



Meeting God in a Cave

sunday 15 august

connect group resource

How to use this resource

These notes support the message shared each Sunday morning. There are four sections with thoughts and ideas for connect group leaders. Use the bits that best suit your group rather than try to cover all parts of this resource.

Each week there is a one page resource on the [church website](#) for individuals to use for their personal reflection or in discussion with family or friends.



IN THE BIBLE

When we read in the Bible about caves we often read about significant events with people or God. Sometimes when we look at the original language behind our English word in the Bible we discover aspects we miss 2,000 years later. In Hebrew, the language in which the Old Testament was written, we find the word translated cave means: a cavern (dark), cave, den, hole. One bible resource tool shows that it comes from a Hebrew root word which means: to be exposed, to be bared, to be laid bare, to be made naked.

Read [Joshua 10:16-27](#) where there is an account of the end of a battle as the enemy kings hide from Israel but are discovered and executed. These were brutal days and the Ammonites were a brutal people.

Read [1 Samuel 23:14-24:22](#) where David is pursued by King Saul but continually escapes him when in a forest, on a wilderness plain and among the rocks and caves.

1 Samuel 23:14 reveals that no matter how hidden someone is God can expose them.

As this happens in the natural realm **discuss how it is a reflection of what happens in the spiritual realm** in our life and relationships with God and people. Look at [Jeremiah 23:23-24](#) and [49:10](#) and [Psalm 139:7-12](#).

Reflect how this makes us behave. Do people (we) do things in secret of a moral or character aspect?

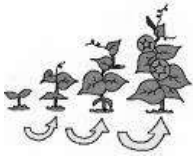
Why? How might we have a greater personal awareness that nothing is done in secret and everything can be revealed? Note: some things are secret but not a moral or character issue e.g. maintaining a patient or clients confidentiality. We are looking at the things which would embarrass us if they were revealed. David had King Saul pursuing him to destroy him. We have an enemy pursuing us and trying to destroy us. It is only the truth of 1 Samuel 23:14 which protects us.

Now we take a change of direction to look at what happens when we meet God in a cave.

Read [1 Kings 19:9-18](#) which follows Elijah as he is overcome with despair and flees an enemy to finally rest in a cave in the desert. It is fair to say that Elijah was laid bare in that cave. He was exhausted, felt alone and abandoned then God comes and Elijah, the great man of God, has an encounter with God.

Read [Exodus 33:12-23](#) which tells of Moses' encounter with the Lord after discovering Israel's rebellion and feeling alone and inadequate to lead such a nation. The cleft of a rock is very similar to a cavern or hole. Moses and Elijah were very special people. It they who Jesus meets ([Mark 9:4](#)).

Discuss if these encounters were just for people like Moses, Elijah and Paul or if it something God wants for us today. **Consider what happens with these encounters** in caves with God and look at the original Hebrew meanings at the start of this section. Can you think of other people in the Bible who had solitary power encounters with God? What would we need to do to prepare for such an encounter and why do we need to be laid bare?



SPIRITUAL GROWTH

In Biblical times caves were most commonly used as places to live, or as a place of safety to escape an enemy or escape from God and caves were also used as a burial place. See Biblical examples in the In the Bible section. Caves were numerous in Israel because of the large areas of soft limestone rock. Spiritually caves can be places of growth and transformation. It is this aspect we examine in this section.

Has anyone in the group had a cave experience to escape an ‘enemy’?

Examples of the sorts of ‘enemies’ we encounter in Auckland are: sickness or a failed relationship or financial strife or a hard job/boss or people. People who have battled and overcome depression will probably identify with this cave like experience. People who have been laid off from a job, and can’t even get an interview for a new job, know what this can feel like. Someone who has failed in business or sport or marriage or as a parent knows this feeling. Anyone who has lost a dearly loved spouse, child, parent or friend probably spent time retreating to a cave.

**What was the experience like? What did you learn from it? What advice do you have for others?
Did you find God in the cave? Share about this.**

Has anyone in the group had a cave experience to escape God?

This might have happened as he was seeking us to be saved by Jesus or it might have happened after salvation when we started to make poor choices. Or it might have happened after a tragic situation so that your faith and trust in God was damaged for a season. It might have happened when the Bible no longer was desirable to read and when prayer became hard and intermittent and going to church was no longer something you looked forward to.

**What was the experience like? What did you learn from it? What advice do you have for others?
Did you find God in the cave? Share about this.**

Is there a difference in the two ways caves were used as a place of hiding?

You probably will only have time for a few people to share these personal and sometimes painful experiences. Their stories will be rich in teaching everyone else.

Let’s look at caves as a burial place. In the Bible there are three amazing graves from which life sprung once again: Elisha’s grave ([2 Kings 13:21](#)); Lazarus’ grave ([John 11:38](#)) and the most important of all is Jesus’ grave ([Luke 24:1-7](#)). Caves can be places we bury our big dream for life because it looks like it is all over and finished with. If God hasn’t put the dream in the cave then it can live again. It will probably be different to what it looked like originally but it can breathe life again if it is from God and if He says let it live.

Does anyone have a dream which they once held close to their heart, a dream they would sacrifice everything for including their life at one time, a dream which they still think about at times but the dream seems to be buried in a cave?

Share about the dream and how it died. Is there still a longing in your heart for this dream to happen even when your head tells you all the reasons it will never happen and you must have been mistaken?

How do we know if God wants the dream to live, or it was never from Him in the first place and that is why it died, or it was from Him but we messed up the plan He had so the dream was lost in the process?

This is a hard question. There is no simple online pop quiz to complete to give you an answer. This question has to be answered by seeking God and listening to His answer. Someone else can guide you but in the end you have to make the journey to find the answer and it might cost you time, emotional energy and some sacrifice. Meeting God is a relationship and the meeting matters most at this stage. Have faith you will meet Him and hear Him because that is what He wants most in this relationship with you. This is spiritual growth.

Finally on this section of dreams buried in caves and coming back to life. Look at the life of Job, he had dreams and fears and he lost all that he loved except His love for God. The dream was lost for a while and restoration came; it wasn’t the same as it once was but he and the dream lived again. Our dream in the cave might live again, it will be different, we’ll have to adapt. The test for us will be how badly do we want to pursue it, what will I pay and how much faith and trust will I have in God.



CARING & SHARING

Caves were used as places to meet God. They were places of powerful encounters for Moses and Elijah. Sometimes people didn't end up in a cave but were alone and in a place to hear from God. Jesus did this often by seeking a lonely place to pray. In our modern life it is difficult to find a lonely place and to find time in our busy life full of work, family, activity, leisure, entertainment and shopping. Well God has got this covered so that we don't have to wait to get away once in a while on a spiritual retreat or conference for a day or two (good though they are). He gave us this advice – take one day a week off from our normal routine. Read [Isaiah 58:13](#) which comes after verses about fasting.

In Hebrew the English word Sabbath comes from a root word which means *to cease or to desist from the routine*. In Greek, the language the New Testament was written in, the word means *intermission*. We are to cease from routine - don't do what you normally do, instead do what you don't normally do. It was about creating a day of distinction. It was about living a day which is distinctive (different) to the other six days of the week. Sabbaths were intended to be communal. They involved being in fellowship with other people and with God. It isn't simply about just not being engaged in paid work. It isn't simply about going to church and then living the rest of the day the same as any other day of the week with or without work. Keeping the Sabbath is one of the 10 commandments up there with not murdering, stealing and stuff like that! God said keep it holy; see [Exodus 20:8](#) and [31:14](#). The religious people of Israel turned this command into legalistic rules to judge other people's action – they had 39 prohibited actions. They destroyed what God intended through the Sabbath; see [Mark 2:27](#). It was given even before God gave Israel the Law; see [Exodus 16:27-30](#). Ignore all the rules people try to impose on you about things like which day of the week the Sabbath should be observed on and the rituals we should be obeying. We can reclaim the gift of the Sabbath as an attitude of our heart and in doing so we will meet God powerfully and intimately every week.

So with all this information, take a leap into a discussion which can become tricky to lead but should be very worthwhile. Look out for people imposing their rules and views on others and for people who come under personal guilt and condemnation from Satan. The goal is to reclaim the gift of the Sabbath for everyone in the group should the power of it have been lost in their life. Here are some questions to choose from after sharing the above information:

- 1. What do you think God would recommend for us to do on our Sabbath in these times and this society of Auckland?**
- 2. What are some of the non-work routines people continue to do a lot on Sabbaths?** Not the things like making meals but stuff which is optional or “pursuing our own interests” Isa 58:13 NLT.
- 3. What does our typical Sabbath look like?**
- 4. Is there something we would like to add to our Sabbath? What?**
- 5. Do we feel convicted by the Holy Spirit when there is a discussion about the Sabbath? Why?**
- 6. Under the Law in the Old Testament breaking the Sabbath was punishable by death (wow!), that's not what happens now of course, but is there a spiritual death which gradually occurs?**
- 7. Is there anything we could do now to change the way we spend our Sabbath so that we are refreshed and reach greater intimacy with God as we meet with Him?** If so, make a note now and commit to try this in the next couple of weeks on your next Sabbath. If this step is repeated with something new then the Sabbath will become the intermission in our week.

For many of us the gradual change from weekly routine on our Sabbath will start powerful changes in our life and we will find meeting God becomes increasingly easier. This could be one of the ways to help people in the group out of caves if they are there as a place of escape from trials in life. The help will involve community with these people and others in the group where they might share the same day for a Sabbath.

Could Isaiah 40:31 be talking of the benefits of a heart observation of the Sabbath?

“but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.” ESV

This section of the resource is based upon a mid-week message by [Chris Hodges](#) 15/1/09 available on iTunes.



REACHING OTHERS

It only takes one week of reading and watching the local and national news to know that many people in our society are under pressure in life and a lot are not coping so that they harm themselves and others.

Many people retreat to caves to escape; these might look like our home, television, internet, entertainment, alcohol, drugs and excessive work.

Many people are in such caves not by their choice; these might look like poverty, old age, sickness, loneliness, disability and decisions of other people.

Ask the group to list all the solutions which they can think the world offers such people who do not know Jesus.

Some of the answers will be genuinely beneficial while others will be superficial commercially driven ideas to benefit other people as much or more than the struggling person.

Ask the group to list all the solutions which Christians offer such people who don't know Jesus.

The Church has many things the world lacks like hope, love and peace. We have an eternal life. We have the power of the Holy Spirit and Jesus' blood and body available to help such people. We know the way to salvation and forgiveness from God.

Invite some people in the group to think of an individual, who they know, who is struggling in 'a cave' and doesn't know Jesus. **Discuss how this struggling person** could be helped by the person in the group and / or by others in the group. Choose what to do, but at the least **engage in powerful prayer** for these struggling people to be set free just like the messages on Sunday showed us.