

## To Build a Fire: A Series in Three Parts on the Discipline of Prayer (1)

For anyone who enjoys camping, there is one basic discipline that you must learn to master. No matter how wonderful your camping gear or your many other survival skills, you must master the ancient art of *fire*. It is the crucial element that may make the difference between life and death in the most extreme of conditions. Just this past week, we heard of those who barely escaped near certain death on Mt. Everest. With subzero temperatures, low oxygen, and winds too extreme to keep a fire ablaze, those stranded on Everest had no options. Rescue was their only option.

Now, as Christians, we ought to not find ourselves in such a situation. Of course, having been dead in our sins, we were in need of rescue from its clutches. And, by faith in Christ we *have been* rescued. But, we are in need of daily supply by the power of his Spirit. That is why we must keep the fires of prayer always burning. As Paul teaches us, "pray continually" (1 Thess 5:17). We must be regularly before the throne of grace seeking out the strength for another day. The world in which we live is too dead and too cold to allow the flames of prayer to peter out. So, we ought to be ready to take any help we can find in this all-important work.

That is why I want to point you this month to David McIntyre's little book, *The Hidden Life of Prayer*. There he gives three helps in the building up of the fires of prayer in the life of the believer. Our focus for this month will be what he calls *the quiet place*. McIntyre advises us that we ought to have some place of quiet that we can offer up prayers to our Father in heaven. Now, of course, your first reaction may be like most, that there really is no place that is quiet. Between the busyness of early mornings, getting children cleaned up and ready for school, cooking meals, running off to work, constant traffic, day-long stress, and equally unsettled evenings of personal responsibilities, *who in the world could find a quiet place?* Certainly, our enduring savior experienced the very same problem. When he could find no quiet place, he took to the extremes and mounted up to the 'rough uplands' to lift up prayers in the frigid mountain air (Luke 6:12). *The reality is that any place can become a place of prayer.* One poor mother, unable to free herself from constant responsibility, would pray at the kitchen table with her apron over her head, while bustling children scurried about the room. One missionary said, he was never in want of a quiet place as he could simply pull down the brim of his hat. But, no matter where we find it, we must make for ourselves a quiet place. It is the first piece of equipment to keep our prayers daily burning.

When David had found himself under great threat from his son Absalom, he fled to the wilderness. In the same manner ought we to flee from the constant strain of life to some secluded place, where we can find refuge. This may involve cutting ourselves off from the world for a time. Leave the phone behind, turn off the computer screen, and dial back the radio. There is nothing more unsettling than receiving a phone call mid-prayer. You must make preparations. That is why Jesus had to essentially disappear. He had to get away from the distractions and constant concerns of his own day and get himself caught up in the concerns of the kingdom to come.

In Jack London's novel, *White Fang*, he recounts the story of two men traveling the 'Northland Wild' while fighting off nightly attacks of fierce wolves. When the wolves pressed in on them, they built a fire. All night, they stoked the fire all about them to shield themselves from the fierce enemies. Often they hurled bright, burning cinders when they came too close. Though the fire had nearly gone out, by daybreak at least one of the men would remain standing on their feet. And, it was only because they kept the fire burning.

There is a lesson to remember here. Find a quiet place, no matter what it takes. For in the harsh elements of this fallen world there is but one means of survival: *to build afire*.