

Task #9 - Decision-Making: Snakes and Doves
The 12 Tasks of an Effective Father

I wanted to let you to know that one of our table leaders, Pete Greenfield, was at our leader meeting the other day, and I mentioned that the Web Cast there is someone in Guam, there are some in Australia, too. There are different people around the world who are watching this Web Cast on a regular basis. I mentioned Guam, and he said, "Is that so in so?" I said, "I don't know." So I went back to the office and checked, and sure enough, Pete Greenfield, our table leader in the back corner, has a niece who's husband is in Guam and doing a Bible study with this Web Cast. Isn't that fascinating? What a small world. Did I get it right? Got it right.

I want to talk to a little bit about the food chain this morning. We're doing a series on fathering. Last week we did mentoring and the idea of roots and wings, which is the idea that our children are wanting to become independent. We want them to become independent especially when they get into their teen years. I remember when our son was 18 years old we couldn't wait for his college to start because he was ready; not for any another reason other than he was ready. The problem is, though, we send our children out into the world to be independent and they immediately encounter the food chain. So this morning I want to do a little mentoring discussion again on decision-making and that will unfold.

I had a fascinating experience last week. For the last two summers, Jim Seibert, our administrator, and I went out and found an old 1957 Watertown lap straight siding ??? boat. It's a beautiful boat. Then we buried it right off the edge of my patio. I put butterfly plants in there so now I have an incredible butterfly garden in the old boat that I look at off the end of my patio. It's really pretty neat. Last summer, and this summer, I have been enjoying watching a black snake that has decided to take up residence in the boat. This snakes hunts the lizards. I've been watching this go on for two summers. Last week, I am watching the black snake stalk then slither through the weeds there, or whatever, plants (sorry, slip of the tongue there), slither through the brush, or whatever, stalking this lizard. Now, fortunately, I was watching because the next thing I know this black snake has straightened out like a rod and is charging straight at me at full speed across the patio. Fortunately, I saw what he was doing chasing this lizard so I didn't totally freak out, but once he got on the hard surface, and if you've ever seen a snake on a hard surface they don't get good traction, so he really slowed down and didn't catch the lizard, didn't get his dinner. When I looked over the side of the chair and down there was his head and I became a little rattled, so I bundled up the magazine I was reading and hit him on the head, and he slithered back quickly into the boat. That's the food chain, men. That's the food chain, and your children are going to be part of it soon enough. The little lizard eats the winged insect, saw that last week, too; the snake eats the lizard; the owl eats the snake and so it goes.

There is a food chain out there, and children will do as well as the decisions they make once they start participating in this food chain. You can pick up a paper any day and find examples of this. I am going to give you a couple from the same article in yesterday's paper. This is the sports page, the Racing Confidential, kind of a recap of the racing stuff that's been going on. One man who reports a Cruchi???? His name is Randy Goss, and he will not be running the crew at the Bush series race this weekend because the paper reports he had a more important thing to do, attend his daughter's high school graduation. Not bad. Here's a fellow who's made a pretty good decision. You know these race teams. You know how quickly they change around, and how much you're loved there, from week to week, based on performance. You only have one daughter; she only has one high school graduation, good decision.

Next column over, Casey Atwood, wrecked on lap 51 of the Coca Cola 600 resulting in neck pain and a headache. He reports himself, he said, "The last two races I wore the Hahn's ??? device. This time I decided not to wear it. "I wish I would have been wearing it." Bad decision. And that's the way it goes: good decisions, bad decisions. And so, in some sense our lives are the sum of the decisions we make; some wise, some foolish. Make sense?

This week I want to talk about helping our children make good decisions knowing that good decision-making is a key to your children's success. Decisions about dating, sex, drugs, alcohol, smoking, money, becoming independent, relationships, friendships, family relationships, what else? Integrity, values; all kinds of decisions that our kids will make as they go out to become independent and become part of the food chain.

Now we have a little text in front of us, and I'd like us to take a look at it. Matthew, Chapter 10. Let me set it up for you. Jesus is sending out the twelve disciples. We are going to be in Matthew, Chapter 10, Verse 16. If you don't have a Bible, let me encourage you if you are a guest, to look on with someone who has a Bible. If you are not a guest and are a regular and do not have a Bible, think about it, this is a Bible study. Anybody need a \$20 loan here?

Jesus is sending out the twelve and he's giving them some instructions. I would like us just to read Verse 16. Actually, we are not going to actually delve into the original meaning of this so much, but we are going to make the application, which I think is a very valid application, to our lives today. Matthew, Chapter 10, Verse 16: Jesus is speaking. "I would never send you out like sheep among wolves," he said. Isn't it interesting that Jesus said, "I am going to send you out like sheep among wolves." Men, Jesus is going to send your children out there, and he's going to send them out like sheep among wolves. They will be vulnerable; you're vulnerable. It's interesting that Jesus is ascending God, and he sends us in a way that we are still vulnerable. He does not put some sort of a shield around us to protect us. Interesting.

"I am sending you out like wolves among sheep." Now, it doesn't work that way either, does it? We're not the tough guys. We are the wolf bait; we're not the wolf. Understand? We're the wolf bait. And Jesus, knowing that we're the wolf bait, knowing that your children are the wolf bait, sends us out there in vulnerability. Because of this whole food chain that's out there, the wolf and the sheep, Jesus gives us one sentence that can powerfully help us help our children when they become involved in the food chain to make good decisions.

Look at the next sentence. "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore," which means for that reason or because of this, "be shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves," or be wise as snakes and harmless as doves. That's it. Here's the big idea this morning. Watch this. God does not want to take your children out of the world, but He does want to take the world out of your children. God does not want to take your children out of the world, he wants to send them into the world, but he does want to take the world out of your children. He says, "Therefore, be shrewd like snake and as innocent as a dove." We are going to have a very simple lesson this morning. I'm going to give you some snake lessons, and I'm going to give you some dove lessons.

Snakes lessons: Why do we need snake lessons? Because God is not going to take your children out of the world, we need to know how to operate and exist in the world so we need some snake lessons.

I grew up on five acres of land out at the edge of civilization. There were subdivisions back this way and wide open frontier that way. Because of that there were a lot of snakes. I became very fascinated with snakes when I was in the seventh grade. So, like a lot of young boys, I, from time to time, had a fairly large snake collection. Sometimes I would have a dozen different kinds of snakes. I actually even paid for a snake once, it was a rat snake, it was six feet long, I paid fifty cents a foot, and I didn't know about the rat snake, and the next thing it was gone. The next time I went out to the cage it was gone. How many of you have ever collected snakes or been involved with snakes? Snakes are fascinating. One thing I learned very quickly about snakes is that they are utterly and completely predictable. In other words, they always act the same way, every time. If you give a snake the chance to bite you, and it's a biting kind of snake, it will bite you every time. Poisonous, non-poisonous, it doesn't make any difference. If a snake is a biting kind of snake, it doesn't wake up one day and say it doesn't think I'll bite anybody today, they bite you every time. They are predictable.

We need our children to understand that out in the world there are some things that happen in the food chain that are predictable, that there are some snakes out there, and they will bite you every time. They need to understand what these are. They need to understand. Alcohol, drugs, pre-marital sex; these are not things that only bite sometimes. They bite you every time. Every time. Any question about that?

We need to teach our children how to survive. Basically, we need to give our children a little survival training for the food chain. If you want to read on with me in Verse 17, it says, "Be on guard against men..." There are folk out there who are bad actors; they pretend they won't bite you.

How many of you fathers have been watching MTV lately? Go ahead and raise your hands; don't be embarrassed. How many of you fathers have watched MTV within the last 12 months? Raise your hands. Well, there are a couple of guys. I went out on MTV the other night, and they were showing the 100 most shocking moments of rock and roll. Have you heard of this show? They show 20 at a time (20 per hour). Okay VH1? That shows what I know. All right, let's start over. How many of you have watched VH1? Trust me, it's all the same. Well, it's not all the same, but it's all pretty similar because VHI or MTV they both bite, they're just different kinds of snakes. Now I'm not saying that you shouldn't watch MTV or you shouldn't watch VHI, it may be certainly permissible. I would just suggest to you that the Scriptures say that any man commanded by Scripture is what? Permissible. Then the Scriptures tells that not everything that is permissible is what? Beneficial. So you decide. I was shocked by these moments not from the things that actually happened like the Red Hot Chili Peppers Sock Tour, you know about that right? Oh, you don't know about the Red Hot Chili Peppers Sock Tour? It was a very famous tour they did where they came out on stage one night and they were naked except for the socks they used to cover their genitalia; the entire band. They did the whole tour and the crowds go crazy when they do this. The crowd is of 14 and 15, 16 and 17 year old kids. But that was not even so shocking to me because I expect the wolf to act like they did; it would be foolish to expect the wolf to act like the kingdom. To expect a wolf to act like a sheep, go figure, why would Christians do that? So I expect that. But I was amazed at the interviews with these different bands, and they would say things like, "You know, I am proud of everything I ever did on stage." Their faces show that they had just a completely seared conscience, complete immorality, no sense of right or wrong; in fact, proud of that which is base giving full vent to the basic instincts and thinking that this is good; really thinking that it's good.

So I would suggest to you that these are wolves and these are snakes, and they would have your children, and you need to teach your children to be on guard. I wouldn't say don't let your children be exposed to these things. I would say expose your children to these things based on their age and using some discretion; using some wisdom here, that's the whole idea. Talk about it with your kids. In other words, we have a story, we can talk about that here, the Christian story, and they have a story. So, it's important for our children not only to have a Christian story, but the other stories that are out there because as I quoted here, people need stories to give meaning to the facts of their existence. So these people are doing these things for reasons. You know what, I fell in love with these people. I fell in love with all these people with these seared consciences because, as you know, as has been well said, a cynic is merely a disillusioned idealist. I just see the broken dreams and the shattered lives there, and my heart goes out to these people. I still don't want them biting on my kids. Do you understand what I'm saying here? I still don't want them biting on my kids. You shouldn't either. I don't want to sacrifice my children on the alter of reaching out to wolves. Think about it.

What is wisdom without innocence? Jesus tells us here, "Be wise like a snake and innocent like a dove." So what is a person who is snake wise or world wise, but is not dove innocent or kingdom innocent or harmless. Our youth pastor, a long time ago, said to us one day when he assembled all the youth in the youth group. He was a little nervous. He said, "I've been working with your children for a number of years now," then he took quite a while to develop the courage to say what he wanted to say. He said, "I've come here tonight to tell you your children are worldly. And when your children and my children become world wise, but are not kingdom innocent, they will at the best become worldly, _____, and self-sufficient. At the worst, they will become dishonest.

The parable of the shrewd manager comes to mind. So we must teach our children to be wise, but we cannot forsake their innocence either. So the big idea this morning is, what? God does not want to take our children out of the world so we need to make them world wise. But, he does want to take the world out of them. We need, also, to have some dove lessons because he wants to take the world out of them.

When we talk about dove lessons, what are we talking about? We're talking about things like surrender, submission, not having to have your own way, but rather seeking God's will. We're talking about a servant heart; we're talking about loving God; we're talking about loving other people. We need to teach our children these things. What do you have, though, if you have a child who is innocent, but not wise; kingdom innocent, but not world wise? What are you going to end up with? You might end up with someone like me.

The other day I was out working in my garage. We have a side street that comes up and this man and this woman drove slowly one way then came back and stopped, and this woman, a big, heavy-set woman, got out of their car and said, "Sir, do you know where so and so lives?" I said, "No, I don't think there's anyone on this street by that name." "She said, "I used to work for that person, and we're from Atlanta, and we are staying at my sister's house, I can't remember the whole story it was so long, but, anyway, the purse got stolen and the police didn't believe her, and now they don't have any money to get back to Atlanta, and it's going to take \$30 to \$40 for gas money to get back to Atlanta. By now, I'm bawling, I'm with her, I mean, you know. I'm with her. I'm with her. I said, "You just wait right here," and I'm thinking of all the Scriptures I've read about, you know, just all the scriptures I've read. So I go in the house and I get not \$30 or \$40, but I get \$50. I went back out and I said I was going to turn this into a witnessing opportunity, so I got a copy of "The Man in the Mirror" and put the money in "The Man in the Mirror", and I came out, and she was now sitting in the car with her husband, and I gave her the book, and she said, "Have you written other books?" I said, "As a matter of fact I have." She said, "I think I've got some of your books at home." So, in my mind I said, "Oh, bless you, sister." I said, "God speed and be well," and all that kind of stuff. It was about 5 o'clock in the afternoon, and they left. At 10:00 p.m., there is a knock on my door. Now my wife, when I told her what I'd done, she said, "You did what? They'll be back." I said, "Honey, they live in Atlanta, they're down and out, trust me, these are good people, and they got my book." (Lots and lots of laughter) I go to bed early and at 10:00 there's a knock on my door. Knock, knock, knock. My wife goes to the door and comes back and says, "You get this one."

Now, let's see, five hours from Orlando going north, you ought to be up near Tallahassee by now, but it's my friend. There was some other story about the water pump went; we're out on the interstate, and I was half asleep so I can't really understand why this story made sense at the time. She said they'd gotten the car fixed and needed \$40 more or whatever it was. I said, "Look, wait right there," and I shut the door and made my decision. I went and got the \$40 and gave her the \$40. She said, "I'm just praying that the Lord will -----, and when I get back to Atlanta, I'm going to wire you back this money." I said, "Yeh, okay, whatever, we'll see."

Innocence without wisdom is going to also cause a lot of problems. There are two types of innocence without wisdom. One type is the person who thinks I'm a Christian. Oh, just shoot me; I'm a Christian dove. Take advantage of me, I'm suffering for Jesus, I'm letting you run all over me for Jesus. Go ahead bite me, bite me, chew my arm off. I don't care; it's for Jesus. That's innocence without wisdom. Right? Are you with me?

There's another type. And that is the person who is out of touch with reality. You meet Christians like this all the time who are walking around in a fog like somehow the kingdom of God, the world over here is, ethereal, like it's not really there. You have them in churches and such, and they're just not credible. Nobody would ever come to Christ because of these people, because they're just so incredibly unwise. Innocent, yes; precious, yes. I take that back; not necessarily precious, but anyway. You know what I'm saying, right? But we do need to teach our children some dove lessons, though.

I know a man whose daughter has been married for about 25 years or so, and she did not make a good decision in the choice of the man that she would marry. He has abused her verbally their entire marriage. They have lovely children; she's a believer. Her children, most of them, have become believers, and I really feel confident in time they all will. I've said it here before. Child pain is a pain that never goes away. This man met with his daughter recently to help her think through whether or not she should divorce him. This man has watched this son-in-law abuse his wife verbally, financially, neglect his children, no mentoring, no investment whatsoever in the children, sit around drinking beer, getting a big pot belly and swearing not only inside, but outside in the neighborhood as well. What would you do? What would you do? How do you counsel your daughter, your beloved daughter? You have sent this child out among the wolves as a sheep and the sheep married a wolf. What do you do? How do you handle it? Do you do what the world would do? Do you do the world-wise thing? Or do you do the kingdom thing? Do you tell your child this is the way it is? Do you appeal to, and this is the application, Biblical authority, or do you just do what seems right in your own eyes like the Israelites did when they had no authority? I talked with this man about it, and what he decided he wanted to do was tell his daughter to do what God wanted her to do; to stay in the marriage. It took every ounce of strength, emotional, physical, psychological and spiritual strength that this man had to give his daughter this message. But, you know what? It was the right message. Because when you live by your own ideals, you turn into a snake. You stop being a sheep; you become the wolf.

God does not want to take your children out of the world, but he does want to take the world out of your children. When you submit your lives to biblical authority, teach them biblical authority, it's the difference between being a snake or a dove.

Let us pray:

Lord, we are looking at some snake lessons and some dove lessons this morning because that's what you told us to do. Lord, we, frankly, might not rather be sent out into the world, or if we were said to be going more in a position of snake invulnerability, but that's not what you've done. And so, as we teach our children how to make good decisions as they go out and become part of this food chain, Lord, help us to teach them to be, yes, world wise, but even, also, kingdom innocent. We ask this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

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