

## Message - God does His best work in caves

### Introduction:

1. A lot of people in this world - all pumped up

- They want to "boldly go where no one has gone before"
- They want to have a "just do it" mentality
- Many people in our fast-paced culture do everything excessively - they want supersized living
- People just love to do crazy, over the top types of things

2. Now, I'm a Christ-follower and I want to do over the top type of things for God

- Not for myself, or to garner attention for myself, but to press the boundaries in giving glory to Jesus for all he has done for me
- I want to do great things for God - and I don't know any sincere, devoted Christ-follower who wants to do otherwise
  - I Read Parable of Sower - all want to be good soil
  - I want to be part of a group of difference makers for God's Kingdom
  - Use the gifts God has given me in compromising ways
  - I want to not just hear about abundant life but experience it!
  - If those are some of your passions, please know that there is nothing wrong with that...Jesus encourages it, we were created for it
  - Remember, the Kingdom of God is IN OUR HEARTS AND LIVES
  - That doesn't mean by any stretch of the imagination that we do this successfully...that's why we depend on, based our lives on God's love and grace

3. Well, it has been my experience that the only thing that will sidetrack that - and I've seen in my life and countless others...is discouragement

Discouragement is one of the great enemies of the Christ-following experience

- it is an enemy of drive
- it is a cancer that will pull enthusiasm and joy right out of you
- it is also a test...because how you respond to life when things are not going well and how you respond when discouragement sets in is one of the most important realities that you will ever face as a person who loves/follows Jesus

### 1 Samuel 21:10ff - text for today - read the story

1. Context:

- Reign of King Saul is on the decline - the votes are in and it doesn't look good
- In meantime, Samuel comes to an old guy's house and anoints David, boy as King
- People fall in love with David
- Everything he touches - turns to gold
- You got that giant that gets in the way, David takes care of it
- You've got a king with some emotional issues, David takes care of that
- You've got enemies in the way of God's people and purposes, David takes care of that

If there was ever a guy who was on a ROLL...it was David...it seems like at the early part of his story, nothing could go wrong with whatever he touched

Then, one by one, things started to go wrong - ever experience that? Ever been "on a roll" and then something happens in life where the "wind seems to be taken out of your sails" and you wonder about how things that were going so well all the sudden start to take a dive? I know I have...

Listen to this litany of loss on David's part:

- Lost job - goes from shepherd boy to great warrior to fugitive
- Lost popularity, status, income, money
- Lost wife - marries Saul's daughter (Michal) - she stood up for him but dad comes in and takes her and gives her to another guy
- Lost mentor - Samuel dies
- Lost best friend - Jonathan proves blood deeper than friendship
- Lost home - find him in Gath - no place to go - Gath - Philistines and Goliath, place of his enemies
- Lost himself - has to fake insanity, loses self-esteem, identity all gone

2. 1 Samuel 22:1 - David ends up in the cave of Adullam

- David expects a palace - gets a cave
- what's worse, no explanation of why and no vision of when it will be over

3. Does that in any way sound like a place you've visited before?

Tell you the truth, I've read that brochure about caves, I've "been there and no desire to go back"

The Cave:

- It's where you go when all the props, crutches, all that holds you up gives way

- It's where the floodgates are open, dam breaks, hole in hull of boat gives way, you're sunk
- Everything is going great, then POW - you find yourself flat on your "back"
- It seems like all of the sudden, things are not working out as you've envisioned
- Lost job, financial security, spouse, dream of family life, marriage you always thought you would have, mentor, friend, health
- You make a bad decision and everything comes crashing in
- You've been there, I know it
- On a feeling level - this is what most of us experience - devastation, fear, loneliness, depression, a sense of being desperate
- In caves, you even start asking uncomfortable questions - most of them aimed at God - "God, why? Have you forgotten me? Don't you hear my prayers? I thought you were there to protect me? Am I going to make it? How? What does this all mean?"

Now, I know people, know some of you - some of you aren't there now...but listen to this - you will be

\* Sooner or later, everybody logs some serious time in the cave

- Now, I could end right here - everybody would walk away all depressed...but let's just say that God has some things to say to you and me
- All cave dwellers...God has got some words for you and me!

Rest of this message, let me kind of outline for you some of the things that God's Word shows us about how God acts in our lives as we're hanging out in caves

(at the end of this document, there is a "handout" that I wrote on lessons I've learn in walking the "wilderness" of life as well as dwelling in caves...take a look at it carefully when you have completed reading the rest of this message text)

**The Big Lesson - Caves are where God does some of His best work - it is where God molds, shapes us like nowhere else**

- I don't know where we got this idea that everything in our lives should go along without any trials or pain or caves but let's just say this, you gotta welcome the cave - why?
- Sometimes - when all you've got is God, come to the realization, that's enough
- Mother Teresa - "never know Jesus is all you need, until Jesus is all you've got"
- In the caves of life - you grow!
- The rest of this message includes lessons for cave dwellers...not meant to be trite or simplistic...but there are things that we can do while we are logging time in the caves of life to find encouragement from the Lord

Here's David's experience - in 1 Samuel 22 - David is on the run - he is having some hard years, years of struggle and most likely wondering whether God's promises are true

1 Samuel 22:2 - he did have some people around him - little community of 400 malcontents - this is NOT a "fun bunch" - these are men who are as miserable as David is - remember, misery loves company (isn't that true?)

1 Samuel 30:1 - David is in the wilderness still - Ziklag refugee camp - one day, David and the guys are out fighting a battle and they come back to Ziklag and the place has been leveled and their families are gone

1 Samuel 30:4 - Dave and men wept until they had no more strength to cry...ever feel like that? (I have)

1 Samuel 30:6 - then, we read, how the 400 turn on David (in other words, David's situation goes from bad to worse)

BUT THEN LOOK AT 1 Samuel 30:6 - "**David encouraged himself in the Lord**"

- I love that - it's a great thing to be encouraged by others, by a worship experience, inspirational book, even a community of friends - that's many times how God acts
- But still realize - when you are in a cave and you have NOBODY to turn to but God, when you DO turn to Him, then you start to really become strong!

**Lesson today - There is a Pathway to being encouraged in the Lord**

- I don't want this to be trite, OK?
- These are not steps to success, they aren't easy and there are no guarantees in life
- But I do know that there are some things that we can do that will move us closer to God's power of encouragement - as you walk/journey toward a new sense of life
- Better way to put it - The following are some Healing Pointers for Cave Dwellers

**#1 - When you are in a cave of discouragement - you must discuss your discouragement - you must open your mouth in the context of your relationship with God/and redemptive community and talk about the cave**

- Psalm 142 - song for cave dwellers - express your heart before God
- Tell your trouble to God and at least one other person you trust

- What do you say? Feel free to complain, yes, you can complain to God/others
- You have got to get to the bottom of the pain, discouragement
- You have got to get to the reason why the cave is your home
- Some people never do this - they avoid pain, they go into denial, pretend that it isn't there, try to avoid discouragement but friends, it does NOT work

Here's something I read several years back - The HOLE story - You can see its relevance to our talk today about caves (if it helps, use "caves" instead of "holes" and you will see what I mean).

*We all fall in holes, don't we? We're walking our way through life and sooner or later, we find that we are at the bottom of some hole, looking up at the sky wondering how we got here. It is inevitable. Holes happen! You see, the issue with these types of situations in life is not that they happen but what we do when they happen. I love the following. Read it and reflect on it for a few moments.*

#### *Chapter I.*

*I walk down the street.  
There's a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I fall in.  
I am lost...I am helpless;  
it isn't my fault.  
It takes forever to find a way out.*

#### *Chapter II.*

*I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I pretend I don't see it.  
I fall in again.  
I can't believe I am in the same place;  
It still takes a long time to get out.*

#### *Chapter III.*

*I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I see it is there.  
I still fall in....it's a habit.  
But my eyes are open.  
I know where I am.*

Here's truth about Discouragement:

- It drains the life out of you/others
- It promotes negativity
- It doesn't go away on its own
  - Now, remember, God is NOT the God OF discouragement - He might bring you challenges, conviction, discipline, testing but NOT discouragement
  - God is God OVER discouragement or better yet, God is God THROUGH discouragement
  - If you walk with Jesus, problems and caves have less ability to take the wind out the sails of your heart/life
    - o So, you've GOT TO talk - share with God and, like I said one other person the nature of the "cave" in your life

## **#2 - Take some positive action - underline some or put "ANY"**

In other words, it comes to the point where you have to make some decision to do something

- David took some action - in 1 Samuel 30:6ff - there is a story of the Ephod that David "pursued" - the Ephod was something that priests wore - it was eventually a symbol of the 12 Tribes of Israel but in this biblical context it is a symbol of the prayer and what it means to turn to God and seek the will of God
- That's what David is doing in this text - going for God's will - David purposely seeks it

Here's what you can do in the cave - do something! Sometimes you have to take a step to deal with it

- When you are in a cave, trust me, no other person outside of yourself can take action for you that can make any difference - YOU have to take action

Here's the rest of the "Hole Story" from above -

### *Chapter IV.*

*I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I walk around it.*

### *Chapter V.*

*I walk down a different street.*

When discouragement sets in, you die - that's the plain truth

Some of us just need to take some action - face reality ("I'm in cave") and then do something

12 Steppers (Healing from addictions) understand this - they call it "one step at a time" - they cannot conquer their addiction with broad sweeping, "I'm going to do this forever" types of goals - it is rather sobriety ONE DAY AT A TIME (baby steps)

\* Identify the source of your greatest discouragement (job, sin, financial life, relationship)

\* Ask self what you can do - make even 10% improvement

\* Then take that step, baby step, but it will restore hope

- Refuse to live in a state of chronic helplessness
- Put an accountability person/group/community around you that are committed to keeping you in reality
- Refuse to live with a victim mentality
- Don't wait for someone else to solve your problem
- Don't wait for someone else to change so that you will feel better
- Choose a "different street"
  - CHANGE YOU!
  - LET GOD CHANGE YOU!
  - THAT WILL RESTORE HOPE IN YOUR LIFE!

### **#3 - Resist Temptations**

This is a big one - follow me on this, OK?

- In 1 Samuel 24 - there is another story from David's life that shows us very clearly why I say this...when you are in a cave, you are susceptible to temptation
- When you are in a cave, you are not only in a vulnerable position emotionally, but you are in a place where you will be, NOT might be or could be but WILL be tempted to take all kinds of escapist behaviors to feel better
- Thought will hit you, "here's a shortcut" that will make me feel better
- The Story in 1 Samuel 24 (we don't have time to read it, so let me summarize it for you) - David is hiding in a cave with a few of his men and guess who walks in to "relieve himself?" It is King Saul - David must have thought, "this is the day, David." "Here's your way out of the cave." (read story on your own)
- David looks at Saul, looks at his sword, looks at the walls of the cave and he must have wondered, "is this from God, doesn't Saul

deserve death?" (the story's context definitively demonstrates that at this time in Saul's rulership, he was out of control)

- But David chooses NOT to kill Saul - and when he does so, even his men argue with him and challenge him on his decision - but David rebukes them (1 Samuel 24:6), why?
- Temptation was there - but if he would have killed Saul, it would have destroyed his integrity, spirit, his obedience to God - it was a shortcut

### Serious Words - Some of you are in a cave right now

- There is a shortcut to relief and discouragement and pain that is tempting you
- You have a decision to make - will you give in or submit to God's will?
- Decisions like for cave dwellers happen all the time - you will be tempted if you are in a cave of financial discouragement to take some shortcut (maybe on your taxes, maybe through out of control spending); if you are struggling with your computer habits, you'll be tempted to check out some sites where images that are truly not God honoring can burn themselves into your heart and mind; you might be tempted lie to get out of a jam; if you are married and facing relational discouragement, you may be tempted to check out another relationship that promises intimacy (Anything where you think, "hey, this would make me feel so good, and by all means, God wants me to be happy" - if you are thinking that, that is the thought process that leads to more failure and more discouragement)
- You will be tempted to justify actions that will be "quick fixes" for your discouragement, trust me
- Yet, you know, when you look at that temptation, that if you give in to it, it will only lead you outside of God's plan/will for you
- In caves of discouragement - you will face decisions - will you take the shortcut or walk with God through the temptation?
- You need to say, *"yes, God, I will spend my time in this cave - I will not take a shortcut - I will not give in to financial temptation, deception temptation, I will not justify a shortcut to temporary "pain relief" - God, I do not want spiritual stubbornness to embed itself in my soul...I want every secret to be brought out into the light because I do not want anything else but You and what you want for my life"*
- Trust me - in cave, temptations would be so easy to give into - and yes, they would be a relief but you've got to resist it!

There's a story in the book of Genesis (chapter 39) about a guy by the name of Joseph - in a time of discouragement, he had to deal with a HUGE temptation - it is the story of Potiphar's wife - the lesson - sometimes you just have to run from temptations, no matter what it costs you!

**#4 - Lastly, when you are in a cave, find your ultimate refuge in God - that's the truth of life - God is a refuge and strength in times of discouragement and fear**

Sometimes all you can do - is hang on to God

- Psalm 57, 34, 31:1
- God says, "I will not let you go - trust me!"

Immerse self in God's presence - Immerse self in God's goodness

God's goodness/care is a safe place - because God is with you - Psalm 23

When God says that He is our refuge and strength, what does that look like? What does that feel like?

- Images in the Bible - God is our "Hiding Place"/we can find refuge "Under the shadow of His wings"
- Hiding place - shelter from harsh realities, place of irrational peace/rest

There is no other refuge that is safer than the refuge of the Lord

Seek intimacy with the Lord through prayer - set aside time, undistracted time, and seek to connect with God at the deepest level of your heart - if you seek, you will find!

Trust me - as we conclude, God knows about caves - Jesus has been there - Jesus was crucified and He was buried in a cave. People thought that it was over...but what did God do?

- The victory of Jesus was birthed in a cave - His resurrection can be our resurrection as well
- Like we said above, God does some of His best work in caves
- He resurrects discouragement, He overcomes fear, He brings victory of death, He raises new life out of the most desperate of circumstances
- 1 Corinthians 15 - if you were dead in Jesus, you are NOW alive in Jesus

You in a cave? Look for Jesus? Trust Him?

**Personal lessons in the time of our Exile, a Wilderness or Cave experiences**

By Robin Dugall

*Note - an "exile" or spiritual wilderness are those times when you feel like you are wandering through life disconnected from God. You wonder why you ended up feeling empty and abandoned. These experiences happen in Jesus following lives. They are not abnormal nor are they experiences that have not been felt many times by countless others who love God. Some have called these times, "the path of descent." We all have them...they are part of what God uses to transform our lives and give us a deeper sense of love and dependency on the Lord. In addition to the above message on "caves" (times of discouragement and fear in our lives), below are some lessons I've learned when facing these challenging seasons of life.*

#1-We need to remind ourselves that we believe in God...no toothless, passive, powerless entity

#2-We need to see reality...sometimes, the "cave" or the "exile" in our life was brought about as a result of our own actions. Don't blame God...that will not be helpful though it is our tendency.

#3-We need to see that God sometimes will use other people to minister to us in times of trial or discouragement. We want to "cocoon." But others can help pull us out even if they do not know they are being used of God. Be on the lookout for these "deliverers".

#4-We need to remember that the cave of discouragement or personal exile may have a purpose in God's plan for our lives that we do not see, understand or even appreciate. Seek God for understanding. Desire to learn the lessons of the wilderness/exile/cave for they are there for your growth in Christ.

#5-We need to let God "out of the box" and not expect Him to act in as He has in our past. Though God may act in a similar manner, He is also ready to do something new in you.

#6-We need to trust in the grace and goodness of the Lord. If you focus on anything while in the cave or in "exile", focus on the truth that God will not abandon you. Do not give in to self-pity for God's promise is that He will provide.

#7-We need to remember that God is more interested in new life than He is in a spiritual "paint job." That may be the one lesson that is worthy of learning while in "exile". God uses caves and/or exiles to change and transform us.

#8-We need to remember that God does not forget you while you are in the cave or in "exile". Christ has chosen you as His own. If you do not forget Him, the Lord will help you remember that you are precious to Him.

#9-We need to listen to the Lord when He says that we have a responsibility to share our deliverance and salvation with others. We are to be servants and lights to the world.