

Have you ever been lost in the woods? I have, and believe me, it is a scary feeling! As a child, I spent a lot of time in the woods. I would go on hikes at least three or four times a week during the summer, sometimes with friends, sometimes by myself. I remember one time I was with my friend Danny on one of these hikes and we became disorientated briefly. We quickly got our bearings but I remember my heart starting to pound when we looked around and didn't see anything recognizable. That was scary enough, but years later, I got another lesson I'll never forget. I was a young adult now and had some military training in land navigation; I was proficient at it and while on a camping trip with another friend Bob, we decided to test our navigation skills and hike cross-country to a fire tower about three or four miles away from where we were. We plotted a course on the map, shot an azimuth with the compass, and went out into the forest. As we hiked, we kept a close check on our position and compass heading.

After a short time we came onto a fire road, this road looked straight as an arrow and was on our exact compass heading! We decided to continue on the road without checking the map, after all we could see the road was straight and it was right on our compass heading, so we got careless. Rule number one when navigating in the wilderness is "Never Assume." We hiked on for about thirty or forty minutes just enjoying the scenery and the fresh air, when Bob asked, "wasn't the sun on our other shoulder just a little while ago?" I agreed that his observation was indeed correct so we checked the compass. Much to our surprise, we had, within just minutes turned 180 degrees from our proper heading, all while hiking on what seemed to be a "straight and narrow path." We were heading away from our intended destination! What a lesson! Things are not always, as they seem. What seems to be the right path could be taking you away from the destination you intended if you get complacent and lose focus? So it is with your walk with God as you try to navigate the path he intended for you. We have to keep checking the compass (the Holy Spirit) and the map, (the word of God) as we navigate through life to insure we are truly headed in the right direction. The Holy Spirit will always point you in the right direction. Notice I didn't say path this time because as it was illustrated by the story I just shared, sometimes we can be fooled by what appears to be the right path.

Most people have heard the term, "you're either for God, or against Him," and hence, you are either heading towards God or Away from Him. It amazes me as to how God communicates with us. Even a simple hike can turn into a lesson on life. This story made me think of how confusing life can be at times, especially if you do not have any sense of direction. Most of us think we know where we are heading, but as you can see, complacency and overconfidence can get you into trouble. When navigating, whether over land, water, or in the air, you have to keep track at all times of where you are, likewise the direction you are heading.

Many people of the younger generation might have trouble understanding this because most people rely of G.P.S. navigation nowadays. The G.P.S. system is very accurate and makes treks into the wilderness and back a virtual "piece of cake!" You simply tell the G.P.S. where you want to go, push a button, and follow the little pointer arrow...it cannot be much easier than that! That is of course as long as you brought along extra batteries or do not fall victim to some of the other variables. This is what gets many people in trouble; they rely on this one form of navigation and do not have a contingency plan or another way to verify their position or direction of travel should something go wrong.

A good way to verify your position is to have a simple map, but this too may not be sufficient when hiking off the trail. A regular map might show you where you are by various roads and landmarks, but it does not show you what the terrain is like, nor does most G.P.S. systems. You might be headed in the right direction, but the terrain in your path might be impossible to traverse. In order to solve this problem, there is another type of map, a topographical map also called a To-Po Map (pronounced "Toe-Poe").

This map shows all the hills and valleys. It even shows swamps or marshes, which might be impossible to walk through. What a “God Send” that would be whether the G.P.S. battery died or not! Assuming the battery did die, with a To-Po Map, you would have a much better chance of finding your way; that is, provided you have a good sense of direction. Even with an excellent sense of direction, the wilderness can be confusing; remember I mentioned that time with my friend Danny...everything looked the same when we became disoriented. The perfect companion to the map is a compass. Just like the little arrow on the G.P.S., the arrow on the compass shows you your direction of travel with one major difference... No Batteries Required. It is as reliable as...well, God Himself.

I said all that to say this...With the proper tools such as a Compass or a G.P.S. and a Map; you can find your way anywhere. Of course, you will need a little training in navigation, which you can get by taking some courses, or even by reading yourself. As I mentioned before, God also gave us tools to navigate through life. I cannot think of a more complete and comprehensive instruction manual and navigation aid for life than the Bible. Although most passages in the Bible apply to certain people and situations, it never ceases to amaze me as to how I can read the same verse I have read many times before, and get a totally different meaning out of it depending on my current situation. I am totally convinced that it is the Living Word of God. I stated earlier that in order to navigate some training would be necessary and the same is true when utilizing the Bible to navigate through life. I remember a simple concept taught to me early in my Christian walk that has made the Bible come alive to me where before it was just another collection of words. Here it is. When studying the Bible, as you read a passage, ask yourself three questions. What does it say...what does it mean...and what does it mean to me? When you do this, it will show you how personal this book can be, and that it is truly God’s way of communicating with you directly and providing guidance and direction on a daily basis.

When Bob and I were straying off course on our hike to the fire tower, God used the sun to get our attention and get us back on course. In similar fashion He later used His Son to get both Bob and me back on course toward Himself as we walked through life. Pay attention to the Son!