



It was a stunning day in the Adirondacks along the shores of Lake George in upstate New York. The bright orange sun lit the summer sky and hung over the mountains like the pendulum of a clock, but it was the trees blanketing the mountainside that swayed back-and-forth in the breeze. Above me the blue skies were motionless and void of any clouds, except for a few birds circling in the air. The lake was calm and the surface of the water reflected the sunlight like glass.

It was perfect conditions for a kayak trip across the lake.

Joining me on the outing was my friend Greg.

I adjusted the straps to my lifejacket and with three quick snaps I secured it around my chest. We each grabbed a double-bladed paddle as we walked down the faded and worn pier to board our kayaks. I chose a yellow one and steadied myself as I eased down into the seat, the drenched cushion quickly soaked through the seat of my shorts. I made myself comfortable and placed my feet on the two foot rest inside the hull. With one strong shove from my paddle I pushed out from the dock and turned the kayak away from the silver bay. It took a few sporadic strokes with my paddle to adjust my position and move past the rows of motor boats docked along the pier, but soon I was taking rhythmic strides and gliding smoothly across the water. Greg was close behind.

The lake was active. Groups of swimmers splashed around near the shore, some diving underwater with goggles and snorkels and others batting beach balls through the air. The sandy beach behind them was covered with afternoon picnickers and sunbathers baking in the heat. There were also other kayakers and several small sailboats with multicolored sails maneuvering around the bay. One had capsized and thrown its young captain overboard, he tried desperately to pull himself out of the water and back on board while receiving directions from a nearby instructor. He was wet and frustrated.

In the shallow waters I could see clear to the bottom of the lake; along the sandy gravel floor were larger stones, scattered twigs, shiny bottle caps, and other unidentifiable objects worth diving around for. The further out I went the deeper it got and gradually the transparent view of the bottom became dark and opaque. I gripped the aluminum shaft of my paddle with both hands and rowed methodically on each side of my kayak. While my left hand pulled the face of the blade back through the water, my right hand pushed

forward in the air sending sprinkles of water down on me. The nose of my vessel pointed toward the opposite side of the lake and our destination about a mile away.

Greg and I carried on casual conversations and between our discussions about any and everything my thoughts would drift away. The bliss of my surroundings turned my recreational kayak trip into a spiritual voyage. It began with a simple reflection on the amazing works of my Creator—the trees, the mountains, the lake, the view—and I felt an unexplainable connection to its serenity. It's hard for me as a Christ follower to avoid this, the outdoors always seem to send majestic whispers acclaiming his handiwork. The Apostle Paul said, "There are things about him that people cannot see—his eternal power and all the things that make him God. But since the beginning of the world those things have been easy to understand by what God has made." ¹

I was driven simply by my desire to make it to the other side, to stay the course and accomplish the goal. It's my nature to carry a sense of purpose down to the smallest details of my life; I attribute that to my relationship with God and find my greatest successes stem from his belief in my potential. Sometimes I fall short of being as optimistic as I should be and I certainly make mistakes, but I am determined to be aggressive in hearing and obeying his voice. I am reminded of the words of Frederick Buechner that seems appropriate to my kayak trip, "We are in constant danger of being not actors in the drama of our lives but reactors, to go where the world takes us, to drift with whatever current happens to be running the strongest."

Sometimes I fall short of being as optimistic as I should be or positive all the time, but I am determined to be aggressive in hearing and obeying his voice.

Having Greg with me reminded me that we are not alone in our life journey. The further we move across the lake the more my muscles begin to ache and lure me to cut my mission short, or change my direction. But as he rows along beside me and encounters his own struggles in trying to keep his boat moving straight, we become an inadvertent support to one another and keep moving forward. How important it is in our journey that we surround ourselves with friends who will not slow us down, but in their own determination to follow God will encourage us and keep us accountable. And how much stronger is a community of seekers who receive inspiration from the Spirit of God and gain strength from one another. "A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken." ²

Soon we reach the middle of the lake and my thoughts oscillate between, "*I'm tired and this is further than I expected*" to "*this is a great workout and will hopefully burn off the double scoop ice cream sundae I ate before I came.*" The truth is I am enjoying the moment and my eyes are fixed on the base of the mountain in front of me. In pressing on to where God is taking me in my journey, sometimes into the unknown, it's essential that I remain focused. My love for writing has caused me to embrace the scripture in Hebrews that speaks of our Great Author and says, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (12:2)." The Contemporary English Version reads, "We must keep our eyes on Jesus, who leads us and makes our faith complete..." It is also here that the water is deepest and the aforementioned "dark and opaque" depths hide shiny bottle caps and scattered twigs. The space between conceals everything. Hidden in this void are things left only to my mind's eye and sometimes these imaginations are prone to run wild.

Authentic adventure is unbridled by fear and is experienced in its truest form when certain risks are taken. The trek is about our faith becoming complete just as much as it is about fulfilling our destiny. In fact, God's intentional plan is to take us beyond just a satisfying experience and take us to the place where we are perfected in character. "His secret purpose framed from the very beginning is to bring us to our full glory (1 Corinthians 2:7, NEB)."

Finally we arrived at the inlet on the other side. At the front, standing tall like a gateway, were several large boulders that a few people were climbing and jumping off into the water below. It was there that I separated myself to explore the cove alone. The trees had grown tall and their lakeside branches drooped lazily over the banks, and behind them began a stretch of thick woods that extended up

the mountainside. The lush overgrown greenery was thick with vines and underbrush that squelched out the bright sunlight, creating dense shadows. The young boy inside this shell of a man beckoned me to go ashore and explore, but time wouldn't allow. Mark Twain said, "There comes a time in every rightly constructed boy's life when he has a raging desire to go somewhere and dig for hidden treasure." I continued on along the bank and collected a few smooth stones for my son's fish bowl. Soon it was time to return to the bay and the row back would further test my endurance, another mile, and a few blisters on the palms of my hands.

Three days later I took another trip.

This time with a new acquaintance, a youth pastor named Donny.

The day was very different from the first—the sky was overcast as storm clouds approached in the distance—the lake was choppy from the heavier winds. The silver bay had less activity and the sandy beach was occupied by only a few dedicated swimmers who were watching the inclement weather.

I adjusted the straps to my lifejacket and with three quick snaps I secured it around my chest. We each grabbed a double-bladed paddle as we walked down the same pier to board our kayaks. For this trip I chose an orange one and steadied myself as I eased down into the seat, and this time the seat was dry. Systematically I made myself comfortable and placed my feet on the two foot rest inside the hull. We pushed away from the dock and turned toward the open lake.

It quickly became evident that we had a new opponent—the wind. Rhythmic strides turned into laboring strokes against the rough waters. Light sounds of thunder rolled in the background. Donny and I were definitely working against the conditions and rowing across the lake was not an option. An African proverb says, "Smooth seas do not make skillful sailors." It is the stormy conditions of life that test our character and our attitude and our tenacity. How we weather them proves our determination and commitment.

A small motor boat approached from the distance and our kayak trip was about to be cut short. The dark skies and the thunder had forced this bay attendant to comb the bay and bring people in off the water. The approaching storm was too risky and he kindly asked us to return to the dock.

Two kayaks, two completely different experiences, and a lot of meaningful reflection. There are lessons to learn from every avenue of life and we must value the times when God speaks to us through his Spirit. "Once when he (Jesus) was standing on the shore of Lake Gennesaret, the crowd was pushing in on him to better hear the Word of God. He noticed two boats tied up. The fishermen had just left them and were out scrubbing their nets. He climbed into the boat that was Simon's and asked him to put out a little from the shore. Sitting there, using the boat for a pulpit, he taught the crowd." ³

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¹ Romans 1:20, New Century Version

² Ecclesiastes 4:12, New Living Translation

³ Luke 5:1-3, The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language. Eugene H. Peterson, 2002 NavPress



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