

**Salvation On
Sand Mountain
Snake Handling
And Redemption
In Southern
Appalachia
Paperback 2009
Author Dennis
Covington**

**Salvation on
Sand Mountain:
Snake Handling,**

Redemption, and the Appalachian South

Dennis Covington's *Salvation on Sand Mountain: Snake Handling and Redemption in Southern Appalachia* (2009 paperback edition) isn't just a book; it's a gripping anthropological study, a poignant exploration of faith, and a deeply personal account of a complex cultural phenomenon. This powerful narrative delves into the world of Pentecostal snake handling in the Southern Appalachians, offering readers a rare glimpse into a community wrestling with faith, fear, and the ever-present possibility of death. This article will explore the book's key themes, its enduring impact, and the unique perspective it offers on religion, culture, and the human spirit.

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The World of Appalachian Snake Handling

Covington's book offers a profound look at the practice of **snake handling** within certain Pentecostal churches in the Southern Appalachians. He immerses himself in the lives of these devout believers, witnessing their rituals firsthand and experiencing the intense emotions surrounding their faith. The book isn't just an observation; it's a journey into a world often misunderstood and misrepresented. The author doesn't judge; instead, he seeks to understand the deeply rooted beliefs that drive these individuals to handle venomous snakes as an act of faith. He meticulously documents their daily lives, their struggles, and their unwavering commitment to their interpretation of scripture. This immersive approach allows readers to

connect with the community on a human level, moving beyond sensationalized portrayals and into the heart of their beliefs.

Faith, Fear, and the Power of Belief

A central theme running throughout *Salvation on Sand Mountain* is the intricate relationship between faith, fear, and the power of belief. Covington masterfully illustrates how deeply intertwined these elements are within the snake-handling community. The act of handling venomous snakes is not seen as a reckless display, but rather as a demonstration of unwavering faith and trust in God's protection. The constant presence of danger – the very real possibility of death from snakebite – intensifies the spiritual experience. This high-stakes act of faith becomes a powerful testament to their

devotion, illustrating the potent force of belief in shaping human behavior and defying perceived limitations. The book explores the complex theological justifications for their practices, providing context and understanding to what might appear to outsiders as inexplicable risk-taking.

Redemption and the Search for Meaning

The concept of **redemption** forms another crucial element in Covington's narrative. He shows how snake handling, while seemingly dangerous and extreme, is viewed by practitioners as a pathway to spiritual purification and redemption. The book highlights the individual stories of congregants grappling with personal struggles and finding solace and meaning within their faith. These are not simply people blindly following tradition; they are

individuals seeking a deeper connection with the divine, a path to forgiveness, and a sense of purpose in their lives. The often-difficult lives of these individuals, marked by poverty, hardship, and societal marginalization, underscore the profound spiritual significance of their beliefs.

Covington's Narrative Style and Impact

Covington's writing style is both engaging and insightful. He employs a narrative structure that blends meticulous anthropological observation with personal reflection. This creates an intimate and immersive reading experience, making the complex realities of this community accessible to a wider audience. *Salvation on Sand Mountain* is more than just a factual account; it is a story of people, their faith, and their struggles. The book has

earned critical acclaim for its sensitive and nuanced portrayal of this often-misunderstood community, influencing discussions on religious freedom, cultural understanding, and the complex relationship between faith and risk. The book's lasting impact lies in its ability to foster empathy and understanding toward a community often judged and feared. Its exploration of **Southern Appalachian culture** and its unique religious practices offers a crucial contribution to anthropological and sociological scholarship.

Conclusion

Dennis Covington's *Salvation on Sand Mountain* remains a powerful and compelling work of non-fiction. Its exploration of snake handling within the context of Appalachian Pentecostalism provides a profound understanding of faith, fear, redemption, and the

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diverse tapestry of religious expression in America. By immersing himself in the lives of the community, Covington offers a respectful and insightful perspective that challenges preconceptions and fosters greater understanding of a unique and often misunderstood subculture. The book's enduring relevance lies in its ability to provoke thought, challenge assumptions, and ultimately, to connect readers with the very human search for meaning and redemption.

FAQ: Salvation on Sand Mountain

Q1: Is *Salvation on Sand Mountain* a biased account?

A1: While Covington's perspective is undeniably shaped by his own experiences and observations, the book strives for objectivity. He immerses himself in the community,

allowing their voices and experiences to shape the narrative. While his interpretation and analysis are present, he generally avoids overt judgment, presenting a balanced portrayal that allows readers to form their own conclusions.

Q2: What is the significance of snake handling in the context of the book?

A2: Snake handling is central to the book, not as a sensationalized spectacle, but as a key ritual reflecting the community's deep-seated faith and understanding of scripture. It represents a powerful act of faith, demonstrating trust in God's protection and a willingness to embrace risk in the name of religious devotion.

Q3: How does the book address the dangers of snake handling?

A3: Covington acknowledges the inherent risks associated with

handling venomous snakes. He details instances of snakebites and their consequences, emphasizing the very real possibility of death. However, the focus remains on understanding the theological framework and beliefs that motivate these practices rather than simply sensationalizing the danger.

Q4: What makes *Salvation on Sand Mountain* different from other books on Appalachian culture?

A4: Unlike many accounts that might focus on a single aspect of Appalachian culture, *Salvation on Sand Mountain* provides a deep dive into a specific religious practice within a broader cultural context. It goes beyond stereotypes and offers a nuanced look at the interplay between faith, culture, and community.

Q5: What is the lasting impact

of *Salvation on Sand Mountain*?

A5: The book's impact lies in its ability to challenge preconceptions about Appalachian culture and religious practices. It has contributed to broader discussions on religious freedom, cultural understanding, and the human search for meaning in the face of hardship. Its sensitive and respectful approach has fostered greater empathy and understanding toward a community that is often misunderstood.

Q6: What are some of the key themes explored in the book?

A6: The key themes include faith, fear, redemption, the power of belief, the human search for meaning, the intricacies of Southern Appalachian culture, and the complex relationship between religion and risk-taking. The book also subtly explores themes of poverty, societal

marginalization, and the search
for community and belonging.

**Q7: Is the book suitable for all
readers?**

A7: While the book is well-written and accessible, its subject matter might be disturbing or upsetting to some readers. The depiction of snake handling and the potential for serious injury or death is explicitly presented.

**Q8: Where can I find *Salvation
on Sand Mountain*?**

A8: The book is readily available through various online retailers such as Amazon, as well as many libraries. You might also find used copies at independent bookstores or online marketplaces.

Delving into the soul of
Appalachian faith: A look at
Dennis Covington's "Salvation on
Sand Mountain"

Dennis Covington's 2009 publication, "Salvation on Sand Mountain: Snake Handling and Redemption in Southern Appalachia," isn't merely a account of a unique religious practice; it's a deep exploration of faith, community, and the complex relationship between conviction and reality. The book, a blend of investigative accuracy and intimate reflection, offers a captivating glimpse into the world of Pentecostal snake handling in the Southern Appalachians, challenging preconceptions and widening our understanding of religious manifestation.

Covington's journey begins with a unassuming assignment: covering a judicial case involving a snake-handling preacher. However, his research quickly evolves into something much more profound. He immerses himself in the culture of Sand Mountain, Alabama, forging

relationships with the people who practice this perilous ritual. He observes firsthand the strong faith, the true devotion, and the challenging lives of these individuals.

The book isn't simply an sociological study, although it exhibits many of those features. Covington's style is compelling, blending factual observations with emotional reflections. He adroitly avoids judgment, allowing the audience to develop their own conclusions about the practice and its significance. He paints a lively picture of the culture, showing its strengths and its shortcomings with fair measure.

The central subject of the book is the search for redemption. For the snake handlers of Sand Mountain, handling venomous snakes is a expression of their faith, a test of their devotion. The hazard involved is seen as a metaphor for the risks and

challenges of life, and the persistence through these challenges is a measure of their faith. This perspective provides a framework for understanding the practice that extends past the immediate. It's not simply about showing faith, but also about meeting fear, accepting weakness, and searching a deeper connection with the divine.

Covington's account highlights the tensions between faith and reason, tradition and modernity, and the personal and the community. He portrays the snake handlers not as zealots, but as intricate individuals wrestling with the same issues as anyone else: endearment, loss, fear, and the pursuit for significance in life. The book effectively demonstrates the relevance of understanding different cultural and religious perspectives, and the risks of making judgments based on surface-level understanding.

In conclusion, "Salvation on Sand Mountain" is more than just a compelling read; it's a powerful examination of faith, community, and the human situation. Covington's sympathetic portrayal allows readers to interact with the nuances of snake handling culture and to grapple with its implications for understanding religion, risk, and the enduring pursuit for redemption. The book's lasting influence lies in its ability to question our assumptions and broaden our understanding of the human soul.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs):

1. Is "Salvation on Sand Mountain" a imagined account?

No, it is a factual account based on Covington's first-hand experiences and study.

2. What is the main argument of the book? The primary argument isn't a single, clear-cut

statement, but rather an exploration of the layered relationship between faith, risk, and community within the context of Southern Appalachian snake handling.

3. Is the book judgmental of snake handling? Covington approaches the topic with a objective perspective, preventing judgment and allowing the reader to form their own opinions.

4. What makes this book so engaging? The book's power lies in Covington's captivating writing style, which merges factual reporting with intimate reflection, resulting in a moving and stimulating reading experience.

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