeffers had been talking to students of many different backgrounds about Christianity. Zoroastrians, Buddhists, Hindus, atheists, agnostics, liberal Christians, Roman Catholics, and others of various anti-Christian and Christian views had been coming to their door. These students were from all over the world: Haiti, Argentina, Canada, England, Scotland, America, and the Scandinavian countries. The Schaeffers had been in a ministry with students for more than six years prior to L'Abri's founding and their decision to minister to students on the basis of trusting in the Lord for His provision. This is to emphasize again that in their work they did not take "leaps in the dark" any more than Dr. Schaeffer taught that Christian faith was a "leap in the dark" or a "leap of faith." Many similar

enterprises have failed on this very account: people have leaped into a work without any clear knowledge that the work is truly God's will for them. Or, they have started a new work without waiting for God to make the necessary preparations in advance. If L'Abri had taken leaps in the dark over the years (that is, jumped into something without any idea about where it might lead, or without knowing that God had led them to make that decision), it would have hindered their witness to the fact that people become Christians for good and sufficient reasons; they do not take a blind leap of faith. People need good reasons to advance in faith or mission work. The aim of L'Abri, from its founding to the present, has been to walk prayerfully after good and sufficient reasons have been given by God for the next step.

Perhaps some have begun works similar to L'Abri, being inspired by the L'Abri story, only to have them fail because they were not really inspired by God or according to His will. Sometimes, while helping people to face their failed endeavors, Dr. Schaeffer encouraged them by saying that if we feel we have made a mistake and begun a conscious Christian endeavor that is not on the track God prefers, still He is able to work with us on that track or help us get on another track.

From the time of Edith's answer to prayer about L'Abri, up to and even beyond its official founding in June of 1955, times were not easy. Satan attacked and buffeted them all along the way, but what Satan meant for evil God meant for good, and worked to their benefit. Had it not been for her promise from God in the context of the prophet Isaiah, Edith could have felt that the trying events were designed by God to move them from Switzerland. Instead, she saw them as part of the spiritual warfare in which they were deeply involved.

On February 14, 1955, Swiss officials notified Fran and Edith that they must leave Switzerland because they had made a "religious influence" in Champéry. Someone had complained that the Schaeffers had led some of the villagers to turn away from Roman Catholicism. Officials forbid the Schaeffers to return to Champéry for two years. At the very time things began to break apart in their mission work (with the denomination seeking to make things difficult for them), the Schaeffers lost their home in Switzerland by an uncharacteristic government edict. If they wanted to stay in Switzerland, they needed to find some other home in some other canton.

They searched diligently for some other place to live, but they could not afford any house they were shown. Finally, in the midst of a snow storm, Edith found Chalet les Mélèzes in Huémoz in the Canton of Vaud. Previous owners named Mélèzes after the beautiful mélèzes or larch trees that grew between the chalet and the road. The day she saw Mélèzes, Edith prayed for a sign from the Lord, that if He wanted them to buy the house He would send them \$1,000 the very next day in the mail. She had never been so bold and asked for something that seemed impossible before, because someone would have needed to put the check in the mail before she prayed! But she prayed and believed that with God all things are possible, and God could answer a prayer "backwards". 2. That is, God can answer prayer even before we pray by influencing people to act and us to pray with perfect timing. The next day, before she left with Fran on the train to show him the chalet, they received their mail--and found a check for \$1,000.00. Some dear friends in Ohio had written in their letter that "the Lord, they felt, had led them to send it to the Schaeffers to start a fund to buy a house where young people would come to learn more about the Lord Jesus." 3. The Holy Spirit had provided His answer through friends even before He had inspired her to go boldly to the Lord with an "impossible" request. This three story chalet, completely furnished, would cost them about \$17,000, but they had to trust in the Lord's leading for the rest of the money to be given in time to make the necessary payments. When the first payment was due, they counted their gifts in their "house" fund, and discovered that they had \$3.52 more than they needed. For most of the time in L'Abri, and even to this day, God works just this closely to provide their needs--one day at a time.

To provide for those He sent, God had to give the Schaeffers more than a \$1,000.00 earnest payment for their home. To stay in Huémoz, they had to make a \$7366.00 down payment on Chalet les Mélèzes by May 31, 1955. And they had only sixty days to pray for that amount. By May 22, they had received only \$4915.69, so they continued to persevere in prayer. Only on the last day did they receive the total they needed. God had motivated 156 people to send them money. God's evident display of faithfulness encouraged them to move ahead, and Fran resigned from his Mission Board on June 5 to officially begin L'Abri. These remarkable answers to prayer regarding their home in Switzerland, in the mountains for L'Abri, gave the Schaeffers the courage to write their mission board and resign. God had enabled them to move to Huémoz by April 1, the deadline set by the government. God had provided the money for them to purchase their home by May 30, the deadline set by the chalet's owners.

In addition to providing money, God provided people for the Schaeffers to serve. Even before Fran resigned, God began L'Abri by sending people in answer to prayer. On the weekend of May 6, 1955, Priscilla brought home from college a girl who had many questions. From that day forth, God began leading a stream of young people with questions to their door. L'Abri came to be a spiritual "shelter" for people with real and honest questions. God's hand was so obviously in the work that when Dr. Schaeffer courageously wrote his mission board on June 5 and resigned, he asked that all salary be cut off immediately. He told them that God had led them to begin L'Abri Fellowship. The Schaeffers had had the reality of the existence of God demonstrated to them in real ways up to that point, and they began L'Abri simply from a desire "to demonstrate the existence of God by our lives and our work." 4.

God granted them success, because they began L'Abri with careful thought and prayer. God gave them a purpose and helped them plan. God gave them a vision for mission in answer to prayer, and then guided them to establish goals consistent with the teachings of Scripture. They did not develop a false pride in themselves or their work, but emphasized

God's grace, for which they gave thanks. They did not cease to rely upon careful thought, prayer, and the power of the Holy Spirit. They remained faithful in following God's inerrant Word to the best of their ability. They did not become authoritarian in their relationships, and they made changes in proven procedures slowly and prayerfully. They did not try to "hang on" to people or workers in L'Abri, but encouraged people to seek the Lord's will for their own lives and go where they thought He was leading them. Dr. Schaeffer often said, "I will not be the Holy Spirit for anybody" by telling them what to do. They respected every person for his own creative talents and individuality; therefore, as the work grew, each new L'Abri branch became an expression of each leader's own creativity. They did not restrict workers to a preset form for each L'Abri, but they did insist that each worker teach the clear teachings of the Bible and give honest answers to honest questions. Within the bounds of Scripture, the Schaeffers encouraged great freedom in L'Abri. For these reasons, among others, they did not develop any of the characteristics we apply to the cults today. Any evaluation of their work should not be centered on whether or not they did things the way you or I would have done them, but upon whether or not they achieved goals that were substantially consistent with biblical teaching.

The Schaeffers described the purpose of L'Abri as "to show forth by demonstration, in our life and work, the existence of God." 5. If you ask, "Did they do this?" The answer is yes. But they also made plans to achieve this goal in specific ways: they would pray in four different areas. First, rather than appeal to others to send them money, they would pray for God to meet their material needs. Second, they would pray for God to send the people He wanted to L'Abri, and keep all others away. Third, they would pray for God's leading every day, rather than planning the work themselves. Fourth, they would pray for God to send the people He wanted to join them in the work.

As L'Abri grew, the Schaeffers knew they needed a study center. With so many coming from different nations, they needed taped lectures and recorders, books, and a quiet place for people to listen, read, and think. Once again, they turned to God and asked Him to provide all these things to help others. After Edith's cousin Marion, who had served as a missionary to Egypt, left \$20,000 to L'Abri in her will, they completed the Farel House study center and bought the first tape recorders for the Schaeffer's teaching tapes. They named Farel House after William Farel, the Swiss Reformer who convinced Calvin to stay in Geneva and make it into a model Christian community. Four hundred years before the beginning of L'Abri, Farel had preached near Huémoz. He was one of the warmest and most understanding of the Reformers. They wanted Farel, with his Christian spirit and temper, to be a model for every student at L'Abri. Fran taped lectures for Farel House students, and L'Abri still makes these tapes available by mail. Many Egyptian young people meet and study at Farel House, so cousin Marion's missionary work continues. Francis and Edith's missionary work showed that in addition to missionaries going to a foreign country to reach the native people, God can also send people from around the world to a missionary's door or study center.

In their lectures and way of life, the Schaeffers did not put the Christian faith into a compartment or "box" unrelated to life and separated from different aspects of living. They called both new and old Christians to walk in truth at all times and in all places. They taught believers to confront wrong ideas and actions with love for others and out of respect for a holy God. They encouraged people to learn about the Christian faith and be open to learning about different views so they could help others become Christians. At different times in history, Satan tempted people to believe different and wrong systems of thought. Dr. Schaeffer warned: "A world spirit has always existed from the fall of Satan and of Adam and Eve. The creature wants to be autonomous from the Creator. This world spirit takes on different forms in each decade. We can be infiltrated by that form of the world spirit that surrounds us." 6. He wanted to teach people how to recognize the form the world spirit was taking in their decade, so they could resist and help others resist its infiltration.

They wanted to live in close contact with the supernatural world moment by moment, as though they had died, gone to heaven, and returned to tell and show others that there really is a God who is there. They wanted to show that God would lead His people moment by moment if they would live on the basis of faith in Him moment by moment. As times have changed, their purpose has not changed, but as L'Abri has grown they have looked more and more to the leading of the Holy Spirit in making group decisions that affect the whole work.

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