

Hope: The Ultimate Survival Preparation

People putting survival plans together tend to start in the wrong place. They commonly begin with the physical items, basic needs; food, water, shelter, medical, etc. These are obviously important, we can only survive a few seconds without air; days without water, weeks without food. Then there are the situations when we face some emanate and dangerous threat. This might be a physical confrontation with an attacker, fire, an accident, extreme cold, flooding, or severe weather. Being prepared for every situation is good of course, however, total physical readiness is obviously impractical. No amount of planning, packing, practicing, honing skills and gathering resources is going to guarantee survival in every situation. The fact is that physical preparations are prone to the possibility of failure.

In actuality the core of a battle is not physical at all; the most important preparations for it don't fit in a duffle bag, or a cellar pantry. They aren't caches of gold buried in the yard, or government agencies tasked with responding to your plight. They are not even people, not doctors, financial advisors, parents or friends. In fact, at the heart of every challenge we will face is the hope within us. Hope is a life flame that lights our way, gives us energy, and moves us on. When hope exists we experience its strength, endurance, patience, calmness, and even contentment. The vacuum from its absence draws; fear, despair, anxiety, and the debilitating effects of irrationality. It is only when we can see by its light that we are able to boldly engage life's challenges. Despair and fear can paralyze even the best prepared person. For that reason alone no amount of physical preparation is of any use if it can't be employed.

Hope and faith are common to everyone. Hope is like a desire for something: relief perhaps, happiness certainly. It is usually for some improvement in your situation. Faith can be seen as the vehicle of choice to accomplish that desire. A person hopes for relief for instance. They have faith in a number of things to bring that relief. Most of these things could be classified as minor in importance if you wanted to rate them. A person lost might have a minor faith that searchers would find him, or that he could find the way on his own. I classify these as "minor" not because they don't necessarily work but because if they fail there remains a faith in something greater to turn to. It is this greater faith that is so often overlooked. How many people take time to ask themselves, "when all the chips are down - what is the last thing I need to have faith in?" If you were stripped of all but one resource what would it be? That is your "major faith."

One tragic example of this occurred in the Rocky Mountains recently. An ill prepared hiker was caught in the high country during a heavy winter storm. Just as it could be said of about anyone, a part of his preparedness plan was a hope and faith. He may not have taken time to think about it but it is something we all have innately to one degree or another. His primary hope was simply that he wouldn't get lost, and the backup plan or faith was in a day-pack with meager provisions. His primary hope was dashed as he came to grips with the fact that he was indeed lost and in a life threatening situation. The tragic sequence that ensued was predictable, and not all too uncommon. With the faith he had placed in himself shaken severely he began doubting all of his abilities.

Rational thought and logic would have counseled him to calmly assess his predicament. He had a thermos with hot chocolate on him, a ground cloth, and a few high carbohydrate candy bars. He was in a remote area but near a number of small streams. Streams always lead in one direction, down to rivers, and eventually to people. He was in fact only a few miles upstream from a lodge. The snow was about two feet deep but passable, and he was in moderately good physical condition - probably adequate shape for the challenge. His biggest foe that day was a failed hope. The faith he had placed in himself was critically shaken. The confidence he had lost should have been his first line of defense.

In this type of emergency fear and panic are quick to appear. Without a strong faith to steel him, to provide courage and direction, he was robbed of his logical, analytical abilities. Situational awareness comes from the calm conscious assessment of a person and their surroundings. Fear and uncertainty block this process. We have certain natural behavioral urges usually invoked by our emotions, or a perceived threat, we know them best as our 'fight' or 'flight' responses. These hormone and adrenaline fueled reactions are often beneficial in the short term. They enable us to focus our physical resources to accomplish incredible feats. They can empower muscles with surprising abilities for a short duration. In response to a perceived threat they instantly increase heart rate and blood pressure. These responses can be quite beneficial, running away from harm can be a wise strategy at times, running really fast might be even better.

It's when these natural urges conflict with logic and rational thought that the problem gets worse - not better. Have you ever seen a horse panic when it's entangled in something? Its overwhelming panic reaction is of flight; it has no ability to reason the situation out. Pulling against the snare for instance is the only response it can conceive, although it is clearly doing more damage than good. In the case of our lost hiker, yielding to his natural urges drove him to run. He ran aimlessly until his energy was expended, then walked as far as he could with what was left. The longer he went without finding relief the more his hope was diminished and the stronger the panic urges became. Most people in this predicament tend to run uphill as well. Logically thinking, running uphill in the mountains means less chance of finding people, colder, more rugged, thinner air, and basically less chance of survival.

To make a bad situation worse, through the panic he determined his pack was simply hindering progress. He made the unimaginable choice to discard it along the way. His heavy winter coat was soon to follow. It was moist from perspiration. In fearful desperation, feeling it was claustrophobic and restrictive, he threw it off too. As the inevitable hypothermia took more and more control of his mind he became overwhelmed with fear. He fled from shadows, noises, and in the end, even rescuers. His body was eventually found huddled under a bush where he had hidden a short distance from snowmobiles searching the area for him. It was Game Over: wilderness - one, hope - zero.

The first items, absolutely critical to your emergency resource arsenal are a firmly defined faith and hope. I recommend the issue be settled before a need arises, but as long as you're still breathing it's not too late. Considering that there is a good chance this faith will be tested it should be as unshakeable as possible. You will settle on one with

a conscious decision. This should pass the test of logic, it will have to sustain the challenges you bring up in your own mind, as well as from others. It has to work, not simply in your imagination but it must be tangible enough to stand firm. My primary faith has been in place for thirty seven years now; I feel it is firmly in established. Many are in the process of developing it; others are nurturing a wounded and weak one or one that is yet to be tested. With a myriad of options to choose from; some have settled on "having a purpose in life," others: a spirit, object, or organization, possibly one of the hundreds of religions. Mine is in Jesus Christ.

Whatever fits your life and beliefs - choose carefully, it may someday mean the difference between life and death.

Bill Scott