

Building His Fire

by Dr. Paul D. Norcross

Note this article is taken from Dining at the Master's Table: Learning to Hear the Voice of the Lord, by Paul D. Norcross, 1997:

Mutsuko Yoneda couldn't ignore the voice of the Lord any longer. For three months He had been urging her to flee the city and go to the hills. Within her spirit, the Lord's insistence was so loud that she knew she must not delay. Mutsuko packed up her children, and explained to her sister-in-law employer what the Lord had said. That night she found lodging far away in the mountains. The next morning, the city of Hiroshima was no more. (One Shall Chase a Thousand, Mabel Francis and Gerald B. Smith)

Mutsuko had learned to trust the voice of the Lord. She had built her relationship with Him such that she recognized His voice, and elected to obey it. There were other Christians in Hiroshima. The Lord is no respecter of persons (Rom 2:11, Eph 6:9). He certainly tried to get through to each one of His children. Some of them did not hear.

Proverbs 3:5

Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

The word "trust" means to confide in. When we confide in the Lord, we are sharing our heart with Him. For the Lord to direct our paths, we must be willing to listen. Many Christians bring their troubles to the Lord, and their overwhelming preoccupation with them drowns out the Lord's direction, advice, teaching, and counsel.

Preoccupation with self instead of preoccupation with praise and worship produces anemic results. A self-burdened heart prays the problem. But a praise-burdened heart prays solutions and gets results. This is because a heart dwelling on problems is a heart of pride. The problems are held as being bigger than God's ability to solve them. On the other hand, a heart of praise is a heart of humility. God resists pride. His grace goes to the humble (I Peter 5:5 and 6). The ones who come to Him according to His standard (praise and thanksgiving), not their own standard (focus on self, unthankfulness) are the ones who are given more grace. Please don't

misunderstand – God hears the cries of His people! It's just that His voice and loving fellowship are able to penetrate hearts prepared with praise.

So how can a Christian begin to build his or her relationship with the Lord such that they learn how He works within their spirit? Paul did it by spending his first three years after conversion "alone" with the Lord in Arabia. Jesus Christ learned how our Father worked within Him during his 40 days in the wilderness. Let the Lord teach you how to draw close to Him in your own life.

The best way I know to begin to draw close to Him is to spend time daily praising and worshipping the Father. When you faithfully come to Him, you will be astonished at the deepening of your fellowship with Jesus, and the amount of direction He'll provide.

Psalms 100:4

Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name.

Entering His gates and His courts refers to the innermost sanctum of the temple, where God lived in the Old Testament. One time a year, the high priest entered the holy of holies to commune with God. If the priest entered with sin and uncleanness, he would not survive the entrance. He would be killed. Today, as a result of our confession of Jesus as Lord (our Boss!) our bodies are his habitation (Eph 2:22) and we can have an audience with Him at anytime. But we will not often enter a close fellowship with Him in our prayer closet if it is not preceded by thanksgiving, praise, and repentance for our sins.

Our offering today is the praise of our lips (Heb 13:15). It is praise out of a thankful heart which opens the access to the Lord's fellowship. He will speak volumes in the quiet, worshipful stillness of our spirit. Matthew 7:18-25 contains sobering truths for Christians who have not learned to hear the voice of Jesus our Lord, and of our heavenly Father.

Matthew 7:21-25

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

*Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:
And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.*

How are we going to hear His sayings if we are not spending time close to His lips? How are we going to know him (literally to know by experience) so that He will not be able to say "I never knew you" -- i.e. I never had an active, ongoing relationship with you -- if we are not regularly spending time dining at the Master's table?

Revelation 3:20

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup (fellowship) with him, and he with me.

Perhaps you have known these principles and have personally seen the benefits of faithfully applying them in the past, but somehow the fire has died down. The routines and hectic schedules you face all work against spending time alone with the Lord. Of course they do! Satan tries to see to it. So what can you do about it?

You can build a fire with the Lord's help.

In cold weather the first thing I often do when I wake up is to go down to the basement and re-build the woodstove fire. The embers have burned down overnight, and new wood needs to be added. But even before the new wood goes on, sometimes I need to begin by shoveling out the old ashes, and rebuild with dry kindling. I might need to blow on it to flare up the embers and ignite the tinder. In other words, I have to work with it to make flames appear. The few glowing coals that remain don't produce much heat.

We have to work with the Lord each day to keep our fire going. Some of us go a whole day with a cold stove before finally figuring out the reason why they feel distant from the Lord. Some will add sweaters or phone calls to spiritual confidants. They'll stomp their feet and remark that they're spiritual temperature is falling. They'll briskly try to rub the spiritual cold from their arms by reading countless testimonials, and try to warm themselves at someone else's fire by attending endless seminars. They'll see frosty breath and wonder where the Lord's fire went -- all because they forgot to build their own hearth fire each morning with Him.

To make flames appear, we need to use good wood, seasoned with a humble confession of sin (I John 1:9), and placed over the kindling of praise and worship. We need to blow on the flames -- perhaps gently, or maybe fervently -- according

to the leading of the Lord, and we need to refresh ourselves in the warmth of His flame as the fire takes off. Curiously with my woodstove, I have to do this every morning if I expect to be warm for the day. Jesus did it. Shouldn't we?

Mark 1:35

And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.

God is not going to knock you over the head to tell you things He reserves for the quiet warmth of your hearthfire. He didn't yell at Moses or Abraham or Samuel. Instead he attracted Moses' attention with the burning bush. Moses took his shoes off and paid heed. Abraham could have remained in Haran in the comfort of the family business, and Samuel could have rolled over and gone back to sleep each time he heard the voice of the Lord. Ananias could have continued eating his falafel burger and ignored the Lord's message to go minister to the future apostle Paul. Mutsuko Yoneda didn't just happen to wake up one morning to hear the Lord talking to her. All these people had built an ongoing relationship with the Lord, making Him their best friend. In so doing, they had learned to trust His voice. Such trust is not built by occasional visits. Trust comes from a relationship built over frequent heart-to-heart sharings. Why not frequent Jesus' fireside?

John 10:27

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:

The word for "know" here in John 10:27 is the same word as in Matthew 7:23. It means to know by experience, i.e. to have a relationship. Those who don't know the sound of the Chief Shepard's voice do not have a relationship with Him that is sufficiently developed. A common result is a low intensity fire – embers that are lukewarm. Sheep must hear the voice of the shepherd.

We are all tempted with lifestyles that are too busy; ones that crowd the Master's time alone with us. We long for the warmth of His counsel by the hearth fire of His heart. We want to eat a full meal at His table, but instead if we sit down at all, it is only to snack.

God won't build this fire for you – that's your job each morning. But what joy it is to spend time alone with Him in His presence as He helps you take your little embers, and fans them into a daily spiritual bonfire. The words He shares at His fireplace will include the words of revelation you need to help build His church (Matthew 16:13-19) and prevent the gates of hell from prevailing against it. This is how we get our

revelation manna for each day. This is how we are to grow up into Him – at His fireside, dining at His table.

May God continue to reveal His Son in you each day as you approach Him in praise and worship, learning the certainty of His voice in your spirit.

Yours in Christ,

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