

It was a beautiful day, and we were making our way by raft down the Nantahala River in southwest North Carolina. My son Zach and I have made this trip regularly throughout the years, for we love to be in the Appalachian mountains. We love the thrill of rafting, and were experienced enough to go on our own (without a river guide). So here we were in the Nantahala Gorge in a two-man inflatable “duckie” – with me in front and Zach in the back.

We were several miles downriver and were having a great time, getting refreshed regularly by being splashed with ice-cold water. We chatted about the surrounding beauty, and paddled some as we drifted along. After plowing through some fairly rough rapids, however, I heard Zach say from the back of the boat, “Boring!”

At first I was shocked, but then I realized he was indeed having a good time. He was just letting me know that he was able to accept the challenge of the river. And that he could take a higher level of danger and excitement! It still gives me great joy to remember that moment, and the relationship that we were developing together.

I can see various lessons from our experiences in whitewater rafting. The Lord may lead us beside still waters<sup>1</sup>, but though we need calm we also need furious activity sometimes as well. There is something oddly peaceful about the sound of water tumbling down a mountain stream. Being in the river itself helps you to understand the power of it – if you get jammed up against a rock it could be exciting, but frustrating and potentially dangerous too.

When the surge of the river drives you towards huge rocks that must be avoided, you are taught the meaning of commitment. Once you get within a certain distance, the river takes control of your boat and you simply have to ride it out along that path. The best defense is a good boat, one that absorbs the buffeting shock of the water and the boulders, and keeps you afloat no matter what<sup>2</sup>. I am thankful for the engineers that created the self-bailing duckie! We just have to stay inside it!

The greatest lesson, though, was about building a relationship by sharing such an amazing activity. I think that it is much better to learn about how to handle adversity when you are with someone. Ironically, the tempest of the waves enables you to develop peace with each other in a very special, memorable way. Creating a great memory for a father and son: this is what the rafting trip was really all about.

1. Psalm 23:2b
2. see Ps 18, and Romans 8:1