

Same River Twice

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. 3 No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His servants will worship Him. Revelation 22:1-3

We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. Romans 5:3-5 ESV

Four friends, Kramer, Stan, Skinner and Mikey returned to the river to ride together again after many years. Each of them felt called to return but weren't really sure why. Facing the challenges of the river was exciting to them. Facing the challenges of life was more difficult. They each had unfinished business in their lives. Are you facing challenges in your life? Who can you count on when you need help?

Stan was disappointed that he hadn't been part of his son's life and ended up being very critical when he talked to him. Skinner struggled with finding his niche in life. His brother-in-law wanted to straighten him out. Geno called him a loser and said everyone knew it, even his friends. He said Skinner's life was a joke. Skinner told his friends, " I never told Maggie the whole story. I was afraid she'd be disappointed in me. I don't know what I'd do if she was." Do you treat others with compassion or are you sometimes critical?

Kramer said his daughter with muscular dystrophy was an angel with a broken wing. When he and his wife were expecting her as a baby they knew there were problems but decided to let her go full term and leave the rest to God. When asked if he thought they'd made the right decision he said, "I wish I could make her better, but regret that I had her? No, just think what I would have missed. Part of the reason we keep coming back here is because we don't know what is going to happen. It's never the same river twice. Instead of a little girl that runs and plays we have a little girl in a wheel-chair struggling to sit up. The river's out there. Sometimes it is all you can do to keep a grip on the oars."

Do you struggle to hold onto the oars? God will help us through difficult times if we ask Him.

When Stan's boat overturned, Gwen, who couldn't swim, was trapped under the boat. Later she was mad at Stan saying "I almost drown out there today. You haven't had your head in this whole trip because you're so busy feeling sorry for yourself. Get on with life." When Stan quit complaining and gave his son some encouragement their relationship changed and they even started having fun together.

Have you ever been stuck in life because you can't get past something that has happened in the past?

Geno began to see Skinner in a new light and learned to respect him because of how he handled the difficulties on the river. He saw Skinner's pain when he told about the young man who died on a previous trip. Geno saw Skinner's dedication to his wife when he was willing to run 12 miles to call her to say Happy Anniversary.

Have you ever misjudged someone? Is there someone who you need to give another chance?

When the four friends visited the "Broken Oar Ranch" Kramer finally knew why he needed to come on the trip. He realized that he had lost a friend, too. The tragedy wasn't just Skinner's problem. Kramer also realized that he couldn't bear the thought that he would soon be losing his daughter that he loved very much. Even though his daughter was severely handicapped she brought love and joy into his life.

Have you ever lost someone who was very dear to you?

Dear Lord, we all have struggles, challenges and questions in our lives. Open our eyes to see the changes You want to make in us. Help us be truly thankful for all of the blessings that You have given us. Give us the courage to face difficult and trying times knowing that You will always be with us. Watch over us and keep us in Your loving care. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.