

How the Holy Spirit, Like a GPS, Can Lead You to Unfamiliar Places

Maps are fascinating tools. Maps typically aid in travel or discovery, but they also identify places, location and proximity. Maps are also a snapshot in time as urban regions have expanded, leading to the incorporation of the smaller towns on the urban fringe we call suburbs.

While my love of maps is genuine and sincere, I rarely used them back in the day. However, I use a geographic positioning system constantly, even when I know where I am going. I even use it for going to work or getting home! Why? I reside in an urban region and the commute is unpredictable. Big city living is not for the faint of heart!

Like all technology, the GPS transformed our lives, including in small ways we struggle to consider. Readers of a certain age (as well as the author) recall the joy of either depending on a paper map or the well-meaning directions a friend offers to their house. Those were the best! “Go left on Brown, right after the Circle K!” My favorite? The “you have gone too far” remark. “If you pass the steak house, you have gone too far!” This is low tech “rerouting” for younger readers.

These quaint, antiquated navigational tools possessed a certain charm, hence the growing map collection. Yet getting from Point A to Point Z has changed in ways that stun me. My younger self experienced the early phases of the tech revolution, so a “digital map” seemed feasible. I could envision transitioning from the foldable paper map that you could never refold to digitally replicating the routes. However, a system that also gives me an estimated time of arrival and identifies and adjusts for traffic, accidents and

all manner of delay? No words.

In addition, those “adjustments” often remind me of the Christian walk. Go with me here if you would. My normal GPS experience/excursion is numbingly familiar as travelling with little drama, delay or distraction. That said, life (and accidents or road construction) happen especially in Texas, where major highways are in a seemingly eternal “improvement” loop. Such events trigger alternate routes, most of which only slightly deviate from the original path.

However, some deviations are more exotic than others. My GPS once rerouted me through a winding, partially paved country road meandering for nearly 30 miles through rural “neighborhoods,” undeveloped farmland and two downtowns marked by old courthouses, all in an effort to avoid East Texas road construction. This vista bore zero resemblance to the major highway I had been traveling and hoped to one day discover yet again. Yet the scenic treks are hardly reserved for endless green pastures as the system has also introduced me to neighborhoods dotting urban enclaves I would never know existed save the desire to avoid a 20-minute delay thanks to a broken-down vehicle.

Yet the GPS typically rescues from trouble (or traffic), even if it takes me through hairy places or parts unknown. My faith is usually validated. Granted, such “shortcuts” challenge my trust and faith in the direction-giving voice telling me where to go and when to turn. Moreover, I have heard the stories. Couple rigidly sticking to directions ends up in barren apocalypse miles from civilization. On the other hand, maybe they just miss their hotel check-in time.

Either way, technology is not perfect. The GPS is not God. Yet the relationship bears similarities. Providence via the Holy Spirit takes us in uncharted directions, away from the familiar and comfortable. We say goodbye to the interstate and hello to unpaved roads!

It remains fascinating how we humans cling to the familiar and comfortable. Seriously, the “comfort zone” is often a sad place. Remember how the Hebrew nation was ready to high-tail it back to Egypt at the first sign of desert-driven strife? They chose slavery over freedom! On a lower-stakes level, the interstate sure offered security and familiarity, but staying the course would have added 45 minutes to my journey. Granted, God’s people spent 40 years wandering the desert.

Could you do that? Could you leave every sense of comfort, security and sense of self-worth in the dust and start is the bonus that you have zero idea of the outcome and how or what you would be doing. More importantly, are you called to do that? Does God expect followers to drop and reject everything?

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