

First Pastorate

Father, we thank You for this glorious day. We thank You that we can be here to think and study together. We pray that You will teach us. Father, we desire to learn Your mind for our own lives and ministries to other people as we look at one example of a couple You raised up to be Your children and Your servants in our generation. Father, we pray that You will help us, give us understanding, and show us where we can learn to follow their example as they followed Yours, not in any other way. Father be with us, we ask, in Jesus' name. Amen.

We reached the point in our last session where the Schaeffers moved to Wilmington, Delaware to study at Faith Seminary. We discussed at the end the sad split that took place within the new Presbyterian church. It divided in two, and there were now two seminaries and two denominations. Half formed Faith Seminary in Wilmington, Delaware with the Bible Presbyterian Church. Dr. McRae was the president of the new seminary, and Dr. Laird Harris, who later joined the faculty here at Covenant, taught there and so did George Seville, Edith's father. He taught Greek and missions.

It is interesting to look at the list Edith gives of some of the students who were there. Many of them mean a great deal to the history of the Reformed Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). As well as Francis Schaeffer there were Doug and John Young, John Sanderson, Art Glasser, Walter Cross, Herm Emerson, Jack Murray, and various other men who studied there at that time.

As well as being one of the students of the new seminary, Schaeffer was tremendously involved in the setting up of the campus. He was asked to go with Edith to Wilmington to find a campus for the new seminary. He needed to find houses for the faculty, a dormitory for the students, and rooms for the classes. He went with almost no money; they had \$40 of their own to put down as a down payment on the rent of these buildings. They found four buildings very close to each other and put \$10 down on each of them. Then it was his job to try to equip all these houses and rooms with everything from washbasins and toilets to cookers and refrigerators. They had almost no money to do it on, so he went around junkyards all around the city, finding things that were being through away or cost virtually nothing. He got together a whole truckload of stuff to get the seminary started.

In the middle of all of this, their first child was born. Priscilla was born in the middle of the summer as they went through the move. Edith recounts a very amusing story in some ways of how everything was totally chaotic. Francis, who had quite a short temper in some ways, got absolutely furious with Edith, the baby, the junkyards from which they got their stuff—who tried to cheat him—the traffic, and absolutely everything else. In the middle of all this he realized that God was teaching him a lesson on patience and forbearance. He should not just rush around actively at everything but really be prepared to depend on Him. Suddenly in the middle of it all when the last thing happened, which was the final straw, Edith and her mother, who was with her, thought this would be it. Now Francis was really going to lose his cool totally. But he just said, “All right, Lord, I am sorry. It is enough.” He realized that God was disciplining him for his impatience and for his lack of forbearance in difficult situations. He learned a very important lesson then that stayed with him throughout his life in terms of how to cope with stress, strain, and difficulties that come your way. Sometimes we have to be prepared to simply endure those things. Getting furiously angry with other people, the situation, and God is not the way to deal with them.

Francis graduated the next year in the summer of 1938. He had been a straight A student, and he was the first new pastor to be ordained in the Bible Presbyterian Church. At his graduation they sang a song that stayed with Edith and him throughout their lives. It was “Give Tongues of Fire to Preach Thy Word.” She recounts how, at

that graduation, as they sang that hymn, it began to be her prayer from that time on that God would give him a tongue of fire to preach His Word. She prayed that God would never let that fire cool off and that it would be with him throughout his life and ministry. She prayed that he would be able to speak God's Word with a tongue of fire.

Francis was ordained into the pastorate the summer he graduated from seminary. He pastored Covenant Presbyterian Church in Grove City, Pennsylvania. He went there in May 1938, right after graduation. Edith says they were now in a new category, and an uncomfortable and invisible line separated the two of them from everyone else. That invisible line was the Reverend and Mrs. Francis Schaeffer. She realized immediately the way people began to treat you differently once you were in the position of being ordained. It was something that neither of them enjoyed and always worked against. They desired to be not set up on a pedestal or regarded any differently from anyone else.

Sadly, one of the areas where we have forgotten one of the central teachings of the Reformation is Luther's emphasis on the priesthood of all believers. While we may pay lip service to that in our traditions, sadly very often in many evangelical churches our ministers are set up as a new priest. That is what creates that uncomfortable invisible dividing line that sets people off. They are put in a separate holy category, and it is something we need to work against.

The Schaeffers were at that little church in Grove City for three years, from 1938 to 1941. It was tiny when they went there. It was a brand new Bible Presbyterian church. There were 18 people who left the big liberal Presbyterian church in the town, and they met in the American Legion hall. Schaeffer was paid \$100 a month to cover all his expenses. Their rent of \$36 a month had to come out of that, and \$5 a week went toward food. So they lived on a fairly skimpy budget in a little apartment next door to the American Legion hall. Edith recounts the very first sermon that he preached there. On page 204 of *The Tapestry*, she talks about how every week as he preached she would pray for him. What she says is worth reading out in full because it is very moving, and it is also tremendously important for those of you who are going to be pastors or pastor's wives. It is a tremendously important word. She says,

What about the pastor's wife? For me I felt my very big responsibility, along with caring for Priscilla, was never to stop praying for Fran as he preached. I felt keenly that it was up to me to pray for the power of the Holy Spirit for the Lord's words to be given for the message to really touch, not only others, but the speaker himself. "Speak to him and through him," was not just a formula of prayer. It became the cry of my heart. This was to continue through the years, and it was very possible and practical (I know because now I have 45 years behind me) for me to continue that prayer no matter what. Even if we had just had a fight of some sort before he spoke, it was very possible and practical for me to sit under the Word of God, really forgetting anything personal, to listen to what was coming forth and to be thankful that Fran was hearing this as well as to hear it myself. In the hope of helping some new young pastor's wife, I would say that it is imperative never to sit thinking, "How can he say that when he has just been so unreasonable?" It is imperative to believe that God is able to speak through the one for whom we pray and able to speak through us ourselves when we ask Him to and at the same time to know that the speaker is being spoken to. To feel that no one can preach who has not been perfect in the area on which he is preaching about is to miss the reality of the truth of what fallen human beings are like and what the Word of God is like. To grow, to strive for reality, to call out to the Lord for forgiveness, and to seek to live in the light of His Word are, of course, important. But perfection is not to be reached in the land of the living, though we are called to teach a perfect message, which has come from the perfect God.

One of the things I enjoy about this book is the way she is so refreshingly honest about the difficulties of their relationship. It is something, sadly, that is very rare in Christian biographies and autobiographies. Edith's words are tremendously profound because it is very easy in a marriage or in any situation where we know someone really closely to think, "How can this person say these things?" I know for myself in preaching sometimes one cannot help but feel hypocritical about some of the things that one says. I always feel that, first of all, I preach to myself and only then to other people. Everything I prepare is for me to hear first and then others. In other words, in preparing, one sits under the Word of God oneself. I do not just think, "That is what those people need to hear." I think that this is what I need to hear. I think if that is one's mentality, it will come across in one's message. The preacher is not up front pointing the finger at people, saying, "This is who you ought to be." There is some humility that comes across in the message, "This is what we all need to hear, me included." With that it makes it much easier for the one in the position like Edith, the wife, friend, or one's children, to be able to really pray, even if you have had a fight or have been arguing about something to the last moment before you left the car to enter the church. That is the human situation we find ourselves in. There is no one who is not a sinner and does not have family fights, difficulties, arguments, and struggles of one kind or another sometimes. Sunday morning can be tremendously chaotic as you get yourself ready to go off to church with your family. There has to be the preparedness to forget all that and pray for God's work to be done in the situation and to sit under the Word oneself. Her words there are tremendously helpful.

Francis was the pastor of this little new church in Grove City. It did not even have any children. The church was so small that the parents felt that the children had to keep going to the Sunday school class in the big church from which they had come. They needed to have a larger group to be with on Sunday mornings. So there were just 18 adults at the beginning of that little church.

Let us talk about what they did and Grove City and what form Francis' ministry took. His first thought was to begin to reach out to children. They did not have one child, so he decided first to have a hot dog roast. He went out in his car, saw some kids playing by the side of the street, and asked them if they would like to come to a hot dog roast. It was two or three boys, and they agreed to come. So he asked the boys to take him to their friends. They went out and gathered up a carload of kids. They found 17 kids on that first occasion, squashed them all into his Model A Ford, and brought them back! These were children from non-Christian homes. He gave them a hot dog roast and talked to them about the creation and the Fall. From that evening onward, he was called "Rev" by these kids. That was their affectionate name for him.

He started a boys' group like that that met regularly. It was made up of kids whom he found on the streets playing around. They decided that first summer that they would immediately have a summer Bible school even though the church had no children. Francis would direct the camp and do some teaching. Edith's mother came to help with teaching. And some of the ladies from the church said they would help in various ways with it. How would they get children to come, though? There is a wonderful passage in the book on page 206 where Edith describes the visiting team and how they went out. They got kids to come by gathering the boys with them who came to the first hot dog roast. They went off in Francis' car up and down the streets, stopping at houses where someone knew someone else. He would go up to the door, introduce himself, and explain that they were going to have a free Bible school. The children were welcome to come. They also made various advertisements.

They did not have any idea when the Bible school began whether anyone would come at all. It was a two-week Bible school, and on the first morning they were tremendously apprehensive, waiting to see what would happen. The Lord had blessed their visits from door to door and house to house, and on the very first morning 79 children came! By the end of the two weeks, there were more than 100 kids in attendance. All through their ministry they were both tremendously gifted in working with children. God blessed that gift. Working with children was one part of their work. Eventually a Sunday school developed, but it began with the hot dog roasts,

the boys' club, and the summer Bible school.

A second aspect of their work there was with young people. One summer they met Mrs. Eleanor McClesky from Atlanta, Georgia. She had started a high school work called the Miracle Book Club. They became lifelong friends with her. They started a Miracle Book Club in their home in Grove City, reaching out to high school kids. Each week they had a group of kids coming into their house. It was mostly kids from non-Christian homes who came.

After a little while, they moved to a larger house; they found an old house toward the country that was basically falling down. They worked on putting it back together, using their creativity in various ways. Their sofas were made from old car seats, which Francis put a wooden frame around and she covered over with material. As he went around visiting people, he picked up bits and pieces, like an old butter box lid, which she turned into a tray by burning a fruit pattern on it to match their curtains. They were always able to make something very nice with very little. No matter how little money they had, they ended up with a situation that was really beautiful. People really enjoyed coming to their house they felt at home and welcomed.

Another building project Francis was involved in came as the church began to grow. They needed a place of their own, so he found a little church building that was going to be destroyed when the valley was flooded by a dam. He and the men from the church went out, took it apart, and rebuilt it for their congregation.

A third aspect of their ministry, which is tremendously important in understanding Francis' ministry, is his commitment to pastoral visiting. As Edith says, this is something he was very gifted at. He kept working at it over and over again. It is very easy for a pastor in a small church to be basically lazy as he wonders what he can do. One could simply spend one's time sitting in his study doing some good studies, but in terms of actually getting out and building the church, sometimes little can be done. Francis did an enormous amount of visiting, though. He visited the 18 members of the church, along with their relatives, and anyone in need in the community whom he heard about. He also visited regularly the parents of any of the children who came to the hot dog roasts, the boys' club, or the summer Bible school. He visited all of those families.

One of the things that he started to do at that time, which became a pattern of his whole life, was that when he visited people, he often took work with him to do. He found that most people are much more prepared to really open up and talk about themselves and have deep communication in a less formal setting than sitting down in a pastor's study and talking face to face. He would often take along a chair to sand or some work to do. As the farmer he visited milked his cows, Francis had something to do as well. He found people would be far more open that way. He also often took their baby girl Priscilla with them. Edith recounts on how one occasion he came home without her. Edith asked where she was, and he said he did not know. He had to go back around to all the houses he visited that day, and eventually he found her playing happily in someone's home! For many years he took one of his children with him when he went on pastoral calls. That was a third aspect of his ministry. He was committed to making pastoral visits. He got alongside people, was prepared to share the Gospel very straight with them, talked about their own personal needs, and prayed with them.

A fourth aspect of ministry was the Schaeffers' recognition of the value of prayer. Edith recounts how there was one lady in the church who suffered from multiple sclerosis. She was tremendously ill and could hardly move. She had to be fed liquid food because she could not chew on anything solid. All her muscles were breaking down. Francis Schaeffer regarded her as one of the most important members of the church, because she was constantly praying for people. He could go to her and share with her the needs of people, particular needs of the church, and areas of concern. He was sure that she would devote her days to praying for the needs of that congregation. He genuinely regarded her as one of the most important people in that congregation. For him there were no insignificant people. There were no people who have no part to play in the life of God's people.

They also carried on praying fervently for his family. It was during their time in Grove City that his father was converted. It happened after his father had a stroke one day. He sent immediately for his son. When Francis got there, the very first thing his dad said was, "Son, tell me about this Jesus you believe in." It was then that they sat down together and he was able to share with him. He had talked with him many times before, but he was able to share with him again, and his father became a Christian at that point. From that point on, his father was alongside them in the work they did. His father's mentality changed. Instead of regarding his son as a drone and a parasite because he was a minister, he was now someone who was committed to what he did. He supported him in any way that he could. He helped them out as a family in one way or another. After their years of prayer, his father was converted.

Over time the church grew, and the Lord blessed the Schaeffers' efforts in visiting and reaching out to kids and young people. Within the three years of their time there, the church had grown to 110 members. There were new people and unbelievers who came every Sunday. They were only there for three years, not because that was what he had planned, but because one of the elders at one point made the remark that he felt that a pastor says all that he has to say in three years. After that it was time to move on, and sadly, sometimes that is true. If a pastor simply gives out what he learned in seminary after three years, he usually has given everything he has to say. Then he goes on somewhere else and says the same things again. Of course it should not be that way, but Schaeffer was very young. This was his first pastorate, so he thought that is what he should do when that remark was made. Even though they became very close to all those people and had a very flourishing work, he felt that he ought to move on.

Francis Schaeffer was a tremendously hardworking man. When we get to the section about Schaeffer's time in Saint Louis, I will have to share some of the things Mrs. Magginoe, who was his secretary, recently said to me. We were laughing together about how difficult it was to work with him because he worked so hard. He expected everybody who worked with him to work incredibly hard as well.

Let me tell one story that she mentioned. Sometimes she would babysit their children when Francis was out speaking somewhere in the evening. They came back, and even if it was two o'clock in the morning, he would say to her, "How about some dictation?" He would dictate a few letters before she went home for her to type up the next morning. My wife was his secretary at one point as well, so she would be totally sympathetic to stories like that. She had many to recount herself of the times that his demands for work from those who worked with him seemed completely unreasonable. It was never because he expected other people to work hard but did not work hard himself. It was simply what he always did himself. He worked tremendously hard, and that had an effect on everyone around him because they had to work hard also.

The Schaeffers left the church in Grove City in 1941. From there they went to Chester, Pennsylvania, where he became the associate pastor in a much larger church. Right around the time of their move, their second child, Susan, was born. Also during this period he became moderator of the Great Lakes presbytery of the Bible Presbyterian Church. The Bible Presbyterian Church in Chester, Pennsylvania had about 500 members. The pastor was Dr. A. L. Latham, who was in his 70s. Schaeffer went there as the associate pastor. This was a large church that had come out of the main Presbyterian church because of liberalism. As usual, they lost their building, so they had no building. The denomination had taken it from them. They met in an old mill. As he was not the main pastor in this place, Francis' work was rather varied. He preached on Sunday evenings and spent an enormous amount of time doing pastoral visiting. He also worked with young people in Bible clubs and summer Bible schools.

Let me make a few comments about his ministry in the church in Chester. As we go along, I want to pick out things that tell us something about how their ministry developed. This includes areas where they were gifted and things that they were committed to. God shaped the gifts He had given them and the experiences they had

for the work that was to come later. God always does that with all of us. There are patches of our lives where we wonder what value it has, but in the providence of God, He will use it at some point in our future. We may be quite sure of this, though we have no idea when or how that will be. We must be careful not to insist that, because we have had certain training or experiences, we must do a certain thing right now. Instead we should put ourselves in God's hands and say, "Lord, I am prepared to do what You call me to do, and I will leave the working out of how all these things come together into Your hands. You are the Lord of my personal history; I am not."

The first point I want to make is that in his pastorate in this church, he worked with a wide range of people. As it was a bigger city church, there were some people who you could call intellectuals. There were university students who came to him with their questions raised by their study. He was prepared to sit down endlessly and talk to them. At the same time, he spent a great deal of his time visiting and talking with shipyard workers. There were many people like that in that church, and he felt perfectly comfortable with people like that. At the time they would have been astonished if anyone had said he was a person who only reached intellectuals. That certainly was not true, nor was true it at any point in his life. It is a misunderstanding that arises from looking at the books he has written and thinking that his whole ministry was that kind of output. Francis related to a huge cross-section of people.

Edith mentions in *The Tapestry* that they all appreciated his preaching in the church. People from all walks of life said you could always understand him and his preaching. They said they learned so much when he preached. He spent a lot of time working with neglected children, as they now had a ministry in a city there. He spent time working with children with Down syndrome. For him it never really mattered who the person was whom he sought to serve. Whether the person was a university professor or a child with Down syndrome, if it was someone who God put in his path, then it was someone he was called to serve and be helpful to. Edith recounts how he went twice a week to teach a little boy who had Down syndrome. Eventually another child started coming as well, and they worked with colored blocks and helping the child in his development. Both these children with Down syndrome really began to progress during the time he spent with them. He regarded that as just as important as anything else that he did. He also spent quite a lot of time in the bars in Chester. He went into them and talked to men there about the Gospel. Sometimes he dragged them home before they spent their whole week's wages on drink. He worked with all sorts of people. When they built a new church there, he helped design it. He had some talent in that area from his background engineering and technical drawing. He helped design it and worked alongside the men of the church on the scaffolding as they built it.

The second thing I want to mention about their time there was a summer camp that they did in their first year there. It was a Bible camp in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. It was rather different from any Bible camp they had been to before. They planned that it would be for all ages, so they had tiny babies though people in their 60s in attendance! It was a two-week camp, and 118 people went to it. Edith says it was something that they saw later as the integration of the ages. It is not good to constantly separate people off into age groups. In our churches, people need to be integrated together and have family experience of people of all ages together. This group of people included many children who had never been in the countryside before in their lives. That time out in the Blue Ridge Mountains was the highlight of their whole lives.

Just before they left they discovered the cook could not come, so Edith had her first experience of cooking for a large group of people. She just said she would do it, and she cooked with the assistance of some of the other women for these 118 people. If you read this section in *The Tapestry*, she really worked at making it creative. This was something she always did when she prepared food. The kitchen may be left in total chaos, and I can testify to that having worked in her kitchen for a year, but where people ate it was always beautiful. Everything would be beautifully set out, and even if there was not a lot of money to spend, the food would be nicely prepared. It looked wonderful on the plate, and it was a situation in which people could really sit down, relax,

and feel comfortable, welcomed, loved, and cared for. This was because of the amount of care that had gone into that preparation. Her first experience of that in a big way, which helped her in L'Abri years later, was cooking for those 118 people at that camp. She worked creatively with the budget she had. She comments that some of the people enjoyed that camp so much that they did not want to leave it. They wanted it to go on forever! Along with all the family atmosphere, they worked at making it a lot of fun with hiking, Bible studies, and other activities.

A third point I want to make is something that began to be a concern for Francis. He wondered how the Lord's people should spend the Lord's money. Are we going to do the Lord's work in the Lord's way? The church in Chester built a large new church, which would be adequate for the needs of the church for many years to come. But immediately some people in the church wanted to start building an even bigger building so that the first building would eventually become Sunday school rooms. Schaeffer began to have very serious reservations about that kind of approach. He felt there were so many desperate needs for the money that the Lord's people give. Should it just be spent on building brick and mortar that is not needed at the present time in the hopes that they would have an even bigger building at some point in the future?

They were there at Chester for just a few years, and they moved on from Chester to Saint Louis where he became pastor of the Bible Presbyterian Church here. It later became Covenant Presbyterian Church. They were in Chester from 1941 to 1943. He was concerned over the way money was spent and over the way they thought of the buildings they put up. They needed to think about what importance they had. It was not that they did not need a building, but they had to determine their priorities. They thought about how they do the Lord's work, praying for His direction and giving their money to Him for His control. It is so easy for the church to become a place to build an empire in one form or another.

A fourth point about their time in Chester is their commitment to the seriousness of prayer. They also felt a seriousness of talking to people, whoever they are and whatever their situation. We need to have a sense of urgency about the task that is before us, both in communicating with people and in depending on God for what we will do. Edith describes how, when Francis' father died after being in a coma for several days, all through the time that he was in the coma, they carried on praying with him, talking with him, and reading the Bible to him. They had no idea of whether he heard them or not. This was something that I have heard him say over and over again. Even if the doctors tell you when you do a hospital visit that this person cannot understand you or hear you, that there is no point in talking to them, that there is nothing there any longer, Schaeffer's attitude is not to take any notice. You should go, spend time with them, love them, say encouraging things, care for them, and carry on speaking to them. They did this with his own father. It was something he stressed over and over again.

I had a striking confirmation of his encouragement to do this with a friend of ours in England. It was a girl we knew very well who was a nurse. One day as she drove through London, she felt a brain hemorrhage coming on. She was able to drive herself to the hospital where she worked, climb out of the car, and then collapse on the steps. She was taken into the hospital and went into a coma for several months. I talked with her afterward about what it was like. During that period she could make no indication that she could understand or was aware of anything. The doctors did not think she was aware of anything. She could not move her eyes to give any kind of indication that she could see, hear, or understand anything. She had no control over her body at all, but she said that all through that time she was totally aware of everything that was happening. Very particularly, because she could not do anything else, she became acutely conscious of the way people treated her. Some people came into that room and just regarded her as a blob of matter just there on the bed to be dealt with. She needed to be moved around, fed, and watered. But some people had no compassion or concern for her. Other people who came in really regarded her as a person even though there was no longer any sign of a person being present. They still cared for her, encouraged her, and spoke to her as if she could hear even though they did not

know if she could. She says the very worst thing that happened in the whole time was on the day that she began to come back and have control over herself. A doctor came into the room just a few minutes after she began to regain control, and he saw that she was crying. This was the first sign of any kind of physical reaction at all. He realized what was happening, so he immediately put her in a wheelchair and wheeled her into a class of medical students as an object lesson. Rather than sitting down with her and saying that it was wonderful to see what was happening, he treated her as something to be displayed.

This is a tremendous temptation to all of us. I do not want to make a point about the medical profession, but we need to consider how we treat people who are severely disabled. This applies particularly to people who do not appear to be responsive. We have no way of knowing whether they are or not. In her particular case, she came back from such a situation as that, and all the time she had been aware. This was something that Schaeffer thought was tremendously important. Our urgency of communicating with people is so great that even if they do not appear to be able to physically respond, we have to keep on talking. And we have to keep praying for the work of the Holy Spirit in them. It is never too late until someone has died to communicate the truth to them. So we keep praying for God to work in them.

One last point about prayer is in the Schaeffers' church, a little girl became sick with an incurable tongue disease. The doctors said that she would die, and there was no hope at all. The mother of the little girl asked Francis to come and pray with her. This was something he was prepared to do and did over and over again throughout his life. He took James 5 seriously. He came and got a little bottle of oil from Edith, and he went with some of the others from the church and prayed for her. From that day she started to recover until the disease was completely gone. The doctors had no explanation for it at all. Edith makes some very important points in writing about this. Even though Francis prayed, and on this occasion God chose to heal the child, they never took that as something automatic. It is not as though you can put some money or a prayer and some oil into a slot machine and expect God to answer in a certain way. It simply does not work that way. Sometimes God's answer is no, and sometimes His answer is yes. We cannot demand that God answer our prayers in certain ways. For him it was simply a matter of obedience to God's Word. God's Word tells us to do this, so we must be prepared to do it and to pray, believing that God is able to heal. Sometimes He does, as in that situation.