

'Man vs. Wild' Star Talks Faith at Florida Prison

✖ *Man vs. Wild* star Bear Grylls stopped by a Florida prison this week to tell inmates about the one survival tool he can't live without: his faith.

During a visit Thursday to the Tomoka Correctional Institution in Daytona Beach, the British adventurer, who has eaten animal eyeballs and camel intestines and confronted some of the world's most poisonous snakes on his popular Discovery Channel show, said his relationship with Christ is what gives him strength.

"I risk a lot to do this stuff, but I've been given a really privileged platform where people know the show. I want to do something good with that," he told roughly 160 inmates gathered for a chapel service. "And that's really why I'm here. I want to say this [faith], deep down, is what strengthens me. It helps me in the difficult places. [And] it's not exclusive."

The talk is one of two appearances he made this week as a spokesman for the Alpha course, a Christian discipleship program developed at the charismatic Holy Trinity Brompton church in London. Grylls also spoke Wednesday night during the annual conference of the ministry's U.S. branch.

Grylls said attending an Alpha course several years ago with his wife, Shara, gave him a chance to ask some big questions about God and His plan for humanity. "Alpha was a really good excuse to ask these questions," he said. "It was kind of low-pressure and easy and it was fun."

As a child, he said he never questioned the existence of God. "I had a really natural faith in God," he said. "I knew God existed. I never asked. I just knew. I felt loved, and it was

there. But I lost it."

He met Christians as he grew older, but they seemed judgmental and boring. "I thought, *I don't want that*," he said. "And I walked right away from it."

He thought his life was OK until his teen years when some close friends suddenly abandoned him. "It's so easy to be brave when everything's OK," he said. "That's another big lesson I've learned. Real bravery is about when it's not going OK."

Sitting alone, he wondered where was the God he knew as a kid, and he began to pray. "I want that same faith and that same friendship and that same relationship and that same freedom again," he said. "If You're there, will You be that friend to me again? Amen."

"And then that was the end of the prayer. Little did I know, actually, that is *the* prayer. Everything else, really, is academic. That's the prayer: Be my best friend."

Grylls said he always loved climbing and living adventures, so he eventually joined the military and became part of the British Special Air Service, where he served as a trooper, survival instructor and Patrol Medic.

But while on a mission in Africa in 1996, his canopy ripped at 1,600 feet, and Grylls fell to the ground and broke his back in three places. He spent the next 18 months in a military hospital strapped in plaster and braces, not sure if he would ever walk again.

"Suddenly everything you've taken for granted in your life, like your movement and your freedom, is ripped away from you," he said. "It was a dark road of not knowing whether I'd be able to walk again let alone do this one thing that I could do well, which was to climb."

But in 1998 he fulfilled a lifelong goal by climbing Mount Everest, the highest mountain in the world. The journey is so dangerous one in six climbers die; four of the climbers who journeyed with him lost their lives.

When he reached the summit, he took some snow that eventually melted into water he stored at home. He and his father, British politician Sir Michael Gylls, who died in 2001, would occasionally drink from the water. Gylls said he also christened his children with it.

"It wasn't about the water," he said. "It was about believing that dreams are worth fighting for and they're worth risking a lot for. You've got to. Everything has a price. Things don't come easy ... whether you're climbing big mountains or you're surviving prison."

Gylls said his faith journey remains a rocky road, "full of struggles and doubts and challenges." But he said he clings to two Scriptures: Psalm 73:23, "You hold me by my right hand," and Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (NKJV).

"We make everything so complicated and so theological and so smart and so together and so confusing," he said. "Actually, all that matters is, I'm holding you by your right hand, and I can do everything with Christ. And that's, for me, is what holds me a lot on mountains when things are going wrong. ... It's what holds me when I'm struggling with my faith and doubts."

An Alpha course will soon launch in the Tomoka prison, and Gylls asked inmates who participate to e-mail him their stories.

"Because that's what motivates me," he said. "It's amazing when I hear the stories. It happens all the time-amazing stories of lives turned around, people finding that simple, simple faith that says, 'I'm home and I'm held and I'm

forgiven.' I've seen the toughest people in the world have their lives turned around."

Grylls said his family is his priority, and he struggles with being away from wife and children—ages 6, 3 and 9 months—to film the show.

In 2007, London's *Sunday Times* criticized Grylls for reportedly exaggerating the dangers he encounters during filming and staying in hotels during overnight camping trips. He said Thursday that he takes a small crew of four on expeditions—a cameraman and sound engineer and two ex-Special Forces troops for safety. He said he stays in the wild, while the others are picked up by helicopter and flown to hotels.

He admits, though, that his show is more of an adventure program and that the Discovery Channel's other wild man, *Survivorman*'s Les Stroud, takes a more textbook approach to survival. Stroud travels into the bush alone and films his own adventures.

Grylls said his worst journey is always the most recent. Last week he returned from the jungles of China, where he had to ride out a hurricane, and before that he was in Indonesia's black swamps, where crocodiles have been feeding off the corpses of 65,000 people killed during the recent tsunami.

He says he doesn't love being in the middle of nowhere with nothing to eat but, perhaps, bear poop. "You have no idea," he said. "I love being home. I don't like eating scorpions and snakes. But we've all got to earn a living, you know?"

Does he ever bargain with God when he's caught in a sticky situation? one inmate asked. "I'm a heavy bargainer," he said. "That's all right. The great thing is we have a God who doesn't tire of that. The more He gives, the more He likes to give, so keep asking."