

Spiritual Survival

Richard Dawson

22 September 2013

Romans 5:1-11

Revelation 3:14-22

[Video] Bear Grylls specialises in survival in the wild. Do you remember what the 4 principles of survival were?

1. Protection
2. Rescue
3. Water
4. Food.

These amount to Bear's Survival strategy. 4 goals which maximise our ability to survive in the wild. And these are great goals for this environment. They maximise our ability to survive in a hostile environment. They enable us to stay in the game.

What we often don't realise, however, is that while we may have tamed the natural environment to some extent and so don't often have to think about how we can survive in the wild we haven't tamed the spiritual environment in which we all live. And the fact is you and I live in a spiritual environment which is not getting better but worse.

In the very short space of my own life time the basic Christian understanding of the spiritual environment we live in has diminished by, I would say, a factor of 80%. In other words, the

understanding of what our real condition is spiritually has diminished. The understanding of what is good and righteous and wholesome and which brings spiritual health has diminished by that much as has the understanding of what we can do about it.

So that leaves so many people exposed to the dangers of a spiritually wild landscape with little idea about how to survive and that's where you and I come into it. You see we need to be concerned to survive in this spiritually dangerous environment and we need to be under no illusion that survival is the game. And the question is – are we aware of the basic strategy the Bible teaches for this? Can we easily list off 4 basic strategies for spiritual survival as easily as Bear Lists 4 basic strategies for physical survival in the wild?

And these things should be at our fingertips. We should be able to have this sort of information at hand both for ourselves and for those around us. You can't suddenly find yourself out there in the wild and think – 'OK... where's that list of things I should do? Darn, left it at home somewhere! Ooops. What do I do next?'

And the same goes for our spiritual survival kit. You can't end up in some really dangerous situation spiritual and think – 'OK, where's that list we spoke about at church last week. I know there's some good things I should do here but what are they?'

We actually need to have this stuff right there – available whenever – ready to go whenever we need it.

So can we remember the 4 basic things Bear teaches here?

(1. Protection 2. Rescue 3. Water and 4. Food.) Look for shelter/protection, set yourself up for rescue – make it as easy as possible to be rescued – find good water and keep the food coming.

How does this translate to our spiritual context? Let me give you 4 similar principles based on the Gospel. Firstly I'm going to reverse the first two. In faith what counts isn't that we look for rescue but that we've been rescued. This is the fundamental Gospel statement – Christ has done the work. We are no longer lost. We can jump on board Christ's rescue helicopter any time we want. So Rescue becomes our number one principle.

Where are you with this first principle? Have you accepted the rescue of Jesus? Jesus calls each person to allow Him to be our Lord and Saviour – to be in the driving seat; to be our chief guide and counsellor. Have you said to Jesus 'I need you Jesus, I need you in my life. Be my Lord!' Unlike the wild Bear deals with the wild we deal with spiritually cannot be handled apart from being rescued and being rescued requires that we recognise our need to be rescued. I wake every morning with a deep conviction that I need the rescue of Jesus – that this day will bring spiritual challenges that I just cannot be sure I'll handle

well without the rescue of Christ. That I will need help just to know when I need help and then I'll need help accepting help and then I'll need help staying with the rescue.

You know the greatest problem in the wild is getting people to recognise that they need help. I read this terrible piece of news the other day...

“Two climbers have died in separate accidents over two days in the Aoraki-Mt Cook National Park - a New Zealander living in Melbourne and a Briton climbing with three companions. The body of the male climber who fell to his death on Saturday evening was recovered by rescuers yesterday, along with his climbing party of three who spent a freezing night on a Mt Cook cliff face. The man, a British national in his early 30s who was working in New Zealand, fell around 609m near the Mt Sefton Bivvy above the Mueller Glacier, Inspector Dave Gaskin said. The accident happened because the climber was not qualified to attempt the ascent, and did not have the right equipment with him, Insp Gaskin said. "It was a jolly big fall which he couldn't have survived." “

A major part of survival is know that you need help, knowing the conditions are dangerous, knowing what we can cope with and what we can't. And what the Gospel says is that we all are lost and in need of rescuing.

²¹But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, ²²the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. **For there is no distinction, ²³since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; ²⁴they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith.**

(Roms 3)

Who needs to be rescued? We all need to be rescued and the sooner we recognise this the sooner we're on our way to surviving. Have you truly said to Jesus – I need your rescue - I cannot do this on my own. I need you in my life, leading me life, helping me to survive Lord.

Number 2 is protection. This is such a key principle in spiritual terms because the rescue of Jesus changes us but not everything else till the end of Creation. The wild things are still out there. So we need shelter from these wild things. What is shelter in our spiritual context? What brings us into shelter?

In the natural world which Bear deals with we need shelter from the elements whether they be driving snow and sleet or sapping heat and dry. In the world we're talking about the storms which come our way consists of two main sorts. They consist firstly of the kind of thing that the world uses to drag us

away from God – temptation, abuse, attacks on our belief, discouragement from people we know. These are external storms but we also face considerable internal storms. Our own flesh can lead us astray. Our own foolishness can expose us to the elements. Our own wilfulness can cloud the will and the Word of God from us.

The shelter we need comes in the form of the work of Christ to sanctify us – to recreate us in His own image. In other words, rather than create our own shelter as Bear would teach us to do Jesus does a deeper work in us to make us into a shelter. We do not manipulate the environment around us. Rather we are changed so that we can stand the environment.

So Christ changes us from the inside out. We are no longer so exposed to temptation, we no longer battle desire for things that are not healthy or are, in fact, downright dangerous. We no longer have to deal with not knowing how to react in certain situations because we've become wise in regard to these. In short, we are sheltered from the cold of such a negative spiritual environment.

Number 3 is Water. In Bear's world water is third and above food. Why is this? The answer is simple. On average we can live without food for weeks, sometimes longer depending on how much we've got stored here! On average we can live without water for only about 3 days max. In survival science they talk about the rule of threes. If you're ever stuck out in the

wilderness, remember what survival experts call 'the Rule of Threes'. You can live 3 minutes without air. In a harsh environment — it's snowing, say — you have 3 hours to survive without shelter. After 3 days, you need water or you'll perish and you can make it 3 weeks without food, though that won't be fun.

Jesus said to the woman at the well if you would only drink the water I give you would find a spring of water within you springing up to eternal life. What is this amazing spring? It is the work of the Holy Spirit into which we are all baptised. It is the Person of the Spirit which enables all spiritual life to exist. To survive in the spiritual wild we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Paul said, 'Be filled and go on being filled with the Spirit.' And we do this by asking — asking Jesus to give us His Spirit daily. God knows what we need. We need also to ask for it.

Finally Number 4 is food. The very last thing Jesus did with His disciples before He was arrested was to teach them both what to eat and how to eat it. 'This is my body given for you, do this in remembrance of me.' The consuming of Christ's body together as a community is a provision which we cannot do without. When we separate ourselves from community, when we try to go it alone, when we imagine that without this communal meal we can survive in this environment which looks as if it provides all we need but which in fact is barren spiritually — we just grow weak and find ourselves struggling to believe we

can be rescued or, perhaps, even that there is anything to be rescued from.

The interesting thing about eating is that as I said – we can survive for perhaps three weeks without food. In other words, lack of food doesn't stop us from living and I think the same goes spiritually. We can go on without taking in the food Jesus gives us. We can go on without partaking of Christian fellowship; we can go on without taking communion; we can go on without reading our Bibles but the fact is that spiritually, each day we do this is a day we are getting skinnier and more vulnerable to attack. It a day we lose strength; a day we have less energy to make good decisions; a day when our immune system is compromised. Yes we may not notice it but in the end it takes its toll.

This is what happens to those in the wild who stop taking in food. Their thinking degrades, their emotions take over, despair dominates and eventually they give up. The message, eat whenever you can, however you can.

Four principles of Christian survival... 1. We need the rescuing work of Jesus 2. We need the shelter of Jesus 3. We need the work of the Spirit within us and 4. Jesus provides food for our souls. Come into the bush with me folks. I may not be the best at surviving but I've got someone who's even better than Bear Grylls right by my side!