

“If you are going to be all God has called you to be, not someone who looks back at all the missed opportunity and wasted potential then you have got to learn to encourage yourself.”

“A weapon which you don't have in your hand won't
kill a snake”

African Proverb

Chapter 7

“The will to win is not nearly as important as the will to prepare to win.”

Bobby Knight

Your First Aid Kit, What to do when a Snake Bites

Any person who frequents the outdoors, whether it be a rock climber, hiker, or camper knows that accidents of all sorts can and do happen. Even the most experienced outdoorsman can come across a situation that they haven't seen before or a danger that may prove to be beyond their ability to handle. When you are far removed from the comforts of civilization time can be of the essence and often time is the difference between death and life. For such instances it is absolutely essential you have at your disposal something that can mitigate the damage and potential for injuries to be even more serious.

Hazak

The Giant Killer and future king of Israel, David didn't always have it so good. In fact he spent a good portion of his life hiding from, outsmarting, and trying to outrun King Saul who was on a personal vendetta to eliminate David. It was during this time that David was inspired and wrote many of the Psalms recorded in the Old Testament. He used this time of desperation to reach out to the Lord for comfort, as his source of strength and protection. He had already been anointed King, many years before by the Prophet Samuel, and yet found himself living a nomadic life with every day a struggle for survival. Now, I've felt in my life like I was struggling to survive. When as a nineteen year old I fathered my first daughter and was going through the ups and downs of a tumultuous time in the relationship with my wife all while working full time and going to school full time. I experienced the questions that one asks of one-self when going through a prolonged separation from my wife and experiencing financial hardship in a place far from my family and the support system I had grown up with. But I still cannot fully imagine what must have been going through David's head and heart at this point in his life. Always on the run, always up against the wall, a spear or bow and arrow pointed directly at him, as he longed for the fulfillment of God's promise to him. It must have seemed like an eternity away. Needless to say David knew heartache. He knew betrayal.

As a warrior he also knew victory. Isn't it like the snake, though, to try to knock you off your high point? I think he does it for two reasons. First, he wants to get you thinking in the religious mode that says God wants to keep me down so He can keep me humble. It's sad but true for many believers. Because they do not know the character of the God we serve they think hard times are a punishment for their success in any area, to keep them from getting a big head. Secondly, I believe the enemy often strikes after a high point for us is because he wants to take our eyes off of what God is capable of doing in our lives and cause us to shrink back from where we are destined to go. To the place

where those who know their God go, the place of strength and great exploits. (Daniel 11:32)

Stop the Blame Game

So David knew victory, he was famous for the great victories he and his mighty men had pulled out. After one such victory it's recorded that David and his men came back to their homes only to see their entire village burned down and their wives and children taken away as prisoners. To make matters worse for David his men had now turned on him and were preparing to stone him.

(Why is it that for many of us when things go wrong in our lives the first person we look to blame is never the man in the mirror. It is shameful that members of the body of Christ are so quick to turn on their pastors, as if the men of God have control over the decisions and circumstances in our lives.)

Not a Genetic Condition

Over the last fourteen years I've noticed a disturbing trend in medicine. The diseases that are wreaking the most havoc on people are not the result of bad genetics but rather diseases of excess. Things like heart disease, liver disease, lung cancer, and Type II diabetes all can be prevented (or at least to a large extent controlled) by exercising better discipline in our lives. Using more restraint in the things we put in our mouth would go a long way in reducing the death toll related to these diseases. Perhaps even more disturbing, though, is what I hear coming out of people's mouth in relation to these and other conditions like alcoholism. For some reason, and this is especially true in the people I see who won't get better, the problem is never due to something that is *there* fault. Either it was their mother's fault because of the way she cooked while they were growing up, or their dad's fault because he was too busy working to get them more interested in sports. For others they blame their job for causing so much stress they need a few drinks to relax and they don't have the room in their schedule to exercise. With people who continually shift the responsibility for their condition to someone else I simply tell them they are welcome to continue to hold this view so long as they want to hold onto their problem.

Put Blame to Shame

David found himself in a predicament, even he had never experienced before. In the past when Saul was pursuing him he at least had the unfailing support of his mighty men. Now, even they were ready to take out their frustrations on God's anointed one. Rather than panic, what did David do? Did he cry out why me? Did he give up? No and No.

He did the only thing he knew how to do; he did what he had trained himself to do when hard times and impossible circumstances presented themselves. He hazaked himself!!

He what?

He Hazak (ed) himself. You heard right.

The motto of the boy scouts is to always be prepared. Well, in your first aid kit you need to always have a hefty supply of Hazak for the situations that catch you off guard. When the snake lunges out at you there is no guarantee your buddy or your pastor, or even your spouse is going to be around to pick you up. Who knows, maybe just like David you could find yourself all alone, with even a few judgmental eyes staring right at you, menacingly. Before you go to the nearest pharmacy looking for a big box of hazak let me stop you right there because this stuff ain't available in stores and you can't get it for three low payments of \$9.95.

Let's take a look back for a moment at David as he returned home from the battlefields.....

When David and his men came to Ziklag, they found it destroyed by fire and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive. So David and his men wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep (I Samuel 30: 3-4)

I don't know if you've ever been in a situation where you felt you couldn't even muster the strength to shed a tear. One thing I can tell you is, it is a condition I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy. When I was going through a period of separation from my wife I got to this point. It was a pain and a weakness that is almost impossible to put into words. The best way I can describe it is that it was beyond emptiness. I felt tired, beaten, limp like a blown up doll with all the air released so that only the sand at the base was anchored to the floor. I am sure what David felt, returning from battle to find his home burned and family gone would make my situation look serene by comparison.

David would have been justified to complain about his predicament, to ask "why me?" But his response is a great example to anyone who is facing insurmountable odds, because he proved with the Lord on our side there is no such thing as insurmountable.

And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the LORD his God. (I Samuel 30: 6)

Turn the Tables and Recover All

Everyone around him was wrapped up in their own grief, focused on their problem on what they had lost. Instead of complaining, belly aching, or murmuring David turned the tables on the enemy and so turned the tide in his direction. He "encouraged himself in the LORD" and the bible goes on to say he pursued, he overtook, and he recovered all. The word for encouraged in this passage is a Hebrew word pronounced HAH ZOCK. I want you to know that if you are going to be all God has called you to be, not someone who looks back at all the missed opportunity and wasted potential then you have got to

learn to encourage yourself. You can't always count on your brother or sister, you can't always depend on your momma or papa. You can't expect there to be a coach to pick you up off the ground and say it is going to be alright. It's great when you have it, but one thing I notice about not only David, but other great men and women of God is they have enough of God in them that when tough times and hard situations come their way they find strength in themselves to be reminded of what God has done in the past on their behalf and what he is willing to do in the future.

God Did It Before and He Can Do It Again

Encourage yourself by mentally reviewing your past successes and what God has done for you in the past. Remember the times when He has snatched victory out of the hands of defeat. Trouble does come, but it doesn't last always. If He has come through before, he will come through again. If He has given you the skills, ability and talents to be successful in the past, those skills are still available to you for future successes. STOP replaying those negative failure thoughts and do as the word commands you to, thinking on things that are good, just, and profitable. (Philippians 4:8)

Don't stop there. David encouraged himself yes, AND he also pursued. He prayed and sought the face of the Lord and then He acted. Replay the past successes than take the action needed to get you motivated. Whether helping someone else, or taking steps to come out of your own personal, business, or relationship slump. It won't just magically happen. You've got to do something.

And the Lord said unto him [Moses], What is that in thine hand? And he said, A rod. And he said, Cast it on the ground. And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from before it. And the Lord said unto Moses, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand and caught it and it became a rod in his hand. Exodus 4:2-4

Moses had no confidence in himself or in his ability to lead the Israelites. He was worried the people wouldn't believe him and said as much to God (see verse 1). He did however have a rod in his hand and he had *El Shaddai* backing him up. Even so he still had to, in obedience, use what he had. You are not responsible to make things happen, but you are responsible to use what is at your disposal, and no matter how small or insignificant in may seem with God behind it, it's enough.

Bust out of Your Slump

I'll never forget my own personal slump experience. Here I was a leader in the church I attended and I was going through emotional burnout. I was ready to give up, to quit my practice as a chiropractor, sell my house and move to Hershey PA to become a house parent at the Milton Hershey School. It would have been so easy. No mortgage to pay, good benefits, free chocolate, free food. But it wasn't really what God had called me to.

It was the path of least resistance, but it wasn't the path God had mapped out for me. Here I was feeling sorry for myself because things weren't going quite the way I wanted them to. I decided before making a rash decision I would speak with my pastor to

get his perspective on the situation. It was during this meeting that God reminded me of an event that had taken place about a year earlier. A word he had given me that I took to heart, but failed to act on. He had instructed me to go out on my own in practice and break off the partnership I had been a part of for seven years.

It was a confirmation of something my wife had shared with me months earlier, and yet I hedged on making the jump. But now, some ten months later it finally hit me why I was experiencing this “slump”. It wasn’t because I was in the wrong profession or didn’t have what it took to be a success. It was because I failed to act on a directive from God. I hadn’t committed a sin, in the sense of the word we usually perceive as sin; but I ignored something that was designed for my benefit.

No wonder I was feeling defeated, no wonder I wasn’t reaping the rewards that were promised me. I learned a valuable lesson that day,

You cannot expect God to keep giving you new revelation when you don’t act on the revelation He has already given you.

Pray, yes. Encourage yourself, yes. And then *act* on what the Lord gives you.

Resistance from your own Flesh

One thing you have got to know when the need to Hazak yourself exists. Your flesh, your physical man is never going to want to do it. It’s like I was sharing with my eight year old daughter when I first got her involved with exercising. She would complain about not wanting to do it, or how much it hurt, or how hot she was, or how much she wanted to watch Kim Possible. And then she asked me if I *wanted* to exercise.

I told her, just like I am about to tell you. Most days I do not want to go to the gym and workout, or at least my physical body doesn’t. My mind does because it knows how good it feels to sweat and have a rush of endorphins go through my body and the exhilaration of accomplishment, my spirit does because it knows how I use the time to pray and close off the cares and frustrations of the world around me, but my body, most of the time would rather take a nap.

Your body is going to fight you tooth and nail because you are breaking out of the comfort zone. The good news is your will and your spirit were created to conquer the flesh.

Your Spirit was created to conquer
the flesh.

The Snake Antidote- Building up your resistance.

Not all outdoorsman keep it on them, but I would venture to guess the wisest ones wouldn’t be caught without it and neither should you, *Anti-venom*. Believe it or not anti-venom is actually made up of snake venom. Much like the vaccinations used to inoculate

against certain diseases snake antidotes utilize a small dosage of snake venom. The venom is typically injected into an animal so that the animal can produce antibodies against the poison which can then be used to counteract the poison when injected at its normal strength.

When the antibodies to the poison are present they provide a RESISTANCE to the action of the snake poison. The bible tells us **“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”** (James 4:7). Notice it doesn't say pray and he will flee, or fast and he will flee, it doesn't even say God will resist him for you and he will flee. It says for you and me to create a barrier to his vile poisons so that they cannot invade and take over our lives and the good things that God has in store for those who love HIM.

If you are going to shake off the snake in your life you must build up your resistance to discouragement. Just as you need to resist the temptation to sin, you also need to resist the temptation to be discouraged, disappointed, let down, down trodden, defeated, broken, beaten, dismayed, disillusioned, and distressed. Those things are all a state of being that God has given you the authority to dispel. The resistance to them all is already in you, because if you are a believer those snake venom antibodies have been welling up inside you since the day you became Christ's and He became yours.

“The word is nigh you, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that is the word of faith.....” (Romans 10:8)

Listen to this my friend: *Faith filled words pouring out of your mouth, even when you don't feel faith filled, have the power to free you from the shackles of the enemy.*

Just as you need to resist the temptation to sin, you also need to resist the temptation to be discouraged, disappointed, let down, down trodden, defeated, broken, beaten, dismayed, disillusioned, and distressed.

Don't get caught with your words inside you

In my study on snakes and the effects of snake poison one of the saddest stories I read about involved a man who was an accomplished outdoorsman and yet surprisingly had a very unique fear. This rough and tough man of the wild could face off against a grizzly bear, scale vertical cliffs, go for days eating nothing but nuts and berries, but he couldn't tolerate needles. Not surprisingly he had never been vaccinated or given any type of injection his entire adult life. He hadn't even ventured into a hospital or doctor's office for the fear that they might try to trick him into being “jucked” (that's a technical term meaning to prick the skin) with a needle. According to the story he was traveling in the Rocky Mountain region traversing wooded, rough, and rocky terrain when he stepped into a snake nest and received a seemingly harmless bite from a baby snake.

As he continued to walk, however, he soon realized this wasn't a harmless bite, but the bite of a poisonous species. He quickly radioed for help to a nearby ranger

station. He did everything he knew to slow the spread of the poison, and sat down near a stream and splashed some water into his face. He was always known to be an extremely well prepared hiker and indeed kept a first aid kit with him at all times when in the woods. He even had a vile of snake anti-venom, for this particular type of snake.

That, though, is where this snake story takes a rather sad twist. When the rangers found this man his heart had already stopped beating. He lay dead with a full vile of snake anti-venom and an unopened syringe on the ground next to him, apparently to fearful to inject the one thing that could have saved him.

Here's The Point

Faith filled words POURING out of your mouth are powerful and will produce the desired result because the Word of God cannot return void (Isaiah 55:11). But those same words bound inside of you, are like the vile of anti-venom waiting to be used but with a skin that has never been pierced through with the syringe. If you are going to shake this thing begin speaking, begin declaring, and begin decreeing what you want, not what you see going on around you.....

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