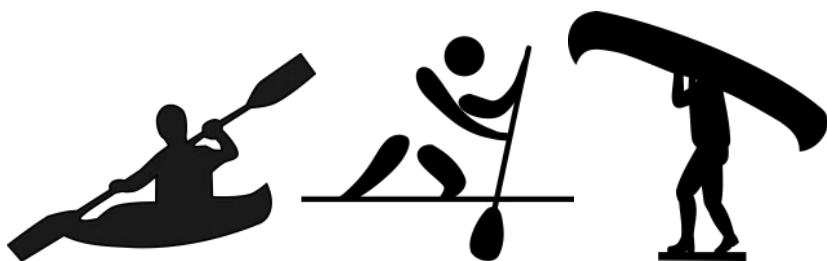


Summer Lovin' Devotions

Week Three

June 25-July 1, 2017



Paddle Your Own Boat

As you begin each day: Take some deep breaths and acknowledge that you are in God's presence. As you read, pay attention not just with your mind, but also with your heart. Are there words or phrases that stick out to you? If yes, take time to consider them. Carry the words with you throughout the day and let God continue to work with you on what has been brought to your attention. If you get distracted as you read, that is okay. Use the distractions as a reminder to thank God for those happy distractions and as a reminder to give to God those troubling distractions.

All scripture is from the Common English Bible unless otherwise noted.

Day 1: Without a Paddle

I raise my eyes toward the mountains. Where will my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. God won't let your foot slip. Your protector won't fall asleep on the job. -Psalm 121:1-2

When boating, nothing gets a heart pounding more than dropping a paddle in the water and having it move quickly out of reach. When that happens the boater becomes more at the mercy of the river than ever. There is no way to steer and it's difficult to come up to shore. One is literally up a creek (or down) without a paddle. Paddles or oars are important when boating. Even in a sailboat, a spare paddle can come in handy when the wind dies while you are in the middle of the lake.

Like paddles when boating, there are important things we need in our faith as well. The Bible helps us steer our lives as we learn and serve Christ. Regular reading and study can show us the way to grow closer to Christ, directing us in our daily walk. Psalm 119:105, ESV reads: *Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.* Like paddles, God's Word and prayer are vital to guiding our paths and growing in relationship with Jesus. Don't be caught without the paddles of faith to navigate the tough stuff of life, such as illness, financial troubles, and relationship issues. Christ wants us to turn to Him for help in all things.

How has Scripture been important in your life? How has prayer been important? What issues are you facing in your life today? What paddle of faith has God provided for your use today?

Prayer: Loving Lord, thank You for Your desire to be in close relationship with me. Help me to seek You in all situations so I won't be up a creek without You. Amen.

Day 2: Whitewater Faith

One day [Jesus] got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake." So they put out, and while they were sailing he fell asleep. A windstorm swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger. They went to him and woke him up, shouting, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" And he woke up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was a calm. He said to them, "Where is your faith?" -Luke 8:22-25a, NRSV

Any person who has paddled or rafted on a river with any sort of rapids knows the thrill of whitewater up ahead. Fear and trepidation often give way to excitement. Once in the raging channel of fast moving water, thrill will present itself. There is no turning back once the boat has entered the rapids, and the paddlers are at the mercy of the raging waters.

Our faith can be like the rushing waters of the river. Giving our hearts to Jesus Christ can be exciting, and when we fully surrender to Christ, we can get caught up in the rush of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit sweeps us away into exciting ministry that makes a difference for Christ. But, like the boat on the river, your heart must surrender. Sure, you can decide to say no, just like a paddler can decide not to enter the rapids and instead turn the boat toward the calm waters near the shore. But what is the fun in that? Instead, take a chance and surrender to Christ, riding the power of the Holy Spirit to see where God takes you.

Waters that are always calm often mean we are not risking enough to let Christ show His power. As the disciples followed Jesus, their faith was also tested. In today's scripture, after Jesus calmed the storm he asked, where is your faith? How do you exercise your faith in the calm waters and safe harbors? How do you exercise your faith in the raging rapids? Where do you see raging water in your

life? Where have you seen God's power? Christ urges us follow Him into the rough waters so we can see the power He has to calm the seas.

Prayer: Dear Lord, give us the faith needed to follow Christ, even if it takes us into the raging waters. Amen.

Day 3: Which Channel Will You Choose?

The Lord said, "Go out and stand at the mountain before the Lord. The Lord is passing by." A very strong wind tore through the mountains and broke apart the stones before the Lord. But the Lord wasn't in the wind. After the wind, there was an earthquake. But the Lord wasn't in the earthquake. After the earthquake, there was a fire. But the Lord wasn't in the fire. After the fire, there was a sound. Thin. Quiet. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his coat. He went out and stood at the cave's entrance. A voice came to him and said, "Why are you here, Elijah?"

-1 Kings 19:11-13

Many rivers offer more than one channel in which to paddle. The main channel is usually wider with faster moving water. Then there are quieter channels that meander deeper in the trees. These channels were created when the rivers were higher and often remain because of erosion that occurred in the side channel. They are usually more shallow and seem to be the safer route. Yet, because of the way they were formed these channels may be more dangerous because of the fallen trees and debris that lie hidden beneath the surface of the murky water. So paddlers have a choice...take the fast moving main channel or venture off to a side channel. There are risks in both, and depending where you are in your life, you will choose to paddle one or the other.

In our walk with Christ, we have times when we will choose the fast-moving channel in order to engage in exciting faith

experiences. When we embrace this path, we have to trust the power of the Holy Spirit to guide us into new adventures. In contrast, by choosing the side channel we can be more leisurely in our walk of faith, potentially experiencing more time for contemplation than the fast moving channel can accommodate. Yet, it may not be as uneventful as we would like because the Holy Spirit enters into our quiet times and surprises us with inspiring experiences that come from unexpected places. For Elijah, God showed up not in the earthquake, nor the wind or the fire, but in the quiet.

Both channels, quiet and raging, have a place in our walk of faith at the different times in our lives. When have you experienced a fast paced time in your faith? When have you experienced a leisurely pace? Which one do you choose for yourself on this day? Whichever you choose, God is sure to show up and reveal God's self to you.

Prayer: Gracious God, You desire our trust in the many seasons in our lives. Help us to seek you in the activity and seek you in the quiet. Amen.

Day 4: Just Around the Riverbend

Through his faithfulness, you are guarded by God's power so that you can receive the salvation he is ready to reveal in the last time. You now rejoice in this hope, even if it's necessary for you to be distressed for a short time by various trials. This is necessary so that your faith may be found genuine. -1 Peter 1:5-7a

One of the coolest experiences that happens when paddling on the river is the unknown. Rivers do not go in a straight line. Instead, they meander hither and yon, and one has no idea what will be around the next bend along the river. There might be a stretch of rapids up ahead, a new side channel to traverse, or a family of otters out for a

swim. To truly enjoy the river experience from the boat on the water, one must be observant of the water and the shore on both sides.

Each day we wake up to new and exciting possibilities. We know not what God has in store for us or for our church this day or the days to come. Yet, if we live our lives in an expectant state, we will be receptive to whatever opportunities God provides for us. In what ways has life surprised you? What trials have you been through that you didn't expect? What blessings have you received? How can you be more open to what God has for you today?

Prayer: Dear God, You desire our regular and genuine attention to our deeper walk with Jesus Christ. When we tune into to You, we will be overjoyed by the surprises You present just around the riverbend. Amen.

Day 5: Companions in the Boat

For Jesus has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you." So we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?"

-Hebrews 13:5b-6

There are times when we desire solitary time when paddling. We can be alone with our thoughts and spend some time in prayer. There are other times when we enjoy having others in the boat with us or in a kayak floating down the river next to us. It is a peaceful time to share in the scenery or share in the silence together. Whomever you pick as your companion when you paddle, choose someone who can lift your spirits. It may also be helpful to choose one who could be of assistance if the rapids get too strong or you encounter something unknown in the shallows along the bank.

Most of all, know that Jesus is always going to be in the

boat with you if you have given your heart to Him. Today's scripture reminds us of that truth. So, whether you're paddling a boat, taking a walk, laying awake at night, riding in the car, or anywhere else, Jesus will NEVER leave you or forsake you.

Who will your companion(s) be today? Who do you know who may need a companion? Is God calling you to help?

Prayer: Dear Lord, life was not meant to be done alone. Thank You for sending us companions to join us on the journey. We especially thank You for the never-ending presence of Jesus in our hearts and lives. Amen.

Day 6: Traveling the Portages

I ask that you'll have the power to grasp love's width and length, height and depth, together with all believers. I ask that you'll know the love of Christ that is beyond knowledge so that you will be filled entirely with the fullness of God. Glory to God, who is able to do far beyond all that we could ask or imagine by his power at work within us; glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus for all generations, forever and always. Amen. -Ephesians 3:18-21

If you have ever paddled in the Boundary Waters in Minnesota or on a river with dams, then you know what a portage is. For those who don't, the portage is the space of land that stretches between two lakes. If it is on the river, it is the stretch of land that goes from the area above the dam to below it. If one wants to explore more areas by water then portaging across the land between is necessary.

The way the portage works is that the paddlers pull up on shore, pull the boat out of the water, and walk the boat and all the gear to the other end of the portage. The distances of the portages vary from 100 feet to the longest portage in Northern Minnesota, the Grand Portage, which was 9 miles

long. It was the place where fur traders left the lakes in order to go to the fur trading village along the shore of Lake Superior.

This space between, like the portage, is an important link from one place to the next. Our lives have our own between spaces: the space between graduating high school and going to college; the space between getting engaged and the wedding; the space between losing a loved one and finally feeling like life is moving forward again; the space between retirement and the experiences that fill the days once full with work. Any time we are transitioning to something new and different, we are in the portage of our lives. We carry all the weight of space between as we sort out what comes next.

But we do not travel the portages alone. As we explored yesterday, Jesus joins us in all things and will never leave our side. We read Paul's prayer in today's scripture, asking that we would know Christ's love deeply and be filled with the fullness of God, even beyond imagination. How can you be open to God's fullness and love in your life today? What have been portages in your life? Were you able to experience Christ with you in the space between? What did you learn about God and yourself during the portage?

Prayer: Lord of Life, thank you for walking the portages of life with us. Help us carry the burdens that often accompany these spaces between. Amen.