

A GPS For Our Spiritual Pilgrimage

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John 14:3-6 "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I have gone, there you may go also. And you know the way where I go. Then Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, how we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I proclaim myself the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.

"The way," or "that way" was the term the early apostles described our spiritual journey, spiritual pilgrimage, or perhaps our wilderness wanderings.

Acts 19:9 But when some became hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of **the Way** before the people, he withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.

Acts 19:23 About that time there occurred no small disturbance concerning **the Way**.

Acts 24:22 But Felix, having a more exact knowledge about the Way, put them off, saying, "When Lysias the commander comes down, I will decide your case."

About five years ago, I called a pastor I formerly knew in Pasadena, Robin Webber, about a sermon I remembered he had given back in 1986. In the course of the conversation, Robin asked where I had ended up after the split of our previous fellowship.

I told him I was with a very tiny splinter group called the Church of the Great God, pastored by John Ritenbaugh. Robin Webber said "Great—I'm so glad you stayed with 'the Way.'"

At a funeral in Big Sandy in 1998, Dave Havir, pastor of the Big Sandy Church of God, asked me where I had gone after the split of our previous fellowship. I told him I was with a tiny splinter group called the Church of the Great God. He replied, "I'm so glad

you stayed with the truth."

When Raymond McNair, my former boss, was excommunicated from the now defunct Global Church of God, I called him, assuring him that I considered him a stalwart minister of God's truth and would stay in contact with him. He asked me where I was now attending church since the split of our previous fellowship. I told him I was attending with a tiny splinter group known as the Church of the Great God, pastored by John Ritenbaugh. He replied, "I'm so happy you stayed with 'the way.'"

I replied that although we all seemed to end up in different campsites, we are all travelling the same spiritual journey and that if we travel into one another's campsite, we should make sure that we make one another welcome.

In the course of the conversation, I mentioned to him that as far as I know, John Ritenbaugh had coined the term 'Greater Church of God' to characterize our collective over-arching set of beliefs and doctrines. Raymond McNair liked the term and said he would start using it.

In the vast number of splinter groups we call the greater church of God, of which many of them have the same set of overarching doctrines, in my current community of Hawkins/Big Sandy/Gladewater (also known as the Hawkwater Metroplex, or as some affectionately call it 'Heresy Junction') probably the majority of these splinters have representation.

Many of the pastors in their heart of hearts realize they do not have exclusive dibs on doctrinal truth. We all have strengths, we all have weaknesses, and to be sure, we have plenty to learn from one another.

In our current state of splintership—or perhaps, I should say bobbing around in life rafts—we should keep our docking mechanisms in good shape, offering help to lost fellow travelers whether they stay with us 24 hours, 2 years, or 10 years.

I know in the past several months, some have expressed anxiety about people floating. I know that any amputation is going to hurt and bring residual pain. But that should really be none of our concern. Having lived in the Big Sandy area, I can assure you that floating has always taken place ever since the Church of God was blown apart. We cannot go into the mindset of our brothers and sisters who are with us on this journey, probing their comfort levels or motivations. Let us take comfort in the fact that the Lord knows who are His, and who the tares are. Remembering that Jesus washed Judas Iscariot's feet, we need to be kind even to those we suspect as tares.

I remember watching a DVD of the Mormon anthem, Come, Come Ye Saints, in which the Mormon pioneers were shown in a series of covered wagon caravans moving from Missouri out to Utah. In one scene, a covered wagon tipped over in a river and the wife of one pilgrim and her two boys had to join another caravan. The concluding scene showed a joyful reunion with their father as the Mormon Tabernacle Choir sang the strains:

We'll find this place

Which God for us prepared far away in the west

There none shall come to make us afraid

There the saints will be blessed

When I see that cheerful family reunion in that clip, I always get a big lump in my throat—picturing the reunion of many splinter groups on our current spiritual journey through the desolate wilderness.

Back in 1987 at Faculty dining, Rod Meredith looked at me quizzically and said, you always remind me of a Mormon spy. Maybe he had more insight than he realized.

Six years ago on October 25, I gave a split sermon on the topic of Developing Spiritual Wanderlust. In that message, I expressed fascination for the "Covered Wagon" image or motif.

Melvin Rhodes, in the September/ October 2002 "Good News" magazine, used the metaphor of a citadel and caravan: "In explaining Europe to Americans, and America to Europeans, I have sometimes used the analogy of a citadel and a caravan. Europe is the citadel—America, the caravan."

I have heard other variations on this idea, such as "fortress Europe" and "covered wagon America." This wagon train or teamster image also applies to all of Jacob's offspring—in North America, Australia, Europe, or the Middle East.

In our current spiritual journey, we also find ourselves, much like the pioneers of old, heading across a wilderness in a foreign or unknown land heading toward the promised land, perhaps with a visual image like Father Abraham implanted in our imaginations (Hebrews 11:16). As Abraham's and Jacob's descendants, we have collectively been on

this journey since God told Abraham to leave his home in Genesis 12:1.

I bet some of those pioneers wish God would have given them a device like this Global Positioning System. My son Eric gave me this to me four years ago as a Father's Day gift. It is a truly a remarkable invention.

Levi Quinn, in his article, "What Does A GPS Tracking System Do And How Can It Be Useful To You?" mentions that the Global Positioning System or GPS was originally developed by the US Department of Defense. It is dependent on a constellation of twenty-seven earth-orbiting satellites, twenty-four of which are working; the remaining three serve as back up just in case one fails. It is a navigation system that enables one to determine location, time, speed and direction. It was primarily developed for military operations. It enabled the British to win the Falkland War in 1982.

In 1983, the GPS application was made available for civilian use through a directive issued by the former President Ronald Reagan.

Many civilians took advantage of the GPS application. It is commonly used to aid them in navigation. Using a GPS tracking system on a car trip can be more convenient than using the conventional map, AAA Trip-Tik, or even Google Map.

In order to use the application, one must have a GPS receiver. This is very useful especially when traveling unfamiliar territories. The device lets you know where you are and how will you get to your destination.

It is amazing how the system works. The satellites orbit around the earth. It is arranged in such a way that there are four satellites visible in the sky wherever, whenever. In a day, these enormous satellites make two complete rotations. The receiver's responsibility is to detect four or more of these satellites. Once it has located those satellites, it uses the information to determine its current location.

All of us who have used the GPS (I fondly refer to her as Miss Gypsy) have taken her gentle corrections: "Remain on the correct route for two point three miles." "Ping" "Off route. "Recalculating. Recalculating. Recalculating." "Turn left on Madison Street and drive three tenths of a mile."

We soon learn that when Miss Gypsy gives us orders, we go where she tells us to go.

Even those of us with the most recalcitrant human natures, not wanting to take orders from anyone, realize that it is in our best interests to take orders from the little lady in the

box.

One thing I really like about Miss Gypsy is that no matter how many times I mess up, she never gets angry. She just continues to repeat: Recalculating, recalculating, recalculating. One even might be mesmerized with her carefully measured sexy voice. Some guys, if we are to believe the TV commercials, have fallen in love with her.

I like to picture Miss Gypsy as Marlene Dietrich as she appeared in the 1947 romantic spy film called *Golden Earrings*, involving a former British spy (Milland) who received a set of gold earrings in the mail and recalls his wartime journey across Germany disguised as a Gypsy by a beautiful Gypsy woman (Marlene Dietrich). During the trip, he gathers damaging information against the Nazis as he falls in love with the woman who hides him.

The electronic Miss Gypsy (unlike Marlene Dietrich) sometimes makes mistakes in her pronunciation. It calls Beulah Street, the main street of Hawkins, Bo-lah Street, and she seldom gets her German diphthongs correct as she says "Toperween" for Toeperwein, or "Weedner" for Weidner in San Antonio. But I have learned to trust Miss Gypsy for directions, leading me effortlessly through Los Angeles, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Kansas City, Des Moines, Tulsa, the rolling farmlands of western Minnesota, and I expect her to escort me around Topeka, Kansas.

Sadly, I have not updated the maps since I received the device (four years ago), so sometimes Miss Gypsy thinks she is trying to rescue me from the cornfields in Pflugerville, pulling me back to Interstate 35, when I am actually driving on one of Governor Rick Perry's marvelous new tollroads (#130) which cuts one hour from my travels to San Antonio (helping me to avoid the traffic snarls of Austin) making it a six hour commute rather than a seven hour or more commute. Newer models of the GPS warn of traffic snarls and alternate routes to avoid them.

Miss Gypsy knows all the restaurants, shopping centers, entertainment locations, museums, and historical points of interest.

Immediately after Eric had given me this thoughtful gift, I thought I would do something original and find some spiritual parallels, working this into an article, Bible study, sermonette, or sermon. To my surprise, I found that the Baptists, Protestants, Evangelicals, Roman Catholics, and Jews had all beat me to the punch. Many articles, blogs, sermons, and Bible Studies have noted spiritual parallels, some of them somewhat shallow and pedestrian, and others extremely insightful and thought-provoking.

One pastor expressed His enthusiasm that the GPS has provided an insight as to how God Almighty can answer with precision and accuracy countless prayers from people, all asking for directions to different destinations simultaneously.

When we look at these incredible, dazzling spiritual parallels suggested by the GPS, we should not become guilty of worshipping the device, perhaps wishing we were more like the device—perhaps desiring that our minds worked like a computer. That would amount to blatant idolatry because our inventions (including the computer, the calculator, the translating machine, and the GPS) were created in our image, and we were created in God's image.

The GPS, the Blackberry, Smart phone, and the I-Pod are crude reductionist imitations of the vastly superior human nervous system. And we, in turn, are crude, reductionist models of the vastly superior God Being.

Nevertheless, the analogy or metaphor is the favored method of professional educators and our Elder Brother Jesus Christ, who relied heavily on metaphors, parables, and figures of speech.

In this message today, I intend to give a review of some of the findings I have found in the current literature pertaining to the subject of the spiritual GPS, and then delve into some subtleties not yet explored, subtleties (including the establishing of an intimate reciprocity between God and His called out ones within the sanctification process) leading to a more effective spiritual journey, navigating our pilgrimage which we refer to as "the Way" into God's Kingdom.

The many articles, sermons, and blogs on the spiritual GPS identified the following grounds of comparison. The Global Positioning System was identified as:

- The Bible
- The Law, Prophets, and Writings
- The Proverbs and Wisdom Literature of the Bible
- God's Law
- God's Holy Spirit
- The Mind of Christ
- The Law Placed in our Hearts
- The Sabbath and Holy Days
- The Spirit in Man
- Prayer and Bible Study
- Our Conscience

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- Our Emotions
- Our Life Experiences
- The Consequences of our Sins
- Affliction and Correction
- Guilt and Suffering
- Haunting memories resurfacing from our subconscious
- Blessings and Cursings
- Tests and Trials
- Remorse
- Repentance
- The Sanctification Process itself
- The counsel from the ministry
- The influence of our brethren within the Church
- The Big Cloud of Witnesses in Hebrews 11
- The admonition of our brethren

If we look at the common denominator for the 26 items I have just listed, we notice the emphasis on course correction, guiding someone on back on track, encouraging a steady course toward the destination, gently correcting if the pilgrim should get lost or stray off course.

Any entity, thing, person, or event which steers the wayward traveler back onto the right course could serve as grounds of comparison for the GPS or the Global Positioning System

In this sense, the principle upon which the GPS is based has already had precedence in the Bible. Before humankind had launched one satellite, God was already using His created heavenly bodies:

Genesis 1:14 Then God said, "Let there become lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs and for seasons and for days and years; [by extension regulating the weekly Sabbath and the annual Holy Days in which God's plan for all mankind has been revealed]

Job describes the mighty constellations that God created in Job 9:9 when God asks Job, "Who makes the Bear, Orion and the Pleiades?" These massive, heavenly bodies made navigation possible centuries before the first GPS transponder was launched into space.

The navigation systems that God Almighty has wired into birds (the arctic turn) and the robin and fish (the salmon) make the GPS look crude and unsophisticated in comparison.

Thousands of years before we had a visual display screen, with a day and night visual, God had provided Israel a visual display with the cloud that accompanied them by day and the pillar of fire that accompanied them by night:

Exodus 13:21-22 The Lord had gone before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.

In retrospect, Nehemiah gave this insightful description:

Nehemiah 9:19 You, in Your great compassion, did not forsake them in the wilderness; the pillar of cloud did not leave them by day, to guide them on their way, nor the pillar of fire by night, to light for them the way in which they would go.

The Bible has been identified as functioning like a global positioning system. One anonymous writer, in an article titled, "How do I find God," suggested that we can consider the Holy Bible as God's Positioning System. More people purchase the Bible, read it, and follow its inspiration than any other document on the face of the earth.

God designed the software and the coordinates. We should regard the Bible (inspired and designed by God Almighty) as more accurate and trustworthy for our spiritual pilgrimage than any GPS devised by man.

The World's First GPS

Scott Ray, in his article "The World's First GPS, The Word of God," makes the compelling case that the Bible is a very unique book in itself. It tells of this world in three perspectives: Times Past, But Now, and the Ages to Come. It tells of the beginning. It tells us of now, the Dispensation of the Grace of God, and it also tells us of the Ages to Come, or the future that has not happened as of yet.

Let us turn to a classic metaphor of the Scriptures back in Psalms 119.

Psalm 119:105 I consider Your word as a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Consider also Paul's characterization of the scriptures as a mechanism to guide, provide correction, and re-orientation:

II Timothy 3:15-17 And how from your childhood you have had a knowledge of {and} been acquainted with the sacred Writings, which are able to instruct you {and} give you the understanding for salvation which comes through faith in Christ Jesus [through the leaning of the entire human personality on God in Christ Jesus in absolute trust and confidence in His power, wisdom, and goodness]. Every Scripture is God-breathed (given by His inspiration) and profitable for instruction, for reproof {and} conviction of sin, for correction of error {and} discipline in obedience, [and] for training in righteousness (in holy living, in conformity to God's will in thought, purpose, and action), so that the man of God may be complete {and} proficient, well fitted {and} thoroughly equipped for every good work.

In Richard Ritenbaugh's sermon on Preventing Deception, he states, "God's Word illuminates the path of our lives. If we keep God's Word shining along the way, then we will be far less likely to trip. We will not be easily deceived. Because we are following the light, we will see what the light reveals in the path ahead of us. It is only when we turn the light off (before we have actually arrived at our destination) that something could spring up in the dark and trip us. Therefore, if we keep the light of God's truth shining brightly ahead of us, then we have a greater chance of avoiding deception."

The Law, Prophets, and Writings served as the principal beacons and satellites before the Son of Man arrived on the scene.

The Proverbs and Wisdom Literature of the Bible

One time in the early 1980's, when I was taking a theology class at Ambassador College in Pasadena, I bristled when the instructor idly speculated, "There is some question whether Solomon, with his checkered record, will even make it into God's Kingdom."

I reflected that Solomon was responsible for three books in the Bible. This gentleman had not even written one epistle. [Ludwig Wittgenstein said, "Whereof we do not know, thereof we should stay silent."] I find it equally hurtful when I hear idle speculation about some of our former teachers and mentors who have finished their course.

William Sterling, in his article, "How's Your GPS," compares Solomon's Proverbs as God's Positioning System, encouraging us to follow certain paths and avoid other deadly paths, giving us practical advice about friendship, marriage, childrearing, business relationships, the work ethic, avoiding sloth and laziness, controlling the emotions, and precautions about social faux pas or mistakes.

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.

Sterling refers to Proverbs 3:5-6 as another GPS, a God Positioning System, a foolproof system that is based on trusting God and living out that trust. When we choose to trust God, although it may sometimes seem counter-intuitive, God will always direct our paths.

Solomon, in his Ecclesiastes (which the previously referred to zealous theology instructor maliciously and erroneously characterized as an abortive suicide message), taught us to examine life self-reflectively in the manner of a scientific experiment.

Ecclesiastes 1:13 And I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning all that has happened under heaven It proves a grievous task which God has given to the sons of men to suffer affliction.

Solomon has demonstrated human beings have the capacity to be self-reflexive—to think about the consequences—to think about their thinking.

Ecclesiastes 2:3 I explored with my mind how to stimulate my body with wine while my mind guided me wisely, and how to take hold of folly, until I could see what good does it do for the sons of men to do under heaven the few years of their lives.

In all the twists and turns of his lifetime experiment, testing pleasure, testing madness, testing the value of work, love, and lust, Solomon arrived at the right conclusion. It was not tacked on as an afterthought, but it grew naturally out of his countless observations of everything under the sun:

The conclusion (conclusion, final destination of course correction) is to fear God and keep His commandments, and everything will be brought into judgment.

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 The conclusion, when we have heard it, consists of the following: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which you have hidden, whether it has come from good or evil motives.

God's Law was designed to give us an awareness of sin in our lives in order to cause us to recoil in revulsion. Notice Paul's graphic description in Romans 7.

Romans 7:7-9 What shall we say then? Does the Law equate to sin? May it never happen! On the contrary, **I would not have come to know sin except through the Law**; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET." [Miss Gypsy warns us not to take a certain route because of a traffic snarl. The gages on our dash tell us we are nearly out of fuel or the pressure gauge tells us the radiator is about to explode.] But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin dies. [The gauge is the indicator of the problem, not the cause of the problem.] I felt once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died;

Ignorance is bliss

James builds a corollary on that concept in James 1:23-25.

James 1:23-25 For if anyone hears the word and does not do the word, he resembles a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what he previously looked like. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will receive blessings in what he does.

The kind of liberty one thinks he receives from breaking the law is not pleasant. When he drives over the speed limit, he is always looking for troopers, and swerving to avoid slow moving traffic, but the motorist who obeys the law feels a sense of peace and well-

being.

The sense of peace we experience by yielding to the law rather than fighting it is seen in the Psalmist David's exclamation:

Psalm 119:165 Those who love Your law have great peace, and nothing causes them to stumble.

Some have suggested that the conscience God has given every human being resembles a wired-in GPS regulating ethical behavior.

Our Conscience

According to Catherine Booth, wife of the founder of the Salvation Army, Conscience could be considered an agency of man's spirit that is sensitive to the character or integrity of our behavior, a faculty which is integral to our nature, common to all human beings everywhere and in every age. The apostle Paul alluded to it in Romans 2:15. Every human being has a conscience, whether educated or uneducated, enlightened or unenlightened, active or dormant; it can be seared, but not totally blotted out. Consequently, Christianity should not attempt to discard or dispense with it—and certainly not attempt to destroy it, but instead to yield to God's sanctification, transforming human nature into godly nature. (02)

Romans 2:14 For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, act lawfully by themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them,

Even the Gentiles in the book of Amos were severely punished, not because they knew they were breaking God's law, but because they were bad human beings, violating their own ethical standards.

Having a conscience void of offence implies a 'purged' conscience, made clean. Conscience must be made clean, before it can be kept clean. The residuum of all sin settles on the conscience, and as all have sinned there can be no consciences clean by nature. The only way by which consciences can be purified is by purging from guilt and making them ready for new service. 'Purge your conscience from dead works' (Hebrews

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9: 14)—from all pollution, uncleanness, sterility. Conscience is not only polluted by sin, but outraged, incensed, made angry; it needs to be pacified as well as purged, and this can only be done by the Blood of the atonement.

The conscience is actually an aspect of the spirit in man described in Proverbs 20:27 in a metaphor not unlike a GPS device.

The Spirit in Man

Proverbs 20:27 The spirit of man is the candle of the LOORD, searching all the inward parts of the belly.

John Ritenbaugh, in his May 2006 sermon on Purpose Driven Churches, makes this observation commenting on Proverbs 20:27: "That is incredible when you think of how many people have lived and died on earth. Let me give you this scripture from *The Amplified Bible*. It is just a little bit clearer. 'The spirit of man (that factor in human personality which proceeds immediately from God) is the lamp of the LOORD, searching all his innermost parts.'"

Another aspect of the spirit in man we identify as Our Emotions

According to Motivational Coach John Grosberg, one method of measuring our spiritual progress or feedback is to pay attention to our emotions or feelings. Many of us have been told throughout life that our feelings could not be trusted, and that we needed to place head over heart. Although there are good reasons to not allow feelings to dictate our behavior, we need to realize that feelings can give us vital feedback on our spiritual journey, giving us insights that intellect might miss.

Realizing that emotions are automatic reactions of hidden underlying causes, we should look for the underlying causes to enable us to understand what might be going on in the recesses of our nervous system. Though we may not be responsible for our feelings, we can only control our behavior. As we mature spiritually, we find our behavior dictated increasingly less by our feelings, but instead we use the messages communicated to us by our feelings to make better decisions.

Our emotions lead us to change course in our spiritual behavior by means of affliction and correction, guilt and suffering, and profiting from our life experiences, both good and bad, and remorse about past foolish behavior.

Affliction and Correction

The Psalmist David thanks God for affliction as a matter of course correction in Psalm 119:

Psalm 119:67 Before I suffered affliction, I went astray, but now I keep Your word.

Psalm 119:71 It is good for me that I suffered affliction, that I may learn Your statutes.

Paul spoke of a thorn in the flesh in II Corinthians 12:7-10. In verse 7 Paul suggests that it was given to him to keep him from exalting himself. Dave Havis has a theory that when anyone asks for spiritual gifts, God may also provide a metaphorical thorn to puncture the pride. When you consider that the Corinthian church boasted about their spiritual gifts, it must have been a pretty prickly group of congregants.

Guilt and Suffering

God has made it clear that we cultivate and maintain the ability to feel spiritual pain in order to move us away from behavior that endangers us. Paul assures the Corinthians:

II Corinthians 7:9-11 Yet I am glad now, not because you were pained, but because you were *pained into repentance* [that turned you to God]; for you felt a grief such as God meant you to feel, so that in nothing you might suffer loss through us or harm for what we did. For godly grief and the pain . . . produce a repentance that leads and contributes to salvation and deliverance from evil, and it never brings regret; but worldly grief . . . is deadly. . . . For [you can look back now and] observe what this same godly sorrow has done for you and has produced in you. (*The Amplified Bible*)

The role of suffering to steering the saints toward perfection was undertaken by our Elder Brother Jesus Christ as our Heavenly Father prepared Him to be a High Priest.

Hebrews 5:6-8 As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec, Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared;

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Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;

David Grabbe, in his sermonette *Life Doesn't Work on a Balance Sheet: Why Bad Things Happen* (given February 5, 2011), indicates that suffering is actually a godly tool used to perfect individuals. God the Father fully understood Jesus Christ's predicament, but allowed Him to suffer in order to qualify and perfect Him for His role as our High Priest, experiencing the horrendous consequences of our sins, including the separation from God and the oblivion of death. Following our Elder Brother's example, we must endure suffering, submitting patiently to God's will, enabling us to be perfected for our roles as members of God's family.

We learn that suffering is a necessary part of evil. Any deviation from God's law causes a world of hurt. Suffering, like a GPS prompt, teaches us to get back on track. Suffering enables us to get back on course.

Our Life Experiences

Our life experiences are replete with embarrassing and painful memories of our past sins and God has purposely designed it that way.

The Consequences of our Sins

Numbers 32:23 "But if you will not do so, behold, you have sinned against the LOORD, and have absolute assurance that your sin will find you out.

Michael Eric Dyson relates the story about a boy and his father, who sought to rid his son of his habit of lying. Every time the boy told a lie, his father hammered nails into a piece of wood. At one point, when the board was nearly full, the boy promised to stop lying. His father promised to pull a nail out of the board each time his son told the truth. When the board was completely empty, the boy began to cry. What's wrong son? The boy's father asked. "You should be happy. You've stopped lying, and the nails are all gone." "Yes," the boy replied. "The nails are gone, but the holes are still there.

Thank God for the holes: they are permanent reminders not to ever do that again. I have a dent in the front of my Cavalier, reminding me not to drive into anything. The dent in the back of my Cavalier reminds me not to back into anything.

Abraham was the father of the faithful, but he also did a lot of foolish things—some of the things he did concerning trying to help God out with his promises has led to the horrible Islamo-Fascist terror we have in the world today (the so-called Arab Spring). His co-habitation with Hagar eventually led to the construction of the al-Aqsa Mosque, the Dome of the Rock, symbolizing for Muslims universally the dominance of Islam over Judaism and Christianity.

Abraham was the friend of God

God knew Abraham would make a mistake—many, many mistakes. God did not believe these mistakes were permanent. A friend allows us to make mistakes and later allows us to return to his/her good graces. A parent lovingly allows his offspring to make mistakes, suffer the consequences, and then return to the parent's good graces.

Haunting memories resurfacing from our subconscious

Even though God has forgiven us we still have memories in our subconscious.

Remorse

Like our father Abraham, we have all made countless mistakes and they have left their mark. Our thoughts flash to surface things that we have said in past. Emily Dickinson described this terrible torturous discomfort we feel after we have done something wrong in her poem Remorse.

Remorse—is Memory—awake —

Her Parties all astir —

A Presence of Departed Acts —

At window—and at Door —

Its Past—set down before the Soul

And lighted with a Match —

Perusal—to facilitate —

And help Belief to stretch —

Remorse is cureless—the Disease

Not even God—can heal —

For 'tis **His institution** — and

The **Adequate of Hell** —

The father of General Semantics, Alfred Korzybski, once proclaimed, "God will forgive your sins, but your nervous system will never."

The self-proclaimed Chaplain of Bourbon Street once made the insightful observation, "Purgatory is this side of the grave." The problem is that this purgatory does not have the power to purge or expiate sin.

As John Ritenbaugh observed in his Bible study on Hebrews (Part 10) given in December 1987, "As splendid as it was, there was neither provision for the forgiveness of sins nor a purging of guilt in the Old Covenant." Guilt from a tormented conscience is agonizing spiritual pain which can only be purged by the blood of Jesus Christ.

This sermon will now take a turn, leading to a conclusion very much in harmony with the sermon on Ecclesiastes Thursday afternoon. In Isaiah 55: 8, we read that God's thoughts are not yet our thoughts, nor are His ways yet our ways. But He undoubtedly desires that we do eventually get to that level.

I can tell you as a teacher that nothing gives me more pleasure than to go over an instructional program with a student and then have the student teach it back to me with insight, not as an automaton.

Over the past 19 years, one motif that has surfaced repeatedly in John Ritenbaugh's messages is the principal of reciprocity. Psychologist Lila Wolfe defines reciprocity as the human need and tendency to want to give something back when something is received. This need is strongest when the gift is given without expectation of return. James 4:8 provides a portal into the godly principle of reciprocity.

James 4:8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

We are also reminded in the beatitudes that if we become pure, we will be able to see

God

Moving back to Isaiah 55:7:

Isaiah 55:7 Let the wicked forsake his way And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the LOORD, And He will have compassion on him, And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.

In II Timothy 2:21 we learn that the choice to repent and purge ourselves is left in our own hands

II Timothy 2:21 Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will become a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.

Isaiah 55:9 "For as the heavens appear higher than the earth, So compare My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts.

It is time to readjust our satellites—and we learned last Thursday afternoon that we cannot do that under the sun. It has to come from access to God's throne in the third heaven through continuous access to God's throne room through daily prayer, meditation, and Bible Study. Regular fasting should also be a part of the regimen.

We are assured that if we draw closer to God He will draw closer to us, and furthermore the closer we draw to God, the closer He will draw to us. We have been advised by previous maps that we cannot grow spiritually with less than a half hour a day. While it is advisable to set aside regular blocs of prayer, it is becoming increasingly imperative—especially in the difficult times ahead on this spiritual pilgrimage to pray without ceasing.

I Thessalonians 5:16 Pray without ceasing

Ideally our walk and talk with God should resemble the behavior of Tevia in Fiddler on the Roof, who was continually having a dialogue with God Almighty similar to Abraham's chats with the Eternal. (Tevia: "Would it defeat some vast eternal plan if you were to make me wealthy?")

A GPS for our Spiritual Pilgrimage by David F. Maas (<http://www.cgg.org>)

As we continue on our spiritual journey through a trackless wilderness, we need to learn that the process of sanctification could be described as a process of reinforcing positive spiritual habit patterns through making life choices and then interpreting the consequences of these life choices.

If we look up over the sun, updating our maps and satellites through continuous prayer, study, and meditation, God promises us that He will put His Laws into the midst of our nervous systems (Hebrews 8:10 and 10:16, derived from Jeremiah 33) leading us right into the promised land.