

Learning From a Capsized Canoe

By Jim Reese

It was a beautiful July morning for a canoe trip. My wife Adrienne and I launched our craft at the West Montrose Bridge and began our 37-kilometer voyage down the Grand River to Freeport. We'd both recently celebrated our sixty-sixth birthdays, so we joked about traveling down Route 66.

The air was fragrant with fresh breezes, and scattered cloud decorated the clear blue canopy above. As we meandered through the fertile countryside, birds were singing, fish were jumping and we were exulting in the wonder of our great God and his marvelous creation. In fact, it was a worship service.

Kingfishers would occasionally swoop out of shoreline trees to plunge for prey. A raccoon was so enjoying a clam dig that our silent passage didn't deter his crunching delight. Every kilometer or two, we spotted a great blue heron standing as a sentinel along the shore.

But a meter and a half above us, debris that was caught in the trees along the banks bore witness to a recent flood. And the receding waters were still higher, and the current stronger, than our previous annual excursions down this ancient waterway in southern Ontario. Maybe that explained why we saw hardly anyone else that day. But years of canoeing made us feel quite safe as we steered through occasional whitewater.

Thanks to the faster current, this trip took us only five and a half hours compared to our normal seven, and would have been even shorter, had we not encountered the unexpected within two kilometers of our destination. A family of geese, lazing on the right bank, caught our attention and I reached for my camera. While Adrienne counted them I captured them on film. But in those brief seconds, our canoe, carried by the strong current, began coasting sideways downstream. And before I could grab my paddle to correct our course, we encountered a submerged rock broadside.

Up and over we flew. All our gear went under, and we were chest deep in rushing water. Ideal depth for baptizing, I later thought. Our first reaction was to recover, if we could, our life jackets, paddles, safety rope, pouch of extra clothing and lunch bag while not losing grip on the overturned canoe. My waterproof camera was still in my hand. Casting all retrievable items on shore, we helplessly watched our paddles float downstream.

Our second reaction was to stand there, one at each end of our swamped canoe, and laugh. It was the laugh of great gratitude. We were still alive and well. We'd reclaimed most of our goods. And the paddles? Well, the current could carry us the rest of the way. With a mighty roll of the canoe, we were again afloat, reloaded and hydro-powered.

About a kilometer on, we saw one of our paddles, caught in shoreline weeds. And another hundred meters revealed the second paddle awaiting pickup. A few minutes

more and we arrived at our destination, able to give account for each piece of equipment we'd rented. We drove home wet, but rejoicing, as the Lord began to impress some fresh lessons on my heart.

Lesson One: *Enjoy the trip, but keep alert.*

There's so much beauty along life's journey, which God has put there to bless us and to prompt a thankful heart. "God . . . richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment" (I Timothy 6:17). But let debris along the shoreline remind us that a flood of destruction is possible. Hidden rocks of the world, the flesh and the devil can cause us to lose our balance. Often we are most prone to capsizing while gazing on the blessings. So keep looking ahead. "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2).

Lesson Two: *You can travel most of life's journey without incident, but still mess it up toward the end.*

I'm grateful for God's grace upon my life to this very day. But I'm not home yet. Paul told Timothy to "fight the good fight, holding on to faith with a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith" (I Timothy 1:18-19). O God, help me finish well.

Lesson Three: *Wear your lifejacked.*

Our happy ending could have been much different if we'd capsized in water over our head. The name "Jesus" means "Jehovah is Savior." He died for us to become our lifesaver. If you haven't already, now's the time to pull your canoe out of the water and put on Christ by receiving him as Savior and Lord. Then launch out by faith in Christ for the rest of your life journey.

Lesson Four: *Successful living is a team effort.*

One can paddle a canoe alone, and with sufficient strength, one can right a capsized canoe. But it sure helps to have a partner. God intends his children to travel in fellowship with other heaven-bound believers. That's what church is all about – helping each other get safely home.

Lesson Five: *Everyone will eventually reach the end of the journey, but how?*

As we stood dripping at the end of our venture, I was reminded of a young friend whose canoe capsized downstream from where we stood, and who lost his life in the raging current. His brother wrestled himself and two young sons to safety, but he couldn't save his brother. D. L. Moody said, "I see the world as a burning, sinking ship. It's not our duty to paint the decks of the doomed craft, but to get as many off and into the lifeboat of salvation before it's everlastingly too late."

Have a safe and wonderful trip. And take as many as you can with you!