

Commentary: Even lost in a dark cave, we find hope

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As I write this, the world celebrates the rescue of all 12 members of Thailand's Wild Boar soccer team along with their coach as they recover in a Chiang Rai hospital.

Hope has prevailed, rising triumphantly up from a swell of darkness, desperation, fear and despair.

Trapped in a flooded network of caves 2 ½ miles underground at the borderlines connecting China, Thailand, Myanmar and Laos, these 13 were missing for 10 days before they were found. The cave was dark, flooded in parts, with some places tight and almost impassable.

Still, the world's great strategists, cave divers and SEALs stepped up, showing patience and sound minds primed with boldness and perseverance. News reports informed us it might be weeks or even months before the team could be rescued. The monsoon made quick rescue efforts not only more dangerous but more critical.

Tragically, one courageous diver died even before one rescue was made.

With the rest of the world, I grieved for that brave man. Rescuers say his death spurred them to work harder, faster, smarter. I believed his death also inspired each person of faith to pray more fervently.

Each stage of the search and the rescue spawned miracles.

Finally, over three grueling, gut-wrenching days, one by one by one, the boys were slowly, laboriously moved along the cave to the mouth. Eight days after they were found, they are all safely out of the cave.

So, we celebrate, breathless with the wonder, feel a little guilty for any doubts we had, and give thanks.

Miracles abound in dark places

Amazingly, one of the boys knew five languages, which equipped him to communicate with the rescuers from other countries.

Before the boys were found, we learned the rainwater dripping from the cave's ceiling was safe for them to drink and kept them from total dehydration. Almost immediately after the coach was brought up — the 13th and final rescue — the main water pump devised to keep the cave from completely flooding failed. Rescuers sent to recover oxygen tanks and equipment abandoned the equipment and scrambled to get out alive, before access in and out of the cave was completely cut off.

Coincidences? Hardly! Surely God's divine provision each step of the way, before, during and after, shows just how precious in his sight are those who are lost and that they are always in his sight, no matter how dark a place they find themselves.

In life, too many times it seems we find ourselves trapped deep in a dark cave, perhaps of disease, addiction, loneliness, abuse, loss or financial collapse, feeling abandoned, isolated, desperate, separated from others and wondering if God has forgotten us. We cry out to others and to God, or we crawl deeper into the darkness, isolating ourselves from others and from God.

We can't always see those who sit by the mouth of the cave praying for our rescue, much like the boys and their coach couldn't know of their families sitting vigil, praying and hoping in front of their cave. They couldn't know of an entire world — persons of every faith — praying for their safe rescue.

No matter how deep or dark or hopeless we feel, God doesn't want us to drown but to emerge triumphant. So many times, when we are called to wait and wait and wait in caves of darkness ... we grow weary of waiting.

But even when we can't see a way, God has already meticulously carved the way.

God's words of hope during dark times

"We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed" (2 Corinthians 4:8-9).

"We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure" (Hebrews 6:19).

"Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1).

"Hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently" (Romans 8:24-25).

God's words of hope for sustenance and recovery

When we are trapped, and even after we emerge from darkness, we fight physical and mental health repercussions. Scripture says God can lift the captives above even their mental and emotional struggles — inside the cave and out.

2 Timothy 1:7 says, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power,

and of love, and of a sound mind.”

2 Corinthians 10:5 tells us to “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ,” and Philippians 4:8 tells us to think on what is good.

In my lifetime, I’ve wandered, lost my balance and fell, or felt pushed into some pretty deep, dark caves. This miracle in Thailand reminds me I was never really alone or without hope.

Psalm 18 lays it all out: “He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters. He rescued me from my powerful enemy, from my foes, who were too strong for me. ... He brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me because he delighted in me.”

All of us can rise out of the darkest place into a spacious place as God lights the way. Freedom may not be quick or easy, but we must never lose hope and we must trust — even in our darkest days and most desperate hours — God is with us, working for good.

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