

Saint Louis and Children of Christ

Before we move on to the Schaeffer's move to Saint Louis, there are a couple more things I want to add to what I said in the last section on their time in Pennsylvania.

My fourth point about their time there had been the emphasis on the urgency of prayer. I wanted to add something Edith shares in *The Tapestry* about her anxiety with regard to moving to Saint Louis. She recounts how the children were so well settled where they were in school and in their home, so she was very anxious about moving. As they began to pray more and more about the possibility of the coming move, she needed some kind of direction from the Lord as to whether the move was right. They had many people in the church trying to persuade them not to go. These were all sorts of people whom they respected, which made it very difficult as they prayed about their future. She writes on page 225 about how God's answer to her prayers for confirmation about the move came to her. She was praying, quite tearfully, thinking about the future and whether they should move or not. She needed some direction from the Lord. As she kneeled, cried, and prayed, she started to sing. She tells what she sang, which was a verse of one of her favorite hymns by Frances Ridley Havergal. But when she went to look it up afterward, she discovered that that verse was not part of the hymn. It was a new verse that God had given her in that moment. It was a tremendous encouragement to her. The words that she sang were "My will made known to thee as thou dost wait on Me / The future now thou canst not see / But I will work for thee."

These were God's words of encouragement to her. They were quite a turning point in Edith's live. She had a tremendous sense of knowing that we can turn to God when we are in need. He will direct us in the way that He wants us to go. This is an element that became more and more apparent throughout the rest of their ministry. When you come to the years of L'Abri, you can see a real openness to God to be able to work in their lives in ways that were quite unexpected. They did not put God in a box and say that He could only speak to them in certain ways. They had a readiness to be open to His moving and speaking into one's own personal life.

The fifth point I want to make is something about chastening and the Lord's discipline. Edith recounts this with regard to herself. I mentioned last time how Francis learned something about the Lord's discipline in his anger as they moved to seminary in Wilmington. This time it had to do with Edith and the move to Saint Louis. She had all sorts of plans about what they would do when they got to Saint Louis. It started off with her saying that, whatever else happened, they would not be living in someone else's house when they got there. She wanted to have their own house from the day they arrived. The last thing she would do was take her husband and children and go and stay with someone else. She felt that was not a good way for a new pastor to begin his work in a new situation.

So entirely by herself, she set about planning how she was going to do this. She arranged that she would go down to Saint Louis and find a house. She had a measuring tape with her to start measuring for curtains as soon as she found the house. Everything was planned out, and the ticket was bought to go by train. She describes in detail what happened as she ironed her blouse for the second time, quite unnecessarily, making sure that everything was exactly right. She was always very concerned, and still is, about what she wore. She had an accident with the iron. It basically blew up in her face. She was taken into the hospital with second-degree burns. She describes what happened then as a moment when God chastened her. She did not believe that He caused the iron to blow up; she has never had that kind of view of bad things happening, as if God directly sent them. James says that God does not tempt us with evil because He is not evil Himself. He is able to use such situations to chasten us and discipline us. Francis came home and found her in this state with her face bleeding and her eye damaged from the explosion. Edith points out how she was rushed to the hospital, and even when she lay on the table and they bandaged her up to look like a mummy with her head twice as big as normal, she

still said, “I have to go and catch that train to get to Saint Louis and find this house that we will live in so we do not have to stay with anyone else.” She says, “While I was laying on the table, a change had come in me. I had said meekly and with confession of my sinful stubborn will, which had not even asked for the Lord’s will, ‘I am sorry, Lord. I will stop my struggling against Your will, whatever it is. I see now that this has been all my scheme, and I give up. I will not go until we all go. I will stay at whoever’s home you want us to stay.’” She learned a lesson there about not making your own plans without asking for God’s blessing. She learned to wait on Him and be prepared to do whatever He wants us to do, even if it is difficult.

She goes on to speak about chastening and how important it is that when someone is chastened, it is not someone else’s job to point out that you are being chastened. With the situation I mentioned before, when they had their accident in the car and Francis got so furiously angry, she did not say to him, “Now the Lord is teaching you!” On this occasion he did not say to her, “Edith, do you realize the Lord has been trying to get through to you, and you have not been listening? Now He is chastening you.” She points out that it is never our place to rebuke one another in that kind of way. We should not point out to one another what God’s chastening is. It is something individual, between us and our heavenly Father that we have to learn before Him. It is ours to bow before God when we understand what He does in our lives. She points out that the personal relationship we have with Him is not simply in wonderful prayers being answered. She gives many examples of answered prayer in her books. But our relationship is also about experiencing the discipline of the Lord.

That takes us onto the next section, which is the move to Saint Louis. They moved to Saint Louis in September 1943. They now had two children: Priscilla, who was 6 and Susan, who was 2. Francis became the pastor of the Bible Presbyterian Church, which was at that time situated down in the city on Union and Enright. Later it became Covenant Church and has long since moved out into west county. At that time it was down in the city. When they arrived, they stayed in the home of one of the families in the church for the first three-and-a-half months. This was the very thing that Edith had refused to even consider. They had a wonderful relationship with that family and remained friends with them for years and years afterward.

Let me make a comment before I go into particulars of their ministry in Saint Louis. I talked to someone who was a member of the church in that time who was Francis’ secretary during those years. She said he used to preach sermons that were almost always 45 minutes to an hour. Some people found that difficult, especially if they had to be back home by 12:30 and he did not finish until then. They had to catch the tram back to wherever they lived. He was involved in helping start several new churches and encouraged struggling churches. He worked in Poplar Bluff and Valley Park. There was a mission in town on Sydney Street, and he helped the church out in Afton. All of this was in addition to the work in what later became Covenant Church. This period in Saint Louis saw the maturing of his pastoral gifts. In speaking to me about this the other day, his secretary said that everyone came to him for counsel, prayer, and encouragement. His practical wisdom as a pastor was tremendously appreciated by the congregation. The Schaeffers moved on Christmas Eve, three-and-a-half months after they arrived, into a house they bought on Waterman Boulevard. His address was 5248 Waterman Boulevard in the city.

There are several main points I would like to make about the Schaeffers’ time in Saint Louis. The first is with regard to the use of their home. As soon as they moved into this house on Waterman Boulevard, they began to use it for their work. This became a theme of their whole life. They felt a tremendous importance of having an open home. They practiced hospitality, invited people in for meals, and did things in their home. They felt that one’s home should be a central part of one’s ministry. They saw that as obedience to the New Testament’s commandment to practice hospitality. Very quickly they began a children’s class with friends of their own children in their home. Some of these children were from Jewish, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Episcopalian, and

non-churched families. They started a Bible class almost immediately with little children from their neighborhood. Also very soon they started a women's training class. They encouraged other women in the

church to start Bible classes in their homes. Very shortly, in fact, there were 20 women meeting in their home each week and 20 classes for children in these women's homes. When the women came to their home each week, Francis and Edith taught the women who came the lesson for the week as if they were children. She made flannel graph illustrations for them. They taught them together, and then they all went down to the basement to make their own flannel graph illustrations for their own lesson with the children. They discussed the work they did together, prayed for various children who came to their classes, and encouraged and supported one another. This was the beginning of what later was called Children for Christ. We will talk more about that in a moment.

Also in their home they began to reach out to the Jewish neighbors who lived around them. This became a theme that has been present with them throughout their lives. They had a longing to be able to communicate the Gospel to Jewish people. One of the first things Francis wrote was a pamphlet, which was widely distributed around Saint Louis, called the "Bible-Believing Christian and the Jew." This was in 1943. They were very strongly opposed to anti-Semitism, and that has always been one of the commitments of their ministry. God has blessed that for Edith. He has given her personally since Francis' death many opportunities to reach out to Jewish people. It was always a concern of theirs, and it was fanned into flame at this time living in an area in Saint Louis where there were many Jewish people around them.

They also had a wedding in their home. Edith describes this in *The Tapestry* on pages 239 to 240. It is quite an amusing description. It is a good example of her creativity and also, as she acknowledges, her perfectionism, which went over the top sometimes. She describes how she was three weeks from having her third baby herself, and because their home had a beautiful staircase coming down, they decided to have the wedding there. She took the place of the bride's mother and prepared the house for the wedding. She cooked all the food for the wedding. If you ever had one of her meals, you know how beautifully she would prepare everything in such a situation. I can imagine the kitchen must have been a total disaster by the time she finished. She got all this done, and she did not have a chance to get herself ready. So she did not actually go to the wedding herself. That is a good illustration of her creativity, which was later used so much in L'Abri. She was prepared to take her home and make it a place for someone else to have something that they would remember for the rest of their life. So using their home is one thing that they valued very highly. Later in her book she said, "A family is to be an open door." It is an open door to other people. Every Christian individual, couple, and family is called to open their home up to other people.

The second element of their work in Saint Louis is the one that I want to concentrate on in this lesson. It is the children's work that they began there. As well as the work they did in their own home, the work of Children for Christ developed. It began formerly in December 1944, just a year after they came to Saint Louis with Francis Schaeffer as its local chairman. It began with a separation from Child Evangelism Fellowship (CEF). The Schaeffers had been involved with children's work with CEF in Saint Louis, but they felt that they needed to start something new, separated from CEF. This is because of the conviction that anyone teaching the children ought to be a member of a Bible-believing church that was part of a Bible-believing denomination. This was in order that when children were converted or became interested in the Gospel through the work of the Bible studies, they would then be encouraged to go to a Bible-believing church. Otherwise they possibly ran the risk of going to a church that was half liberal. CEF refused to take a stand on this. They felt that they were happy to have anyone as a teacher who was a born-again evangelical Christian regardless of what church they were affiliated with. But at this time the Schaeffers took this view of separation very strongly. We will come back to that later.

They started this new work called Children for Christ. It is very interesting if you read the minutes of the separation between what they did and what CEF did. They were very careful not to criticize or challenge the spirituality of any of the people involved who stayed with CEF. The division that came about was done in a very careful way so that it would not leave bitterness afterward. They had seen enough of that already in the

split that took place a few years before when he was a seminary student. The three words that were used on their brochures to describe the work of Children for Christ were separated, church centered, and complete. Separated meant that everyone teaching in the Children for Christ classes was required to be an evangelical themselves but also a member of an evangelical church that was not involved in the World Council of Churches (WCC) or the Federal Council of Churches. They worked with people from any evangelical denomination. There was a commitment to a broader evangelicalism. They did not work only with people within a Presbyterian or Reformed context. They were prepared to work with any evangelical church that was not a part of the WCC. The work was church centered, and this was one of its primary distinctives. Every group was encouraged to work through a particular evangelical local church rather than being something that was separate in someone's home. The work was developed through local churches so that the children were tied to a church. It was complete, which meant that it had a seven-point program.

Let me go over those seven points, which made it very comprehensive. The first part of it was home classes. These are classes like they had in their own home. These classes were fairly structured, but they had a more informal atmosphere because they met in people's homes. The children in these classes were of mixed ages. There were a lot of choruses with action encouraged. The class was illustrated by felt graphs. They encouraged the children to bring their friends, and they were characterized by a lot of Scripture memorization. It is interesting to read about it, because it is far more than you would find in almost anything today. There was a strong encouragement to those teaching the classes to appeal to the children for a response to the Gospel. And there was a strong emphasis on prayerful preparation for the classes by the teachers. So there were home classes that took place all over Saint Louis, 20 of which were from their own church.

The second thrust of this complete work for children is what were called released time classes. At that time, some states permitted children to be released from school for one hour a week for voluntary religious education. They required these to have a much more formal atmosphere than the home classes. So the atmosphere of these was school-like. It was a more formal educational context. The stress was very strong on memory work and question and answer. The children had to do homework. The children were grouped according to their grades at school. They involved a very clear evangelical stand, being very careful to distinguish what the evangelical Gospel is from liberalism. That was the second part of this thrust. All over the city, there were groups of children released from school one hour a week to have these released time classes.

A third element of this work with children was open-air work. This was rather similar to their first work in Grove City where Francis went out into the highways and byways and dragged children in. They went out into the parks and public places to draw in unchurched children. These were much more informal gatherings. They had Bible stories, hymn singing, and outdoor activities. They created a great big flannel board for these, and the reverse of the flannel board was a slate board with chalk. They could just flip it over and either use the slate or the flannel board. These involved a lot of visiting and very careful follow-up with the children to encourage them to come to others of the classes. So there was open-air work, going into the community and having classes out in the park for anyone who came along.

The fourth element was called Empire Builders. That was like Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts but with a Christian emphasis. It had an emphasis on Bible study and on scout craft. There was a lot of fun and games, outdoor activities and hiking. At the same time there was a lot of emphasis on Biblical study. In these groups they encouraged the pastor of the local church to lead the boys. They emphasized strongly that if the pastor did it, he

had to love children and he had to enjoy doing outdoor activities. They met for worship and Bible study in the church, but it was all very carefully structured. Schaeffer produced a 160-page workbook for the kids in these classes. They regularly had advancement tests in both scout craft and in the Bible. They were divided into two groups, juniors and seniors. Another element of them was a strong encouragement of leadership among the children. They began to recognize boys and girls who seemed to have gifts of leadership to lead the others and

develop those gifts. This involved very careful follow-up with the families, trying to draw the parents into the life of the church as well. What was unusual about this is that it was all based on the local church. It was not something out in the community, but it was related very specifically to a church. That is why they encouraged the pastor if possible to lead the group.

The fifth element was summer Bible school. They stressed very strongly that this was not to be vacation playschool. It would be real school for four to five weeks each summer. They met five days a week from 9:00 AM to 12:00 noon. It was all very carefully worked out with a 12-year program. If a child went right through the 12-year program, they ended up with a diploma at the end. There were even report cards. There was a lot of door-to-door visiting by the pastor. Edith mentions how one summer Schaeffer visited over 500 homes in Saint Louis, as well as other people going out and inviting children to come. That first summer they had 400 at the summer Bible school for the whole month.

I remember talking to Harvey Woodson about this recently. He told me how very seriously these things were taken. On one occasion he recounts how he did not go, and Francis was at his house that afternoon to find out what was the matter with him. He really followed up; if any of the boys did not turn up, he went out to see where they were. He wanted to see whether they were sick or there was some problem in the family. He took his pastoral responsibilities tremendously seriously, including quite small children. He treated them all as individuals and followed them all up. He showed a care and concern for them as individuals. In the summer Bible school, the children were divided into grades. Vivian, Schaeffer's secretary, mentioned that she taught one of these classes, and she had 40 eight-year-olds. That was her class! There was a huge summer Bible school that took place here in Saint Louis. If possible, they tried to pay the teachers to make it practical for young mothers with small children to come. That way they could have someone else look after their own tiny kids so they could come and help teach. Each day began with 20 minutes of worship, prayer, and singing led by the pastor. Then there would be an hour class, 20 minutes of play, and another hour class. They had a big picnic for everyone at the end of the Bible school and a closing night with the parents. Harvey mentioned to me, and Vivian too, what an enormous amount they were able to communicate to these children during this period. Many of these were children brought from all over Saint Louis. They came from the inner city, north Saint Louis, and south Saint Louis to the summer Bible school. On the last night they would let their parents know what they learned. They had learned an enormous amount during that period of time.

The sixth element was camp. After the summer Bible school, there was a two-week camp. It had some teaching and a lot of fun. It was out in the country somewhere with good wholesome food. There was a fund for poor children from the city who would not be able to afford to go so that they could go. The emphasis in the camps was on conversion. Many of the children who came were from non-Christian homes. For those who were already Christians, the emphasis was on consecrating themselves to God's service. That was the sixth element: a two-week camp after summer Bible school.

The seventh element was rallies. These were held for children from a larger area, for the whole Saint Louis area. Several different churches, with their own Empire Builders or home class groups, could all meet together. They brought the children from a larger area together. Their purpose was to partly have fun by being together in a large group but also to show the children that they were not just part of a tiny movement of Christians. There were many other Christians, too. There might be just one or two of them in their own particular school or street,

but from all over the area there were many Christians who could come together on an occasion like this. It was not just a handful of believers. Parents were invited to come, but it was basically a kids' rally. Mrs. Schaeffer created an enormous shadowgraph with a big framework and a white sheet over it. Then she made life-size cut out cardboard and plywood figures, which they had adults hold behind it to illustrate whatever Bible story they used for the evening. Seven hundred children came to the first of these rallies held in Covenant Church. It was reported in the *Post Dispatch*. The article and the pictures are in the archives in the library here at Covenant Seminary. Those were the seven points of Children for Christ.

You can see that Children for Christ developed into something really big. They had a tremendous passion for reaching out to children and also a great deal of organizational ability. They got down and did things. By the summer of 1945, the work of Children for Christ became national. It started in Saint Louis in the church where Francis pastored, but in the next few months it became a national organization. Francis Schaeffer became its director. They got student representatives at various evangelical colleges and seminaries. There were articles about the work in the Christian press. Schaeffer went and taught training classes at some Bible colleges to raise up teachers for these various activities of the Children for Christ program.

They worked on children's tracts as well. The Schaeffers wrote some of these, and Edith's sister, Janet, wrote one, which was illustrated by Edith. They produced quite a bit of material themselves: the flannel graphs, the shadowgraphs, and the Empire Builders manual. Then people like Marie Wallace, for example, produced some things for the children. As it became a national organization, it meant a lot of traveling for Francis Schaeffer all over the country in terms of encouraging groups in other cities and churches all around the United States to start Children for Christ. By 1948, the work became fully international, and Schaeffer became its international director. By 1950 there were works in the United States, Alaska, Chile, Palestine, India, Japan, France, Switzerland, Holland, Norway, and Finland. By 1952 it also included Germany, North Africa, Brazil, and Spain.

The Schaeffers carried on producing material for these. They wrote a series of Bible studies on the book of Luke, which later became *Everybody Can Know*. They were written for the Children for Christ work. They created flannel graphs to go with them. These lessons were translated into French, Norwegian, Spanish, Dutch, Finish, Chinese, and Portuguese. It became a fully international work. Schaeffer wrote this in his director's report in 1953, which was after they moved to Europe: "Children for Christ is one of the greatest living demonstrations of what can be done by the power of the Holy Spirit without great fanfare. It has gone from its beginning in Saint Louis to national and international size so that at the present time 20 foreign countries, 35 states, and the District of Columbia have works in them. God has given international work to us with very little human pressure."

In all that time there was only one half salary being paid to a half-time secretary, Ms. Bernice Killam. The Schaeffers did an enormous amount of work themselves with no remuneration for it. Children for Christ did not pay them at any time. Some of their expenses were covered in terms of printing and other things that they produced. But the work had cost very little money, and it was in many different countries in different languages. Let me repeat again what he said, because it became such an important thing to them, "Children for Christ is one of the greatest living demonstrations of what can be done by the power of the Holy Spirit without great fanfare. God has given international work to us with very little human pressure." The central thing here is the tremendous blessing that God poured out on this work. One may add that they put an enormous amount of effort into it and really used their gifts in this work. This is a footnote: Children for Christ was eventually closed down in 1982. The remaining money was given to the home for the children of lepers in India. The Schaeffers had not been involved in it for many years by that time. In the early 1950s, they stopped being directly involved in the work of Children for Christ. As the work of L'Abri began to grow and take their whole time, other people carried on the work. Don McNabb became its director in Saint Louis.

