Many years ago when we were on our first pastoral assignment in northern Virginia, my son, Don III, and I decided to take a raft trip on the northern branch of the Shenandoah River, which flowed nearby.  Before we left, we studied maps to chart our departure spot and landing. This was where my wife, Gloria, would drop us off and later meet us. Then, with a borrowed rubber raft and a few supplies to meet anticipated thirst and hunger, we set out.  The weather was ideal and, for the most part, the river float was pleasant.  At one point we came to a small island that forced the river to divide, so we had to decide which fork we would take.  We decided to take the left side of the island where the water looked very placid as far as we could see. However, this introduced a problem that has stuck in my memory for many decades.  When we first took this route, we couldn’t see the turbulent rapids. We didn’t want to deal with them and the possibility of landing in the drink, so we began to row back to the point of our decision to take the right fork.  
  
Then we discovered the strength of the current we had been floating on.  What had seemed to be a lazy glide now tested our strength and endurance to the max.  After quite a struggle (rubber rafts don’t cut through the water efficiently), we finally made our way to the shore of the island and portaged across it to the other side, dragging the raft along.  Once back in the water, we continued quite effortlessly to our destination.

This experience reminded us that we do not know the strength of sin until we seek to remove ourselves from its power as it drags us toward the rapids of trouble. Sometimes we are tempted to give in to our inclinations because it seems much easier than fighting against them.  But God’s promise is, “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him,” James 1:12, KJV.  The psalmist David wrote, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble,” Psalm 46:1, KJV.  He also wrote, “Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler…”  Psalm 91:3, KJV.  Although the battle becomes hectic at times and we’re tempted to give up, we should always remember that God is in this with us and will not allow us to be overcome if we will rely on Him.  To the ones who may be in the thick of the battle today, remember, when you’re pulling against the stream, you can count on Christ to strengthen you.  You can be victorious in His strength.

When we are tempted to withhold from our tithes and offerings, we should remember the promise that if we are faithful to God He will open the windows of Heaven and pour out more blessings than we can possibly need.  IT IS ALL OF ME IN RESPONSE TO ALL OF HIM!

--Adapted from a Sabbath devotion written by

    Don Eckenroth, Retired-Carolina Conference