

## WHOSE GUIDANCE SYSTEM DO YOU TRUST?

When driving to a new destination, I like getting directions from someone who has been there before. "Follow the main drag, pass the diner, bear left at the fork in the road, turn right at the post office, and it's just down the road" may be short on metrics, but it's full of helpful landmarks. If I can't get directions from someone who has been there before, I rely on Global Positioning Service (GPS) through my phone. That's how I recently navigated to a clergy retreat two states away.

I had been there once and anticipated the same route: down the mountain, a long stretch of interstate highway, a hot mess through Atlanta, and 90 minutes of cool down to the rural retreat center. That route was confirmed as I set forth. But even before I was down the mountain, GPS recommended a different way, purportedly to avoid a crash site. Would I trust GPS and accept the new route? With only a moment's hesitation I agreed, and was onto a new road.

Meandering through small towns, happily looking at lakes and cattle instead of semis and brake lights, I marveled that I put so much trust in the guidance of an impersonal satellite system and its federal overseers. I didn't really know where I was, where the road would lead, or what lay along the way; and yet, I willingly followed the route.

Then I wondered, Do I trust GPS more than God's positioning service? Do I listen as closely for his directions and faithfully follow his every turn in life, even when He suddenly diverts me to an unfamiliar road, or warns me of a spiritual crash ahead? Sadly, not always. How about you?

Instead of relying confidently on almighty God, who made us, knows us, loves and sustains us, we sometimes fail to put our trust in Him, and lean on our own understanding instead (Psalm 139:1–16; John 3:16; Acts 17:28; Proverbs 3:5–6).

Sometimes we resemble the ancient Israelites, of whom God said, "Ah, stubborn children,...who carry out a plan, but not mine, and who make an alliance, but not of my Spirit, that they may add sin to sin; who set out to go down to Egypt, without asking for my direction, to take refuge in the protection of Pharaoh" (Isaiah 30:1–2).

Striking out on our own, our common human instinct, reflects three big mistakes: not asking for God's direction, not listening for his answer, not doing what He says. If you have done these things, like I have, you know it leads to the wrong place. I sometimes have to stop right in the middle of writing a message -- including this one -- to confess that I have set out on this work God has given me to do without asking for his direction. Thankfully, God's positioning service will mercifully help us "make a u-turn and return to the route" if we repent, submit to Him, invoke the Holy Spirit, and consult the Bible.

The Bible is "a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path", through which God makes known the path of life to us (Psalm 119:105; Acts 2:28). He promises to direct us along that path if we will but ask: "Thus says the Lord, 'Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls'" (Jeremiah 30:19, 21).

As we begin our Lenten journey to the cross with Jesus, let us ask for his guidance, and fully trust the turn-by-turn direction He will give us every step of the way. After all, He has been there before, He knows

the landmarks; and, best of all, He is our companion on the way  
(Matthew 28:20b).

With love in the Lord,  
The Rev. Christine Maddux