

Neighbors in Cave Experiences

by Vince Riley, Meeting Place Church

The world watched as the fate of 12 young boys and their 25-year old coach hung in the balance while being trapped in a cave in Thailand. They went in to explore the cave with the intentions of being there for only one hour, but it was not that simple. One hour turned into nearly a three week ordeal that involved rescuers and volunteers from around the world converging on Thailand just to extract the boys from the cave.

[Expert divers](#) from the Thai Navy SEALs, who were experienced in conventional diving situations, were faced with an unprecedented challenge – How were they going to get these boys through the dangerous six mile long maze, underwater canals of winding passageways, jagged rocks and dark pools to bring them out safely? The boys would have to swim under water for nearly two and a half miles, with none of them having had any formal scuba diving training or experience. At times, the task must have appeared to be hopeless. But that didn't stop officials from mobilizing a team of 110 Thai Navy SEALs, hundreds of soldiers and other volunteers from around the world who were determined to rescue the boys from the cave. In a united effort, they were able to bring all the boys out of that cave. None of the boys were lost, all of them were saved!

The entire experience answers the question, *who is my neighbor?* In this incident, help came from hundreds of volunteers, some from around the world and some from neighboring countries to secure the boys' safety. Rescuers from all over came together for one common purpose – to join in the rescue mission to SAVE LIVES! All cultural, philosophical and personal differences were set aside for the common purpose of saving lives.

The "cave experience" of the boys can be applicable to anyone who has ever felt alone, trapped, afraid, isolated, backed-up or boxed-in. Every day, we cross paths with people living in spiritual caves. They are our friends, our relatives, our associates or our neighbors. On any given Sunday people who have had, or are having "cave-like" experience dawn the doors of our churches and are sitting beside us in the pews. People whose circumstances and experiences in life have soured them; they are depressed, in debt, in despair, discouraged and disappointed.

Cave experiences can happen to anyone. They do not discriminate. Cave experiences are inevitable and impartial. In 1 Samuel 22, we can explore the cave experience of King David when he escaped to the cave of Adullam while he was on the run from King Saul and Achish, King of Gath. The text tells us that:

"David therefore departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam. So when his brothers and all his father's house heard it, they went down there to him. And everyone who was in

distress, everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to him. So he became captain over them. And there were about four hundred men with him.”(NKJV)

As David is hiding out in the cave of Adullam, something unique takes place that serves to remind us of who our neighbor is. When David’s brothers and his father’s household find out that he is hiding out in the cave, they came and joined him there. So begins a “cave-like” community with many of them sharing the same problems and challenges in life. What developed as a result of this gathering in the cave of Adullam defines the epitome of COMMUNITY: A group of people sharing common cultural characteristics and interests. One lesson we learn from David is that our cave experiences are not exclusive to us. Scripture reminds us in 1 Peter 5:9 to “*Keep your guard up. You’re not the only one plunged into these hard times. It’s the same with Christians all over the world.*” (Message Bible).

Another lesson we learn from cave experiences is that some of the best things can come out of the worst situations. Some of David’s most poetic, yet powerful Psalms originated from some of his most challenging situations. The inscription above Psalm 57 indicates that it is “For the choir director: A psalm of David, regarding the time he fled from Saul and went into the cave.” The Psalm goes on to say:

“Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy! I look to you for protection. I will hide beneath the shadow of your wings until the danger passes by.” (NLT)

Cave experiences should teach us how to earnestly call upon God and trust for his divine protection.

A final lesson we can learn is viewing David’s cave experience from a redemptive perspective. The four hundred men that came to David at the cave of Adullam initially came in distressed, in debt, and discontented, but they eventually arose from the cave together with a renewed purpose to fight alongside David in defeating their enemies. Now, David did not pay their debts, but Christ has paid our debt giving us eternal life and a renewed purpose for living. Now we are united in the rescue mission, putting theological, philosophical and personal differences aside for one common purpose – SAVING LIVES!



Thanks to Vince Riley for this LeaderLesson. Pastor Vince Riley of Meeting Place Church is a native of Charlotte, and has served as a police officer here, on church staff, and with Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. He is married to Lydia and they have two adult children and two grandchildren.