

“God’s Great Adventure”

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Now, the kids learned these five things that were so very important to our week - and one of them was: Adventure. Today I want to talk to you about an adventure and tell you a story. Now, the adults can listen too, but I’m mainly talking to the kids today.

One of the adventures - maybe you heard about it? How many of you heard about the kids from the Thailand soccer team who were stuck in the cave? A few of you.

Well, I want to tell you more about this story: It started out that these boys from Thailand - they were ages 11-16 - the youngest ones would be around 4th grade. So, they were playing soccer and they did a great job. So, one of their traditions was to go out of town to this cave and they went way down inside. It was a mile-long cave and they would move through it. It was during their dry season so everything seemed great. Now, it was scary going into that cave. Can you imagine what it was like in there, in pitch black? They had their flashlights. They couldn’t see anything except with their flashlights. They walked and walked, and they moved through this. A mile is a very long way. That’s from this church, walking all of the way to I-235 - that is how far it is. But imagine being *inside* the cave?

Now, sometimes the cave was really big, but other times it got so narrow that it was two-foot wide - just narrow enough to scoot through yourself. Sometimes it was really low, so you had to duck down and almost crawl through it to get all of the way to the end. The boys made it almost to the end - about three quarters of a mile – when, all of a sudden, they couldn’t hear the rain. (Remember when it flooded here a couple of weeks ago? It was like that.) The sky was falling and the water rushed in, and it came in. One of the divers said later that it was like the Colorado River - it was so dirty, mucky and icky - and it was all rushing in.

The boys didn’t know what to do. There were 12 boys and their soccer coach. The boys saw the water coming and they knew they couldn’t go back, so they kept going deeper in, hoping there was another exit.

All of a sudden, they had to find “Acceptance” - that was our second word of the week. Because, they had to accept the fact that the water was coming in, they had to have acceptance to trust each other and trust their coach to find a way through this. They had to accept that God would help them. The water kept coming and they kept going through the cave hoping to find an end. It was scary, and they were crawling, and the water was getting higher. They kept going. Finally, a whole mile in they found a sand bar, up on the top, where they could go, and the water stopped right before it got to them. It was deep. It was deeper than you guys and most of them couldn’t swim. Only about 20 percent of the people in Thailand can swim and, so, they sat there.

Think about it. Think about how long a day is when you have nothing to do. How many of you have ever been bored? Now, imagine that you are sitting with 11 of your friends and the adult coach and there is literally nothing to do. You are worried about the flashlights

going out and you are getting scared. That's what was happening to those boys and they were far underneath the earth.

So, the coach knew that he had to find a way to give them peace, so he told the boys to start praying. They prayed and it calmed them down, and they got less scared. So, then he said let's meditate. Have any of you tried meditation? Good. Quite a few of you. It calmed them down even more, because when you panic it doesn't help. The minute you are done panicking, you wear yourself out. You're still right back in the same place.

These boys were cold and they were scared, and worried their flashlights were going out. That happened for one day. It happened for two days. Two days is like a whole weekend. Have any of you been bored for an entire weekend? Ohhhhhh! It is the worst.

I remember I got in trouble one time and my mother said, "No TV for a whole weekend. [I] thought I was going to die." [Laughter.]

Now, imagine being in a cave with no TV, no phones, nothing – for not two days, not three days, not seven days, not nine days, not ten days, but eleven whole days. The flashlights started to go out and they were so worried. The coach kept saying, "you need to rest." "Rest," the fourth word [for this week].

At first, the coach thought it would be a good idea to start digging. Maybe they could dig their way out. But then, all of a sudden, the coach realized that they were losing oxygen, and oxygen is what you breathe into your lungs. If you don't have oxygen, try holding your breath. [Scott held his breath for a few seconds.] You can't hold it very long - maybe a minute or two at the most - but that is nothing. They were there for days and their oxygen - you have 100 percent of your oxygen - but they were down to 15 percent. As you breathe in, you are breathing in oxygen. But, when you breathe out, you are breathing out carbon dioxide. You are breathing out stuff that in a confined space can actually be dangerous, if you are in a very small room for a very long time, and there are a lot of you in there. They were losing their oxygen. They knew to continue to pray and to meditate, and instead of trying to dig themselves out, they knew it would be better because they wouldn't have to breathe as hard. They wouldn't be having all of that carbon dioxide problem, and they rested.

All of a sudden, God answered their prayers. On the eleventh day of sitting there mostly in the dark, so that they wouldn't burn out their last flashlights, all of a sudden, up came two divers, and the boys screamed out, "We are going to live."

Now for those eleven days that those boys were huddled in that cave so scared, in the dark, outside there were a whole lot of other people scared. They, too, were having an adventure. They had to figure out how to get twelve boys and a soccer coach out of there. They [the boys] didn't know how to swim. In some spots they would have to walk, but it was so slippery – from the goo, the ick and the mud - and they could fall and they could drown. In other parts they had to put on a mask and tanks and breathe. Can you imagine how scary that would be if you couldn't swim and it was in the dark, so you couldn't see anything?

So, all around the world, divers got together and they made a plan. They set up clips, and divers would dive for six to eight hours a day, making clips all along the cave, so they could

make ropes that would help pull the boys through the water, along that underwater time, so they could get out safely. Now that was a mile long, but they are going through two feet wide underneath the water when some of them [the boys] couldn't swim. The day came they put the last clip. They came up and, from the divers' perspective, they were amazed all twelve of the boys were alive and safe.

Now, how many of you like to eat? Alright. Now, they did not eat for eleven days. Can you imagine how bad 12 boys' stomachs would be growling? Uff dah, it was bad. The only water that they could drink - because the water was so icky down there - [was] the from stalactites [that] would come down and the water would drip down the walls. They would stick their mouths out and catch the water as it went in. That is the only thing they had to fill their tummys to feel like they were full, so that they could rest and have peace. They pretended that they didn't need anything but water; so they became very weak. All of the people outside were getting scared because more rain was coming, and they didn't know what to do. Finally, because more rain was coming, they had to get those boys out.

So, they bring in the divers and they could take four boys a day. It took eight hours to take four boys out - that is a whole day. So, they took the tanks and got stretchers. (Have any of you seen stretchers, like when somebody is sick and the ambulance comes? They are like little beds.) On them they hooked these masks. They were full face and they had tanks, and they would drag [them] - where the water wasn't too deep - over all of that slime. They dragged the boys on those things. Then, when it came into water, they clipped up those things they had been putting on the walls for eight hours a day, looped the ropes through them and pulled the boys through the water. They sat there with their masks on for six to eight hours each. That's why it took so many days. You had four boys and the next day you had four more boys - which was eight - and the next day you had the last three, and then the last day the coach and another boy - and they finally all got out. I believe as they were going through their own river - their own water - they experienced all of these feelings because when they got out they felt joy - such a wonderful joy.

Now I want you to think about, as you hear that story today, everything you did this week on that river was fun. But, what you learned in this story is that God will help you even when you have a bad time. Sometimes it won't be fun like you had this week. You may be caught in a situation that is scary and you'll learn that when you have an adventure, and it's scary, you need to have acceptance; to accept that your situation is what it is and that it will get better, that you can accept and trust that other people will come to help you. And, you need to accept that God is always there - even a mile into a cave with all of the water flooding in - God is there.

What you learn from that is, when you are having a scary time and in a very bad situation, the most important things to do are to pray and meditate and find peace. Then rest. Relax. Don't get so upset that you can't breathe; that you start crying and are upset. Relax and trust the Holy Spirit to help you. Then, when it's all done and you're safe again, like those twelve soccer players and their coach, rejoice, [be] joyful and [filled with] thanksgiving. Thank God for the gift of helping you.

That's how we learn from the soccer boys: How to ride this river and what you learned at Vacation Bible School this week. Can all of you say, "Amen" for me? Amen!