

Special Messages from 2017

How to Deal with Snakes, Wives, and Battles

Unedited Transcript

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Well, good morning guys. You know we run, Michael and I were just talking in the back. We run on a two-week delay so I figure this would be a perfect Valentine's Day Message. No, it has nothing to do with Valentine's Day. Hey, it's great to be with you here this morning, in the new digs. This is my first time teaching here so that's kind of fun. Glad to see you guys all here this morning.

We are going to talk this morning about how to deal with snakes, wives and battles. I've been doing a little research lately about an incredibly disturbing topic of suicide. In Britain right now, for men under the age of 50, suicide is the leading cause of death. As a class, according to the International Business Times, this is a class, men have suffered high levels of reactive depression, the form brought on by distressing life events and this is what's driving the relentlessly high male suicide rate, rather than long term mental health issues. In other words, it's a crisis. A guy goes through a crisis. He's not mentally ill. He goes through a crisis and for some reason, the end result of that crisis is that he's committing suicide at an alarming rate.

Ages 15-44 in Australia, men, leading cause of death, suicide. More than heart disease, more than cancer, more than accidents. Suicide. We're doing a little bit better here. In America it's only the number ten cause of death for men. A study by Alexander Sigh, an assistant professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, reported about a year and a half ago that men who don't have strong social ties commit suicide at more than twice the rate of men who surround themselves with friends, family and community groups. This study followed nearly 35,000 men over 24 years through the ages of 40-75. Guys in their study, ages 40-75. This guy's a practicing psychiatrist. He said this fits perfectly with what he sees in his practice. He said this, "When I talk to people in various of forms of distress, one of the common threads is some element of social isolation or dissatisfaction with personal relationships and social engagement."

Three components, marital status, social network size and religious service attendance showed the strongest protective associations. Social integration also was inversely associated with cardiovascular mortality. In other words, when you're isolated, it's bad for your heart. It's just amazing the cost, the cost of isolation and that's what we're going to talk about.

How do deal with snakes, wives and battles? Well the idea is this. You can't do it by yourself, including the wives one. You can't do it by yourself. People that do it in isolation don't succeed. We're going to talk about the awful consequences of isolation. Then we're going to talk about the powerful benefits of having friends and finally we'll talk about the practical process of building relationships. Let's pray and then we're going to jump into the scriptures together this morning.

Father, we look around us, and we see men who are unhappy, Lord. We see men who isolate, who withdraw, and, Lord, we know that that's not the way that you designed us to be in relationship, to be in community. Lord, for some of us that's a hard thing to do, especially in times of crisis. Father would you speak to us this morning? Would you show us in your scriptures what happens when men isolate and what happens when they don't? Lord, also would you begin to build in our lives these key relationships that we need, Lord - maybe even starting here around these tables this morning. Lord, speak to our hearts. Speak to our minds through your Word and through your Spirit this morning. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

The awful consequences of isolation. We're going to do a little bit of a Bible survey this morning, so you won't have to turn with me very much. If you want to you can. It says Exodus 3 I think on your handouts. It's supposed to be Genesis 3. That was my fault. It's supposed to be Genesis 3. Let's think about Genesis 3. What's the story at the beginning of Genesis 3? Do you remember? Story of the fall. The story of the fall.

The story begins, Eve is in the garden and the serpent comes and talks to her and tricks her. He speaks to her with mistruths and misdirection and he tricks her. Eve falls for it, thinks that maybe this fruit that they were told to stay away from actually would be good for her and so she takes a bite of the fruit. My least favorite sentence in the entire Bible is, or my least favorite phrase in the entire Bible is when it says that she turned and gave some to Adam, and then those horrible four words, "Who was with her." He's there the whole time. He was there the whole time.

They're in the garden. You got to think at this point, it seems like, from the way the first three chapters of Genesis work, Adam and God talked to each other, that they had, that there was a relationship there. God gave Adam direction and gave him this garden to tend and gave him a mission in life and then gave him this woman to do it with. There was interaction and yet at this moment, for some reason, Adam just stood there and watched.

One of the consequences of isolation is that there's no one to help you with lies and with leadership. All around us we're being lied to continually. We're being told that we, either the consumer mentality or the pleasure mentality or the worse than that, the sort of meaningless mentality. Nothing really matters so do whatever you want. There's no one there to help you deal with lies if you're isolated. There's no one there to help you with leadership. I mean, Adam needed to speak up and he wasn't in right relationship with God at that point. When God came looking for him, he hid. Then he started blaming God. That's awesome. "That woman you gave me," he said.

He wasn't ready in that moment to be a leader in his marriage. He wasn't ready at that moment to deal with the lies of the serpent and so he failed. He isolated himself. Do you see this with guys? Do you see guys, they have a mistake or they get in a difficult time and they just withdraw? You can't talk to them. You know that word, fine. I love The Italian Job. They say, "How you doing?" He says "Fine." Fine stands for freaked out, insecure, neurotic and emotional. It's like guys' default is just to, you don't want to let anybody know that anything is wrong. You don't want anybody to know that you have any weakness. You don't want to let anybody know that you don't have it all figured out, that you made a mistake. You put up the barriers.

You can do it, you can do it sitting at these table every week. You can come and isolate yourself sitting around a group of men every week. It doesn't have to be physical isolation. It can just be emotional

barriers, spiritual barriers that you put up and you don't let anybody in. If you're going to live your life like that, then there's nobody to help you with lies. There's nobody to help you be a leader.

If you do have a Bible, turn to 2 Samuel 11. This one we can look at together, because the next story is the story of David. When you are isolated, the next consequence is that there's no backup when you are in moral danger. There's no backup when you're in moral danger. 2 Samuel 11:1, "In the Spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab who is the commander of his armies, and his servants with him and all Israel and they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Raba but David remained in Jerusalem." This is kind of a famous verse for men that we talk about. That David stayed home when kings go to battle. David was not an inexperienced king. He was a battle tested king and he knew that the springtime was when kings went to battle and he doesn't go. Instead he sends his commander, he sends his servant, and this is interesting, "and all Israel."

What they probably mean is all the fighting men of Israel. Who do you think David's friends were? He was a warrior king. He basically sent everybody away who would have any degree of accountability with him. He sent them away and then he stayed in the palace by himself. Now keep reading, verse 2, "It happened late one afternoon when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house that he saw from the roof a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful. David sent and inquired about the woman and one said is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. David sent messengers and took her and she came to him and he lay with her. Now, she had been purifying herself from her uncleanness. Then she returned to her house and the woman conceived and she sent and told David, I am pregnant."

So David's sitting home alone. He's bored and so he starts walking on the rooftop. Now the palace of the king, the house of the king would be at what point do you think in the city? The highest point, right? Do you know where all the bathtubs were in homes at this time? On the roof. Women would take, would clean themselves at dusk, a little bit of privacy plus over the roof line, couldn't really be seen from the street. Unless you were above her, right? It says it happened. It doesn't say it just happened. I don't, I'm not a Hebrew scholar but I'm pretty sure it wasn't like, you know for the first time ever David was sitting there and he woke up from a nap and he went eh, I think I'll go for a little walk on the roof. I've never done that at four-thirty in the afternoon as the sun's going down before.

Walking on the rooftop at dusk of the palace of the king is like clicking around on the internet, stuff that you're not supposed to go to. It's the exact same thing. He knew exactly what he was going to see, or hoped what he would see. With no one around to see what he was doing, all his friends out at battle, all the men that he been through battles with, that he had suffered with, that he had fought with, all the guys that could look him in the eye, he had sent them all away so he could walk on rooftops at dusk and see women taking baths.

You know Proverbs 18:1 says, "Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire. He breaks out against all sound judgment." How's that? I mean hello? Right. You can see this in the story of David, how he just isolated himself to seek his own desire. You know years ago I was in a small group at church. I was happy to be in the group because the couple that was hosting the group, there was a leader of the group and then there was the host couple of the group whose house we used and I really was excited to be in this group with this host couple because they were a little bit older than me. They were leaders in the church. They had kids the same age difference in mine, but they were a few years ahead. I thought, well this is great. Here's a slightly older man in the church that I can sort of look up to. His kids are a little bit

ahead of mine. I can get advice from him. My marriage and his marriage are sort of tracking that way. I thought this would be great.

Several months had gone by. There were five or six couples in this group and the leader of the group called me with some awful news. The husband of the host couple had just admitted to his wife that he had been in an affair for quite some time. A week before Thanksgiving, he said he needed some time to think about things, and he never came back. Several months later I was talking to a friend who was in that group and we were talking about why we needed to have a focus in our church on relationships and discipleship for men. He wasn't quite getting it. He was kind of like, I'm a tough guy. I'm a strong guy. I've got a great life. Why do I need men to be in my stuff? In my business?

I said to him, you know you and I sat next ... I reminded him the story. I said you and I sat next to that guy in that small group for months and neither one of us had any idea what was going on. Then I said this, and this is going to be our big idea. I said every man needs another man who can look him in the eye and tell when something's wrong. Every man needs another man who can look him in the eye and know when something's wrong.

That decision that that guy made was devastating. It tore apart two marriages. It destroyed his kids. It destroyed their trust. He had a boy and girl just like I did. Spent hours talking to the young man about things that he should have been talking to his dad about. His daughter struggled to trust men, as you can imagine, and praise God, He's merciful. He's worked in those kids' lives, but it's still a struggle. They still struggle with the consequences of a decision that a man with no real friends made.

There's no back up when you're in moral danger when you're isolated. Let's look at the story of Judas. Finally, isolation can make it impossible to overcome despair. It can force you to face it alone. When we think about betraying Jesus, we also think about Judas Iscariot right? Judas helped the religious leaders find Jesus away from the crowds, is basically what he did. He waited until Jesus was isolated. That whole week they had been trying to get him but he kept being in crowds of people that adored him, adored his teaching and so they couldn't get him. Judas betrays him when he's alone.

When he makes that decision and he takes that payment, what he basically did was he decided that Jesus couldn't be who he said he was and so he betrayed him. In fact, if we go to Matthew 27, you can see what happens in the immediate aftermath of Judas' decision. In verse 3, Jesus has been delivered to Pilate to be crucified and it says in verse 3, Matthew 27:3, "Then when Judas, His betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind, and he brought back the 30 pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders saying I have sinned by betraying innocent blood. And they said what is that to us? See to it by yourself. And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed and he went and he hanged himself."

Isolated and dejected, he ended up buried in a field for strangers, people who had no one to call them a friend. Those are some of the consequences of isolation. No one to help you with lies and leadership, no one to help you when you're in moral danger, and no one to help you overcome despair, and despair comes for everyone. Well, that's uplifting, right?

Let's talk about the powerful benefits of having friends. Remember that guy? The powerful benefits of having friends. So David, in the Old Testament, not this David, David did have someone who could look him in the eye and tell him the truth. If you go back to 2 Samuel 12, and you see what happens next.

Nathan, the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him and said to him, "There were two sons in a certain city ..." Listen to this story. "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb which he had bought. He brought it up and it grew up with him and with his children. It used to eat of his morsel and drink from his cup and lie in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveler to the rich man, but he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb and he prepared it for the man who had come to him."

"Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man and he said to Nathan as the Lord lives the man who has done this deserves to die and he shall restore the lamb four fold because he did this thing and because he had no pity. Nathan said to David, you are the man." You are the man. Now, keep in mind who Nathan was talking to. He's talking to the king, but he looks him in the eye and he helps him realize what he did and the great part of the story is ... You have to skip down to verse 13. Listen to this, "David said to Nathan I have sinned against the Lord and Nathan said to David the Lord has put away your sin. You shall not die." He still had to bear the consequences.

When you've sinned and you're wallowing in it, either because you're embracing it or you're in denial like David who's in denial, it's your friends that look you in the eye and call you out. It's your friends that lead you to repentance and restoration. I'll never forget one of the early leadership classes we did, a pastor and one of his men's leaders came from a church in Hawaii all the way to Orlando. These were great guys and these were big guys. One guy was about six feet tall and probably weighed 250, 275 and he was the little one.

They told us this story about something that had happened a few months before they left for the training. There was a man in the church that they both knew, they both considered a friend. They both loved him and they had heard that he was planning on leaving his wife. "We went to visit him," said one of the guys, with kind of a twinkle in his eye. I said, "What do you mean visited him? Did you threaten him?" And one of the guys, they laughed, like, "oh no, we didn't threaten him. We just explained to him that as long as we were around, he wasn't going to leave his wife." I said, "What happened?" They said "Well, he got the point. Now they're in counseling." That's what friends do for each other. They don't let each other be stupid. They don't let each other make dumb mistakes. They don't let each other walk away when the going gets a little bit tough. Friends put their, sometimes they put their arm on your shoulder, but sometimes they put their foot in the middle of your back and don't let you go anywhere. That's what friends do. They lead you to repentance and restoration.

Look at the story of Peter. Another benefit of friends is that it helps you overcome failure. I read you the story in Matthew 27 of Judas hanging himself, but if you just go up a paragraph in Matthew 27, it's the story of Peter denying Jesus. Peter was sitting in the courtyard, a servant girl comes up to him and says "you were with Jesus." He says "no." Then another servant girl says, "you were with Jesus," and he says "No". The third time he actually kind of indicates maybe he sort of said an oath. He like cussed, you know. "I don't know the man," and then the rooster crowed.

Now, if you think about this in some ways, Peter and Judas committed the same sin. They were both, they both at some point came to doubt that Jesus could be who He said He was, and so Judas reacted with greed and Peter reacted with fear, but they both sort of abandoned Jesus at a time when He really needed them. While Judas died alone, Peter's story ends much, much differently, right? Don't go there, but if you flip over to John and consider this, in John 20 you see that Peter gets the news from Mary

Magdalene that Jesus is alive. What's he doing? He's with his friend John, and the two of them take off for the tomb and go look at it.

Later on in the chapter, the disciples are gathered together in a locked room, and Jesus appeared. They're gathered together. Peter's with them. Eight days later, they're all there, and this time, Thomas was there. He wasn't there the first time, and Jesus appears again. You go down to the beginning of the next chapter, you see this story of Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James and John just hanging out, and Peter goes "I'm going fishing." I'm probably thinking he went, this is nuts. I'm going fishing. They all go, "all right, we'll go with you."

This group of buds goes out, gets in a boat, goes fishing. Just a few hours later, Jesus and Peter are walking on the beach, and Jesus is restoring Peter in that famous thing, do you love me, do you love me, do you love me? Erasing those three denials that Peter did. Peter was with his friends, with his buddies and it helped him overcome that failure. There's no failure guys ... Listen, there's no failure that you can't overcome when you have good friends. There's no failure that you can't overcome. There's no trial or mistake that you can't get through when you have good friends.

Well, the third thing that we see is that we see in Paul, the powerful benefit of having friends is mission effectiveness. The entire story of the New Testament is full of men in pairs and teams working together to share the gospel. Jesus sends the disciples out two by two but think about Paul. He had Barnabas, then he had Timothy. He had Titus. He had Apollos. He had Tertius. He had Prisca. He had Aquila. Go to the end of Colossians, read all the different people that Paul's like, yeah this guy's doing this with me and this guy's doing that with me. Paul wrote the letters and so we hold him in high regard but he didn't ever work alone.

He got shipwrecked once, but even then everybody was looking to him for his leadership. Paul never worked alone. You will have greater effectiveness in the mission that God sets for you when you do it with your friends. There's just a pattern throughout the Bible of men completing their mission in the company of friends and isolated men failing. We just weren't meant to work alone.

If those are some powerful benefits of having friends, what's a process ... I'm sorry. So here's the big idea. I said it before. Here's the big idea. Every man needs another man who can look him in the eye and tell when something's wrong. Every man needs another man who can look him in the eye and tell when something's wrong. Let me give you three practical tips, a practical process of building relationships.

First one. Form a PAC. You've all wanted to have your own PACs haven't you? Well this isn't a political action committee. This is a personal advisory committee. Think about your life. It's good to have some men that you know that are financially wise. Guys that are ahead of you in their marriage and in their fathering, guys that can provide counsel in key areas of your life. It might seem a little weird, but you need to try to collect these guys around you.

You want guys that you can ask for their opinion in some of these key areas of your life. If you needed career advice, who would you ask? Or financial advice or legal advice? Where would you start if you had a parenting issue or a marriage issue? Think about those guys, and then get an introduction and get to know some of them. Ask them out for coffee or lunch to become acquainted, and then just ask, "Hey, if I ever needed some advice in this certain area, would you mind if I came to you and asked you about

that?" Form a little personal advisory committee, guys that know you and that you know, older and experienced guys.

You know there are some older and experienced guys in the room. I don't know if you noticed that in this room, but there are some older and experienced guys in this room. You need to be willing to be that guy for the younger guys. You need to be willing to have a younger guy come to you, or maybe you even pursue a younger guy and spend some time with them so that he realizes that he can come to you when he needs help in an area that you might have some expertise in. You might even find a guy that ends up being a closer friend than you expected.

There's a man I know in this community that's well known for giving great sound, practical financial advice. He's taken so many young guys through Crown. I know in Pat's business career, he had a reputation as a Christian businessman and guys would come to him for advice and input. Be willing guys to help other guys out.

Secondly, if you're going to have friends, oops ... If you're going to have friends it's going to take time. It's going to take time. I don't mean time to find someone. I mean time to spend together with that guy or with that group of guys once you've found them, to actually develop relationships. When I was in college, I was part of a Christian student group and we had meetings. We sang songs. We read the Bible. We prayed around the circle and then we left. We hardly interacted at all outside of the official meetings. We had common interests in the Bible and in faith but we really didn't live our lives together.

Now I was also in a fraternity. We did a lot of fun things together. Now we had meetings. We had organized events, organized events, parties. But we also spent a lot of time outside of those events together. We ate together. We lived together. We went on adventures around the city of Boston together, where my college was. There came a time when I went through a personal crisis in college that my Christian friends were absent and my fraternity brothers were there for me. They took care of me.

30 years later I'm not friends on Facebook with one of those Christian friends from college, but I am friends on Facebook with a ton of my fraternity brothers and I talk to a ton of them regularly. Mostly, lately, about the Patriots. I had to get that in there somewhere. There's a reason we call each other brothers. I know my friend Eric whose marriage fell apart and he's got a son with muscular dystrophy. I know, and he works with his hands, fixes up cars and he makes furniture. I got fraternity brothers who are lawyers and real estate guys. They're all over the country and we, you know Facebook's great for this. We keep in touch with each other because we went through a lot together. It's 30 years ago.

The disciples, a great example of a group of guys who spent a lot of time together. I mean think about it. They lived in Galilee. Jerusalem was like 100 miles away and they walked everywhere. They're going back and forth to Jerusalem at least a couple times, right? They almost got killed together. They listened to Jesus teach. They watched him do miracles. They spent a lot of time fishing. Think of the stories that they could tell about their experiences. Hey, remember that time when we came back from town and Jesus was talking to that Samaritan woman by the well? That was hilarious.

Remember those 5000 people who came to hear him teach and he talked so long they didn't have enough time to get anything to eat and then we found like some bread and fish and fed everybody with it after Jesus prayed for it? Hey remember that terrible storm, and there's our good old rabbi Jesus sleeping in the boat like nothing's going on. And remember that other storm? When he walked out on

the water to us? That was crazy. And hey remember Peter when he got out of the boat and tried to do it too, and there's old Pete going I'm drowning, I'm drowning.

Can you imagine just the camaraderie that these guys had just because of all the experiences they'd had together? That's what it takes. It takes time. It takes experiences, it's shared experiences to form friends. My favorite story about the disciples is in John 11. It's the story of Lazarus, and we talk about Lazarus all the time and how Jesus raised him from the dead, but one of the cool little parts of the story is before they go, Jesus says, "Hey, guys, Lazarus is sick," and they're like "okay." They're like, Jesus says, "no, no, no, he fell asleep." They're like, "well, he'll wake up." Literally that's what they say, "he'll wake up." He goes, "look dudes, he's dead. We have to go raise him."

The disciples, for some reason don't react to the story of one of Jesus's best friends being dead. Instead they react to going back to Jerusalem because the last time he was there they tried to stone him. Jesus goes, well nevertheless we're going. Thomas, I love Thomas, he steps up and he goes, well, we might as well go with him and all die together. That's friends. Right? That's brothers who say, well if you're going in to danger, I'm going into danger with you. That's what friends do.

Find a few guys you like. I will say this. There's sometimes in the church, we kind of throw guys together into groups based on where you live or based on your age. Nobody ever bothers to figure out if we actually like each other, right? So we're not all alike. God wired each of us differently. Find some guys you like. Begin to spend some time with them.

You know there's a lot of distractions out there that we have to overcome. Maybe the first way to think about this is to think about around your tables, how you might deepen relationships at your own tables. Ephesians 6:12 says, "We're not in a battle against flesh and blood but against cosmic powers and spiritual forces of evil." If you're going to go into battle, you need a battle buddy. You don't just need someone to look you in the eye, but you need someone to watch your back. That's what a battle buddy does.

Ecclesiastes 4 reminds us that "Two are better than one for if they fall, one will lift up his fellow but woe to him who falls and has not another to lift him up." Let me encourage you. Have a battle buddy this week. Maybe do this. Pick a guy or two at your table, and commit this week, just this week to praying for each other, to contacting each other and if possible, maybe even get together to do something fun. Whether that's a cup of coffee or lunch or catching a movie, grab a battle buddy this week. Someone at your table, because remember this, every man needs another man who can look him in the eye and tell them something's wrong.

Guys, we're not meant to be alone. We don't accomplish our mission. We don't overcome our failures. We don't lead as well. We don't face lies as well, when we don't have somebody that can look us in the eye, who knows us and who can help us be the men that God made us to be. Let's pray.

Father, I'm so grateful that you did make each of us in a way that you wired us Lord to be in relationship. Even the most introverted of us Lord, even if we're not a person that's super outgoing and outrageous and loud or obnoxious, Lord even those guys, we all need men in our lives - we all need someone that we can talk to about our deepest and darkest things. Someone that we can share our triumphs with and someone who can pick us up when we fall. Father, I pray that for each man this week, that you would give him a battle buddy, that you would give him someone that would pray for him, that would call him,

that would share a cup of coffee with him Lord, that they might begin the process of building these deeper relationships so that we might live our lives the way that you've made us to and bring you glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.