

To Build a Fire: A Series in Three Parts on the Discipline of Prayer (2)

A good idea without planning will get you as far as disappointment and, rarely, success. For those 'through-hikers' of the Appalachian Trail, the idea of it is great, but there are many variables that must be considered. In order to hike the over 2,181 miles from Georgia to Maine it will take some planning and many sacrifices. As some of these hikers will tell you prior proper planning and avoiding distractions are key to successfully hiking the A.T. There are many profitable things that a hiker can do when they reach local cities. They may call home, developing new relationships, enjoying the local eateries, and take advantage of the modern facilities. But, if a hiker is not careful these can become detrimental distractions that keep them from meeting their goals'. They must plan how much to spend, stick to a reasonable schedule, and not worry themselves over family concerns. A hike like this is often uncomfortable with seasons of rain and cold that will chill you to the bone. And, the only thing to warm you up will be a single thought the thrill of success.

Prayer, I hope you will agree, is a good idea. I once heard someone say that our work frowns upon us while we're at it, but forever smiles at us when it's over. When we remember this, it will help us as we pray. The process and the planning often discourage our best efforts. But, in the discipline of the thing, we are molded and shaped into the image of the Son. I'm sure you have experienced those times that prayer feels like the most cumbersome and burdensome thing in the whole wide world. But, if you stick it out, upon leaving His presence, you are renewed, convicted, and rejoicing. That's prayer. A long, difficult journey with the potential for a whole host of practical and profitable distractions. But, you must stay the course, and plan the way. To have a taste of a delicious portion, you've first got to make the preparations, gather the ingredients, and then, of course, cook it! In order for us to taste and see that the Lord is good, He requires us to make the habitual preparations of a quiet place *and a quiet hour*.

This was the practice of the saints of old, the good Lord Himself, and the pious Christians of our own day. In the opening lines of Psalm 62 we read of one-bygone saint who understood the importance of this quiet hour: "For God alone my soul waits in silence, from him comes my salvation, he only is my rock and my salvation; my fortress. I will not be greatly shaken". David McIntyre in his book, *The Hidden Life of Prayer*, recounts the practice of Hudson Taylor in his overwhelming direction of the China Inland Mission. He was so pressed during the day that he had no time to pray, "accordingly, he made it his rule to rise each night at two o'clock, watch with God till four, then lie down to sleep until the morning". This was certainly at great cost to Hudson Taylor. How profitable sleep is to our tired bodies, but even this was not to be kept by Brother Taylor!

There is a lesser known figure in the background of the Billy Graham crusades that may very well have been the crucial element to Billy's success. Before every crusade, they would send in Willis Haymaker. His job was to organize global prayer support. One of his letters to current and previous crusade prayer chairmen read like this: "If we did not believe that individuals across America and around the world would be praying for us, we would not dare attempt this crusade...we are asking you, as our crusade prayer chairman, to reactivate your cottage prayer groups and join with others in united prayer for revival in New York."¹ The response was a success. Across the world in the U.S., Egypt, Pakistan, China and elsewhere Christians set aside a *quiet hour* to pray for the success of Billy's New York Crusade. Have you ever wondered why Billy Graham was so successful? There are many variables, but I cannot deny what seems to me to be the finest and greatest of them all. The organized, habitual practice of prayer. It is because he followed in the paths of those great stalwarts of the faith who "began to call upon the name of the LORD" (Gen 4:26).

Find a quiet place and make it a quiet hour that you may warm up and excite true religion in your hearts. In a frigid world of cold, dead distractions the only way to revival will be *to build a fire*.

Blessings,

Pastor Tom

¹ <http://www.ccel.us/earthen.ch10.html>