

Biographical Introduction (continued)

Father, we want to thank You that we can meet together in Your name. We pray You will be with us in this class. We pray that You will teach us and that we will not be left simply lifting up a human person's name, even one whom You have used very greatly, but that we will exalt Your name together. We pray that we may be taught by Schaeffer's example. Father, teach us, we pray, and be with us in our time together, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Let me recap where we were at the end of our time in the last lesson. We began with Francis Schaeffer's origins. We went on, second, to look at his childhood. Third, we looked at his conversion, and fourth, at the turning point in his life. He heard Anthony Zeoli preaching in that tent meeting. We also talked about the difficult time he had after that when he began to struggle about his own future.

We started to talk about the fifth section in his life, which was the period between high school and college. In September 1930, Francis Schaeffer started to study at the Drexel Institute. He went to night school to do mechanical engineering as his parents wished. In the daytime we worked at RCA Victor as a busboy. He carried things for the assembly line at \$.32/hour. After a strike at the factory, he worked delivering groceries. He studied in night school, and all through this period and increasingly as time went by, he began to consider the possibility of doing academic studies at Hampden-Sydney College. This was suggested to him by one of the pastors at the church he attended and another friend of his as well. This created an internal struggle within him, because he had a longing to do academic studies, yet his parents were opposed to it. It was a question of whether he should please his parents or study at the university. By December 1930, he considered the pastorate very seriously. His parents were actively hostile to this idea. They considered ministers to be drones and parasites of society. They were completely opposed to college study. In spite of the hostility of his parents, he committed himself to try to find what God's will was for him. He had a growing burden to study for the ministry, yet his parents were opposed. He began to pray very seriously about changing his direction.

On January 30, 1931, his nineteenth birthday, he started going to evening school at the local high school to prepare for college. He studied Latin and German in the evenings and continued working in a grocery store during the daytime. He hoped to go to Hampden-Sydney College in Virginia. His parents basically ignored his preparations for college. He had no idea how he would pay the first year's tuition, which was \$600. He was accepted to the college, and as he began to pack when the time came, his mother did not help him at all. She did not get him clothes or anything else. They would not discuss his going to college with him. He was left completely to himself to get himself ready to go.

In September, on the night before he left for college, his father said, "Get up in time to see me before I go to work at 5:30." Of course, by that time Francis was all packed and ready to go. This was a very important moment in his life. I heard him speak about this on several occasions when he shared with us personally. When he got up the next morning, his father stood by the door, ready to leave. He said to him quite simply, "I do not want a son who is a minister, and I do not want you to go." We can be thankful that the chain-of-command teaching that is so popular today was not around so much in his day. Otherwise he might have been convinced to obey his father on the spot. He had such a burden in his heart that he ought to go to college and prepare for the ministry. After a painful silence, he said, "Pop, give me a few minutes to go down to the cellar to pray." You can read about this in *The Tapestry* on page 62 where Edith gives a complete account of it. He went down to the cellar, and he prayed in agony, "Oh God, please show me now what I must do." He tossed a coin and said, "Lord please let it be heads." No one had ever told him that that is how you should find out God's guidance! That is what he did on the spot, and it came up heads that he should go. So he said, "Lord, show me again. Let it be tails." He tossed the coin a second time, and it came up tails. And he said, "Lord, show me again. Let it be heads." It was heads again, so he went upstairs and said to his father, "Dad, I have got to go."

His father looked at him, walked out, and slammed the door. Just as the door shut, he heard his father say, “I will pay for the first half year.” He always felt that, though his father did not become a Christian until many years later, that moment of seeing how seriously Francis took his relationship with God had a great influence on him. Despite his good relationship with his father, he was prepared to go against his will. That was the first crack in the door of his father being open to the Gospel and seriously considering the Christian faith. Schaeffer went upstairs to his bedroom and felt tremendously confirmed as his eyes fell on a text he had put up on the wall sometime before. “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” He was doing what God wanted him to do.

Schaeffer said repeatedly when I heard him tell this story, “I do not go around recommending other people to toss up coins to find out what is the will of God!” He would never have suggested that anyone else should do that. It was how God showed him at that moment. One should never generalize another person’s experience. For him it was a powerful moment in his life in terms of God showing him very clearly what he should do. He did not have any idea what to do, and he felt quite desperate. God showed him in this way. As you look down through the succeeding years, this was an important moment in his life. It was also a real foundation to him in terms of the fact that he could bring the decisions that he had to make, the needs that were in his life, and the questions that he faced, to God for direction and guidance.

Before we talk about his period of life at college, let me suggest some things that Francis Schaeffer learned from his background. Though his background was not Christian, he received a few things from it. He lived and worked alongside ordinary people. Throughout his life, he had an ease of conversation with the man in the street. That may sound strange to people who think of Schaeffer as the person who preached and wrote for intellectuals. But that is not who he was fundamentally. He was able to preach and write to people who were intellectual and struggling with intellectual questions. But he was perfectly at ease with speaking to and living alongside the ordinary person in the street. That was always part of who he was. It was his background.

Second, and related to that, he had a very strong sense of the dignity of ordinary working people. For him there were no little people. That was the title of one of his books many years later. Neither before God nor before one another should we have big and little people, as if some people in society are more important to God than others or should be more important to us than others. For him there were no little people. When you got to know him as a person, that was something that was very obvious. He gave time, respect, and concern to some important people in the world’s eyes and in the eyes of the Christian world who came to see him later in his life. And he gave just as much time to the ordinary person, the little person, as he gave to people who were considered to be important. It really did not matter to him. It was a question of seeking to be faithful to those whom God brought into his path. He had a very strong sense of the dignity of the ordinary working man and woman. There were no little people to him. That became an important part of his whole ministry.

Third, he had grown up with a father who worked very hard and expected him to work very hard. Throughout his life he had a commitment to hard work in whatever he did. It came out in his ministry and teaching later on. Whatever work he set his hand to, either mental or physical, he gave himself to it. Along with that he had a readiness to pitch in with whatever needed to be done. He gave help wherever it was needed.

Fourth, he had an obstinacy of character. Like all of our characteristics, this obstinacy had a good and bad side. Stubbornness can be very good in the sense of sticking with things and working at them, no matter how difficult they are. It can have some difficult sides to it, too. All of us are like that in terms of the aspects of our personality that are strongest. With any of us, you can look at the good side of a person’s character, and if you turn it over slightly, it can cause problems. You probably know that about yourself. We can add a fifth thing, though this is not from his background. He was just beginning to be awakened to a love for music, literature, philosophy, and art. This blossomed very much in his life later on.

As we think about what he received from his background, it might be helpful to summarize where he was as a Christian at this point. He was a very young Christian. First, he had a strong conviction that Christianity is true. It makes sense to those who are prepared to take it seriously. That was something that was always part of his ministry: Christianity is the truth. It is not something religious for Sunday. It is the truth about the whole of life. It makes sense. The Bible is a book that speaks about reality and the real world. Second, he had a sense of the obligation of Christians to live a radically different lifestyle. His prayer during the period he worked in the factory was that he would make a difference there. In the way he lived and did his work, he wanted to make a difference to the people he was working alongside. Third, from the very earliest part of his Christian life, he was very committed to evangelism and to reaching out to people around him. Fourth, he had a growing prayer life with a passionate commitment to serve God. That was already tested by fire in that little encounter with his father. That was a very profound moment in his life, and he would come back to it again and again. Fifth, and this relates to point one, he had a love for the Bible as God's true and faithful Word. It helps us both in answering our big questions and also in our daily lives in the little choices and struggles that we face. It provides direction for us.

Let us move on to talk about his time at college. He went to Hampden-Sydney College in September 1931. The first person on the faculty he met who assigned him a room and dorm was his Greek professor. He was a man named Wilson who was immediately antagonistic to him as a pre-ministerial student. So he assigned him the dorm where he thought he would have the hardest time. Francis was put in a corridor where everyone else in the corridor or on the passage was a sophisticated, southern aristocrat. They saw him as an outsider. He was the only northerner, and they called him "the Yankee." They were all southerners. He came from a working-class family, but they were all from very wealthy aristocratic families with a long tradition of being leading and ruling families in the South. He was a Christian; they were all unbelievers. He prepared to be a minister, and I am sure they looked down on that. He was completely unsophisticated whereas they were very sophisticated men of the world. They all had their fancy clothes, and he had just one suit for special occasions and his tweed knickers that he had worn in high school. People have often commented about Schaeffer's knickers he wore to the knee and assume that he grew attached to such dress in Switzerland. Mountain climbers in Austria and Switzerland wear those things. But, in fact, he had worn them ever since high school. That was what boys wore in those days.

His hall mates gave him a very difficult time. The dorm was a place where these guys shot their rifles at mice in the evenings. All the lights in the halls were shot out, so it was completely dark. No one from the faculty ever went into the building; that was an unwritten rule that was kept. It was just free-range for the students. He was committed to making it there with God's help. He prayed as he began that the Lord would enable him to be able to handle the situation and that by the time he would leave in four years he would have gained some respect as a Christian there. At first his roommate who was an older student regularly beat him. That was, at that time, part of a freshman's life in that kind of college, to be beaten and to have to put up with it. He was a very small man at five foot six inches. His roommate was six foot two inches and was very strong. Francis finally got fed up with it and fought him back. One of the upperclassmen who watched, as he managed to get on top of this guy at the end of this fight, said, "You are the biggest little man I have ever seen, Philly." They called him Philly because he was from near Philadelphia. He was called Philly all through his college years. I give that bit of background before I go on to speak about his influence spiritually in that passage.

One of the striking things about his time in college was his courage in that situation. He started a prayer meeting right away, though there had never been one in his corridor. It was short, and he would lead it himself. He read a short passage of Scripture, made a few comments on it, asked if anyone else would like to pray, and then he closed in prayer. He was always asking people to come to it. He recalls one occasion where a fellow nicknamed Chisel, who was a big guy, got really angry that he was asked so frequently to come to this prayer meeting. He threw a can at him and cut his face open with it. Schaeffer just carried on asking him. He said, "I will come if

you will carry me.” He put this great big guy over his shoulder in a fireman’s lift and took him along down to the next floor to the prayer meeting.

These were the days of prohibition when he was in college. Despite that there was a lot of liquor flowing around the college and particularly in that passage, given its occupants. There was also a great deal of drunkenness. Very frequently, especially on Saturday nights, many of the men in that passage came home drunk. Because the halls were all dark due to the lights being shot out, they could not find their way to their rooms. Schaeffer always stayed up, every Saturday night especially, and dragged these guys in, undressed them, put them under a cold shower, and put them to bed. He always made a bargain with them. If he did that they had to come to church with him the next morning. That was one of the ways he found of communicating the Gospel in that situation! This lasted for his whole time there. It soon came about that he stayed up studying on Saturday night until everybody was in. As each of them would crawl in drunk, they would shout, “Philly!” from the bottom of the stairs. He would come and fetch them and get them all to bed. Then they would follow along like a herd of sheep to church the next morning with him.

Mrs. Schaeffer writes about this in *The Tapestry*. She says, “If anyone asks you what Francis Schaeffer’s apologetics were in college, I would say the reply should be that he had such a sense of the lostness of people that he did what he felt would help them to be shaken or startled to the point of listening. Then he gave them the truth in some manner. Caring for the boys who needed this care on Saturday nights was, first of all, the kind of thing that Fran considered being a Christian was all about. Second he felt it was to be the best kind of apologetics for the people with whom he was face to face at that moment of their needs.” That was how he tried to communicate the Gospel to his fellow students as well as trying to live very faithfully as a believer before them.

In addition, he taught a Sunday school every Sunday afternoon at a small black church across the fields, some distance from the college. He taught children from eight to 13 years old at this little black congregation all through his years there. He started just a few months after he arrived in January 1932 until he graduated three-and-a-half years later. As well as teaching the Sunday school class every week, he went regularly to visit those children and their parents in their homes around the fields in the shacks that they lived in. He got to know the families very well. He always visited when people were sick. One of the cleaners at the college named Johnny, who was an older black man, became ill, and Schaeffer went to visit him very frequently until he died during his time there. He always read the Bible and prayed with him. He taught that class all the way through his time in college.

Also during this period he had a constantly growing commitment to serve God. In *The Tapestry*, Mrs. Schaeffer has included some examples of prayers that she found in his diary from this period. He had the habit of writing down little prayers in the form of rough verse. Every day as he prayed he wrote a few down. Page 125 in the book gives some examples of some of those prayers. Let me read two or three of them: “Oh God, not only for a time, but for eternity, may I serve Thee. Oh God, I thank You that You use me to win souls for Thee. Give me strength to speak the words Thou wouldst have me speak to them. Fill my heart, Oh God, with true love for Thee and the people You have made. May I serve, but first I want to learn to keep my eyes on Thee. May I be four square, but the cornerstone must be my love for Thee.” His diary was filled with these little prayers that he scribbled down as he struggled with his life at the college.

Let us talk now about Francis Schaeffer’s meeting with Edith. This took place at a church meeting on June 26, 1932, when he was home from college. He attended the young people’s meeting at the Presbyterian church in Germantown. The man who gave the talk that evening had been a leader of that youth group for some time. At some point he had become a Unitarian. You can tell how liberal the church was because he carried on leading the young people’s group even though he was a Unitarian. That particular Sunday evening he gave a talk on “How I Know That Jesus is Not the Son of God and How I Know That the Bible is Not the Word of God.” That

was the title of his talk at the young people's group that evening. It happened that Edith was at that meeting as well. I have heard them describe this evening many times. She was 17 at the time, coming at the end of high school. She was a very fiery young person, and she was very upset with what was being taught. She was ready to get up and say something when she saw a young man get up on the other side of the room. This was Francis, and he said, "I do not know how to answer all the issues that you have raised yet, though I have a Bible teacher at college who does not agree with these views and feels there is plenty of reason not to. I do know that the Bible is the Word of God. I believe that. I do not agree with what this man is saying. And I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. I know that He has changed my own life." He sat down again after saying some other things. Edith whispered to the girl who was next to her, "Who is that young man? I did not know there was anyone in this church who believed anything like that." The girl sitting next to her said, "That is Fran Schaeffer, and his parents have been really mean to him. He wants to become a minister."

Edith resolved at that time that she wanted to help this poor young man. As soon as he finished, she jumped up and said her piece and attacked very vigorously the guy who gave the talk. She quoted Machen and Robert Dick Wilson, who her father knew very well and later on worked alongside them. She tried to tear down what the youth leader said and gave an apologetic for the Bible. "The Bible is true; you can believe it. There are these reasons from history and from archaeology. We have every reason to know that it is the Word of God." Just as she was later in life, she was quite a fiery person then. She was not tempered in quite the same way as she is now. She is a little mellowed by God's work in her life. As she stood up and came out with all this really vigorously, Schaeffer said to the fellow sitting next to him, "Who is that girl? I have not seen her around here before. I did not know there was anyone here like that." They said to him, "That is Edith Seville. Her parents just moved here not long ago from Toronto, and they were missionaries in China."

That is how they met each other. They were introduced to each other afterward, and he asked if he could drive her home. She said he could not because she had a date. He told her to break the date, so she did! That was the beginning of their relationship together. He took her home that evening, and their relationship grew very rapidly from that point. It is quite striking to reflect on this. They met on the battlefield, both standing up for the truth of God's Word and the truth of the Gospel. They met in the context of a serious discussion about the nature of God's Word and the Christian Gospel. One can say that all through their lives together they carried on fighting shoulder by shoulder on that same battlefield. They fought for some of the same issues for a biblical Gospel. That was his first meeting with Edith. They got to know each other very rapidly. She invited him home to meet her parents. She introduced him to some apologetics, especially Machen's writings. During that summer just a few weeks after he had met her, she lent him a copy of *Christianity and Liberalism*, which is still a classic. It sets out the difference between biblical Christianity and the liberal Gospel. He got to meet her parents, and Francis, Edith, and her father had long discussions together. That was in the evenings, because he worked selling stockings from door to door during the daytime.

Let me say a bit about Edith's background. Half of her ancestors came from England to the United States in around 1800. The other half came from Ireland to the United States in the 1840s. Her father was George Seville, born in 1876, and he lived right through until 1977. He died at the age of 101, and right up until a few weeks before his death, he still wrote little commentaries for daily Bible reading. Edith had a very different background from Francis Schaeffer's. Her parents were very committed Christians. George Seville himself came from a Christian family. He was a fun-loving, very artistic man. He was fond of acting; he was musical. All the kinds of things that were not there in Francis Schaeffer's background were there in Edith's. He was a linguist and had studied Latin, Greek, and German in high school and college. He studied Hebrew in seminary. He went to Allegheny Theological Seminary in order to prepare to go as a missionary to China. He went with the China Inland Mission (CIM) to Yangzhou on the east coast of China, not far north of Taiwan.

The CIM, which had been founded by Hudson Taylor, was a mission committed to living among the people. He had to go and wear Chinese dress. He was frequently mistaken as Chinese because he settled himself so well into that culture. It was the mission policy to dress like the Chinese and to live simply.

In China he married a young widow who, with her husband, had studied and worked and planned to go to China with CIM. He died of tuberculosis not long before they were to go. Shortly after birth their baby died. She went alone despite the fact that she was now a widow. She was completely committed to serving as a missionary. It must have been quite difficult at that time in the late 1890s for a young woman to be able to go off to China like that by herself. She had a quite difficult life in losing her first husband and losing a baby, and she narrowly escaped death in the Boxer Uprising. This was a rebellion in China against all foreign influence. While you do not usually read much about the effect it had on the church, it was partly directed against the church. Fifty-eight of the missionaries were put to death, 21 of their children, and thousands of Chinese Christians were killed in the Boxer Rebellion. Edith's mother very narrowly escaped being killed. People were killed right outside the room in which she hid before she and others were smuggled out of China and had to spend a few months in Japan until the trouble died down.

In China, George Seville met Edith's mother, and they were married in China. Edith was the third girl born to them. She was born on November 3, 1914 in China. She grew up there as a child in the CIM. Edith's background is very different. She has a chapter in *The Tapestry* called "Missing Birth Records." This was something she often talked about. What she means by that is that she has no recollection of any point at which she became a Christian. She remembers always being a Christian, always loving God, always believing the Gospel, and always wanting to pray and serve God. She was truly a child of the covenant. Her family had to return to the United States in 1919. Her father became a pastor and then became editor of CIM's missions magazine, *China's Millions*. This was first edited in Toronto and then in Germantown, Pennsylvania. When the magazine was moved there, George Seville moved there as editor in Edith's junior year in high school. It was not long after that that she met Francis Schaeffer. After high school she went to the Beaver College for Women and studied a home economics course. This included chemistry, biology, philosophy, and literature. It also included very practical courses on cooking and dressmaking. She attended as a day student, because her parents could not afford for her to stay at the college.

Edith brought several things to their life together when they met in 1932. She brought some very distinctive qualities to their relationship as a young Christian. These things have been part of their whole life together. The first thing was a strong commitment to prayer. She prayed for God's provision and direction. This came from her parents' background in the CIM. This was a faith mission started by Hudson Taylor where they prayed for their needs to be met rather than trying to have them funded in an obvious or direct way. There were groups all over England and in other parts of Europe, Canada, and the United States who prayed for that work and its needs. Hudson Taylor and his life had a tremendous influence on the Schaeffers. Edith and Francis would often talk about him. Edith introduced Francis to Hudson Taylor's writings and the biography of his life. He had a commitment to prayer in his life of dependence on God for daily needs and for sending the workers that He wanted to the mission field. That is one aspect and quality as a Christian that Edith brought to their life together.

Second, she had a deep compassion for those in affliction. That has stayed with her throughout her life. When she was 14 years old, her mother shared with her about her first husband's death and the loss of her baby. Edith had not known until that point that her mother had ever been married before she met George Seville. Edith remembers her mother describing to her the tremendous sorrow she went through at that time as a young widow, having just lost a child. She also described the Boxer Rebellion and the fear and suffering of the Christians in it during that time. Edith had a deep compassion for people who were suffering and going through difficulties. She learned from a very early age that there were no easy answers to give to people who were suffering. You could not just pat them on the shoulder and say, "It will be all right," or some spiritual words of

similar import. You really had to weep with people and allow them to have their sorrow and their grief before you could give them any words of hope. The hope and the sorrow stand together. The hope does not just wash the sorrow away. They stand together.

Third, something that had a very profound impression on her as a little girl was that in China at that time it was fairly common practice to throw away baby girls who were not wanted. It was not as popular to have a girl as it was to have a boy. She remembers as a little girl walking along the canal tote path in the city of Yangzhou and hearing little cries from a pagoda on the river. When she asked what it was, she was told it was the little girls who had been thrown away. This boat was full of skeletons and dying baby girls. That made a very deep impression on her that was with her throughout her life. She recalled this again and again as she and Francis got involved in the battle against abortion in the United States. It was a devaluation of human life to discard little girls that way.

A fourth thing that Edith brought to their relationship was a commitment to the unity of all true believers. Her father came from a Presbyterian background, her mother from a Baptist background. The CIM was a nondenominational work, which had a very solid commitment to believers from whatever background who really believed in Christ as their Savior and Lord and who were totally committed to the full authority of Scripture working together. She grew up in that context. It was a context in which there was a glad recognition of the genuine faith of all people who truly believed in Christ and who respected the authority of His Word. She was committed to the unity of all true believers rather than a sectarianism, which regards our own group, denomination, or church as the only true church in the whole world. That has too often, sadly, been a way that some Christians have felt. Fifth, she brought a passion for truth over against modernism. This came from her background. Her father worked alongside and was friends with people like Machen and Robert Dick Wilson who were deeply involved in the battle against liberalism. It was called modernism at that time. She brought that passionate conviction with her.