



UP A CREEK
WITHOUT A PADDLE

By Willard White

We settled back to see where the current would take us.

We finally did it! My younger brother and I had saved enough money to buy the river raft of our dreams. I was 15 years old, and we had long anticipated the day that we could raft down the river near our house without a care.

As we walked to the river, I realized that we were missing something important: the paddles! Since it would take an additional 10 minutes to go back and get them, we decided that we didn't need paddles. I thought to myself, "The river isn't too rough. We will just jump in, sit back, and see where the river takes us." After all, we were men, and men didn't need *paddles*.

As we floated down the river, we saw snakes, turtles, shiny rocks, and mysterious floating objects—which remained mysterious since we could never get close enough to investigate them. Without paddles, we were at the mercy of the current and where it wanted to take us, which was often different from where we actually wanted to go. We tried paddling with our hands, but it was a slow form of navigation that did little except entertain the people watching our "progress" from the riverbank.

There were times when we got caught in the slow section of the current. My brother and I would gaze longingly at the enticing rapids, but we had no effective means of steering our way over to them. When we *did* find our way into a small set of rapids, we wished we hadn't. As we came around a curve in the river we noticed

several rough tree branches hanging only a few inches above the water. We frantically paddled with our hands, but they were no match for the current. We plowed face first into the coarse branches, leaving us feeling like we had been run over by sandpaper.

Nursing our wounds and egos, we reached the end of our trip and pulled the raft out of the water. We realized that without a paddle we had missed out on what could have been a more fun and exciting experience.

The paddles my brother and I were lacking are like goals that give us direction in life. Sometimes we go to school, church, or seminary, plop down in our seat, and start with the attitude I had before our rafting trip: "I will just sit back, relax, and see where this class takes me." Then we realize that without a paddle, or goal, to give us direction, we miss out on many great opportunities and learning experiences. We learn ways of avoiding tree branches that come at us in the form of life's trials.

Whether it's school, church, seminary, or any other activity, setting goals can make the experience more interesting and meaningful. With a paddle in hand, life can be a much more rewarding adventure—and a lot less painful. **NE**

ILLUSTRATION BY GREG NEWBOLD