

Maintaining Your Spiritual Fire

Session #3 – Fresh Air for the Fire

Pastor Randy Hurst
First Assembly of God, Fort Myers
June 16, 2021

I put fresh wood in my fireplace, and the fire started to blaze. In no time the family room filled with smoke. Remember, it was my first fireplace. No one had ever told me about the flue. I ran into the kitchen, filled a bucket with water and ran back to put the fire out. But by that time the flames were already dying down.

The flue's purpose is not only to let the smoke out, but also to let the air in. I learned a second lesson. To maintain a fire, there has to be a draft. In addition to fresh wood, you need a supply of fresh air.

The fresh air we need for our spiritual fire is the presence of the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament the Hebrew word for "spirit" (*ruach*) means "breath" or "wind." In the New Testament the word for spirit (*pneuma*) also means "breath" or "wind."

As we can't live without food, we can't live without air. In fact, we'll die more quickly from suffocation than from starvation. As physical breath gives life to the body, the Holy Spirit brings life to us spiritually.

Jesus taught Nicodemus that to enter the kingdom of God we must be born of water and the Spirit.¹ The Spirit enters the believer at salvation and lives within us. But from then on, we need a constant inflow of the Spirit's life and power. When Paul exhorted the Ephesian Christians to be filled with the Spirit,² the verb tense used means to "*keep on being filled.*" We must keep living in the Spirit, dependent on His life, power and a continual *inpouring* of the Spirit.

As a constant fresh supply of God's Word fuels our spiritual fire, a continual flow of the Spirit fuels our prayer life. Spiritual fervor requires being "*devoted to prayer.*" We will not see God's purposes accomplished through us apart from prayer.

An often-quoted Scripture is, "Ye have not, because ye ask not."³ It is quoted often because it is true. Another familiar text is Paul's admonition to the Philippians: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."⁴ Notice that Paul's exhortation encompasses everything we do. We are not to be anxious about *anything*. We are to pray about *everything*! Peace comes when prayer pervades our lives.

The fullness and presence of the Spirit makes an extraordinary difference in a person's spiritual passion. A pastor, whom I'll call Pastor Paul, spent four prison terms in a restricted-access country for preaching the gospel. Each time he completed a prison sentence and was released, he immediately began preaching again, and was arrested and put back in prison. In each of his imprisonments he led significant numbers of his fellow prisoners to the Lord. During his fourth imprisonment he led 42 other prisoners and two of his prison guards to Christ.

One of those 42 prisoners was a drug dealer I'll call Wong. He received Christ shortly after being imprisoned with Pastor Paul, and before long he was filled with the Spirit. Soon after that, he came to Pastor Paul telling him that the Lord had called him to be an evangelist.

"That's wonderful!" said Pastor Paul. "When you and I are released from prison you must

come to my city and attend Bible school.” At that time the only Bible school in the country was essentially “underground.” It moved from house to house, meeting in a different location each day. That way the authorities could not arrest the students for holding a Christian meeting.

A few months later Pastor Paul was released from prison, and four months after that Wong was released. True to his word, Wong showed up at Pastor Paul’s house ready to go to Bible school. Since the school semester was ending in two weeks, Wong was allowed to sit in on classes for no credit.

When the term finished, the school had a one-month holiday break. Pastor Paul told Wong that one of the entrance requirements for each prospective Bible school student was to lead five people to Christ. He encouraged Wong to spend his vacation witnessing to others.

During a past revolution, Wong’s hometown became known as the place where the tide of the war turned and the communists came to power. To honor their atheistic ideology and celebrate taking the city, the communists had torn down all religious buildings—Buddhist temples, Hindu temples, Islamic mosques and Christian churches. In this godless, atheistic city, Wong went, determined to lead five people to Christ so he could attend Bible school.

Three weeks later, Wong called Pastor Paul on the phone and asked if he would come and baptize the new believers he had led to Christ.

“Do you have five?” asked Pastor Paul.

“No,” Wong replied.

“I will not come,” Pastor Paul said. “Until you have five I will not make the 200-mile journey to your city.”

“Pastor Paul,” Wong interrupted, “I have *more* than five.”

“Then I will come,” Pastor Paul said.

Two days later Pastor Paul made the journey to Wong’s hometown and baptized not five, but 753 people!

Wong had not yet taken an evangelism course. Full of the Holy Spirit and “on fire for God,” he simply shared the gospel story.

In many countries of the world, especially where Christians are poor and persecuted, the Spirit’s empowerment motivates believers to do incredible works for the Kingdom. As we depend on God’s supernatural power, we will see incredible church growth around the world. Miracles happen because of *prayer*.

Pentecostals know that God’s purposes are not accomplished merely by human power or ability, but by His Spirit.⁵ We can obey the Word and do our best to live a disciplined life, but if God does not continually act in and through us we will fail. When we are devoted to prayer and depend on the Holy Spirit, His power is evident.

Recently I was privileged to introduce Barnabas Mtokambali to speak at a chapel service at Central Bible College in Springfield, Missouri. Brother Barnabas is the general superintendent of the Tanzania Assemblies of God. My father went to serve as a missionary to Tanzania in 1953.

Brother Barnabas preached on prayer. The Tanzania Assemblies of God has an aggressive church planting program to plant 7,200 churches in the next 10 years. Brother Barnabas explained that the reason believers expect to fulfill their goal is because everything they do is based on prayer and dependence on God’s Spirit to move. He made this statement: “I have noticed your very large library, and I’m sure you have many books on prayer in your bookstore. I know you have many videos and other resources on prayer. But, I need to tell you that all of those books and videos and resources are worthless—unless you *pray!*”

About 10 years ago I interviewed Brother Jean Pawentaoré Ouédraogo, general superintendent of the Burkina Faso Assemblies of God. I have never forgotten this powerful comment he made: “We don’t have much money, but we have something more valuable. We have time. We have time to pray—and we see miracles!”

His words take on even greater meaning in light of a story a missionary friend told me. She said that the U.S. government gave a communications satellite dish to the country where she served. The dish, which enabled its people to have international telephone service, was placed under the jurisdiction of the government postal service. The satellite dish had an intricate series of hydraulic pistons and electric motors, and every few seconds it made minute adjustments to track the satellite and keep in contact.

One day the missionary picked up the phone to call the United States, but nothing happened. She tried again and again before calling the postal service to find out what the problem was. An employee explained that the lines were down.

“Wait a minute,” she said after a moment’s thought. “This is a satellite dish. There are no lines.”

Finally she contacted a friend who worked in the postal service and discovered what really happened. A supervisor watched the satellite dish and decided that it would wear out with its constant movements. He figured the United States wouldn’t give the country another dish if it wore out, so he came up with an idea. Since people don’t usually call between 10 p.m. and 8 a.m., he reasoned, he could disconnect the satellite dish, let it rest all night and then reconnect it in the morning. Instead of making adjustments every second, it would only have to make one big adjustment.

The next morning he reconnected the power to the satellite dish, which frantically scanned the sky to find the satellite beam. In the process, the motors burned out. The satellite dish wasn’t designed for intermittent, occasional contact. It was designed for constant contact.

We were not created to listen to God’s voice only in times of need and crisis. His plan is that we have an ongoing relationship with Him.

Our lives are filled with demands on our time. Even with all the time-saving devices we have, finding time for what matters most is difficult. As I mentioned earlier, Paul wrote to the Ephesians to *keep* being filled with the Spirit. Just before that he said, “Be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, *making the most of your time*, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”⁶ The King James Version says “*redeem the time.*” The Greek expression literally means to “buy time out of the marketplace.”

Maintaining our spiritual fire requires devoting time to prayer. We will devote time for whatever and whomever we love. If we love our Lord, we will give Him time in prayer. Our spiritual fire depends on that relationship. This verse of the hymn “I Am Thine, O Lord” expresses it clearly:

“Oh, the pure delight of a single hour
That before thy throne I spend,
When I kneel in prayer, and with thee, my God,
I commune as friend with friend!”

¹ John 3:5

² Ephesians 5:18

³ James 4:2, KJV

⁴ Philippians 4:6-7, NIV

⁵ Zechariah 4:6

⁶ Ephesians 5:15-17