

# PASSING ON THE TORCH OF FAITH

## Our thoughts on igniting faith in our children

by Lynette & Tim Schrader

How do we pass faith on to our children? What will inspire them to love the Lord their God and their neighbor as themselves? How can we, as parents who fail to be perfect examples, lead our children most effectively to Jesus? Like most Christian parents, we too have done a lot of thinking and processing about the kind of faith we are passing on to our most enormous responsibility and gift—our children.

The idea for this article arose out of the revelations that Frank Schaeffer has made about his parents, the well-known Francis and Edith Schaeffer. (*Editor's note: David R. Swartz will review Frank Schaeffer's book, **Crazy for God**, in the November **Beacon**.*) If you have been a Schaeffer fan, and are familiar with Frank's claims, his

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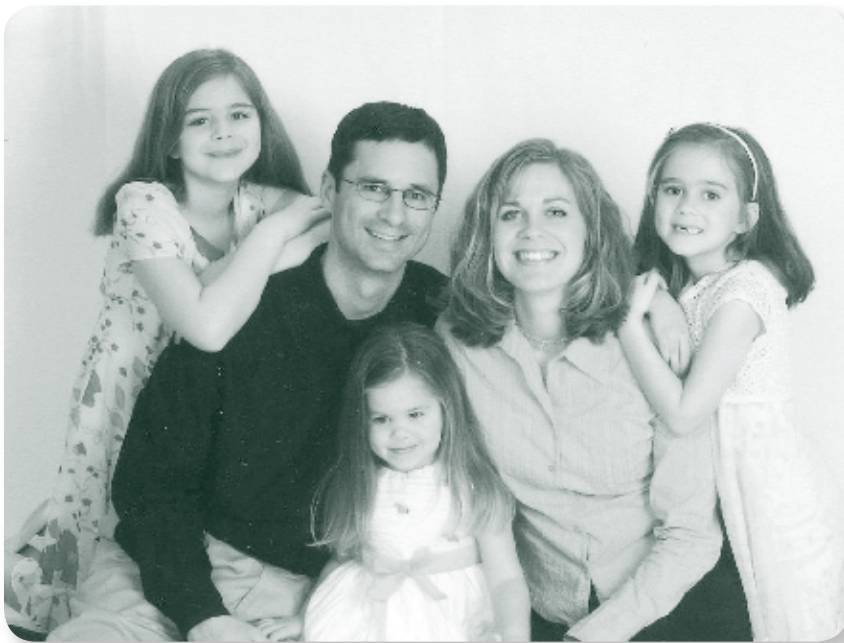
story probably dismays you. This picture-perfect family appears not to have been photo ready at all. While part of us is saddened by this and repulsed by Frank's freely sharing intimate details of his parents' failings, another part of us is not surprised. It is another proof that Romans 3:10 is really true: All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. No family (no person) is perfect, no matter how they may appear. We are not alone in our sometimes disheveled family photo shoot.

Our lack of photo-readiness has, at times, been a sore spot for us. Like most young married couples, we had high expectations for ourselves as marriage partners and parents. When the realities of life hit, from health issues, to financial pressures, to the inexorable 24/7 care of small children, we began to fail our high expectations. We had our first deep taste of our brokenness and inability to "get it right." As is the case in many Christian circles, our struggles were probably not noticed by others. And in many ways, we found it hard to be completely honest about what we were experiencing, partly because of the unspoken pressure to do life right.

As a result of wrestling with our own brokenness and discovering Christ's sufficiency for it, we have concluded that there are two main truths we want our children to grasp, and to grasp deeply:

The first is **who they are as humans**. They are not righteous. They are broken beyond repair. They cannot fully, no matter how hard they try on their own, live a holy life. They cannot fix themselves. They are selfish beyond their worst imaginations. They are desperately in need of a redeemer.

That list is sobering. Yet all of those ideas are biblical. If we weren't all those things, Jesus did not need to die. His very need to sacrifice himself is proof that our efforts aren't enough. And that is precisely why we want them to know who they are. Instead of encouraging our



Tim and Lynette Schrader, with their daughters Modalyn (upper left), Malia (right), and Alayna (center).

children to manage their sin, we want them to meet Jesus at the cross and be transformed from the inside out by the Holy Spirit.

When we failed to live up to our expectations as parents and spouses, we discovered that we had been depending on our own efforts and sheer willpower to do life well. Although it was deeply unsettling, we are grateful that God allowed us to experience brokenness, because suddenly the cross became extremely precious. And we became hungry for Jesus in ways we never had before.

Thus, we discovered a truth we want our children to embrace deeply: The only thing that inspires worship is when we know who we are, sinners in need of a Redeemer. This is where humility begins. This is what keeps us at the cross. This is what frees us from our attempts to do the impossible: fix ourselves. This is where dependence on Jesus for walking in holiness begins. Anything other than this is not true faith. We want to avoid passing on to them the treacherous pit of self-trust, trust in their abilities to manage their sin well enough to “succeed” in Christian circles.

The second, and equally important, reality we want to pass on is: **who Jesus says they are.** Although everything about the above reality of who they are is true, the glorious, magnificent truth is that it is *only half the story!!* The rest of the story is that they are children of a living, breathing, awesome God who loves them enough to die for them. They are the apples of His eye. They are chosen. They are royal priestesses. They have been set free from the bondage of sin and death! They will never be abandoned. They will never be alone, no matter how they feel. They are dearly loved. They are new creations. They have been given a spirit of power. They have an inheritance that will never fade. They’ve been bought with a price.

What a list! And what we began to recognize is that we didn’t always believe the list ourselves. This was made clear to us when we had the enormous privilege of going through some intense spiritual counseling that opened our eyes in new ways to what it means for us to be children of God. We already knew our brokenness to some extent. But we needed to see a fresh vision of who Jesus



The Schrader girls two years ago, having a good laugh: (left to right) Alayna, Madalyn, and Malia.

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says we are. We have experienced tremendous freedom as we have claimed that what God says about us is true. That new vision and freedom has dramatically changed how we parent.

For example, I (Lynette) have always struggled with fear. As a child, I was terrified of tornados and thunderstorms. As an adult, my fears have been for what the future might hold: cancer, car accidents, widowhood.... I now know that as a child of God, I do not have to accept fear as a part of my life, because *God has not given me a spirit of fear, but of power.* As I walk in that truth, and recognize and reject the enemy’s spirit of fear, my fears have decreased dramatically.

This freedom in our personal lives has spilled over into our parenting. One of our daughters also battles fear. Now when she is afraid, rather than appealing to her reason (you don’t have to be afraid of spiders in your bed!), we appeal to her spiritual mind. She now knows that a spirit of fear is from the enemy and how to combat it. One morning

several months ago, Lynette had a conversation with her that went something like this:

6-year-old daughter: I was awake in the night and it was dark and I was so afraid that something would grab me from under my bed.

Lynette: What did you do about it?  
 Daughter: Well, I told the spirit of fear to go away in the name of Jesus!  
 Lynette: And what happened?  
 Daughter: It went away! I wasn't afraid anymore and I went back to sleep.

This reality of who we are in Christ also changes how we react to painful situations in our daughters' lives. One daughter came to us recently, crying. "She [her sister] said I'm stupid!"

In the past, we would have said something like, "That's not true. You aren't stupid. We'll go talk to your sister."

Now we say something like, "Well, is that true? What does Jesus say about who you are?"

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Once that is established, we discuss the issue with the other sister.

We still have many years of parenting ahead of us, and many days we fail. Our

kids might not turn out the way we want them to. We might not manage to pass on the torch the way we would like to. Our family picture still gets a bit disheveled at times. But we are resting in the truth that we are held in God's able hands. So fixing our eyes on him, our family is walking together through life with these two realities before us: we need Him desperately and He is enough. **BB**

*Tim and Lynette celebrated their 15th anniversary in late August. They have three daughters: Madalyn, 9, Malia, 7, and Alayna, 4, and are expecting their 4th daughter in early November.*

# Uncommon \$ense

## The Journey is the Destination

A few weeks ago, while on an outing with my family, I noticed a fellow wearing a t-shirt with the slogan "The journey is the destination." I remember thinking briefly about the meaning of this statement; that we often get so fixated on the destination that we miss the joy that is found in the journey itself. In terms of how we live our lives, the slogan points out that sometimes we can be so goal oriented that we fail to take in the simple pleasures that line our path, or to use another metaphor, we neglect to "stop and smell the roses." This reminder is good advice, especially for those of us caught up in the fast-paced production-oriented American way of life. Play with your children or grandchildren a bit more. Take in a sunset now and then. Spend a little extra time in the garden. Write a letter or e-mail to an old friend. Go through that box of pictures and reminisce.



Dan Ziegler

As I pondered that t-shirt slogan further, I realized that it could also represent an even deeper, theological meaning (Who, I ask you, but a Bible college president would contemplate the theological meaning of a t-shirt slogan?). As Christians in the Mennonite stream of faith, we hold to a two-kingdom understanding of theology. That means that as redeemed followers of Jesus, we understand we are now citizens of God's eternal Kingdom; a kingdom which Jesus, John the Baptist and the Apostles declared was "at hand." Because of Christ's atonement, we no longer belong to the empire of this world, but have pledged our allegiance to King Jesus and his monarchy. We are in the world, but not of it. In a very real sense, we have entered into eternity already, here on earth!

Not all faith traditions own this idea. Some place the coming of the Kingdom as an entirely future event. To them, earth is simply a sinking ship, and their primary task is to fill the lifeboats and wait for rescue. Thus, the final destination becomes the driving force in their spiritual lives and their ultimate motivation. The danger here, of course, is that those espousing this perspective can miss the significance of the faith journey itself. You have heard it said of a person "he is so heavenly minded, he's no earthly good."

As Anabaptists, we understand that while His Kingdom will some day be fully established in Heaven, even now it is breaking in to this dark world via the hearts and lives of those who follow him and live according to His teachings. The power of this way of love for God, neighbor, and enemy cannot be underestimated. The day we commit our lives to Jesus the journey begins, and at the very same moment we have entered into the Kingdom; thus for us, "the journey IS the destination." Eternity is now! May you live this journey abundantly. **BB**