

Our Guiding Satellites

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Imagine yourself walking down a narrow path whilst blindfolded. The only thing you have to ensure you stay on track is the voice of a friend to guide you, telling you to veer left or right. You would have no choice but to follow their instructions because you would realise that they can see what you cannot. It would be foolish to ignore these instructions, or to decide you actually know better, or even to get offended that someone else is telling you which way to go! Likewise, you would soon realise that if one moment you are told to veer left and the next to veer right, this is not a contradiction. Your friend is neither confused, contradictory nor dishonest: he is simply helping to correct the direction in which you need to go to remain on the path.

Small Gate, Narrow Road

Living our lives is somewhat like this. Jesus said that we enter via a small gate to follow a hard road that few find (Matthew 7:14), but it often seems to me that I am walking this narrow path blindfolded. I so easily wander, miss the way or stumble and fall, or I grow weary and am tempted to take an easier way. I realise that I am utterly dependent upon that outside voice to guide me and keep me on the 'straight and narrow'.

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Navigating Christian Life

So where does this voice come from? How can I ensure that I don't get lost? The principle I have used is taken from the concept of a GPS system. A GPS device sends a signal that is received by a satellite which returns the signal. By calculating the time that it takes for the signal to return, the device can calculate the distance I am from that satellite. However, the information from one satellite cannot give me an exact location. There needs to be a minimum of **three satellites** returning the signal for me to pinpoint exactly where I am and where I should go.

The three 'spiritual satellites' I use (or the 'signals' I try to receive) to help me on my journey are as

follows:

1. The Voice of the Lord

He speaks to me via the Holy Spirit. Jesus was quite clear: '*My sheep hear my voice*' (John 10:3 & 27). If I am not taking the time to both hear His voice and follow His instructions, I will never make it safely to my destination. It is imperative that I listen for His voice, distinguish it from all the other voices that surround me and obey His instructions. It is no use hearing His voice if we are not willing to obey. This is the one distinction between the wise and the foolish men who built their houses on rock and on sand respectively. Whilst this is vital, it is insufficient on its own. Not because the Lord is deficient but because I am fallible, sinful, prejudiced in my thinking, theology and feelings and because my own heart is deceitful (Jeremiah 17:9). If all I have to guide me is my own impression of what the Lord is saying, then it won't be long before I go astray.

2. The Word of God

This is a lamp to my feet (Psalms 119:105). We need to understand that the Word itself is inerrant and is the final authority in our lives. We need to be those who read, understand and can rightly handle the Word by applying it to our lives. Again, however, Scripture alone is not sufficient; indeed it may do more harm than good (Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 3:6 '*the letter kills but the Spirit brings life*'). This is again because of my own fallibilities and idiosyncrasies. One problem we can have is that we can twist Scripture or use it selectively, either consciously or unconsciously, to affirm what we want to hear so that we can take the path we would prefer to take.

3. Other People

We are saved into a community, with friends and leaders to help us. They are there to disciple us, to train and correct us, rebuke and encourage us. Of course, we can surround ourselves with friends and teachers who will tell us only what we want to hear or we can surround ourselves with those who will speak the truth in love, point us in the right direction and help us when we stumble. It is instructive to read Ecclesiastes 4:9-11, which tells us that when a man walking alone falls, there is nobody to help him up, but if a man walking with another falls, he has someone to help him. Not only do we have assistance when we walk with others, but our chances of falling are also reduced.

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Make Adjustments

As we progress on our Christian walk, we need to be constantly making adjustments in order not to drift from the path. Rather like driving a car, we are constantly correcting a tendency to veer to the left or the right. We also need to make sure that when there are forks in the road, decisions that can alter our destination, that we can choose the right path with a degree of confidence. If these three things align, then I can have that confidence. If not, then I should take the time to recalibrate.

This is a principle that I have found incredibly helpful in my life. It has saved me many times over. Even so, there have been times when I have drifted or taken a wrong turn. The good news is that if we find ourselves heading in the wrong direction, we serve a God who is constantly calling us back. He is constantly enabling us to return. He is ready to forgive us, restore us and guide us in His

ways.