

### **To Build a Fire: A Series in Three Parts on the Discipline of Prayer (3)**

In the past two months we have seen that to build a holy fire of prayer we ought to have two things in place: a quiet place and a quiet hour. But, what about those times that a Christian finds himself without either? Whether he be away on military service or have a particularly long and exhausting week of work, what is the Christian to do when these prevent him from a quiet place and hour? Well, in this month's article I want to share with you the most basic necessity for prayer anywhere at any time under any circumstance. It is the cultivating of a quiet heart.

I can still remember the first time I was introduced to a Bose surround sound system. We were in Virginia for a choral competition with the RHH Concert Choir. And, there in a local shopping center was a Bose outlet, complete with theatre seating and every conceivable piece of audio equipment Bose could offer. We were mesmerized. It had been a very busy and a very noisy trip, but the moment we entered that room, it was all forgotten. It didn't matter what else was going on in the building, outside, or anywhere else for that matter because it was calm, focused sound. In that room we could tune out the hurried hustle all around us and simply focus on what was played for us. As we passed the exit signs above the doorway, the noise hit us like the bright noonday sun. But, the calm of that moment lingered the rest of the afternoon, even through all its noisy bustling.

This is what it is like to have a quiet heart. When we make the preparations of a quiet place and a quiet hour to meet with our Triune God, that moment will carry us through the noise of life until we are able to return again to His presence. A good friend has always said, "prior proper planning prevents pitiful poor performance". If we want to weather the storms of hectic, unpredictable weeks, then we need to make a predictable practice of prayer at all other times. And, it will be the strength of the Father communicated to us through His Only Son, Jesus, by the power of His Holy Spirit that will carry us through all those unplanned days of hard work and long, noisy hours. .

The author of Psalm 131 must have known this moment well. He says, "My heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me. O Israel, hope in the LORD from this time forth and forevermore". Apparently, this dear saint was a person of consistent, devoted prayer to God. It is interesting that the divine calmness of this psalm appears immediately after a psalm that is one of deep anguish and pain. In Psalm 130 we read of a person who is in deep distress and is crying out to God "out of the depths". So, it is a legitimate question to ask how one gets from the depths of sorrow to the heights of peace in Psalm 131. The key is in 130:5-6 where the Psalmist says, "I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning". In the discipline of 'waiting' patiently and consistently before the Lord, do we in time find ourselves blessed with a quiet heart. But, let's not overpromise here.

Preparing our hearts for prayer really is the hardest part of praying. It is only through a lifetime of partaking of the means of grace (i.e. sitting at the Lord's table, worshipping Him, hearing His word preached, and praying) and repenting of our sins that we in time gain a quiet heart. Even the holiest of God's people have struggled deeply with a quiet heart. John Bunyan (author of Pilgrim's Progress) once spoke of the many "byways and back-lanes the heart finds to slip away from the presence of God". Endeavor for that resolute calmness of spirit that resists sin and glorifies God, knowing that we will only attain it in its fullness when we reach those celestial shores.

Blessings in Christ,

Pastor Tom