A boy’s toy boat went out of reach on a pond one day and started floating away. A man on the side started throwing rocks at the boat and the boy became horrified at what might happen. But then he realized that the rocks were making ripples that finally pushed the boat back to shore and into the boy’s hands.

Sometimes we fail to measure up to what God requires, and stray from God. It might appear in these times that God (or life) is throwing rocks at us. But God is really using the ripples to bring us back home.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Take ancient Israel, for example. God gave Amos a vision of a plumb line. A plumb is a big weight you hang on to the end of a line to get it straight. It’s used for determining the vertical on an upright surface. God, through Amos, told the people that they just didn’t measure up. Their whole society had moved in the wrong direction. Their king, and most of the nation, were worshipping other gods. They had created systems designed to cheat the poor and to put more money in the pockets of the wealthy. The rich bribed the judges so that regular folks couldn’t get justice. People cared only about themselves and lacked compassion toward the plight of others. God was fed up. God, through Amos, tells Israel that he will destroy the places where they go to worship these false gods and send the people into exile.

Sounds scary. I don’t know about you, but I don’t like to think of God as a judging God. I believe in a God of love.

But let’s think about it a minute. If worshipping idols caused the people to stray from God and all the wonderful blessings God had in store for them, then destroying the sites where idols were worshiped might curtail the bad practice and bring the people back to God. If God put an end to the Israel’s governing structure by sending them into exile, then the wicked structure can no longer send the people further from the love of God. Perhaps God, then, is using ripples to send the Israelites back to him.

If we read more of the book of Amos, beyond the passage that we read today, we will see, in fact, that after the high places are destroyed and the people conquered and exiled, they will be restored. In that restoration, the people have the opportunity to start again – to try again to love God above all else and to love others as much as themselves. God uses ripples to bring Israel back to loving God and others. That’s the act of a loving parent.

So let’s apply the allegory of the plumb line to us today. If we each examine ourselves by the straight and narrow of this line, hopefully we do a little better than the Israelites. But, being human, we do tend to get a little crooked every now and then. We intend to go to church to worship God every Sunday, but something else comes up that seems more important. We want to help our neighbor, but instead we use that time or that money for ourselves. We want to take a stand against an injustice we see, but we’re just a little afraid of becoming unpopular so we stay silent. We know the wise action to take, but instead we take a foolish one. Perhaps, sometimes, God does allow or maybe even send a few ripples to push us back where we need to be.

This week I followed the story of the Thai team that was stuck in the cave as the water was rising. The boys and their coach often hiked in the cave, just as they had done that day. Even though this might not have been the wisest action, exploring caves is a very human thing to do. When the water started rising, the boys and their coach had to flee to high ground and divers from all over the world raced against time to flee them. As I watched this drama, I was afraid that this not-to-wise action would result in some of them being lost. But all the boys were saved, restored safe and sound, and are in the process of going home to their families. God didn’t let a bad decision destroy the boys, instead God used the ripples to bring the world together – even just for a moment- united in common prayer. Now before we stretch this metaphor too far, let me say acknowledge that God does not always intervene I the forces of nature to save people’s lives from natural disaster or illness or bad decisions. But even if the waters had risen more quickly and one or more of those boys had died, God still would have restored them. Because death also is only a ripple that brings us closer to God. God loves all of us too much to ever let us be destroyed – to ever leave us without hope.

We don’t always measure up --- our progress toward becoming more Christlike isn’t always a straight line. Sometimes when we go in a crooked line, we endure a few ripples. But God is love and God always restores us, giving us another chance at God’s blessings.

1. Michael P. Green. (2000). 1500 illustrations for biblical preaching (p. 108). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)