

Europe: Summer 1947 (continued)

Father, we want to praise You for such a beautiful day, for this glorious time of year and for Your testimony to Yourself in all of creation. We thank You, too, for revealing Yourself to us. We thank You for the way You show Yourself to us in Your power at work within Your people. We thank You for what we have experienced of that in our own lives, and we thank You for what we see of it in the lives of Francis and Edith Schaeffer. And we pray, Father, as we continue to think about Your work in them, that You will teach us. We ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen.

We were looking at the various things that Francis Schaeffer learned during his trip in 1947. We had gotten, I think, to the eighth point. The eighth point was, as you read through the letters of this time there in Europe, you will see he was committed to sharing the Gospel with anybody he could, wherever he went. It is really quite striking, if you read through them all, the different examples you see of people he attempted to communicate with. In letter number 10, on page four you have an example. He writes, "As we left I talked to my guide of Christ. I do not know how serious he was, but he said he wants to know more for he had found Roman Catholicism wanting. I urged him to go to talk with the Methodist pastor, and he promised he would. I hope the Lord brings forth fruit from that conversation." Edith gives several more examples in the book as well. If you look on page 257, she gives an example there. Francis writes there in a letter of speaking to a Roman Catholic from Austria and an Anglican from Britain. These were both people who were pastors, and he spoke to them about the Lord. Then, she gives another example from one of his other letters from when he was in a hospital in Oslo. One Sunday, even though the other men in the beds in the room he was in did not speak English, he sang some hymns. And he says, "Last night, I had a chance for a little testimony to two men, I sang some hymns. They surely did not understand much, maybe only the word Jesus. But both looked thoughtful and said 'Ya.' Before liberalism came, this was very much a Christian country." And then he says, "Do not grieve about my being sick here, because I feel the Lord has placed me here." In another of the letters, he writes how later when a pastor came to visit him there in the hospital he had a chance to really communicate to the men in the beds in the room where he was, through interpretation. He had a real chance to communicate the Gospel to them with an interpreter.

As you read through the letters, there are many, many examples of this. Wherever he went, he spoke to guides and interpreters. He writes of talking to and then praying with his landlady in one of the hotels he stayed in. When he was sightseeing, he would meet people and talk to them. He had a long conversation with a Chinese man who was a Confucian on the train from Holland and through Belgium to Paris. He met a Dutch couple on the platform of the station in Utrecht. He could not find anywhere to stay the night and they took him home with them. And he stayed up until almost midnight reading the Bible with them and talking about the Gospel with them. He talked to his Jewish porter in a hotel in Holland. He talked to the Greek owner of a hotel when he was in Greece. He talked to just all sorts of people. And it is very interesting as you read through these letters and you see the tremendous commitment he had. This was with him his whole life; he really sought to be some kind of testimony to anyone the Lord brought across his path.

The ninth issue I want to just say a little bit about is his experience of God's care of him in the details of his journey. He actually writes in one of the letters, and Edith quotes this on page 261, that "our God is a God of details." And of course, that is what the New Testament teaches us. Jesus said, "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows" (Matthew 10:29-31). And all the way through the letters you see Schaeffer speaking

about how God has taken care of the details and how God was taking him to the various individuals whom he felt God wanted him to meet. Over and over again he writes about how he had a very short space of time in each city he went to and yet God is able to oversee the details amazingly. God was giving him the possibility to talk to pastors from all these different denominations often at very short notice—sometimes with no notice at all. And he had many wonderful conversations with people, even through situations that seemed to be purely chance. While he was standing in a hotel foyer, for example, he asked the man behind the desk if he knew the way to the evangelical church. The man had never heard of such a thing, but somebody passing the desk at the time said, “Oh yes! I know where that is.” This was in Italy. The passerby said, “Oh yes! I know exactly where that is, and I will take you there right now.” There are many, many examples like that of God’s providential care for Schaeffer during this time.

Edith writes this, “He had gone to Europe with practically no names and no contacts and one had led to another. Much, much later we were to pray for the people of God’s choice to come to us when L’Abri began. We did not know about that but at this time we had prayed that Fran might be taken to people the Lord might have him meet.” She is just pointing out how, as you read through these accounts in his letters, humanly speaking, having so many contacts in such a short time was impossible. But God really provided for him. The other thing that was impossible, humanly speaking, was the amount of travel that he got done when travel conditions were so difficult. Over and over again, he had people who worked in Europe saying they could not believe how many places he had managed to get to in the short amount of time that he had, given the travel conditions at that time.

Finally, Edith gives there the example of safety. When he was flying back from Europe to the United States, the plane’s engine stopped while flying over the Atlantic. Some of you may have read that account in *The Tapestry*. The engine stopped, and the plane started plummeting down toward the sea. Schaeffer prayed for safety and offered to help the person who was sitting next to him with their children. The account says he did not know the full answer until later when they reached the airfield. The pilot said they had no idea why the motor started again, they could not understand it. But, as you read through the letters, you just see over and over again the way that God took care of him in all the details of the situation. He wrote at the very end, “This trip is ended. It has been the great spiritual experience of my life, second only to my conversion. It has been wonderful to realize the unity of the church of Christ. Daily I have felt the Lord’s hand upon my shoulder.” So this was a tremendous experience for him, these three months. This showed him the way that God could care for him in a completely new situation where he knew absolutely nobody and yet God was able to go before him.

Now those are the nine issues that I wanted to mention. However, we cannot stop speaking about this before we mention what Edith goes on to speak about in *The Tapestry*. That is the cost that this journey took, the toll of this journey on him. He returned home to Saint Louis very weak physically. He had been sick and had had to be taken to the hospital on one occasion. But in addition to that, he repeatedly had diarrhea from the very poor food that was available and the lack of sanitation in some places. So he had not eaten well, and he had lost a great deal of weight by the time he returned home. He had often gone without sleep. By the time he came back, he was physically near a state of collapse. In addition to that, the whole time was emotionally very draining. Edith writes about this on page 273, that he was very close to having a nervous breakdown, though not quite. They were able to avoid that by her taking such special care of him when he got home. It was spiritually a tremendously taxing time. He missed Edith, he missed both their sexual union and also their sharing together every day everything they were both doing which, as we have spoken about, they did every evening before they went to bed. They would always spend a good long time catching up with each other and having a time alone with each other. He missed that, and he missed her enormously. She writes how it was a time of tremendous

temptation for him, a real battle spiritually facing sexual temptations and so on during these three months away. I think the way she writes about this is tremendously valuable.

She points out that the boards of missionary organizations, of churches, and so on can make very serious mistakes in what they ask people to do. In asking too much, they are putting people under unnecessary strain. I think that is an issue that really needs to be thought about. I have often felt, for example, if we give a different kind of illustration, when missionaries come back from some other country to here on furlough, the time is anything but a sabbatical, anything but a furlough. It is often far more stressful than the time they spend on the field. Often they are presented with two choices, one of which is the frying pan and the other is the fire, to use an English expression (I do not know if that is an American expression too). But, the frying pan is, if you like to use that image, that the husband will spend the whole six months of the furlough rushing about the United States speaking in dozens and dozens of churches about his work in whatever mission field to which they have been sent. Once in a while he may see his wife and children when he gets back to them. Meanwhile they are often put up in some accommodations that are not really adequate, which does not really give them privacy or time to be a family by themselves. It is already very difficult, because the children have to go to a completely different schooling system from what they are accustomed to.

That is one way the issue of furlough is dealt with sometimes. The other way is for the husband to take his family with him, to drag them around to all the churches at which he has to speak. Sometimes he will do that, but that in a way is less satisfactory. While they are all together, they are constantly sleeping on people's floors and in people's spare rooms. Again, there is a total lack of privacy and a lack of home life. While one can always look back at such times and say, "The Lord has taken care of us, we have met many people who were tremendously kind to us and gave sacrificially for us." Even so, there is a tremendous cost, and many people return from such a furlough more tired than when they came home in the first place simply because of the pressures on their life as an individual, as a couple, and as a family.

But Edith clearly feels, as you read these pages, that too much was asked of Francis in the time that there was, considering the conditions that there were. Now we may say as well that it is partly his own obstinacy, which we talked about before, that he really tried to do everything that he was asked to do in that time. He just did not give up. He just kept pushing on and on and on, going to these different places and taking advantage of all these different opportunities. I think the other comment that Edith makes there is tremendously important and profound as well. That is this, that it is very important not to be romantic about the Christian life and the costs of it. You can look at this time of those three months and say, "Here was a time that was a tremendously important time in the way that God led him as an individual—the various things God exposed him to, the people He took him to, and the issues he thought through and so on." And that is certainly true, and personally it was a time of tremendous growth for him. As I quoted, he called it the most important spiritual experience of his life apart from his own conversion. But when God uses you in a way like that, in a tremendous way, it can be extremely costly. Whenever He uses you in a wonderful way, it is costly. And we are often not prepared to come to terms with that, we think that it is possible to be a benefit in the kingdom of God without it being painful. But the New Testament does not speak that way.

You can think of the image that Jesus used in John's Gospel. This was an image that became increasingly precious to the Schaeffers as the years went by. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds" (John 12:24). Now of course, Jesus was talking about Himself there. Our salvation was purchased at tremendous cost to Him, and we are the wheat, we are the fruit that His death produced. But the same principle applies to the Christian life as well. In the ministry, unless we are prepared to be

that grain of wheat that falls into the ground to die, we will not produce fruit. Unless we are prepared to count the cost, to pick up the cross and bear it, we will not be fruitful. Paul speaks that way very strongly, particularly in 2 Corinthians chapters 4 and 5, where he speaks about the way that he bears in himself the death of Christ. He says that it is only as he does bear in himself the death of Christ that there is life given to others. If we really want to be of service to God and His people, we have to be prepared to count the cost, and the cost is sometimes very painful.

I think what Edith writes there is tremendously helpful. She says this at the bottom of page 272, "Never forget this at any point in life in a thousand different kinds of situations: the answer to the prayer, 'use me Lord, I want to be greatly used of Thee,' can be the hardest thing you have ever faced. It is the answer to prayer that brings exhaustion of a variety of kinds and that brings a cost to be paid that almost smashes you and me. There is always a cost to being used mightily by the Lord and there always was." She goes on to quote Paul in 2 Corinthians 1:8 where he says, "We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life." That was his experience as he sought to be a servant of God, and sometimes it was very, very painful. So there is no room for romanticism about Christian service, nor triumphalism of the wrong kind. Paul can say that God leads us in triumph everywhere, but Paul also speaks of the cost of that. He says, "I die every day..." (1 Corinthians 15:31). And when you read the account of what Paul's life was like, you understand that he meant that nearly literally. Paul says, "Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches" (2 Corinthians 11:25-28). Paul had all kinds of trouble. He is speaking quite truthfully about that cost to himself when he says that he had to die daily. There is a very important spiritual lesson there.

Now, there is a fine line to be drawn here. We may choose a costly path as God uses us in His service, but that does not justify mission boards and church boards giving people impossible tasks or tasks that are too costly. We are called to really try to bear one another's burdens, to lift burdens off each other, not to give people impossible burdens to bear. If somebody chooses a road that turns out to be very costly or that in God's providence turns out to be very costly, that is one thing. But it ought not to be organized by the system. As we think of the cost of Christian service, is that a cost we should bring on ourselves in ascetic ways, by making it even more difficult than it needs to be? Is that what godliness is? I do not think so. It seems to me that life itself is difficult enough. The cost of serving God can be very painful. The New Testament says, "...through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22b) and "'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me'" (Luke 9:23b). That will be different for every individual. For one person it may be suffering some awful illness or having a child with leukemia. For another person it might be constant pain of one kind or another. For another person it might be struggling with depression. For another person it may be having a work to do that takes an enormous toll on you. Thus one cannot lay out what it will be, what that cost will be, for any individual. What the New Testament does not suggest, though, is that we purposely do things to ourselves that are painful. The New Testament sees no value in asceticism for its own sake. God calls us to enjoy the gifts He has given us, not to purposely deny ourselves of them as if there were some value in denying ourselves. Asceticism has no value. You can think of what Paul says in Colossians about that. He says that there are people who say, "'Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!'" and impose all sorts of rules on themselves. But he talks literally

about the humiliation of the body, which is what asceticism really is, and he says, “These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence” (Colossians 2:21-23). Paul rules asceticism out completely. He says that is not what the Gospel is about. There will be plenty of costs in serving God without trying to bring them on yourself. In other words, you do not seek martyrdom either in the literal sense of final martyrdom or in the daily sense of making things worse for yourself than they need to be. That has no value. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:3, “If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.”

This whole issue of an impossible life is something we struggled with over and over again in L’Abri. I remember Schaeffer the first time he came to visit us over in England when the English branch started in 1971. Vicky and I had just been moved in for a few months, and our apartment was in total chaos. The kitchen surfaces were being rebuilt, all of our crockery to serve 20 people and all our food was in our bedroom. We were still serving meals in the middle of all of this, and he came in to sit down and chat with us and to pray with us. He said, “What we are trying to do is not difficult, it is impossible.” I really appreciated that at the time because it was true. It just seemed completely impossible practically, what we were trying to do. This was a question we struggled with over and over through the years. Should we ask of one another what is impossible, or can we try to set this up in a way where it is still going to be difficult and enormously costly but not impossible? I think we learned some important lessons along the way. You really cannot and ought not to ask people to do impossible things. I do not think in any of the branches of L’Abri today we would ask anybody to do the kinds of things that we asked of ourselves 20 years ago. We just did ridiculous things.

I think back on the way we lived some of the time. For example, in England you go to the hospital for 10 days for childbirth, which is a wonderful relief for the wife in such a circumstance, to have 10 days of being cared for after a nine-month pregnancy. Thus when Vicky had our second and third sons, she was in the hospital 10 days both times, but I stayed home. I would visit her every day, while looking after one child who was one year old when our second one was born. And then, when the third one was born, I had two children to look after, one who was one-and-a-half and the other who was two-and-a-half. During this time I also continued to cook meals for 15 or 20 people every day. I was doing that all the time and still trying to teach and preach and everything else. I look back on it and think we were absolutely mad. We would never ask anybody to do that kind of thing again.

We made some very serious mistakes in terms of asking people to do impossible things. It is something we have to be very careful about. I think perhaps one of the reasons why there is so little attention to that is because so much Christian literature, Christian biographies, and so many prayer letters and news letters are so one sided. I think it is something that really needs to be thought through. I mean that this literature is one sided in the sense that they are triumphalist. Only the good stories are told, only the success stories. People write their prayer letters and news letters, and they feel obligated to only tell the good things that happened. They may even sometimes make up things that have not really happened or blow things way beyond the reality of what has taken place. They are not prepared to write openly about the struggles they have gone through, about the pain they have experienced, about the difficulty, about the disappointments, or about the temptations and stresses that they are under. Many Christian biographies are like that, as is so much material that goes out. We really need to strive for a biblical realism.

One of the most refreshing things, I think, about reading the Bible is that it is so honest about people’s weaknesses and failures. Not that there is anything to glory in when we read the account of the

Israelites' failure over and over again or when we read the account of the apostles leaving Christ. But in fact, it is a great encouragement to read that there in God's Word, because we see the struggles we endure are not unique to us. They are common to the whole people of God throughout the ages, and God has recorded them there for us. It is a tremendous comfort that it was through people like us, people who were weak, who failed, who fell flat on their faces, who made mistakes, and who were sinners, that God worked—people like us whom God loved, people like us whom God had prepared to use in the building of His kingdom.

There is a tremendous need for Christian literature to have that kind of honesty, integrity, and realism about it. I think, in fact, the effect of many Christian biographies and news letters is just to discourage Christians. Really I think for most people who read them it is just discouraging because they think, "Well, I can never be like that. These are super heroes. We just cannot be that way." I think that is one of the refreshing things about reading *The Tapestry*. Edith is very honest about the difficulties they went through, including during this particular section of their lives. The other thing we need to add here as we think about this issue of "cost," the cost of this time, is that when one person bears the cost as he did on that journey, somebody else always has to bear it, too. In this case it was his wife, of course, and the children. When he came back there was a period of several months where he needed extra sleep, when he needed special care, where he needed extra time alone with Edith, and she had to be more creative even than usual in finding ways to care for the children. She had to give him quiet and privacy and put off people's demands on him in terms of the needs of the church and the needs elsewhere. This is something I am always very conscious of if I go off somewhere and speak. It may be a really good time and you feel like you really helped people and that God has used you in wonderful ways in people's lives. But you always come home exhausted. And there is a cost on my wife and children as well as on me at that point. It is really important to remember that taking on something, doing something costly, affects other people as well as yourself.

That brings us to Francis Schaeffer being back in Saint Louis. Both Francis and Edith were back in Saint Louis after that summer away. Back in Saint Louis, they settled into the usual round of their fruitful ministry there. He was preaching, visiting, leading young people's discussions, and in addition, doing special talks and lectures with slides about his trip to Europe. It was during this period that Edith started a Bible club, which actually originally was a literary club. The mother of one of the children who came to a Children for Christ class said, "Could you come and speak about the Bible to our literary club?" Edith said, "I do not think the Bible is only a piece of literature, I think it is true." The woman said, "Well, come and talk anyway." So she went and talked for half an hour, and they said, "Please continue talking." She talked for an hour and a half, and the literary club became a Bible study. It is really an amazing story (found on page 264 in *The Tapestry*). Many of the women who went to that were not Christians. Basically what Edith taught there was her bird's eye view on the Bible, what she was later to call "The Talk," which is in the little book *Christianity is Jewish*.

But as the Schaeffers settled back into their life in Saint Louis, their future began to be unsettled. Letters came from all over Europe, from all the places Francis had been, saying, "We so much enjoyed having you here, come and help us. We need your help, please come back." Letters came to them from all over the United States, saying, "Come and tell us about your time in Europe. We want to know what is going on there." So there was a huge increase in letter writing. From that point on, writing letters became a more and more important part of his ministry. He already had done much correspondence, but it just kind of mushroomed from that point onward and stayed with those mushroomed proportions until the end of his life. I must say it is something that makes me feel ashamed when I think about the conscientious way in which he answered people's letters. There were just masses of people's letters all the time.

The third unsettling factor (the letters, of course, were unsettling because of their obvious longing to have him return), but the third factor that was unsettling was a meeting of the independent board. There he gave his report on his time in Europe. Of course, all these people had been receiving all these letters, so they had had a very detailed account of that time as well as the report that he gave. The independent board decided somebody should go to Europe. The expression they used was “to strengthen the things that remain.” And they said to Francis Schaeffer, “We think it should be you.” So the Schaeffers had to face the question, “Should we go or should we not? Should we start getting into all this correspondence or should we not?” There was such a huge amount involved that the question really had to be answered yes or no. They either had to say no to responding to all of these letters in any meaningful way, both from Europe and from all over the United States, and no to the independent board, and yes to the ministry in Saint Louis, to the ministry of the church there. Or they had to say yes to the letters, to the challenge from the independent board to go to Europe.

This was quite a struggle for them. They did not see the way ahead at all clearly, they had no clear idea of what they were going to do if they did go to Europe. So it was not something easy. They did not have some nice pre-organized job to go to. They did not have a church, a Bible school, a seminary, some mission work, or a place to live all set up. There was just the call, “Go to Europe.” And there were all these letters saying, “Come and help us.” But there was nothing specific that you could put your hands on and say, “This is what you ought to be going to do” or “This is where you would live. This is what your work will be.” So, on the one hand there was the uncertainty about the future. “What would happen if we went? What would we do?” On the other hand, there was their life there in Saint Louis with a ministry that was clearly being blessed by God. It was really being used to bring people to the faith, to build people up in the faith, to be an encouragement to many, many people. It was a fruitful ministry. In addition, there were many people they loved very dearly and who loved them in Saint Louis, and they had a very pleasant home there. Edith writes about the way she had already been dreaming of how they would be able to stay in that house for many, many years. She could picture her daughters getting married in the house and coming down the beautiful staircase for their wedding and so on. And of course, she had such an imagination she would have imagined all of those things. So there were many things for them to think about. They decided fairly quickly over those next few months that they would go even though they did not know what was coming. They had to leave many of their most treasured possessions behind. The girls had just been given a beautiful antique dollhouse, for example, which they had to leave there, because there was not going to be room for it where they were going.

So, in February 1948, they left Saint Louis. The children were at that time 10, 6, and 2 years old. They were going to spend five or six months in the United States first. Edith was going to live in Philadelphia. Francis was going to travel around the States speaking about the time in Europe that he had had, showing his slides, giving his lectures about the situation there. And of course people asked questions about what they were going to be doing, so it was a speaking trip both looking back on what he had done and looking forward to whatever they would be doing, that was, “strengthening the things that remain.” And of course they had no clear idea of what exactly that ministry would be. They went to Philadelphia. Edith and the girls stayed with Francis’ mother. They felt this would be a good thing, that it would give her a chance to get to know their children in a new way before they left for Europe so far away, and of course travel was difficult. But that turned out to be an extremely difficult time.

Just as Francis had just had his three months of difficulty, of costly experience in Europe, those months in Philadelphia were a very costly time for Edith. She writes about how his mother wanted to have them, insisted on having them, but behaved all the time as if it were an imposition to have them. Francis’ mother felt they should not go to Europe. In fact, she was “furious” about it—that is the word Edith uses. She took her anger out on the girls all the time, her anger about them going to Europe. So Edith’s

work was cut out in keeping the girls out of her mother-in-law's hair, in doing everything she could to try and serve her, to help her take care of the home. She did everything she could to make life as pleasant as possible. She also created a little bit of time for her to study to be a secretary. This was because from then on she would be Francis' secretary as they went out. She had to learn shorthand and she had to learn typing. But every time she went into her room and closed the door and started working on it, her mother-in-law would just be really angry. She clearly regarded this as a total waste of time and thought that her daughter-in-law should have been doing something more worthwhile.

So it was a very, very difficult time. Edith says she lost weight during this time. If any of you have spent any time living with somebody who really is not happy to have you there but insists you ought to be, you will know how difficult it was. It was a very hard time. And again, Edith writes about that very helpfully on page 280. She says this, "Do we mean it when we say to God, 'Lord, I am prepared to take a low seat. I am prepared to serve somebody?'" Because she had said that, "I am prepared to go, take this time of not having an apartment of our own to go and be with my mother-in-law even though she is a difficult person. I am prepared to go and take that low seat and be a servant there." But we have to realize that when we pray like that, again there is a cost to bear. And then we will try to serve God with gladness in that situation rather than resent it the whole time. After all, it is an answer to our prayers. We have said, "Lord, I am willing to do this." Then when we do it, it will have a cost to it. God does not automatically change the difficult person just because we have said we are prepared to go and try to help them. The person often stays difficult, as the person did in this particular situation. But again, there is a very important spiritual lesson there. If we say to God, "I am prepared to be a servant," we had better mean it, because He will test us, and we will be refined by it. Being a servant like that is never a pleasant experience; it is always costly. We have to work, then, at maintaining a mentality of serving God and serving the difficult person willingly and cheerfully rather than angrily and resentfully.