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UPSTREAM OR DOWNSTREAM ?

This fall provided some beautiful weather for kayaking some of the smaller lakes of northwest Iowa. Did you know lakes can have currents? Many are fed by creeks or springs. Sometimes the force of their current can surprise you when you're just floating along. It can even change your direction.

Then you have to make a decision. Are you going to just go with the flow? Or are you going to work harder to go in the direction you intend to go, instead of wherever the current will take you ?

The same thing is true of the Christian life. Believers in Christ decide to follow Him – and this means going against the current of the world. It's a lot like paddling or swimming upstream – a lot of work ! But it's worth the work when you reach your destination.

Just floating downstream with the current is easy, and takes no effort at all. But going downstream carries you along according to the whim of the current of the world, the flesh, and the devil. That's not where Christ wants you to go, and you are supposed to be following Him.

God gave us the book of 1 Peter in the Bible to provide ample encouragement for Christian believers as we follow Christ and work out God's purpose for our lives. 1 Peter 4:19 says "let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good."

Peter has been talking about how Christians should expect trouble in their lives, because they're following Jesus, and going against the flow. It's not going to be easy – but He promises us the inward strength of the Holy Spirit to follow through on our determination to follow Him.

So while we paddle harder, we trust harder too – obeying His direction for our life and His call to follow Him, against the flow, depending on His strength and grace.

We go against the flow of the world, which is all the outside forces in your life that pull you and beckon you to give in to the culture and the peer pressure and the false promises of living for yourself instead of God.

And we go against the flow of the flesh, which is how the Bible describes the inward forces of our being that tempt us to give in to natural appetites and lusts instead of relying on God's power within us to say NO to sin and temptation.

And we go against the flow of the devil, who is the spiritual enemy of our souls, and who constantly twists the truth to tempt us to stop depending on God and stop obeying the Bible and give in to what sounds good to us instead.

Give in to any of those downstream currents and you'll get farther and farther from following Jesus!

But give in to Jesus instead, and you'll find that your trust in Him gives you strength to paddle upstream ! Because Jesus paid the penalty for your sins on the cross, He is our example in suffering and we can expect to suffer too. But Jesus also broke the power of sin in His resurrection. His new life gives us new life, and the power to say no to temptation and to say yes to doing His will, no matter how hard it is. So He is our strength in suffering.

And there's even more good news, because Jesus is our Savior from suffering. He promises to remove even the presence of sin, when we reach our destination of spending eternity in heaven with Him. And because Jesus reigns on high today, we can trust Him to be faithful to fulfill all of His promises to those who trust Him.

That's good news – and gives us much to be thankful for, as we keep on paddling for Him !