

targets, which starts a whole night of problems. The students from Needles go recruit friends and come back, and I have to stand between the two groups to keep them from fighting one another. No sleep this night for students, nor leaders.

### Day 2

Next morning the canoes are delivered to the camp I had reserved, except we are not there, so our canoes are now one mile upriver. We've already sent the busses downriver to the take-out spot, so now we have 100 students and no canoes. I take some leaders, hitchhike up to the canoes, and float them down to the students. While we are gone, breakfast is cooked in three large skillets, but they crack while heating and breakfast ends up in the dirt. No skillets to cook with for the rest of the trip make mealtimes interesting.

Now we head down the river. The wind is pushing the canoes upriver at a greater rate than the current is carrying them downriver. This is causing canoes to go everywhere but where they should.

By this time we've developed a problem with a trouble-making student (whom my leaders had recommended we exclude from the trip). He will not paddle his canoe. He has found a cute girl who will paddle for him. Her hands are worn to the point of bleeding. Their canoe is almost a mile behind everyone else. When my canoe gets close enough, I tell him to paddle. He refuses. I've had no sleep and I'm in no mood to deal with this problem. I pull next to his canoe, and He decides he wants to fight me right there in the river. When he stands up to take a swing at me his canoe tips and he falls forward with his behind in the air. This looks to me like a great target for my paddle and my frustration, so I swing—hard.

Unfortunately, he moves slightly so that my paddle skips off his behind and smacks the young lady square in the face. The force of my blow almost knocks her out of the boat. She has a very sore face, but thankfully no broken bones. (Please do not start your ministry by hitting students in the face with a paddle.)

Because of the wind and the desert heat, some of our leaders are so late that they miss finding the camp that we had reserved for the second night. I rent a boat and go down the river looking for students and leaders and pull them and their canoes back to the camp. We get settled about 1:00AM, only to find out that some of our girls have gone off with some boys in a ski boat and we have no idea where they are. Finally, we get all of our students to bed.

We are camping right on the river, and that night the river rises and overflows our camp. Our canoes float down-river. All of our sleeping gear, clothes, and food are soaked. No sleep for another night.

### Day 3

We discipline the girls for going with the boys in the ski boat by sending them home in cars. (I later think that may have been a reward, not a discipline.) In the process, we have purchased more food, but accidentally leave it in the cars so we have no food for the whole day on the river.

As we reach a wider part of the river we encounter ski boats pulling skiers. They are running the boats on one side of the canoes and the skiers are going on the other side, so it seems they are trying to take the heads of my students off with the towropes. I finally smack a skier in the stomach and then they try to run over me with their boat. (There I go again, using that dumb paddle.)

When we arrive at the canoe take-out spot where the busses are, we realize we have gone downriver about a half-mile too far, so we have to pull the canoes up the river in the 100-degree heat. Students are sunburned, and they're exhausted from no sleep. Some are sick. Finally everyone is on the busses and we head for home. One of our busses breaks down on a road that has to be a road to Hell. We pull the bus to a small garage, where I spend the whole night fixing it. No sleep another night. The garage does not have a phone. The parents wait at the church for us all night. When we finally arrive, I am told what a great youth leader I am. (Not!)

### Aftermath

After the trip, all my leaders resigned. I told God I was done with this ministry stuff. Of course, He was not done.

This experience changed my life and my understanding of ministry. I learned two important core values.

- Programs don't change lives, God does.
- Students must minister to other students. As we looked back on the trip, we saw that although the leaders were a mess, the students ministered to their friends. Students came to Christ and others were cared for by their friends.

God brought me to the end of myself. I realized that ministry was not about my planning or my program, but about totally depending upon Christ to work in the lives of students. Paul speaks about life-change in **Romans 7:14-23** where he uses the words "I", "me", and "my" 38 times. Then in verse 24 he realizes his problem: "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" And in verse 25 the answer, "Thanks be to God — through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Paul realized that he cannot change himself or others; only through Christ will he see lives change, not through programs or his great ability. He says it all in **2 Corinthians 12:9-10**, "But He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

I am 67 years old and have been ministering to students for more than 40 years. I find that I need still to become weak and allow God to bring me to the end of myself. I can still walk into a group of high school students and minister because they see I am authentic and that I love them. Let's not do programs in our own strength, but in our weakness—and God will change the lives of those to whom we minister.

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