

Romans 8:6-11 N.T. 147 (NRSV)

⁶To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, ⁸and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

⁹But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

“Inertial Guidance System”
Romans 8:6-11 N.T. Page 147

Opening Prayer: Please bow with me in prayer. Father God, we come to you seeking direction for our lives. As we listen for your Word, reorient our lives and set us anew on that path that leads to life eternal. In Jesus’ Name we pray, **Amen.**

Introduction: **When I first started learning to fly**, I was spending all of my time getting nowhere fast. In fact, I made my first 84 take offs and landings all at the same airport. I needed to learn the basics. But then one day my instructor said I was ready to begin learning how to fly cross country. Ah, finally I was going to get to do what flying is all about, which is getting somewhere fast.

For my first cross country flight, I took off from **Rostraver Airport** in Westmoreland County near Bell Vernon, PA and flew to **Washington County Airport** located just southwest of Washington, PA. Now, the key to getting from one airport to another is learning how to navigate. On that day, my instructor was teaching me the most basic kind of navigation called **“Dead Reckoning.”** **You draw a line on an aeronautical chart** from one airport to another and then fly along that line. As I took off from Rostraver, I turned to a heading of 190 degrees and began watching the landscape pass below while holding the aeronautical chart in my hand. I was excited as one landmark after another passed beneath us just where the chart said it would be. **We crossed the Mon River** just south of Monongahela, PA and then **flew parallel to Interstate 70**. Then, just as we were **coming up on the big 70/79 interchange**, I spotted the airport up ahead just southwest of the town. **So, with landing number 85**, I was finally getting somewhere. **Yes, the key to getting somewhere is navigation.**

PAUSE

Move I.

Getting somewhere in life requires navigation too. Getting a college education requires navigation. Finding a good job requires navigation. Marrying the right person requires navigation. Buying a home requires navigation. Raising children requires navigation. Investing for retirement requires navigation. And preparing for the afterlife requires navigation too. You don't get anywhere in life without navigation. Navigation is a plan for getting from point A to point B. So, the first step in making a navigation plan is to select a destination. Without a destination rather than heading somewhere fast, you're headed nowhere just as fast. The destination is part of the navigation.

For my first cross country flight, my destination was Washington County Airport. Now for most people flying is all about getting to your destination. You fly to get from here to there. But for a pilot, flying is about the process of getting from here to there. It's exciting to go from waypoint to waypoint as you watch your flight plan unfold. So, for a pilot, the flight is every bit as important as the destination.

The great nineteenth century American writer Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote, "*Life is a journey, not a destination.*" That has sort of a romantic ring to it, doesn't it? The teenage pilot in me tends to agree. After all, a pilot flies for the joy of flying, not for the joy of arriving at the destination. But that tends to insinuate that the destination doesn't matter? **Well, if I departed to fly to Washington County Airport**, and overflowed my destination and ended up landing at the **airport in Wheeling, West Virginia**, would you think I was a very good pilot? Of course not! It wouldn't matter if I executed a flawless takeoff and landing. I would still be a lousy pilot, because arriving at the right destination always matters. **So, I would dare to edit Emerson's words** and say, "*Life is a journey, and a destination.*" They both matter.

Most people will describe Lent as being a journey. During Lent, we're supposed to examine our lives and see how we're living. Are we following on the right path? Are we still heading in the right direction, or have we gotten ourselves all twisted up? Have the winds blown us off course? Or have we been daydreaming and are about to overshoot our destination? Lent is a time of self-examination. But Lent isn't just a journey; it's a journey with a destination. And what's the destination of Lent? **Many will say that the destination is the cross.** But is the cross really the destination, or is it just a waypoint on the journey? Well for Jesus, the cross certainly doesn't mark his final destination. The journey travels through the Death on Good Friday **towards the resurrection of Easter Sunday.** During Lent, we confirm our destination. **Are suffering and death** our final destination? Or are suffering and death just a waypoint on **our journey to resurrection?** The destination matters just as much as the journey. The destination is a matter of life and death. Are we getting nowhere **or somewhere?** The destination is part of the navigation. **Yes, getting somewhere really does require navigation.**

End I.

Move II.

But **“Dead Reckoning” navigation can be deadly.** You can look at the map, and what you see out the window, and you can still end up in the middle of nowhere. **When you cross the Mon River, there aren’t any signs telling** you it’s the Mon River. When you keep flying mile after mile, and hour and hour you cross more and more rivers and sooner or later you gonna confuse one river for another. And the same thing is true for highways and towns. When you’ve been flying for mile after mile, and hour after hour you cross more highways and towns and sooner or later, you’re gonna confuse one highway or town for another. When that happens, and sooner or later it always does, **either you’re gonna end up landing at the wrong airport or you’re gonna fly till you run out of gas** and end up crashing in the middle of nowhere. That’s the thing about **“Dead Reckoning”** navigation, when you’re right it’s great, but when you’re wrong, you can be dead wrong. In fact, originally people called this form of navigation **“Deduced Reckoning,”** because you use your mind to “deduce” where you’re at at any given moment, but over time, people began calling it *“dead reckoning,”* because the accumulation of **faulty deductions can have deadly consequences.**

Our Bible lesson today, from Paul’s letter to the Christians living in Roman, also talks about a form of navigation that has deadly consequences. But of course, Paul isn’t talking about flying airplanes, since airplanes wouldn’t be invented for another 19-hundred years. **What Paul’s talking about** is a form of navigation many people use to find their way through life. Paul calls this form of navigation the “sinful nature.” In **Romans 8:6a** (NLT) Paul writes, **“If your sinful nature controls your mind, there is death.”** Or to paraphrase what’s Paul’s saying, *“If you think you can do it on your own, you’re heading toward a dead end.”* Sooner or later your own reckoning is gonna be wrong so we might as well start calling the *“sinful nature,”* the *“dead nature,”* because that’s its destination.

Of course, what Paul's telling the Romans here is nothing new. Paul is just restating an ancient tidbit of wisdom from Israel's sages. In Proverbs 14:12 (NRSV) an ancient sage writes, "**There is a way that that seems right to a person, but its end is the way to death.**" "*Dead reckoning*" can look right, but in the end, it can be dead wrong. The "*sinful nature*" can think it's right, but in the end, it's dead wrong too. Now you might think I'm pushing this point too hard, but I'm not pushing it any hard than the Bible does. Simply doing what you think is right doesn't mean you're right. To be right you have to cross the waypoints heading toward **the destination that's pleasing to God**. So, in Romans 8:8 (NIV) the Apostle Paul flatly states, "**Those controlled by the sinful nature (*the flesh*) cannot please God.**" Life is a journey and a destination, and the only life worth the living is the life that pleases God. All other lives are heading toward a dead end. By your reckoning, you think you're right. **But "*Dead Reckoning*" navigation really can be deadly.**

End II.

Move III.

So, God provides a Divine guidance system. God knows all about the pitfalls of our sinful nature, so God provides a far superior form of navigation that sets the right destination and plots the right course. God provides the Holy Spirit. I'm calling this form of navigation the "***Divine Guidance System.***" God crawls in the cockpit and becomes your navigator seeing you safely to your destination.

Now when I was learning to fly, "*Dead Reckoning*" wasn't the only form of navigation that my flight instructor taught me. He also taught me about how to use ground-based radio navigation aids. (Remember back in the 1970s and **GPS was still a military thing** that wasn't yet available the general public.) Anyway, the most useful ground-based navigation aid is the **VOR** which stands for Very High Frequency Omni-directional Radio. **You tune in the VOR's frequency** and then **turn the omni-bearing knob** on the VOR indicator to find the bearing or heading from your current position directly to the VOR's ground based radio transmitter. [In this case, it's due north.] There are hundreds of VORs across the country which serve as waypoints as you navigate from one place to another.

Well, VOR navigation is great, but it only works in places where there's ground-based radio navigation aids. What about flying over the oceans? How do you navigate there? Well back in the late 1960's Boeing Aircraft Corporation contracted with **Delco Electronics to make a space age navigation system for its first 747s.** The device is called an Inertial Guidance System which is the same technology used for navigation in spaceships and missiles. **Using a series of accelerometers and gyroscopes** and IGS detects the slightest movement and constantly is recalculating its current position relative to its last. These contraptions are marvels of modern engineering. Of course, now days they couple the IGS together with signals from satellites in the Global Positioning System so you can know where you are within a few meters. It's all absolutely amazing.

Ok, who can tell me the name of the little boy in the Disney movie who was made of wood and whose nose would grow if he lied? **Yes, his name is Pinocchio.** Pinocchio was the star of Disney's second animated movie released back in 1940. In the movie, **Geppetto the wood carver wished that a little boy puppet he carved would come to life.** One night when Geppetto was asleep, the **Blue Fairy came and brought Pinocchio to life.** But Pinocchio had a problem; you see he's just a wooden boy, so he doesn't have a conscience. **So, the Blue Fairy asked a cricket named Jiminy** to serve as Pinocchio's conscience. Yes, in that classic Disney movie Jiminy Cricket is Pinocchio's conscience, I'm not making this stuff up. **So very early in the movie Jiminy Cricket tells Pinocchio** that any time he needs him all he needs to do is give a little whistle. Then Jimmy Cricket sings a song to Pinocchio that goes like this:

When you get in trouble and you don't know right from wrong

Give a little whistle! Give a little whistle!

When you meet temptation and the urge is very strong

Give a little whistle! Give a little whistle!

Take the straight and narrow path, and if you start to slide

Give a little whistle! Give a little whistle!

And always let your conscience be your guide

Hey, it's great to let your conscience be your guide, but that begs the question "who's guiding your conscience?" **Jiminy Cricket?** I sure hope not. **How about you?** Are you guiding your own conscience? Now there's a faulty deduction destined for some deadly consequences. When you let your conscience be your guide, **you need to let it be God who's guiding your conscience.** So fortunately, **God does provide a Divine guidance system.**

End III.

Move IV.

And following God's guidance leads to life. This guidance from God which is leading us into a richer and fuller life is truly the good news of our faith. Whenever you place your faith and trust in God through Christ Jesus, the Spirit of the Living God comes and offers guidance. **The Holy Spirit comes** and crawls into the cockpit with you and rides along on the journey of your life. The Holy Spirit becomes your Inertial Guidance System with capabilities that put even the best of our human technologies to shame.

How many of you have ever played with a toy gyroscope? (Raise hand.) I wanted to get one for the kids' time today, but I couldn't find any place that had them in stock. Anyway, the biggest manufacturer of toy gyroscopes is TEDCO which has literally sold tens of millions of the scientific toys. The name TEDCO stands for Teetor Engineering Development Company, named after its founder **Mr. Ralph Teetor**. Ralph Teetor was an inventor who is most famous for inventing the cruise control for cars. That's pretty cool all by itself, but what makes this even more fascinating is that Ralph Teeter was blind. Yes, it was a blind man who gave world the cruise control and the toy gyroscope. Well, **if you've ever held a spinning toy gyroscope in your hand**, you immediately noticed that it has a mind all its own. If you try to move it in a direction it doesn't want to go, it actually pushes back. You'd swear that the little metal toy is actually alive. **That's why engineers make huge gyroscopes to stabilize cruise ships.** The gyroscope literally dampens the motion of the waves.

Well, when God's Spirit takes up residence in your soul, you can be sure the Spirit doesn't sit passively by. The Holy Spirit actively resists the life-threatening waves of life. Borrowing from Jiminy Crickets song, when you start too slid from the straight and narrow path, the Spirit prods your conscience to steer you back on course. The Spirit offers loving and yet forceful resistance.

Once again, Eugene Peterson has done a good job of making the ancient words of the Bible come alive for us today. Peterson paraphrases **Romans 8:9-10 (MSG)** like this:

But if God himself has taken up residence in your life, you can hardly be thinking more of yourself than of him. Anyone, of course, who has not welcomed this invisible but clearly present God, the Spirit of Christ, won't know what we're talking about. But for you who welcome him, in whom he dwells—even though you still experience all of the limitations of sin—you yourself experience life on God's terms.

Having life on your own terms is just so much more “*Dead Reckoning*.” But experiencing life on **God's terms**, that's really living!

God's Holy Spirit, God's Inertial Guidance System for your life, is leading you from waypoint to waypoint on the straight and narrow path which leads to life eternal. You're free to ignore the Spirit's guidance. You can ignore the still small voice whispering in your conscience's ear. You can revert to “dead reckoning” navigation if you want. But ignoring God's Spirit risks all manner of deadly consequences. **In John 10:10b (NRSV)** Jesus says, “**I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly.**” Life really is a journey as well as a destination. **And following God's guidance positively leads to life.**

End IV.

Conclusion: When I was learning to fly, it was on my 85th landing when I finally started to get somewhere. That's when my flight instructor started to teach me how to navigate. **Yes, getting somewhere really does require navigation.**

Navigation is a plan for getting from point A to point B. Life, like flying, is about both the journey and the destination. **But “*Dead Reckoning*” navigation really can be deadly.** Sooner or later you're gonna confuse one river or highway for another and your faulty deduction is gonna have deadly consequences. **So fortunately, God provides a Divine guidance system.** When following Jiminy Cricket's advice to “*always let your conscience be your guild,*” you really do need to let God be guiding your conscience. **And following God's guidance always leads to life.** God's “*Inertial Guidance System,*” sets the destination and plots the course which leads to living moment by moment on God's terms.

Closing Prayer: Let's pray. Almighty God, thank you for sending your Son to save us and your Spirit to guild us. May we always follow your prodding along the pathway that leads to life eternal. **Amen!**

10:30 Closing Hymn: “*Savior Like a Shepherd Lead Us*” Red Hymnal No. 381
All Four Verses

Sending Forth: Are you struggling to navigate your own way through life? Are you confusing waypoints and running low on fuel? Then let God's Spirit be your “*Inertial Guidance System,*” so you too can experience every moment of life on God's terms. **Amen!**