

# Harder Than it Looks

One of the great experiences of visiting a river town is a boat trip. Each year, more than 400,000 people visit the famous English town of Cambridge (our cover picture), and many will at some stage enjoy time on the river Cam in a flat-bottomed boat called a punt. It can be restful and enjoyable, especially with a commentary explaining the colleges and beautiful gardens that can be seen so well from the river.

But punting is not as easy as it looks, as many have found out! For a start, the river varies greatly in depth, being so deep in places that you can lose the whole length of your pole and still not touch the bottom. In other places, the river bed is very muddy and the pole can get stuck fast. Many a novice has ended up in the river while trying to retrieve a pole. One of the first lessons with punting is that the pole is not just for propulsion, it is also used to steer. That's the clever bit. If you don't understand that, the punt will go around in circles carrying everything and everyone in its wake!

It is fair to say that life can be very much like this. In the uncharted waters of our future, we benefit greatly from good instructions; we need to practise; and it gets easier as we accept help.

## Instructions

Ideally to be successful on the river you need some instructions and plenty of practice! There will be many times when we think progress is slow. We may often lose our pole or hit the bank or another boat.

This is rather like our lives. Life is never as easy as it looks. We need to

learn the basic rules to life, and put them into practice. The Bible gives us the rules for living and these instructions come from the God who created us and understands us better than we know ourselves. Think about these examples:

*Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil (Ecclesiastes 12:13–14).*

*Do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'... For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you (Matthew 6:31–33).*

*All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).*

Through the Bible, God is telling us to get our priorities right and focus on His purpose, in which case He will look after our eternal well-being.



## Practice

Once we have found the instructions, then we need to practise them until we get more proficient. Back on the river, if you have had a bit of practice you may feel you are making reasonable progress until you come across scores of other people in their punts each trying with difficulty to control their movement. At times the river becomes a tangled mass of boats, poles and people all going in different directions. It takes considerable skill to steer a course through this entanglement, anticipating the speed and direction of all the other boats.

Life can be just like this. We will often feel we have made a mess of things, but that is no reason to give up. The Bible tells us to keep on trying, not to get discouraged, but to practise doing the right things:

*Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honour giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer (Romans 12:9–12).*

*Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart (Galatians 6:9).*

Through His writers, God is telling us not to get downhearted or give up on doing the right things, but to carry on and trust His plans for us.

## Letting God Take Control

Only when we are in a punt that is properly in control can we relax a bit



and enjoy the scenery, the magnificent buildings and beautiful gardens that slip past our gaze.

In life, we all find it hard to steer our course and really need someone with us in our boat to guide us through so that we can get safely to our destination. If our lives are being steered by God, we can start to appreciate all He has done and listen to His instruction. This is the Gospel message, which means salvation to anyone who is prepared to take the time to listen.

The Bible tells us that if we trust in God He will steer our course through life and bring us to His Kingdom.

*If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall He not with him also freely give us all things?... In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us (Romans 8:31–37).*

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