

Snake-Handling Preacher's Faith Rattled After Poisonous Snake Bite Reminds Him of Dad's Death

Less than four months after losing his father to a snake bite, Cody Coots was bitten by a 6-foot rattlesnake on Monday.

Coots' father, Jamie Coots, was pastor of the Full Gospel Tabernacle in Jesus Name in Middlesboro, Kentucky, when he died within minutes of being bitten by a rattlesnake during a church service.

"I was really scared at first, thinking, 'Dad just died, I'm hoping and praying I don't die here,' " Coots told WYMT.

The snake that bit Cody Coots, who took over his father's pastoring duties, was even bigger than the one that killed the elder Coots.

"All I could think about—am I going to make it?" recalled Cody Coots, according to *Lexington Herald-Leader*.

The snake-handling preacher remembered his late father's instructions not to panic after a bite and tried to stay calm. The bite swelled and made him vomit repeatedly. After Coots refused to go to the hospital, family and friends prayed for healing for hours.

"For a rattler bite, it wasn't bad at all," the 21-year-old said.

This is the first time he has been bitten by a rattlesnake, but he's suffered at least five other bites by cottonmouth snakes, *Daily News* reports.

“It shook me, but it didn’t scare me,” Coots said. “So we’ll stick pick them, with the Lord’s will.”

Coots is a fourth-generation snake-handler who succeeded his father as pastor of Full Gospel Tabernacle after Jamie Coots, 42, died on Feb. 15.

The elder Coots appeared in a National Geographic television show titled *Snake Salvation* about Pentecostal preachers who defy the law to use serpents as part of their religious services.

Snake-handling, which is illegal in most places, is practiced as a test of faith and guided by the theory that true believers will not be harmed.

It is particularly popular in parts of Appalachia. Middlesboro lies near the junction of Kentucky, Virginia and Tennessee and is about 60 miles north of Knoxville, Tennessee.

Appearing last year on ABC’s *Nightline*, Jamie Coots said he had been bitten nine times, including once that cost him a part of a finger.